



ZOR DRAXTAU

Number III

LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER



This issue of **ZOR DRAXTAU** has been long in the waiting. Not necessarily for want of anything constructive to offer my fellow gamers, but because its simplicity project to which it was to be associated—**VALEN'CYA'S HORDE**—was an elusive creature to capture. The previous

issue of **ZOR DRAXTAU** which was released with book 3 of the **BONE-HILT SWORD** campaign—**THE SHADOWED KEEP**—was released in May of 2010. Well, here we are in July of 2012!

I'm quite proud of the reception of **THE SHADOWED KEEP** by the OSR community (see the review at <http://tenfootpole.org/ironspike/?p=629>), and I'm confident that **VALEN'CYA'S HORDE** will keep up the history of favorable reviews for Usherwood Publishing's opus of **THE BONE-HILT SWORD**.

So what exactly can you look forward to in book 4? Here's a quick tally;

- **Brand new layout:** we've completely revamped our print and PDF presentations for all of our products (a prime example is before you now in the form of this newsletter). We've also updated our cartographic approach which will hopefully make our maps a bit more legible.
- **48 defined encounter areas:** When I say 'defined encounter areas, I'm not saying things like, "Chamber 1. Room contains 5 orcs, each has 5 sp." No sir. Each chamber is thought out with enough detail to give the GM a clear indication of how the chamber fits into the whole scheme of the adventure, but not so much that the GM's creativity is suppressed. Part of the hallmarks of the Usherwood approach is to aid the GM's creativity, and Valen'cya is no exception.
- **Completely fleshed out water-borne and overland sand-boxing:** We've gone to great lengths offer the players all the freedom they desire to *not* follow a prescribed course before diving into the action. There's every possibility your players will instead wander off onto one of the many sidetrek opportunities provided in the **JOURNEY** section of the adventure.
- **Historical appendix:** We try to be sensitive to our readers desire not have to reams of information before they finally get to the meat of the adventure. Once again, we've moved all that to an appendix in the back of the book. It's there if you want it, but doesn't get in your way if you don't.

- **Seven annotated maps:** As I mentioned previously, all the maps have been re-rendered into a new, and hopefully more legible, artistic style. Each is provided with enough information to get you started adventuring therein, but once again, we've tried not to get in your way with too much data. Make what you will of each map.
- **Eight new creatures:** A few of these monsters are staples that have existed in First Edition fantasy RPGs (dracolich, aquatic elf, hippocampus, and the salamander), but several are brand new, designed specifically for this adventure (garnet dracolich, magma golem, giant marine iguana, and the aquatic troll).
- **Three new magic items:** Sometimes you have a need for a bit of magic that simply has not been envisioned yet (or, at the least, it's not come to your attention specifically). This adventure introduces the *cold ring*, the *mace of curses*, and the *ring of wisdom*.

KRAMER

July 2012
Everett, WA

ELSEWHERE IN THIS ISSUE OF ZOR DRAXTAU

- **Open Gaming Content:** Get a preview of **VALEN'CYA'S HORDE** as I present some of the open gaming items that are included with the adventure.
- **Who is this 'Xerksis' character anyway?** The whole **BONE-HILT SWORD** campaign is centered around an antagonist who has so far been suspiciously absent from the game, other than a casual mention here and there. This article will offer a bit of history to this mysterious figure, and should prove helpful to the GM in book 5—**IN THE HALLS OF THE MAGE-KING**.
- **Coloring art:** I've had a number of questions regarding the process I go through in applying color to the artwork that appears in Usherwood Publishing products. While each piece has its own particular requirements, in this multi-part article, I outline the basic process from artist submission to finished product.
- **Opinion article:** Just like a\$\$holes, they say everyone has one. Here, I wax poetically in defence of POD and the hobbyist publisher.

Open Gaming Content

The items listed here (cold ring, aquatic troll, giant marine iguana) are Open Game Content (OGC), and may be used in your OSRIC manuscripts. You do not need to seek the permission of the author to use such content, and you may manipulate the content to suit your needs. However, you must always provide a full and complete copy of the Open Gaming License (OGL) and the OSRIC copyright and trademark information as found on the OSRIC download site (<http://www.knights-n-knaves.com/osric/>).

Unless otherwise noted here, you must always include the following statement, "Created by James D. Kramer. Used by permission. <http://www.usherwoodadventures.com>".

