



Merry Christmas, Love from

Errational Thinking

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Dedicated readers,

Welcome back to Errational Thinking for this, far more festive, edition.

With Christmas comes, well, Christmas presents and, though I wasn't much expecting to find the complete collection of D&D 3.5 manuals sitting under my tree, (because let's face it, 4th Ed. isn't much to shout about), I was hoping to find something roleplaying-related lurking under my tree corpse. Alas, I was a wincey bit disappointed.

What made up for it though, was spending a wonderful few days with family I haven't seen in a while, while hidden behind the screen of my laptop furiously trying to put together this month's issue, while, again, happily receiving the bounty of articles that piled up in my inbox.

So what do we have the proverbial sack of loot this month? Well, I've gratefully had another Magic Card of the Month article sent to me, with a little less whimsy than my own, we have yet another intriguing RPG review that's sure to spruce up any session, a look at a rather small, but still thoroughly entertaining board game and a blast to the past of dungeon-crawling adventures. There is more, but I'd rather you carry on down the path and discover them for yourself.

Again, a big thank you to all those who made this possible - writers, designers and even the lowly technical monkey, who was forced to work on this into the wee hours of the morn.

Thus, without further a due; as ever, enjoy what lies therein and a very merry, if somewhat belated by now, Christmas.

- Editor Emma



By Emma Johnson

Breaking the Fall

The silence stretched like loose waistband elastic, ready to drop at any moment.

'So,' the Nephilim coughed, phlegm momentarily stuck in his throat. 'What are you all doing here?'

'Why, I, the mightiest knight there ever was, am looking for work.'

The young woman took time out from sipping her tea to answer: 'Same as you.'

'How do you know I'm looking for work,' a somewhat satisfied smile spread across the mouth of the Nephilim, his teeth flashing like spotlights. 'For all you know I could have a thing going on with the master.'

'So you have "a thing" with the master. What's his name?' the woman glared over the rim of her cup.

His eyes searching the room for an answer, the Nephilim could only say: 'John.'

'My puppets say you're lying.'

'Ooo, puppets!' the Nephilim sprang from his seat, peering intently at the now-visible cloth dolls.

Like a startled cat, the woman withdrew the dolls, cradling them in her arms; her cup of tea abandoned; unfinished on the table.

Snapping the elastic band of tension, the knight threw in his cent: 'Well, considering you know the master--'

'Hey hey hey, I never said that. You just presumed I was here for the job...' the Nephilim sat back down again, embarrassment spreading across his face like the flush of a toilet. 'Yeah, I am.'

'Well, then--' coughed the knight.

'There you go then!' the woman continued cuddling her puppets, making them shake gently in her arms.

The Nephilim, who watched, felt somewhat guilty at what he'd done, but still couldn't take his eyes from the animated critters.

'This is coming from the girl who talks to puppets...' The boy in leather spoke up. The woman could only think he looked much like a lost dominatrix.

Muttering behind his helmet, the knight also added: 'Dunno why you're still playing with those at that age...' which they probably all missed, considerably distracted by a small, yet shrill voice peeking out from behind the still-hooded cloak, which also lifted to reveal a pair of furry fox ears.

'Perhaps we ought to, since we're all working together, get to, well, know each other's names. Or something...' the fox girl blushed, her face turning a crimson to match her twitching ears.

'I'll start with myself then!' the Nephilim announced. 'My name's Tobi, you may have noticed I'm a Nephilim. The horns, the tail, might've given it away.'

'Alright. I'm Tiff and I'm an alcoholic.' Tiff, the knight, paused to listen to the laughter, which was obviously muted by his manly helmet. 'Aside from that, I'm also the bravest, manliest Knight you'll ever see and I'll prove it to you on this adventure.'

'Bravest, manliest knight... Called Tiff?' Tobi scratched his horn in concentration.

'Tiff Eyde, or rather, Sir Tiff Eyde. If you prefer, because I prefer, because I am a Knight! The manliest knight you'll ever know,' he flashed a manly smile behind his visor, but that was also lost.

