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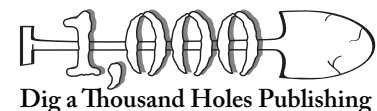
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MISSIVES FROM THE PATRON HORDE

Behold, a Letters Page

Dear Overeditor,

I'm relatively new to the indie game scene and I've only begun following a larger portion of the community recently with the advent of things like Twitter and Patreon. A lot of the community veterans I meet are welcoming enough though I lack a lot of context or personal reference at times.

You see, I grew up as a video gamer. Specifically, a console gamer. My excitement is derived mainly from electronic entertainment and even with about 6 years of Tabletop roleplaying under my belt now I rarely understand or feel the same level of excitement. I often sit at a table with friends or fellow con-goers and have a LOT of fun, but it always seems like everyone else has some kind of idea of what's going on or what the general theme of play means. They have their own memories and experiences from when they played these games growing up that I lack.

This was a problem. In life and in trade, I solve problems so I decided to solve this problem. I began keying in on references people made and tracking down the apparent source material from which it was derived/pulled/inspired from. This...didn't quite work at first. My enemy was a less ubiquitous foe than first imagined. I eventually worked towards

themes, games, series, and other forms of art. At some point I happened across the link to the comic "By Crom!" by Rachel Kahn.

The effect was immediate. I knew I had found a keystone. Something that would lead me to my grail. Through simple words and powerful abstractions Rachael presented a trail I had to follow. I began the search for Conan related material. Being a visual person I tracked down online streams of the old movies. As I would find out later I happened across the lesser of the two movies first, *Conan the Destroyer*. I watched the movie into the night, once again failing to understand many references. I was lost. I had the serpent within my grasp and it slipped from my fingers. I felt defeated in an instant and couldn't recover.

A somber month would pass. I would forget about all of it. The thought, the comics, the ideas; gone.

Until one day last month I received a stock email from an independent theatre in Brookline, MA. The email stated they would be showing *Conan the Barbarian* in less than a month's time. A peak. A rush. It filled my head with bloodlust. I had hope once again. I could feel it. This was it. This was what I had been waiting for even if I didn't know it prior. My goal was within sight. I re-read all of

Rachael's comics. I skimmed various sources of fiction and imagery on the internet. I set wildly high expectations for the movie. I got my sister and a friend to go see it with me. My excitement peaked and I felt, even if I hadn't been around for it originally, as if the movie was coming out for the first time.

The day came.

Our party traveled to see the movie.

Over 2 hours later I was on my knees in the parking lot, willing the blood back into my head. The movie not only beat my expectations but crushed them in a vice grip of universally recognized power! I had never experienced anything like it before. My body weak, my mind reeling, we traveled home and I slept better than I have in many, many years.

Since that night I have been able to understand the excitement, the thrill, of hearing about roleplaying games, their quests, their exploits, their glory. I feel...at home, a part of it. I don't understand every reference made still, but I have the confidence to slip in one or two of my own, and I know the list available will grow over time.

To end this tale, I'd like to say thank you. Thank you to those who have welcomed me to the community. Thank you to those who introduced me to these experiences. And especially thank you to you, Editor, for creating this zine and working with wonderful artists like Rachel Kahn and Bryant Paul Johnson to share with people like me how exciting and fun these worlds can be.

Signed,
Crusher of His Enemies
\\m/

Dear Crusher,

Thank you for your wonderful origin story and an auspicious excuse to begin our nascent letters column.

In a vast multiverse littered with parallel Conans, *Conan the Barbarian* may not be Howard's Conan, but it stands out among the throng. When I need a movie to illustrate sword and sorcery to the uninitiated, it is my touchstone. It is a bildungsroman for a *Swords Without Master*-style rogue. Valeria's plea to Conan, "Let us take the world by the throat and make it give us what we desire," is perhaps the perfect roguish mission statement.

There is a special place in my heart for all the parallel Conans—my introduction to the hobby and the genre was through TSR's *Conan Role-Playing Game*. And I would also rank Rachel Kahn's Conan among the very best. He is in part the perfect spirit guide precisely because of the clarity of purpose he possesses. He can see past the complex artifices of our civilization that trip us up and show us a swift way forward.

On the other side of that coin, we find Bryant Paul Johnson's "Oh, the Beating Drum!" with its hapless adventurers discovering that life is murky all around, regardless of your own personal clarity.