NEW MAGIC

Cold Ring (any): an electrum ring which functions similarly to a *ring of warmth*, except; the wearer maintains normal body temperature in conditions of extreme heat (up to 300°), regenerate heat- or fire-based damage by 1 hit point per round, +2 to all saving throws vs. heat, flame, or flame-based attacks, and reduces damage inflicted by such attacks by 1 point per die.

Experience / g.p. value: 1,000 / 5,000 g.p.

NEW CREATURES

TROLL, AQUATIC

	Freshwater	Ocean
Frequency:	Very rare	
No. Encountered:	1d6	1d8
Size:	Medium (7 ft tall)	Large (9 ft tall)
Move:	30 ft, 150 ft swimming	
Armor class:	5	3
Hit dice:	5+5	6+6
Attacks:	3	
Damage:	1d4+1/1d4+1/3d4	1d4/1d4/1d8+8
Special attacks:	See below	
Special defences:	See below	
Magic resistance:	Standard	
Lair probability:	20%	
Intelligence:	Low	Average (low)
Alignment:	Chaotic evil	
Level/XP:	6/525+8/hp	6/725+10/hp

Aquatic trolls are an amphibious form of troll (qv). They inhabit large bodies of water, where food is plentiful. They are frequently located near human, demi-human, or humanoid settlements where they are known to invade late at night to take victims. Aquatic trolls regenerate hit points and limbs as do normal trolls.

The aquatic troll can breath both below and above water. However, the creature's skin must be kept damp at all times, so they will not frequently travel far from their territorial waters under normal circumstances. If the aquatic troll remains out of the water for more than 4 hours in a dry climate, they will begin loosing hit points at a rate of 1 point each round until they can fully immerse themselves in the water of their normal habitat. Hit points lost in this way are regenerated at the troll's normal rate beginning 1 turn following immersion. Aquatic trolls reduced to 0 hit points through drying-out are destroyed utterly.

As with other trolls, they can also be completely destroyed through immolation by fire, or immersion in acid.



Aquatic trolls do not favor bright sunlight, and will make efforts to avoid it. Aquatic trolls caught in bright sunlight will have movement slowed to one-half, and will always attack last in any round of melee. Light through spell, or that sunlight shed in a cloudy day do not adversely affect the aquatic troll.

The lair of an aquatic troll will have 3d4 individuals. These are encountered at depths from 20 ft to 100 ft deep. The lair itself will be a complex of 3–6 large caverns which may or may not be submerged in water. Any treasure held by the creatures will be contained within a fully submerged cave.

There are two species of aquatic troll; freshwater and ocean.

Freshwater troll: small as compared with other species of troll, the freshwater troll has fish-like scales similar in color and pattern to trout and salmon. Their claws are less potent weapons

than those of other trolls, however, their jaws are lined with hundreds of needle-like teeth. The freshwater troll can attack 3 opponents simultaneously.

Freshwater trolls are hermaphroditic, and reproduce by injecting fertilized eggs into a victim via a hypodermic-like protrusion located below the troll's abdomen. Any freshwater troll is 10% likely to be ready to reproduce in this method. To successfully inject its fertilized fluids, the troll must successfully strike a victim with both claws, indicating the victim has been grappled. On the following round, the troll's reproductive organ will jab into the victim's prone body, inflicting 1 hit point of damage, and injecting millions of fertilized eggs. Unless physically removed from the victim, the eggs will mature into 2d6x10 tadpole-like creatures, 4 in long. These will burst forth from the victim's body in 2 month's time (killing the victim). Unless immediately immersed in clean, freshwater, the tadpoles will die within 2d4 turns. Tadpoles grow quickly, taking only 6 months to reach maturity.

Treasure: 2d6x1,000 cp (20%), 1d6x1,000 sp (35%), 1d4x1,000 ep (15%), 1d4x1,000 gp (15%), 1d4x100 pp (10%), 1d6 gems (25%), 1d4 jewellery (25%), 1-3 rings (10%), 1d4 potions (10%)

Ocean troll: these sea-dwelling creatures are covered in thick scales that are patterned in black and shades of green to grayish-green, with patches of beige and blood-red. The mouth of the ocean troll is huge, and able to inflict tremendous damage. In general, they appear much like a bipedal marine iguana.