'Is that why none of us have ever heard of you?' the boy's leather creaked as he shifted in his chair, his wit widening his grin, but not making the pinch of his armour any less.

'What're you--'

'The name sounds familiar,' Tobi pointed an accusing finger at Tiff, the suit of armour jumping slightly at the action and eyes shifting nervously inside.

MAGIC

The Gathering

Card of the Month

By Liam Wright

The current block in MTG is a return to one of my favourite planes known as Ravnica, so I thought I would showcase one of my favourite cards from the original block. Meet Szadek, Lord of Secrets.



A legendary 5/5 flyer for 2 blue, 2 black and 3 colourless mana, seems a bit expensive right? Take a close look at his ability.

'If Szadek, Lord of Secrets would deal combat damage to a player, instead put that many +1/+1 counters

on Szadek and that player puts that many cards from the top of his or her library into his or her graveyard.' That 7 mana cost is a bit more justified now right?

As I mentioned previously this card was in the original Ravnica block and came with the Dimir deck. The deck's main focus was to make your opponent discard cards from their library, a tactic known as 'milling'. This was, and still is, a difficult tactic to win the game with, but Szadek made things a bit easier.

Picture this: you manage to play this card on your 7th turn, the earliest you possibly can play it due to the mana needed. On your 8th turn you attack with him and your opponent is unable to block, on his first attack he mills 5 cards from

your opponent's library. The next turn he mills another 10 because his ability has doubled his attack power. The turn after that he mills another 20 cards, after three turns you have milled thirty five cards and more than half of their 60 card library (presuming their library is built to standard rules).

Now why would you want to win the game by targeting your opponent's library? Look at it this way: you are possibly stopping your opponent from drawing what they need (in one game I kept milling their mana meaning they could not cast their high cost spells) also their library is more unprotected compared to their life total.

So I bet some of you are thinking 'this guy is easy to deal with, bam destroy target creature'. In today's Magic that is true, but back in 2005 Magic was a lot different. Back then, creature destruction spells were a lot less common than they are now and a large majority of them were along the lines of 'destroy target **non-black** creature'. Szadek is black and blue, making him harder to kill with creature destruction. The only really effective way to deal with him was to counter him as he was played.

So what use is he now that creature destruction is a lot more common, I hear you say?

Well, with a little tweaking; using methods that were not around back then, he becomes even worse.

Shroud or hexproof anyone? Back in 2005 neither of these abilities existed, but in today's magic there are enchantments and equipment that can give either of these abilities to him. If you do give him one of these abilities and get through one attack, so he becomes a 10/10 flyer, he is pretty much unstoppable, even to blocking.

I will admit he isn't the easiest card to use and he does need some extra cards to become a thorn in your opponent's side, and a guaranteed win, but if you can pull it off he can quickly become nightmare for your opponent.

EMPIRE OF Exotic Games



By Joseph Gilbert

There comes a time in every man's life where he needs to wear a dress and run around screaming: "I'm having fun and you can't stop me." *Maid* the RPG is for those moments. The objective of most role-playing games is escapism; the ability to become someone different, capable of pulling the most amazing of stunts, is highly attractive to many people seeking to avoid the humdrum of everyday life. Whilst most games are adventure oriented, turning you into a mighty warrior and pitting you against horrific monsters, *Maid* instead puts you in the shoes of, well, a maid.

The game itself focuses on a mixture of bizarre slapstick comedy and light semi-romantic drama as the players seek to curry favour from the Master of the Mansion, who is typically played by the Game Master. As a form of escapism, the game relies heavily upon the joint imagination of the Master and his Maids, who should work together to build an entertaining story. There are various random tables that dominate the rulebook, which are capable of randomising everything from characters, to the very plot itself. As such, tasks set by the Master can range from the mundane (help prepare for the grand ball) to the extraordinary (help tame a flight of dragons in order to end the zombie apocalypse so you can finish preparing for the grand ball), whilst a character can be anything from a normal-ish human all the way up to a cross-dressing robot werewolf assassin.