It has been my great honor to feature work from both Rachel and Bryant among these issues.

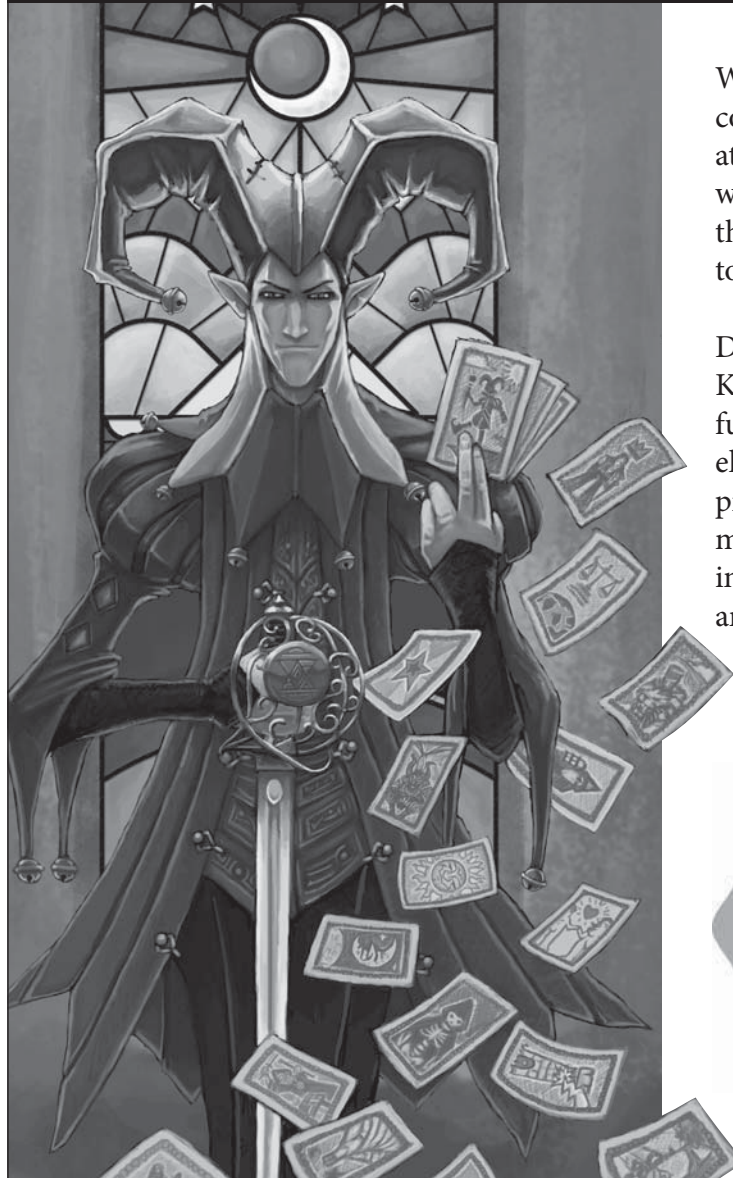
Sincerely,
Eppy



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DAY OF THE COWARD

A tale by Epidiah Ravachol

Illustrated by Russell Ashley

It took six steely-armed soldiers to hold the coward down and a seventh armed with a stout stick to shove the mash past the vanguard of his teeth. They held his jaw. They held his nose. A sour, pungent, metallic concoction of mushrooms, mold, and his own blood filled his mouth. Tears streaming down his face, he swallowed against his will and against his fears. A tingling heat crept through his mouth, throat, and guts. His muscles stiffened, but he no longer fought against those that held him. His world was melting into a vivid hell of bright, painful crimson and sharp paranoia. It would be a while yet before the drugs released his body and let his limbs follow the senseless will of his now-poisoned brain.

They wrapped his gnarled grip around the shaft of a spear. Then they briefly opened the shield wall and shoved him through, before closing it back up, separating the orderly ranks of sane soldiers

from the coward and an army of a thousand other mushroom-addled berserkers.

The berserkers cheered when they saw him. They raised their spears or clashed their swords against their own shields and mailed chests. A salute to a new brother-in-arms. But more than that, a salute to the coming frenzy. For now that the initiates were fed and thrown among them, they were permitted to gnaw on their own rations of dried fungus and let their consciousness fly.