As with the freshwater variety, the ocean troll is hermaphroditic, but they do lay eggs several times during their lifespan. The eggs are large spheres, approximately 6 in diameter. These eggs are attached to underwater cave walls, and are guarded fiercely by the troll community. Once hatched, the fry very closely resemble small, green manta rays. These disperse immediately upon hatching, and swim to great depths to grow and mature. Only upon taking on their mature, bipedal form will they return to coastal areas to establish a lair.

Ocean troll lairs will also include 3d4 giant marine iguanas. When raiding villages, the ocean trolls will be accompanied by 2d4+1 giant marine iguanas.

Treasure: 2d6x1,000 cp (20%), 1d6x1,000 sp (35%), 1d4x1,000 ep (15%), 1d4x1,000 gp (15%), 1d4x100 pp (10%), 1d6 gems (25%), 1d4 jewellery (25%), 1-3 rings (10%), 1d4 potions (10%)

MARINE IGUANA, GIANT

Frequency: Very rare
No. Encountered: 1d4
Size: Large (20 ft long)
Move: 30 ft; 120 ft swimming
Armor Class: 4
Hit Dice: 6
Attacks: 1

Damage: 3d4
Special Attacks: Disease
Special Defences: None
Magic Resistance: Standard
Lair Probability: None (no lair)
Intelligence: Animal
Alignment: Neutral
Level/XP: 5/400+6/hp

The giant marine iguana is an amphibian which lives in salt waters, near wide sandy beaches where they are prone to sunning themselves while digesting their recent kill. Though slow and lumbering on land, they are quick and agile in the ocean. On an unadjusted "to hit" of 20, the marine iguana has grabbed hold of its victim in its powerful jaws, and inflict an automatic 2d4 hit points of damage on all subsequent rounds until the victim is freed or slain, or the creature is destroyed. Once the iguana has grabbed a victim, it will attempt to drag the victim to the water and drowned them. The iguana will not consume live victims, preferring to eat its victims dead. It will prefer to scavenge previously killed food if presented in large quantities.

Giant marine iguanas are excellent climbers, and may scale sheer cliffs at their full rate of movement. They are have been known to capsize small vessels; fishing boats being particularly at risk, as the iguana attempts to scavenge a catch of fish.

Any creature bit by a giant marine iguana will contract a disease unless a successful save vs. poison is made.

Treasure: None.



Xerksis; the Mage-King



Throughout the history of the Bone-Hilt Sword campaign, the unseen force behind the effort to the evil artifact has been Xerksis, the Mage-King (also known variously as Xerksis the Corruptible, Neriax the Elder, He Who Denies Death, and the Black Councilor). But in the context of the campaign setting, just who, or what, is this creature?

Born a millennia prior to the events of the Bone-Hilt sword, Xerksis entered the world as part of a humble sarngoch tribe located on the continent of Kargliv, southwest of the continent of Vermé. Here, the young peasant was schooled in the ways of the *Gift of Making* like all young sarngoch. The boy, gifted in the necromantic arts, quickly came to desire the power that came with his magical talents, and sought to rise to a position of power and authority before his coming of age. Evil quickly became an outwardly noticeable trait in the boy, and cruelty his daily diet. Before the boy would see his sixteenth summer, he would be cast out of his village, and set adrift on the open ocean, driven by enchanted winds to carry him far to the east.

After a month's voyage, the small craft came to rest on the shores of the Verméan continent, near the region that would come to host the paladin village of Henry-by-the-Sea. It would later come to pass that a contingent of paladins would establish the village due to their belief that area had become inherently evil on the day that the young Xerksis first arrived there.

Reviling the world around him due to his banishment, Xerksis swore revenge not just on those of his tribe who he felt betrayed him, but on the entire world of Besh. And due to his teachings

among the sarngoch, the boy knew exactly what he must do; commit himself utterly to his revenge by subjecting his body and mind to the destructive process and magics that would ultimately transform him into an undying lich.

As Xerksis grew to manhood, he plied his evil beliefs to further his own objectives by ingraining himself in the politics of many cities, in many guises—beneficent and baleful—turning village against village, family against family, and brother against brother. Wherever he went, Xerksis was welcomed with open arms as councilor and confidant, and never were his designs and intentions revealed. It would later become known that Xerksis himself was personally responsible for the outbreak of the conflict that would become the To'Drago Karg (the Third Dragon War).