Gameplay revolves around six attributes: Athletics, Affection, Skill, Cunning, Luck and

Will. Each of these is a randomly generated number (2D6/3), which determines how good you are at associated tasks. For example, a maid with high Skill is very good at performing her duties as a maid (cooking, cleaning, bossing around the other maids etc), whilst a maid with high Athletics is very good at physical tasks (running, jumping, chainsaw duelling etc). In addition, you randomly chose two of six Maid Types—Lolita, Sexy, Pure, Cool, Boyish and Heroine, which further affect your attributes. Tasks are completed by rolling a D6 and multiplying it by the relevant attribute. If you beat the difficulty of the task you pass, otherwise you fail. By successfully completing tasks you gain favour, which can be used to improve your attributes, among other things. However, should you fail the task you lose favour. Should you be reduced to zero favour, you must either reduce one of your attributes by one—making you more likely fail tasks in the future and lose more favour—or allow your character to be fired from the mansion, never to be seen again.

Since a character only dies when they are fired, instead of losing health they instead gain Stress. Should a characters' Stress exceed their Stress Threshold (based upon their Will attribute), they undergo a Stress Explosion, wherein the player must role play how their character relieves stress for several real-world minutes—which can range from excessive drinking or racing all the way to stealing or going on a rampage. Such Stress Explosions usually have in-game consequences as well.

In order to progress in the game, the players must collect favour; a canny Master may set the maids in direct opposition with each other,

creating humorous situations for the players to end up in. This is further compounded by the optional "Seduction rules" that allow players to, well, seduce one another. A seduced player is completely at the mercy of their seducer (within reason, of course), who can abuse this to succeed at tasks they normally wouldn't be able to. However, the seducer must give the seduced player extra favour, allowing a seduced player to become stronger at a faster rate than the other players. However, building up too many relationships is liable to cause a Tragedy, derailing the plot as relationships collapse. These additional rules quickly add a political element to the game, helping build drama among the characters and progressing the story in unexpected directions.

Overall, *Maid* the RPG is a game which pulls people out of their comfort zone by placing them in the position of maids and then using a mixture of slapstick humour and political manoeuvring to build an entertaining, if bizarre and utterly random, story for players to escape into. The core rules, with their random tables and simple to learn system, can quickly be picked up by a small group looking for entertainment for an evening, whilst additional rules help expand on the social aspect of the game, building longer, more in depth dramas for a group to participate in and enjoy. So put on your dress, grab a feather duster and get to work!

You can find all the information you need to get started here:

<http://www.maidrpg.com/index.shtml>



THE SPARK OF IMMORTALITY

By Patrick McNeany

Part One

The song of Dominaria has called a new generation of planeswalkers. Masters of vampires, the heralds of angels and mages of every type. The influx of destruction since the Sylex Blast of The Brother's war and the Phyrexian invasion has caused more damage than originally thought. A new generation of walkers have awakened to replace the sacrifice of the old order. Dominaria has been calling new walkers for years; allowing them to integrate themselves into the worlds old and new. Many who carry the spark travel and explore, though they often produce conflicts of interests. As their tales intertwine, the new generation have a choice: to heal the rifts among the worlds or sunder them anew.

~*~

The temples had fallen; the cathars had been driven back by the wilderness to protect the last great cities. Pilgrims once frequented the holy homes of the three great Seraphim of Avacyn, but as of the fall, few were capable of making the fraught journey. Only members of the Chantry of Gavony, with the magic to protect them, are ever safe alone. Toma, of the great cathedral, is one of few who attempt to maintain the temples busying with the temple of Bruna, the Messenger of Alabaster, he prays for the return of the blessed sleep.

The blinding flash of light up the nearby mountain made him look up, as he did he noticed a dark choking mist forming from the

side of the mountain. It became a dark vortex that first formed soft, delicate feet that extend up into curved calves and graceful hips. The torso formed slowly as the mist exploded at the chest; falling gently across the woman's form, impossible dark red hair falling over a shoulder and down her back.

As this new arrival started, across the foothills of the mountain the ground warped and darkened around her feet. Where once grass and plains sprawled, life-sucking swamp began to spread. She grew closer, a wicked axe forming in her grip.