This was how he was expected to die. His mind in the throes of Lady-of-the-Copse, forced to rave among her adherents. He was a single, loose tooth in a monstrous, all-consuming maw made of addicts, criminals, and deserters. The coward's only purpose now was to lose his wits and to rage senselessly. The ever-inching wall of towering



shields behind him would see him and his growing bloodlust to the enemy's front line.

The queen's legions would march behind that wall and drive the berserkers forward. It was a display that struck most cold with fear long before spear ever met shield. Armies have fled before the froth, and as a river swollen over its banks, the berserkers would be loosed upon the open land. Left to exhaust themselves on their own blood-euphoria and carnage. Those that survived would wake in a fading agony, soon to find themselves craving the release only possible through ingesting more Lady-of-the-Copse.

The coward had once marched on the other side of the shields. He took his turns at the wall, shoulder against one of those eight-foot slabs of bronze, oak, and hide. Pushing against the shifting force of mindless thews as the human howling, weeping, and laughter rang through his helm, no matter how much cloth he stuffed in there. He had worn the armor of the legion, not this filthy tunic. He had held both sword and spear, though only twice had he need for them. He had seen three campaigns, each against mortal foe who broke swiftly under the queen's might.

But this was the Vale of the Wizard. Behind them opened wasted plains, dry and lifeless. Before them, the valley walls were lush with gold and violet wildflowers. Only five warriors stood in defense of the valley. Their armor was strangely motley—brass greaves, leather jerkins, iron breastplate—clearly from different peoples, all in poor repair, as if scavenged from the many armies that had in ages past stood where the queen's legions and her berserkers now did. The only thing that unified the warriors were their great, ornate helms, which



cloaked each of their faces with that of a different beast: a warthog, a peregrine, an ape, a serpent, and a beetle.

The mortality of the beast warriors was a matter of some debate in the legion camps. The five had stood against countless armies over untold years. They left none to tell the tale. And though there were rumors that the peregrine and the ape had only recently joined their ranks—as reported by a highwaywoman who claimed to have snuck into the Vale of the Wizard on six different occasions over the past seven years—this did not diminish the awe.

None had survived. This was easy math. Two nights previous, the coward and three others were tasked with scouting the entrance to the valley. In the dark before the moonrise, they put sword to their commander's throat and fled south, away

from the Vale of the Wizard and away from the queen's legions. By the next morning, they had been spotted by riders and they took to the rocks and scrub. But they could not hide. His companions fell to javelins and only the coward remained, tied as a boar from the hunt and paraded back to camp, an example for all future cowards.

And now the coward was screaming. He did not care why. It just felt good to scream. His muscles unwound and he felt his body move as a fluid poured forth. Poured into the valley with the rest of the berserkers. Sound was slow to his ears and strange, as if he could hear further things louder than nearer. The colors about him shifted red in front of him and orange to his periphery. He had dropped his spear, but it mattered not. There was strength enough in his arms to rip and he could think of no other desire.

His last prudent thought, his only hope of surviving, was to keep clear of the beast warriors. Of the many dooms awaiting him in this churning mass of viscera and colors, this was one that he could avoid. Succumb to Lady-of-the-Copse, yes. Let the mushroom seize his mind and drive him through. But do not let it steer him into those tireless warriors. Do not enter the valley!

He could not see beyond the berserkers and their chaos, but he could see the valley walls rising from the battlefield, glittering with flowers. A curious wave of swirling purples, blues, yellows, and reds crept out of the valley and along the sky above like a blanket of fire crawling across the ceiling of the world. It cast a dim shadow that swept down the valley.

When the color wave passed over the zenith and the shadow passed over the coward, he heard a

long, low note as if sounded from a giant horn at a great distance. The note tugged at the coward's consciousness and he felt himself black out and drop.

And yet he stood. No longer screaming, his mind was clear. It was as if the drug had run its course. The shadow dulled the piercing scarlet that had perturbed his vision in all ways but that of the sky, which was still covered by that shimmering wave of color. He turned and watched as the shield wall collapsed. And behind it, as the shadow rolled over them, the legions too fell as if in a slumber.

He fled. Away from the berserkers. Away from the beast-faced warriors. Away from the valley. Across the unconscious horde. Towards freedom.

He expected to be on all fours, scrambling over bodies, but his flight felt more like running through water, like a dream. He considered for a moment

that this was another hallucination brought on by the mushroom paste he had been force-fed. His senses were not to be trusted. So he just ran.