Through the efforts of Xerksis to increase his power and become god-like, he sought the power of the dragons, for they were the stuff of the Gift of Making. And He recalled many of the chromatic beasts back from a centuries-long sleep imposed on them at the ending of the Second Dragon War. And to these he promised the wealth and power denied them by the truce made at the end of the Drago'nith Karg. And the evil creatures were easily swayed at the promise of revenge against those who denied them the victory they felt they so richly deserved.

And so the To'drago Karg was begun by Xerksis the Corruptible. And this war ravaged all the lands, and it was the bloodiest and most violent of conflicts since the Monith Quin (the First Day). And during the many long centuries of this new war, many of



Xerksis; the Mage-King (continued)

dragon-kind died, and very few were birthed. And the numbers of the dragons — both chromatic and metallic — were reduced until only a hand-full were left. And these few retreated into secret hiding places to rest and recover.

And believing that he had sufficiently sapped the strength and power from the lands, Xerksis established himself as an elderly but kindly king in the large city-state of the Imperium Vallis. And here, Xerksis constructed a great white spire in the city; a symbol of his strength and benevolence that can be seen from far out into the Sea dar de Imperium. And at this time, word came to Xerksis through dark minions that forces were gathering through the efforts of a young and idealistic ranger named Mandrake Usher (see **YRCHYN, THE TYRANT** for more information on the history of Mandrake Usher, namesake of Usherwood). And that these forces were foolishly planning to challenge Xerksis' control over not just the Imperium Vallis, not just the continent of Vermé, but over the entirety of the planet of Besh.

Seeking a means to quash the ranger's 'pitiful little band' of rogue humans and pathetic demi-humans from the northern peninsula on the Usher Arm Peninsula, Xerksis created the Bone-Hilt sword; a thing of purest, darkest evil. And into the sword, Xerksis sacrificed a portion of his evil soul, so that whomever

should wield the weapon, would also be invoking his spirit. And during this process, Xerksis also achieved his life-long desire to ultimately commit himself to the dark life of a lich.

Succeeding in both pursuits, Xerksis took the guise of an aged wanderer, and protected the Bone-Hilt sword in magics to disguise the nature of its evil, and changed its form, so that all who saw it, saw only a weather-worn staff of humble origin.

Eventually, Xerksis confronted Usher in one-to-one combat at a remote campsite, revealing his true being, and the true nature of his staff as that of the Bone-Hilt sword. However, Xerksis was unaware of a magical sword gifted to Usher by the elves of the Northern Territories. For the blade gave Usher the power to meet the evil threat posed by Xerksis and his weapon.

During the combat, the ranger managed to break the evil Bone-Hilt sword, separating the hilt from the blade; both the separate pieces being magically hidden in locales far from one another, but still on the continent of Vermé. And because Xerksis' soul was linked to the weapon, he himself was banished to his dark chamber high in the Tower of Xerksis in the Imperium Vallis, until such a time as the sword shall be remade.

Legend states that only when the Bone-Hilt sword is remade, can the spirit of Xerksis the Mage-King be fully destroyed.

Applying Color:

THE USHERWOOD PUBLISHING METHOD OF APPLYING COLOR TO OSR-STYLE LINE ART (PART 1)

There's an awful lot of really excellent OSR illustrators out there, doing an awful lot of really excellent OSR-style art. There's something special that happens with well-executed line art, that just doesn't happen with the slick, glossy pages of the larger game publishers are putting out. To me, I think it's a matter that OSR-style line art gives the viewer's mind room to wander, and to fill in the details, where a life-like rendering does not. However, I also feel that when a reader can download a PDF, black-and-white line art can also fall a little flat on user-experience. So, there's a middle ground that I strive for with Usherwood artwork; an approach that allows me to include the original line art for the print product, and a colored version for the PDF version.

In this multi-part article, I will answer some of the questions that have been sent to me in email about my particular execution.

First, you've got to start with a good quality piece of art that offers opportunity to apply color. Line art that contains large areas of solid black, or that do not have superior line quality, are not good candidates. Generally, I have artists provide me with an initial draft (rarely, I have go further than this and request a

second or a third draft before they move on to final ink). **Figure 1** shows the rough draft from illustrator Peter Szmer for the village of Pelican Bay. Note the red notations to the illustrator pointing out what works for me, and what does not.