Toma became acutely aware that this was not an artefact he would be able to rid her of. He found himself retreating slightly into the sanctuary of the temple, from which he could draw the strength of Alabaster, and reached for his weapons: a pair of bladed cuffs, the design of which was seen as a gift from Avacyn herself; that members of the Chantry we trained to use. Swamps continued to expand around the woman's feet; Toma pushed his will out toward the river that wound lazily around the foot hills of the mountain, forcing it into the air and bringing about a dense fog in a sight depriving natural cover.

In the new arena, Toma could not see his adversary; however he knew that she must also be incapable of finding the temple. This sense of safety did not last long as it was quickly followed by an ear-splitting rumble; with this, Toma became painfully aware of the hindrance of being incapable of knowing her activities or movements. After a time, her actions seemed

to cease; Toma began to wonder how he might escape from his probable death. It was a fate expected of living in the lacking safety of Gavony. The chantry often spoke of old safe havens and artefacts that could help in times of dire need; yet they had become the stuff of myth and legend, since the passing of Urza, centuries ago. Metal and the will to protect and serve hidden long ago by the vanished legacy.

Toma was lurched from his reverie by a burst of heat so strong it visibly began to evaporate his natural defence. The energy flowing from the temple began to coalesce, rising from the crypt, drawing on Toma's latent power, as both a mage and member of the chantry. Before him rose a creation of metal and light that infused the room with energy and life. It was a creature of power, called to protect those of faith. The being of light moved slowly out of the temple, ready to protect the one who summoned it. Toma began to pray, falling into the systems of his faith that had served the church so well; for so long. He prayed for strength and protection, drawing on the energy of the herald Bruna. The energies of the icons of the chantry filled the temple, strengthening the stonework and mortar, studded with runes; waiting for just such a surge. The spells flowing through Toma had never been heard of in the recent seasons of Gavony, calls to the faith as strong as the powers of the chosen of Avacyn. The screech of metal and crackles of energy could be heard over the rush of pure magical energy, as the construct clearly kept the intruder of the realm at bay.

Using its remaining power to the fullest, the construct drove its target back into the shadows. The dark lady had become incensed and distracted; the next attack was the most direct, disarming her of her primary weapon, which was flung into the abyssal fog. The energies exploded, as the wicked axe caught

Toma in his trance with a sickening crack; forcing the fog outward, throwing all beings in the vicinity to the ground. The parting of the fog revealed the shining herald of Alabaster, Bruna.

With a scream of hatred, the darkling woman dissolved into the ground, rupturing it around the raised crypt of Mishra and Urza, an empty place. Shadows extended from the crypt, as Bruna alighted aside the construct, raising it to its feet. The nimbus of energy around Toma signified the activation of his spark, as the energy-infused Bruna acted as a point of focus for the lightning, shining purifying light on the crypt and the remnants of the invader. This was the finishing blow, forcing the shadowy figure out of the world. The evacuation of one side was followed swiftly by the fading of the other, as the energy surrounding the unconscious carthar faded, and the power-infusing the spells that had kept him safe returned.

Submissions

The Hobbit Board Game

By Thomas Rycroft

It seems hobbits are everywhere now, like hairy-toed ants. Granted, though, Tolkien has had a presence in gaming since the publication of the first edition of Chainmail, but how is Tolkien's magical world being treated in modern-day tabletop gaming? Well, let's have a look.

The Hobbit is a lovely product to behold. The board is a beautifully designed depiction of the rolling hills and sheer mountains of Middle Earth. The decks upon decks of cards are lovingly washed in the same pastel colours; with extremely well-chosen flavour text, straight from the classic novel.

It's a beautiful thing when you open a box and are punched in the face with stuff. Cards, cards, cards and cards. There is a beyond generous helping of cardboard in the box: Smaug even has his own fat little deck of cardboard cards on the side.

Cards!