For how long he ran, he could not tell. He had veered away from the legions at some point, and found swifter feet beneath him when he reached the open plain. Above him the sky broiled with color, but all about him was a duskiness that muted the landscape. He felt no fatigue but eventually curiosity forced him to stop and look back.

The legions lying in formation made a cascade of soldiers that spilled out from the mouth of the valley toward the horizon. They were unmoving. Free from the sway of Lady-of-the-Copse, the berserkers milled about among the prone legions.

Among that throng were the stores of the entire army. If he was swift and subtle enough, the coward could provision himself before setting out across that blasted plain. It was his best chance. Otherwise he was unarmed and bound to die of thirst or hunger. So he steeled himself and skulked back into the bivouac.

As he prowled through them, the coward noticed the soldiers breathing, even snoring, and occasionally rolling over. They were a herd of armored beasts sunning themselves beneath a prismatic sky. And they were also insubstantial to him. His hands and feet passed through them as easily as they would a puddle. The same held true for all the features of the camp—tents, trucks, slumbering oxen and horses. He could not pick up so much as a ladle from the water barrels. Again, he wondered if he was not still hallucinating.

“There is no slaking your thirst, coward.”

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He twisted around to see a berserker standing over him. She was half a head taller than him and glowered at him down the flat of the sword she was limply pointing at his neck.

"We are revenants. Dead and doomed in our wandering," she said, turning her sword over, but keeping it loosely level at him. "This is our price to pay. I do not even think you would bleed were I to pierce you."

"So this is not Lady-of-the-Copse?" The coward cautiously stepped back.

"No. Her visions are never this dull. This calm. Or this clear." The berserker sheathed her sword. "And I have seen your body. As I have my own. Strewn upon the battlefield."

The coward fell to a knee.

"Come. I will show it to you." The berserker offered her hand to him. With some relief, he found it tangible enough and she helped him back to his feet.

The two walked in silence through the slumbering legion. Beyond the shield wall, the perplexingly cogent berserkers wandered about their own fallen bodies. Some wept. Some cried out. Most just stared off.

The coward's body was still very near the shield wall and easy to spot as he was the only unarmored one there. But once they were upon it, the coward found it difficult to look upon. His vision blurred and he was possessed with a falling sensation. He looked up and saw the colors fade from the sky and the dulling effect of the shadow slip away as red rage seeped back into his mind.



Then, as before, a long, low note swept over him and the sensation was gone. He looked down and saw his body roll over and drool into the dirt.

He cackled and grabbed the berserker by the arm. "Fool!" He flinched from her glare and let her arm go to point at his prone body. "We sleep! Nothing more! Watch as I breathe."

The berserker cast him aside with her shield and kneeled down to look closer.

"Sorcery?"

"And I have never been happier for it! We are not dead. We are dreaming." The coward started to dance, but a glance to the sky held him.

Over the spearhead of the sleeping berserker army, a hole opened in the sky just long enough for a

body to shoot through it. It closed. Then two more opened and swallowed up two more bodies before closing.

The berserker grabbed the coward's arm and dragged him over and through the others, toward the front line.

At the mouth of the valley, the coward and the berserker found a handful of strangers bent over the slumbering front line. They were dressed in armor as mismatched as that of the beast-faced warriors that stood guard over the valley no more than a couple hundred yards away. The motley figures were slitting sleeping throats and stripping bodies of anything of worth. As each body bled out, its consciousness was sucked up through another hole in the billowing colors in the sky.

The berserkers, comprehending the danger, flung themselves at these scavengers, but their incorporeal assaults went unnoticed.

The coward looked to his new companion who had released her grip on his arm. "We are dreaming and we are dead," she said. "You were right to flee, coward. This is not the death I wanted."

"It is not the death I feared, but I have no taste for this one, either."