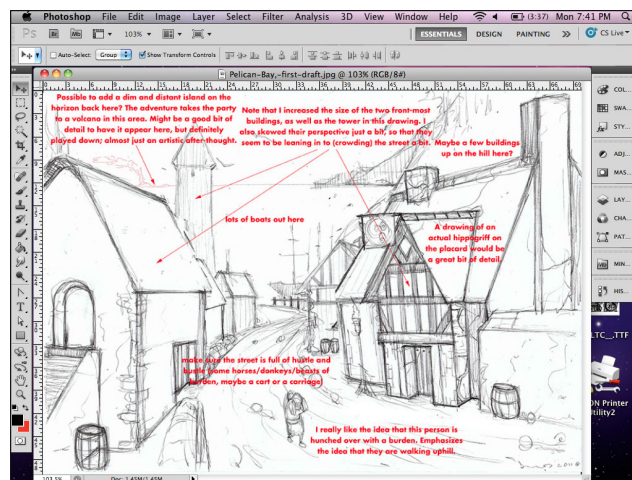


FIGURE 1: The artist's submitted rough draft with editorial commenting.

Applying Color (continued)

Frequently, I'll give them (the illustrators) my thoughts about specific executions as well, though I try to give my illustrators lots of freedom. **Figure 2** shows the final inked illustration as it appears within the module **VALEN'CYA'S HORDE**, after incorporating my feedback.

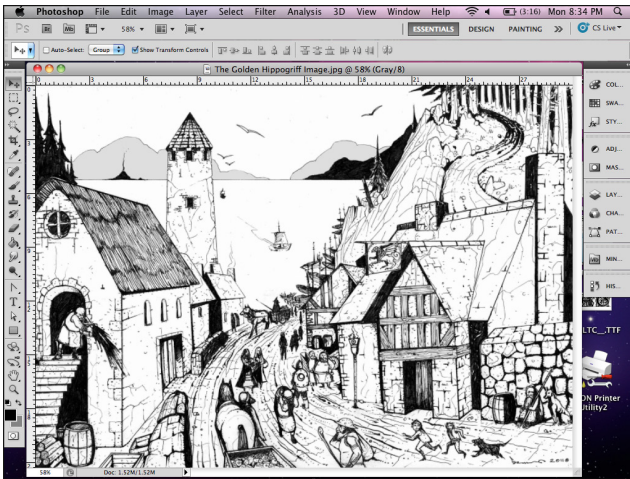


FIGURE 2: The final inked art, ready for the colorization process.

The next step is to prepare the image for coloring. First, set the Blend Mode of the layer containing the line art to Multiply, which allows the line art to behave as a transparent overlay on top of my colored layers which will be stacked beneath it. I then block out each of the major objects as masks. The color used for the mask is not important. In fact, I find the more garish each color I use is, the easier it is for me to identify those areas that require color treatment. **Figure 3** shows the image after blocking in each color mask as a separate layer in Photoshop. One thing to note, your layers at this point should not contain any layer effects, which may cause problems later on.

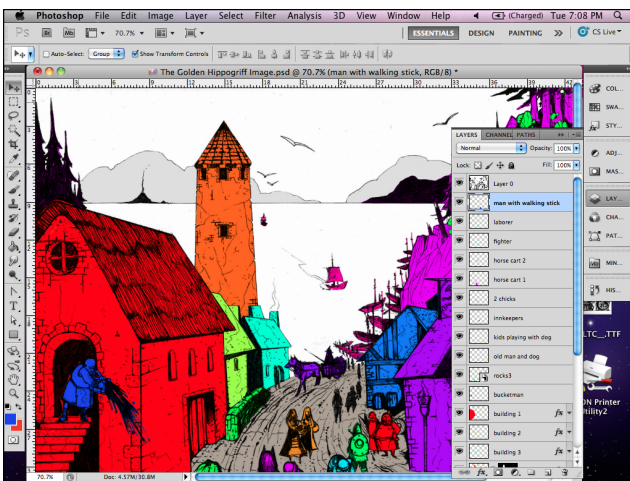


FIGURE 3: Blocking in the shapes of the major illustration elements.

This is one of the most important steps, and it determines the accuracy of adding color, texture, and visual effects that will give life your image. You'll want to make sure you spend all the time needed at this point to get your masks accurate to the line art created by your illustrator. Once this step is done, we can now start looking at applying shadows, highlights, and textures to the object in your images. I usually start working back to front, but since you've blocked your masks at this point, it really doesn't matter where you start. **Figure 4** shows where I have blocked in the sky with a rectangle shape in Photoshop. **Figure 5** shows the shape rectangle with a gradient layer style applied to create a sunset in the background.