Along with all this, we are also given a couple of miniatures, some nice custom dice and a bag of *gems*! However, it's necessary to say that I felt slightly short-changed by the mini Bilbo and Smaug. The minis aren't the best machined things, with some nasty open seams and little-to-no definition in the features.

I'll repeat for clarity: GEMS!

Granted they're pretty badly machined too and are made from, what feels like, shopping bags, but they're colourful as heck.

This game will transform your kitchen table into something really rather beautiful when it's all out (I say this assuming your kitchen table isn't a dragon or something).

In *The Hobbit*, *playerst* take the roles of unnamed, undescribed helpers on Bilbo's journey to Smaug's cavern. As the game is played, each character grows, levelling up in Initiative, Cunning and Strength; while collecting provisions.

The game is structured in an alternating pattern of two different forms of play. The first is a bargaining/gambling style of travelling, in which players must play *Dwarf Cards* to attempt to land on spaces that have are most beneficial to them. The gambling system is very simple: each player has five cards with depictions of the hairy fellows upon them; each card has a number from 1 to 60. Each player will play a dwarf card face down and all will flip simultaneously. The order in which the card's numbers rank (high to low), designates the space on which the player lands.

This is the section in which Bilbo's journey is tracked through Middle Earth and characters get the chance to level up their skills. Each space is marked as an addition to a skill or provisions, while some will remove some of your hard earned levels (ain't that a kick in the head?).

The second section of gameplay comes when the party get to some of the more action-packed segments of the story. There are four of these in all: Battle the Goblins, Fight the Wargs, Escape from the Mirkwood Elves and finally Kill

Smaug the Dragon. These boss fights, as they basically are, are the player's chances to display their prowess from the levels they have been collecting on the way. Players will draw a card which puts their character in peril. Each card will require a certain amount of Attack Power, Defence and/or Provisions to pass. The core of these skill tests will come from the rolling of the five custom dice, while being supplemented by levels. For completing these challenges the players get glorious rewards (GEMS!) acting as a points system to be counted at the end. In other words, the richest player wins. Very dwarven. You may also find yourself attached to your small horde. You'll make sure to select one of each colour. Keep them all in a special pile. They'll become precious to you...

The game really does manage to simulate the growth in power of a character. However, the battles still feel as though they're more up to luck than how skilfully you traversed the segment before. You will find yourself assuming that you can complete a task and just not have the dice work for you. Some players may love this, but personally I found it frustrating.

'So, big whoop!' I hear you saying. 'I kill goblins nightly. Where's the real peril?' Well relax, the game has real peril. Remember the Smaug miniature I mentioned? If a player attempts a challenge and fails like a banana, they must draw a Smaug Card. Smaug's cards have a negative affect for the player, snatching their provisions like so much lunch money, but they may also become the downfall of the entire game. The cards have upon them a symbol meaning that Smaug moves one space backwards from his starting place in his cavern. If the big guy gets to Laketown (ten spaces)

then the game is over. Everyone is dead. And it's *all your fault*.

So, it sounds interesting. It sounds like fun to play. And it is fun to play.

Once.

The main problem with *The Hobbit* is the mind-numbingly repetitive nature of it. You draw a card, do the dwarf thing, move and do it again and again. And it's like this throughout the entire game so that, by the time you're halfway through, you feel like gnawing off little Bilbo's head.

Or at least I did. Trying to play this game more than once is like waiting in a queue to wait in a queue.

As well as this, in the gambling of dwarfs, dominant strategy reigns supreme. If you want the last space you'll play your highest dwarf, for the first you'll play your lowest and for the middle spaces you'll just drop a middle-ranging card which is basically a shot in the dark. There is no space for trying to bluff, or trying to determine which cards the other players have. There's no challenge.

The best thing the game does is give you the sensation of hording as you collect your gems, but the speed at which the game ramps up difficulty means that by the end you're happy just to manage to beat Smaug; you stop caring who has the most colourful shiny things.