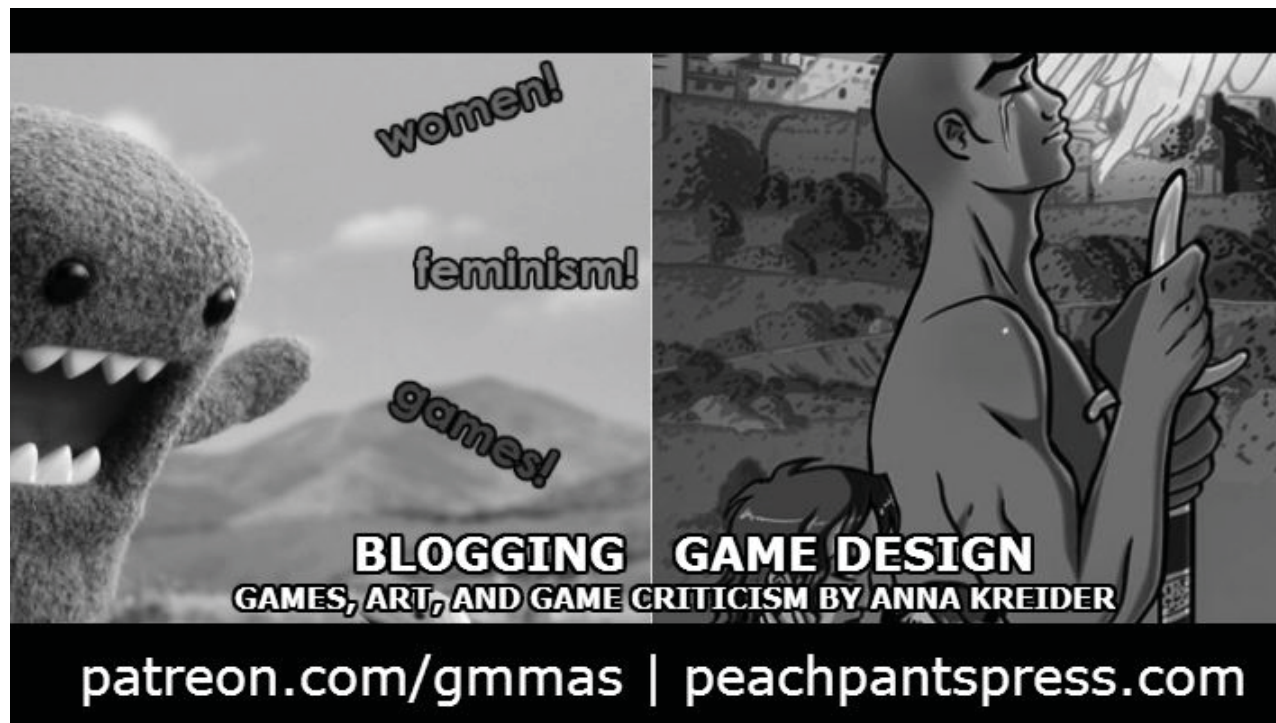
Unwilling to watch the scavengers make their bloody work, carving through the sea of soldiers that lay between here and his own slumbering body, the coward turned to the beast-faced warriors and the Vale of the Wizard. "Come then, let us see what we have died for."

A tangle of ropy plants and the occasional broad, purple leaf stretched from the valley mouth into the dead plain. Upon this carpet of vines stood the five beast-faced warriors, staring towards the sleeping army. Apart from loose strands or straps of armor swaying in the breeze, they were so still that some tentative vines had begun to grow up their legs. With sick irony, the coward and the berserker came to realize that the warriors were scarecrows. Hollow bits of armor draped upon wooden crosses to keep invaders at bay.

The berserker laughed, "From this you fled! Oh coward, would that we could live to tell this tale."

"That the tale will never be told perhaps justifies my flight."

The berserker shoved past the coward and continued into the valley. As she walked off, the sky above her faded and hot red poured into the



coward's vision. And again a vertiginous sensation possessed him, as if he were at once waking and falling asleep. His thoughts focused on a desire to tear at the berserker, but he felt as if he were being dragged from her, from the valley, and back to his waking body.

A horn sounded again, color filled the sky, and clarity returned to mind and vision. "We must find the horn!"

If there had not been enough cause to doubt their senses before, the alien landscape of the Vale of the Wizard held enough wonders to fatigue the mind: strangely colored plants covered in thorns that dripped a sweet-smelling ichor, brachiating octopi that spun pink silk through the treetops, wild cats with human faces, flowers that bloomed like flickering candle flames. All of which the coward and the berserker passed through unseen and unimpeded, just as they had passed through the sleeping legion.

All but one. It was as if some delirious god has stretched the skin of a toad over the massive frame of a gorilla, but its fingers were too long and bent the wrong way upon its hands. It had no head, but a long neck that ended in a great up-curved beak that it used to tease the flesh off the goat carcass on the ground before it. A ring of mismatched eyes hung around its throat like a necklace. Several of these focused on the coward and the berserker. The creature stood upon its hind legs and trumpeted a warning from its gory beak.

