

---

## What Can A&E Do For You?

---

I started with A&E at issue #199, so I've been around for half its life (though I still feel like a newbie compared to Spike), and I thought I'd spend a few paragraphs talking about what A&E means to me. And then I decided that it was a horribly pretentious and indulgent idea and that you had better things to read about. But that begs the question, what **do** you want to read? What makes you, the A&E contributor or lurker come back here month after month? Or more specifically and selfishly, why would you read **my** zine? Or to turn it around, what do I get out of A&E and why do I contribute?

To answer the last question first, I contribute because I can't keep my mouth shut (in a literary sense). I can't just be a lurker. For me, I cannot read A&E without wanting to comment on at least some parts. Usually, I end up with about a page worth of comments. But I also try to add a page or more of original content, even it is just fluffy game-related news, as in this issue.

As a reader, I like original, thoughtful essays and comments about roleplaying games, and to a lesser extent, other games. Anything else is likely to get skipped.

I like some write-ups more than others, even those from the same contributor, but often have difficulty maintaining the narrative thread from month to month. For me, roleplaying is very much an activity that exists *in the moment*, and the retelling of someone else's gaming tale is less interesting. The ones I find most interesting are those that provide insight from the perspective of the player or GM or those told in a first-person narrative of a single PC (presumably the author's).

The biggest problem I have reading A&E (and this will sound terrible) is that it makes me think; my mind often wanders away from the written page and into analysis and reflection. This kills my retention for what I have read (which can be a real pain when following comment threads), but it is what separates A&E from most other sources of gaming discussion. Online sites and forums can also provide food for thought, but they're usually not as nutritious.

One type of discussion that we don't see nearly as often as we used to (or as often as I'd like) are those around game design. Maybe we've all settled down into our favorite systems. Or maybe the system-building spend their time on sites like The Forge. Ty has done the most in this area recently with his Traveller-related essays, but I'd like to see more (even from me).

What do **you** want to read in these pages?

---

## Miscellany

---

### Friday Night Gaming

I have been logging my Friday Night Gaming experience on my website. I should have started this years ago as a means to force me to keep my site up to date. Plus, my write-ups often leave much to be desired, so hopefully the practice will help. We focus mainly on board games these days, but the occasional roleplaying session will appear.

### Monster Hunters

For my old Sunday group I have started a fantasy campaign called Monster Hunters. Yes, it's a terrible name. I'll be using Savage Worlds and following an episodic, "monster of the week" format. The campaign pseudo-wiki is at <http://sites.google.com/site/sinisterthings/>

This is with the same group for whom I had been running Truth & Justice until scheduling problems, people moving, and personal turmoil<sup>1</sup> caused the campaign to collapse and the group to go into hibernation. Hopefully, all the issues have been settled and we can get some good momentum before the holidays. I'm shooting to play every other Sunday, but as I write this, we've had to skip one meeting due to my family holiday obligations (and attempts to find an alternative day didn't work for other players).

The first six-hour session focused on character creation. I am the only experienced Savage Worlds player and though there was a definite learning curve, this group seemed to pick it up easily enough. Each of the five players made a character with an Arcane Background. We have a classically trained wizard, a rogue alchemist, a holy warrior of The Five, a warrior-monk of the Hand of Truth, and a shamanic uncivilized outdoorsy type.

The world is littered with local religions and other mystical practices and the rules that separate arcane and divine magic are not so cut and dry. So I gave them the flexibility to do what they wanted, to create a magic school, religion, or mystic art (and provided them with a couple of examples of each). With this door open, I think they just gravitated toward the cool powers rather than make a "mundane" character. They joked about being power gamers, which is certainly true in some cases, but it is not necessarily applicable to everyone in the group. Really, they make characters like power gamers, but play their characters like good roleplayers, much how I imagine Joshua Kronengold is.

---

<sup>1</sup> None of it mine, thankfully.