But, you know what, I can slam this game for its gameplay, but it really does feel like you're trawling your way in Bilbo's footsteps on his journey from Bag End to Smaug's cavern. If a feeling of nostalgia for a novel you probably read when you were younger (and less jaded) seems a good enough reason to buy, then this game will deliver in spades. Also, if you're up for marvelling at some

stunning art and want something truly pretty, you're sorted. But, if you're looking for good, intellectually engaging games, you may want to give this one a miss.

A Dip Back Into Dungeoning

By Peter Wright

Dungeon Crawl Classics Role Playing Game

Goodman Games, 2012 (ISBN: 978-0-

9828609-5-3)

\$39.99 (£22.89 from iguk.co.uk)

I blame Patrick Field, my English teacher. If he hadn't arrived with the boxed set of TSR's Basic D&D he'd been bought for Christmas 1981, I might never have become a roleplayer. I would never have misspent my youth in the damp, cobwebby cellars of Game on Liverpool's Kingsway Corner, peering at lead miniatures in dusty cases or searching out the latest fantasy adventures. I wouldn't have played *Advanced D&D*, or *Ravenloft* and *Planescape*, or *Call of Cthulhu* and *Traveller*. And I would certainly never have had the chance to teach a module on Writing for Roleplaying Games to second year Creative Writing and English Literature students. Pat Field has a lot to answer for. And he taught me stuff about some playwright called Shakespeare. Still, no one's perfect.

In those dim and distant days, there was nothing sophisticated about D&D and AD&D adventures. The plot structures were simple, the roleplaying straightforward. Motivated by mystery, the promise of treasure, or just a good fight (duelling with dice, of course), parties of PCs would venture into castles and keeps, dungeons and caverns, crypts and catacombs, checking for traps with two thoughts in mind: to fireball, turn, backstab or otherwise dispatch a few 'monsters' or NPCs and to grab as much gold as they possibly could. They were the dungeon crawl years. It was the American Dream in chainmail (+1 if you were lucky). Over the years, RPGs became more complex, emphasising collective storytelling rather than collective homicide. The emo-inspiring *Vampire the Masquerade* is perhaps the best example, but *Call of Cthulhu* and *Traveller* managed

something similar much earlier. The days of the dungeon crawl seemed spent, a necessary stage in the evolution of tabletop RPGs that was best consigned to history. Or so I thought. Then, in 2012, Goodman Games launched the *Dungeon Crawl Classics Role Playing Game (DCC RPG)*, which built on Goodman's reputation for publishing quality 'Dungeon Crawl Classics' – roleplaying modules for *D&D* 3rd and 4th Editions under the d20 OGL.

I confess: I bought the rulebook with some trepidation (and on a whim). Dungeon crawls were part of my gaming past and, aside for a vague twinge of nostalgia, I didn't feel too compelled to return to such simple scenarios. Nevertheless, as someone interested in adaptation, I was curious to see what an RPG self-consciously drawing attention to its embracing of 'Appendix N' might achieve.

For those of you unfamiliar with the term, 'Appendix N' refers to the literary works from where Gary Gygax, co-creator of *D&D*, drew inspiration. It appeared in the first edition of the *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons Dungeon Master's Guide* (1979) and listed many of the seminal works of popular fantasy, including fiction by Poul Anderson, Leigh Brackett, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Robert E. Howard, H. P. Lovecraft, J. R. R. Tolkien and others, that informed the conception of fantasy roleplaying. In *D&D*'s subsequent editions, the influence of such writers waned as the game acquired its own lore, most notably through the *DragonLance* and *Forgotten Realms* settings. The *DCC RPG* rejects any sense of this accumulated weight of gaming history to recapture the flavour of the 'Appendix N' writers. As the rulebook proclaims, '*DCC RPG* is a complete roleplaying game of 1970s Appendix N fantasy.' As such, it is unashamedly nostalgic in form and content.

Printed in monochrome and smelling strangely similar to the original *AD&D* core books (how *did* they do that?), the 470 page, one-volume ruleset is a retro delight. Heavily illustrated by TSR veterans including Jeff Dee, Jim Holloway, Erol Otus, and Jim Roslof, it recalls the 1970s' rulebooks and modules on every page, though the print and paper quality is much better. In many ways, its style is refreshingly *primitive*, with straightforward line drawings and iconic figures that capture the flavour of its forebears and anticipate a return to vigorous, less rules-heavy roleplaying.