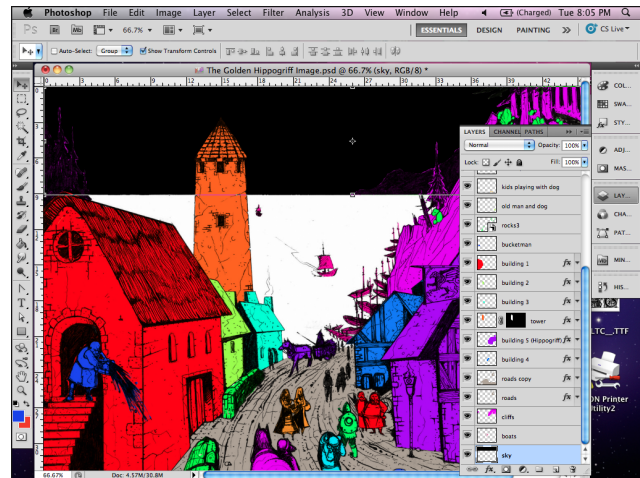


FIGURE 4: Blocking in the sky with a rectangle.

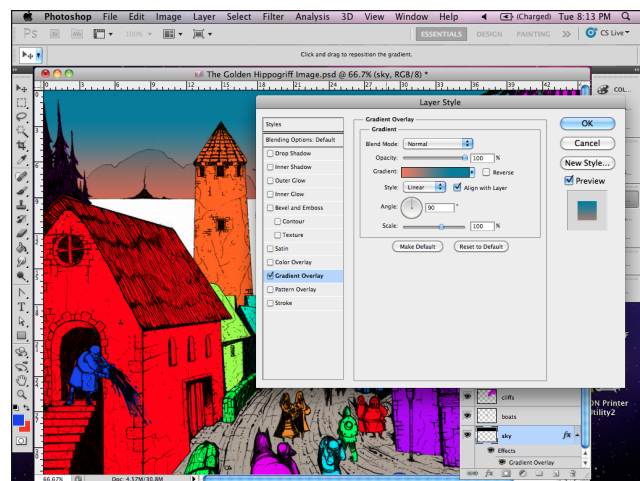


FIGURE 5: Applying a layer style to the rectangle to create a sunset gradient.

After roughing in the sky, I can see that the first issue I want to address are those clouds in the background. I don't want to have them seeming to be the same color as the sky, so I am going to create a new layer called 'clouds'. Then, I am selecting a warm

Applying Color (continued)

light gray color in the foreground color selector that I will be using to paint with. And I will use a brush with a pixel diameter of 50 px, and use the Soft Round brush so my clouds come in with a nice fuzzy edge to them. **Figure 6** shows the completed clouds against my sunset background.

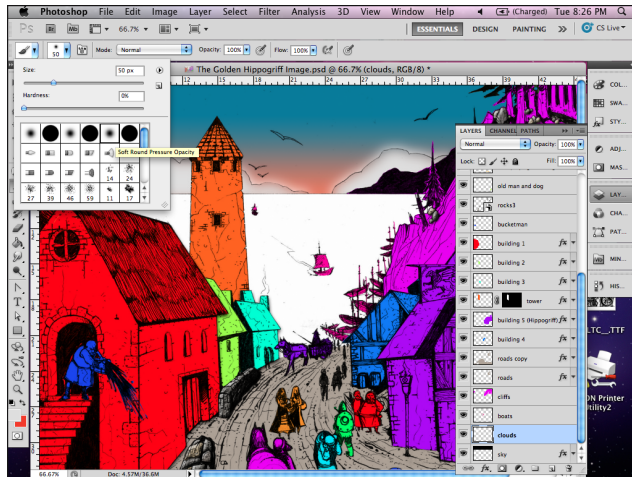


FIGURE 6: Applying a layer style to the rectangle to create a sunset gradient.

While I am working on this area of the background, I now note that I may have a problem with the water out on the bay. There's several issues I want to address here;

- I want the water to appear to have some white caps, so that it doesn't look like flat expanse of color.
- I want to be able to give the feeling of depth to the water as the plane extends into the distance.
- I'll need to be able to apply some of the sunset coloring into the water itself.