---

## Comments on Issue #398

---

### On Pennies

This is a response to a couple of different people. Even though the American penny costs 1.5 cents (or whatever) to make, it can stay in circulation for decades, being used over and over and over. As a token of exchange, it's worth far more than its manufacturing costs alone. If the base metals rise in value to the point where someone can profitably sell them for scrap metal, then there is a problem and the metal composition must be changed. This has happened several times in the past.

I don't understand many people's aversion to pennies. I use them all the time, meaning that I rarely have more than 4 in my pocket at any time. For me, grabbing my spare change is a standard ritual—it goes in the left-hand pocket with the lip balm and cell phone (while the keys go in right pocket). I rarely use the "take a penny, leave a penny" jars at retail stores.

### Myles Corcoran

Another great thing about Terri is that she's far more practical than romantic. A declaration of "Happy Valentine's Day. I didn't buy you flowers," will be responded with a heart-felt, "Thank you!"

Magic in UA turns me off because the acquisition of charges feels artificial and mechanical. In some cases, the difficulty (or disruptiveness to the game) of gaining charges is well beyond the benefit one gets from the powers. I don't own the game to site examples, but it just felt that way the few times I've played with \*mancers.

### Robert Dushay

In my experience, the focus of an argument is almost never to convince some third-party audience, like a political debate. Rather, you are trying to convince your opponent. But if the outcome of Burning Wheel Dual of Wits system may not convince the losing character, I don't see what the point is. If you just want to see who appeared to win, just make a simple task roll without the elaborate pseudo-combat mechanics.

### Lee Gold

Fortunately, I have not personally dealt with a major crime or incident that required authorities to deal with the problem. Anecdotal evidence is not satisfactory to determine the overall success of authorities to successfully deal with problems.

Those previous two sentences, by the way, are an example of "garble." The repeated phrasing is intolerable. See also my comment to Lisa and what I originally wrote in A&E #397. Atrocious.

### Joshua Kronengold

Thanks to your comments to Lisa, I will now consider incomplete any modern-day rpg that doesn't give the damage rating of telephones. : )

### Louis La Mancusa

I was going to send you an email to reply to your comments, but I can't find your email listed in your zine. Oh well.

### Brian Misiaszek

I'm thinking that Gnomish acid is probably pretty good shit, man. : )

Blue Rose, as mentioned recently by others, addresses intelligent animal companions.

### Spike Y Jones

If we were talking about the Constitution, the highest law in the U.S., then we have to be very careful about how we distinguish between word and spirit. Does torture not count as "cruel and unusual punishment" because, as Scalia says, it is not *punishment*? Are powers that are not explicitly forbidden implicitly allowed under the Commander in Chief umbrella? But the Declaration of Independence has no legal standing. It is a propaganda piece written before there was a Constitution<sup>2</sup>. In that light, I think the spirit of the words are more important than the specific words themselves.

### Lisa Padol

I suck. Forget Arcadia. What I meant to say was "Artesia: Adventures in the Known World (which got a bit too narrative and indie for my tastes, but I had fun despite a brief nosebleed)..."

Agreed that the Initiative was run by a bunch of pinheads, but I don't think their portrayal was indicative of Whedon's overall portrayal (or personal opinion) of the military. And Spike is Spike, you can't take his snarky comments seriously.

Does Chris Weil have problems reading the lips of English speakers who spoke with a natural, non-fake accent? Does the act of assuming a fake accent cause the mouth to move in unnatural ways not displayed by people who come by the accent naturally?

### Jerry Stratton

I really liked the mechanic that simultaneously applied mojo spent for a short-term task success to long-term skill improvement. This is much preferable to simply losing the mojo spent on the one task. Players are encouraged to use, rather than hoard, mojo.

---

<sup>2</sup> Or Articles of Confederation.

---

## Comments on Issue #399

---

Thanks to those who noted and responded to my comment about my thinking of leaving A&E.