The Appendix N sensibility is found in its traditional characters, its Spell lists, its 'Cyclopedia of Creatures', which contains a more reasonable number antagonists than the bloated bestiaries and *Monster Manuals* of other fantasy RPGs, and in its own 'Appendix N: Inspirational Reading' which, tellingly, has not been updated to account for the explosion in fantasy publishing that began in the mid-1970s.

The core mechanic is a stripped down version of the OGL d20 system. Prestige classes, attacks of opportunity, feats and skill points are gone. Much remains the same: armour class is ascending, skill checks succeed on higher rolls, critical hits are still significant, and modifiers are within familiar parameters. Rules innovations add to the game's uniqueness, however. Players no longer roll-up one new character but several '0' level PCs who embark on a deadly first mission. The 'Character Creation Funnel' sees most of these killed off – the assumption being that players will have a greater attachment to the survivor(s) who, of course, now have an interesting history, even at first level. It also avoids the possibility of players min-maxing their characters, producing a much more realistic (and random) party composition. Special magic rules – Spellburn, Mercurial Magic, Corruption and Disapproval – make playing magic users much more interesting and

unpredictable. Given the mercurial nature of magic in the *DCC RPG*, for example, no Wizard can be certain *precisely* how a spell will manifest itself in his or her hands. Unpredictable fun for all. Similarly, the Mighty Deeds of Arms rules allow Warriors particular opportunities to perform feats of arms that recall the great swordsmen of fantasy fiction: Conan, John Carter, or Elric.

In other words, the DCC RPG is a fast, fun, retro RPG experience that goes beyond the limits of its title. Dungeon crawls are one possibility, but there is the promise of much more here. A simplified mechanic wedded to an obvious literary tradition opens innumerable possibilities for the inventive GM. Want to adventure in Joe Abercrombie's Union, or the lands of David Gemmell's Drenai books, or Howard's Hyboria? The DCC RPG has the generic flexibility, the tone, and the verve to accommodate just that.

For fortysomethings, *Dungeon Crawl Classics Role Playing Game* is a delightful way to rediscover why they got into roleplaying in the first place; for teens and twenty-somethings, it's a great opportunity to find out why your parents turned out the way they did. Highly recommended.

The Life of a Tabletop Gaming Noob

By Tasha Williams

To be perfectly honest, I've always considered myself to be a console gamer. From a very young age, I was frantically attacking the PlayStation controller buttons to get all those tasty looking gems in Spyro the Dragon; alongside trying to ensure Croc's successful rescue of the fuzzy, little Gobbos (in reality that game was beyond shocking in quality, but hey, it was the 90s). As I got older, I progressed to bigger and better consoles (supposedly) and ended up being one of the cliché who played Call of Duty until the wee hours of the morning with players who appeared to have a limited vocabulary (i.e. spoke only in swear words and sexist comments, of course there was going to be, I'm a woman on an Xbox, CRIME!) and then immersed myself so deep into Skyrim that there were times when I ran around yelling FUS RO DAH in determination to be Dovahkin. And then I discovered Tabletop gaming, and well...my view on gaming has changed significantly.

I first had a go at Tabletop gaming in my first year of university in my Literature 'Beyond Books' module. I was attempting to play The Curse of the River Queen, a Call of Cthulu scenario written by my tutor. Originally, I had kind of taken the piss with the whole character creation side and if I remember correctly, rolled up a fat black chef named Gusto who was born in a bouncy castle. It was only about 10 minutes into the game after the initial setup that I realised how wrong I had been to mock this game form. I highly enjoyed the amount of freedom, and though you couldn't see your surroundings (unlike console gaming) the settings were still as engaging as that on a video game. I found myself becoming increasingly more excited when it came to be my turn in a combat round, or to argue tactically with my fellow PC's to decide what rooms to go in next,

or what decisions to make in terms of the scenario that was put in our way.