To start with, I'll create a layer called 'sea', and paint the area black that will be filled with water (again, the actual color I am painting with is not important at this point).

Once this shape has been blocked in, I first set the layer Fill to 0%, effectively 'turning off' the color I used to paint in the shape of the sea. Then, I am going to work with three different layer styles; Inner Glow, Bevel and Emboss, and Color Overlay. The first layer style I work with is the Color Overlay, since this will affect all the other layer styles. Since I have 'turned off' the black shape by setting the Fill to 0%, I can now set the shape to whatever color I want using the Color Overlay style. This I set to an RGB mix of 78R 183G 190B, and then set the Blend Mode to Multiply. Then I create an Inner Glow, which will indicate visual depth to the water, by making the middle of the shape darker than the edges. On the Inner Glow panel, I set the glow to a Blend Mode of Multiply, 75% Opacity, an RGB mix of 40R 138G 189B. I then

set the Technique to Softer, the Origin to Center, Choke to 0%, and Size to 208 pixels. The Quality settings on this panel I won't change from their defaults.

It should be noted on the Bevel and Emboss settings I will be using, my intention is not to bevel the object, but to apply a texture to it. So, on the Bevel and Emboss panel, in the Structure section, I set the Technique to Smooth, the Depth to 100%, Direction to Up, Size and Soften are both set to 0 px. In the Shading section, I set the Angle to 120°, the Altitude to 60°, the Highlight Mode to Screen at 100%, and the Shadow Mode to Multiply at 0%. Then, I click on the Texture panel. Note that here I have defined a pattern that I will use for my water texture. You can do this by opening a file in Photoshop that you wish to use as your texture, go to Edit > Define pattern... The active document should now be shown in the Define Pattern dialog as a thumbnail. The pattern I created is a sample of grainy stonework, which will work just fine for what I need here. In the Texture panel, after having selecting my pre-defined pattern sample, I set the Scale to 173, and the Depth to +100%, Link with Layer is turned on.

Figure 7 shows the resulting sea plane. Note though that the plane seems to be light out toward the edges, as though the outer edges of the shape are glowing. I'll deal with those issues next.

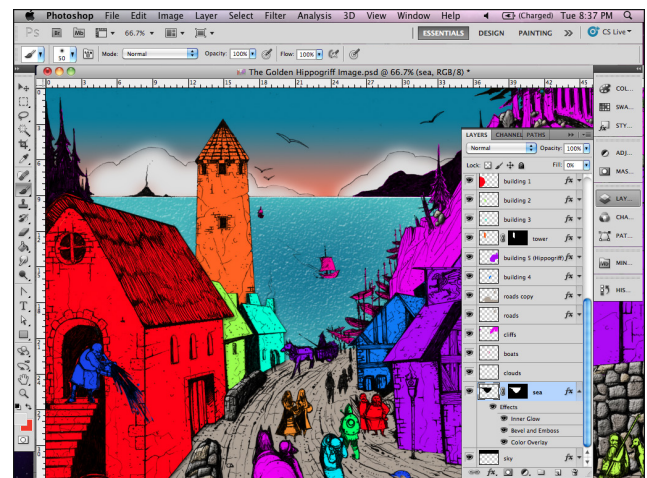


FIGURE 7: Creating the base texture for the sea plane.

Now I need to fix the perspective and sunset lighting conditions on the water's surface. To start, I'll create three new layers; distance haze, water perspective, and a second copy of water perspective (stacked in that order). The distance haze layer is going to be used to create highlight on the surface of the water where the sun has set below the horizon. This layer will have a shallow gradient of orange to transparent (the top of the gradient is abutted to the base of the sky shape). I then create the

illusion of the haze getting narrow in the distance using a Layer Mask, I also change the Blend Mode of this layer to Divide, since I don't want it to be over-saturated with color. The next layer is the first water perspective layer, which is a rectangle object with a Gradient applied to it. The Fill on this layer is set to 0% (again, making the fill color of the rectangle effectively null). The Gradient layer style is a black to transparent gradient (black being at the bottom, to transparent at the top, with the Blend Mode set to Hard Light, with the Direction set to 90°. This setting creates a deep blue hue to appear closest to the foreground. Once that is set, I duplicate the water perspective layer, and Reverse the Gradient direction, which places a deeper hue to the background of the water and sky planes.