### Myles Corcoran

LOL at "He's French! Do keep up."  
RAEBNC on the rest of the zine.

### Robert A. Dushay

My Friday night group has played Mission: Red Planet a few times. The role selection and area control mechanism add a good deal of tension to the game. The chaos and lack of control factor may be high for some (much of your destiny is out of your hands), and you can be locked out of contention for the lead, which will frustrate others. Otherwise, it is a fun, engaging game.

Regarding Casinos and UA, I am reminded of the Bill Willingham comic *Proposition Player*. Unlike "humans only" UA, however, it has the agents of Heaven and Hell (and other gods, iirc) as active participants in the story.

### Lee Gold

Historically, I think people were a lot sicker than we are today due to poor sanitation and water quality. When you are always trying to fight off a cold or some other low-level illness, allergies aren't as noticeable. Unless suffered by someone noteworthy, acute allergies to food, bees, etc. would be too uncommon to mention in historical accounts. I'm just guessing, though.

The transparent dot on Australian currency would foil color printers until the counterfeiters are able to duplicate the paper.

### Spike Y Jones

The gates from the Stargate movie and series quality, I think, as an ancient artifact that is not completely ignored but does not make the PCs central in their discovery. Sure, SG-1 found lots of other ancient alien technology, and some episodes exploited the gates much like Star Trek used the transporters and the deflector array. But I think you can create an rpg without those elements and focus on the gates and where they lead.

### Lisa Padol

Your professor's explanation of good & evil in Shakespeare strikes me in how it runs counter to the American myth, where the heroes are the iconoclasts who shape their own fate despite what society has predetermined for them. This contrast may have originated from when (eastern) America was colonized by people who were villains by Shakespearean standards.

### Brian Rogers

RAE A New Dawn. Within the Kaer, how and why were the two PCs trained to survive in the outside world?

The belief that SF only sells as action/adventure<sup>3</sup> is well-founded in box office reality, I think. If you look at SF movies that aren't action/adventure, they haven't done nearly as well as those that are. How well did *Gattaca*, *Solaris*, and *2010* do compared to *Minority Report*<sup>4</sup>, *Fifth Element*, and *Pitch Black*? For the sake of discussion, I'm specifically avoiding franchises like *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, and *Alien*. Even though they were on the action side of the scale, their popularity skews the box office numbers, I think.

Just as you would have to tighten the rules and provide more specialization for an all-telepath *Trek* game, a game that is all about shipboard adventures should probably subdivide shipboard skills to help provide PC differentiation. But for a campaign without sea-based adventures, such as the land-based focus of D&D 4<sup>th</sup> edition, I would not expect the game system to offer shipwright or sailing as a skill option. Plus, this gives WotC the option to create a campaign book that includes skills, feats, and powers centered on sailing the high seas (if they think it would sell, of course).

Every game takes options off the table. Some games give more options than others, though some of their choices of what to include and what to leave out may be at odds with what you want to do with the game. Is melee combat one skill or twenty (to represent various weapon proficiencies)? Do you allow players to play "monsters?" Advice often given to GURPS GMs is "don't try to use all of it." Indie games are notorious for being very focused with very few options. After all, you don't play *My Life With Master* and complain that you can't play the Master. *3:16 Carnage Amongst the Stars* has one (!) skill to cover all non-combat activities. If you look at all the retro D&D clones available now, how many of them have all the skills and specializations you want? In the end, I can't fault D&D4 for leaving out options.

### Jim Vassilakos

Go ahead and trample around in the myths of the world's major religions. They certainly have done it enough themselves over the past couple thousand years. Hell, if Milton can do it, why can't you? What are you worried about, exactly? Offending the good people of A&E? About blaspheming or uttering heresy? About having a fatwa taken out on your life?

---

3 And I'm including horror in this as well.

4 Despite it's literary heritage, the movie was an action-thriller.