In what turned out to be a very short game, dear Gusto got killed, and I put Tabletop gaming out of my mind for the next few months. But when I came back for my second year in university, I started a Writing for Roleplaying Games module which encouraged me to try out Tabletop gaming myself, in order to see what the particular gaming audience requires of a writer when playing a scenario. I had my first play testing session about a month ago with a few other members of my class. They were significantly more experienced than me but they beared with me and taught me the processes of the rule system as well as the mechanics of the game, allowing me to fully enjoy the experience of the game.

If you, like me are fairly new to Tabletop gaming and are still trying to get to grips with it, I'd recommend these handy tips to get you started:

- Don't be afraid to ask your GM questions. They are usually very helpful and will answer any question, no matter how silly you think it may be. They were like you once!
- Buy a set of gaming dice! I have to wait till Christmas for mine, but I think the second I get them, the whole process will become so much easier. That way you can practice dice rolls at home and understand what rolls determine successes and failures, and you can also practice rolling up characters.
- Buy a roleplaying system book! I own the Chaosium Basic Roleplaying System Guide and it is truly wonderful in helping new Tabletop gamers. Within it you can learn to understand the specifications of weapons, spells, races and learn how to roll up a character on your own, as well

as understand the items associated with certain genres/time eras.

So I hope this helped anyone who was wondering what it was like to be a Tabletop gaming noob. I aim to tell you about my ever changing experiences as a gamer monthly, so until next time comrades!

Cold War: CIA vs KGB

By Thomas Rycroft

Cold War: CIA vs KGB is a small two-player card game, and as a result this is a small review. In its third edition, and smallest box yet, *Cold War* is a card game based around the theme of, you guessed it, the cold war.

The game acts as a sexed-up version of blackjack. You must, as either the CIA or the KGB, handle an event, which has the opportunity to be turned in the favour of either party. Both ways to players must use an undercover agent to spearhead their campaign; each agent has their own set of winning conditions. For instance: the *Master Spy* has a condition where, if you lose, you actually win. Quite cool. The main aim of the game is to gain stability points, but exceed the points needed for each particular event and you cause civil unrest. Good job.

So, the main problem with *Cold War: CIA vs KGB* is the same as blackjack's main problem: judging your opponent's hand and trying to plan your attacks accordingly is near impossible. You would probably have better chance of telling their blood type by the way they sneeze. This is not a very strategic game, which is disappointing given the theme. I wanted to imagine myself as JFK or Khrushchev (well, maybe not Khrushchev...) sending out secret agents to mess with the other country's plans..

Although, having said that, the theme is carried quite well in places. Maybe not in the realm of gameplay, but all of the cards are lovingly crafted; using actual photographic imagery from the events and time of the cold

war. The theme is the true selling-point of this game. If you have any interest in this period of history, then this game is a must-have. But, if you're after a two-player game that will truly pit your mind against your opponent's, there are better places to go -get *Memoir '44*.

Biographies

Joseph Gilbert - Some say Joseph Gilbert is a Scion of Cthulhu, heralding the end times. Others say that he is a time-traveling superspy seeking to cause and prevent certain events for his cyborg masters. A few even whisper that he is a regular geek who lives through the internet from his parent's basement.

Emma Johnson - Emma Johnson, writer, gamer, crotcheter, sleeper. No one knows quite what she'll be doing in the future, but all we know is: it probably won't be anything good.

Patrick McNeany – Patrick is mostly the gamer who watches and waits for the perfect moment to display how insane he really is. He prefers to play in games rather than run them, keeping a good balance of crazy and on track. He will try any game once whether it's card games, board games or RPG's.

Tasha Williams - Tasha Williams is an aspiring novelist, and is currently editing the deadly first draft of her NaNoWriMo novel. She also is an editor of Theseus Publishing Online Magazine and an amateur photographer as well as a console gamer with a new found love for tabletop!

Liam Wright - Liam has always known he would grow up to be a geek in some form or another. Even at the age of 7 he was learning about the world of tabletop RPG's, even if he couldn't comprehend the rules at the time