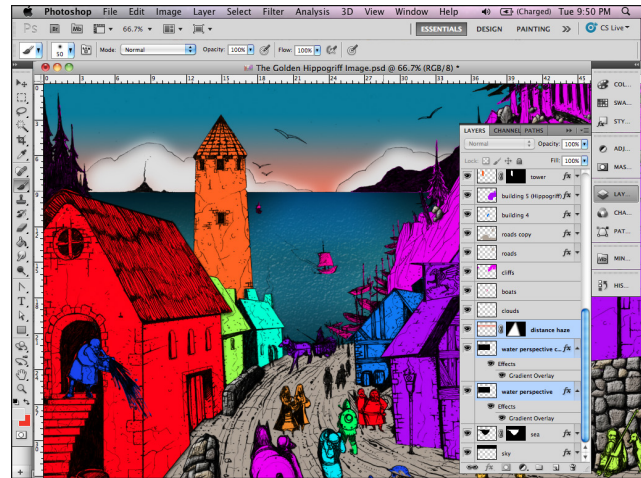


FIGURE 8: *The finished water and sky planes.*

In the next issue of Zor Draxtau, I'll move on to the buildings in the layout, but to this point, and experienced Photoshop user can begin to see how my technique is unfolding.

OPINION PUBLISH OR DIE!

A few times over the last couple of years, I've been queried about the size of my publishing 'organization'.

Well, without knowing how many people are employed by Lulu.com and RPGNow.com, I can't really say. If the question really is, how many people are working with me at my particular office, the answer is simple; 3. Me, myself, and I.

I've been working in the publishing world continuously since 1994. I spent 13 years working at the publishing arm of Microsoft, and for the past 5 years, I've been a freelancer, sub-contracting through another designer. Most of my work through this latter client has been for John Wiley & Sons, Inc, out of Indianapolis, Indiana. So, I have a few projects under my professional belt as publishing goes.

Point being, I was there when the first whispers of print-on-demand (POD) began to make themselves heard. At the time I became aware of POD technology (circa 1997, I believe), the promise of being able to print a single copy of a book was exciting, but was still not a cost effective means of distributing a printed product. At the time, it would have cost close to \$100 to print a 500 page book with a paperback cover and black-and-white interior. Today, that same book, with a hard cover, can be had for less than \$30. While the price point is still not what it could be with a high-volume, offset printed product, it now makes for a viable solution for small publishers like myself. Without the advent of POD technology, I would be stuck distributing all my projects by PDF alone.

Also, the quality of POD products left a little to be desired. The printed image itself tended to look too much like a photocopied document that was set with the contrast set too high. Bindings also tended to be a little on the loose side as well, with individual pages becoming easily unglued with just a casual read.

So now, the POD and PDF technology is right for the small—or, 'hobbyist'—publisher to be able to compete with larger companies, many of whom are, by the necessity of cost, sending their production

to India, China, Canada, and other foreign countries. A sad state of the economy where to remain competitive in the American market, an American company is forced to outsource its printing like this (no wonder our economy is still in the toilet...when will our leaders get around to addressing that little nugget?). Happily, my POD providers are so far still shipping from within the U.S.

Now, let me talk page count.

If you've never been working in publishing, you've never been a part of product launch meeting. Herein, an acquisitions editor proudly announces a new book that's being planned. The book will cover ABC product, and is to be written by Joe Blow Superstar-Author. They just got in the author's preliminary outline. And, due to the budget, the book will be exactly 400 pages. Cannot be more than that, because of cost. Cannot be less than because of spine presence (yes my acolytes, spine width is a selling consideration... how much space will it take up on the shelf). So, okay, we have a project, we have an author, we have a rough outline, and we know exactly how many pages this project will occupy nine months from today? Really? It always boggled me how this can be.

But as a POD publisher, thank goodness, I don't have to concern myself over page count, so long as I can keep it in multiples of 4. The page count is what is when the book is done. I don't have to ad fluff to hit the target, and I don't have to worry about cutting anything I think is important to hit the target. Sure, there's some things I can't do via POD (a map insert printed on card stock in cyan is currently not within my product model), but these are trade off's I think I can live with. I also don't have to worry about storing the product, and fulfilling orders. And an ISBN remains an option, instead of a requirement (any way I can cut my expenses, the better off I am).

So for the time being, I am happy being a hobbyist publisher (it also keeps me under the IRS radar), with the hopes that someday, it might turn in to something more.

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