They fled and it gave chase, its great bulk weaving through the dense vegetation with practiced ease. But they had the advantage, being unhindered by

corporeality and soon the creature broke off the pursuit with a feigned disinterest.

The two stood now at the edge of a thicket of silvery trees on the slope of a small hill. A light fog clung to their trunks and did not spill into the rest of the valley floor. Great shelves of purple-and-white mushrooms grew along the trunks in this fog.

"Lady-of-the-Copse," the berserker whispered reverently as she walked among them. "Is this why we are here?"

"Oh to burn it all to ash."

The berserker shook her head, but said nothing. The coward gave her space and climbed to the hilltop. He was perched above the foliage and could see more of the valley, especially the opposite wall. There he saw scaffolding built to support a horn from the skull of a massive beast. It was as long as a dozen oxen.

As the berserker joined the coward atop the hill, the swirling colors that blanketed the sky parted, giving them a momentary portal through which they could see familiar stars and the comforting blackness of night. Then, as a stone from a sling, the berserker was flung from the ground over the valley walls and up into the dark cosmos beyond. The colors spilled back into place, and within the span of a breath, the coward was left alone under that cruel, prismatic sky.

He would not wait for the scavengers to draw from the well of his throat. Riding the crest of his panic, the coward sought out the goat-eater and taunted it. He lured the misshapen creature all the way across the valley in stages. It would frequently quit

the chase and wander off, but the coward eventually found that the sound of his sobbing enraged it. He wept and he ran to that horn.

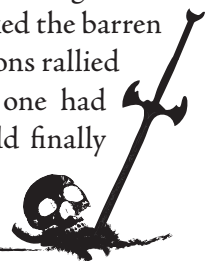
Twice more during the chase he felt himself slipping awake and back into the crimson embrace of Lady-of-the-Copse, only to have the horn sound and draw his body back into slumber.

Upon reaching the horn, he found a sole musician on the scaffolding, dressed as the other scavengers in a mismatched collection of clothes, but this one was adorned in the golden ceremonial armors of generals and commanders.

The coward hid as the goat-eater approached. He watched as it scaled the makeshift tower and as the scavenger general jumped from the tower and cried out in pain upon landing. Then the coward fled once more.

The time would come when the horn failed to sound and the sleeping legions awoke. Those in the thrall of Lady-of-the-Copse who yet had whole throats were the first to their feet. The knife-sharp scarlet light spilled into coward's mind, carving out the memory of all that transpired. He held one last thought: Do not enter the valley!

Lusting for blood, the berserkers followed his flight and overran the fallen shield wall, tearing into the groggy soldiers beyond. They soaked the barren plain in red before the queen's legions rallied and turned the tide. Every last one had to be slain before the queen could finally conquer the Vale of the Wizard.



THE TRIAL OF THE CRIMSON RIBBON

A tale by Jason Keeley

Illustrated by Juan Ochoa

Kruz the Dauntless, seeker of the lost tribe of the Stormwolds, slayer of the nascent demon lord Cthyllion, destroyer of the Temple of Seeping Eyes, and looter of the Thrice-Locked Vault, stood waiting in line.

He had come to Imperium, a city renowned for its learned scholars and erudite thinkers, as a last resort. It had been several months since he had plundered the fabled Gem of Tranquility, a simple platinum ring set with a near-perfect aquamarine, and almost as long since he woke up after a night of wild carousing with the bauble nestled on his pinkie. He could not find a jeweler able to pry it loose. He could not find a magus able to crack its sorcery. He could not find a prelate who would beseech the heavens in his favor. And now, Kruz was reduced to the status of petitioner outside of the gates of Imperium.

After several hours with almost no discernible movement in the queue, Kruz was at the limits of his patience. With an annoyed grunt, he stomped up to the head of the line, ignoring the protesting cries of the others. The gate stood open, but it was flanked by several armed guards. Off to one side, a weedy little man wearing an elaborate hat sat behind a table, scribbling in a large tome.

The functionary looked up from his book to address a shabbily dressed mendicant struggling under the weight of his large pack. "For inquiries about receiving a beggar's permit, please proceed to Subjacent District 12 to the Office of Procharity Solicitations. Be sure to...excuse me, sir," he turned his attention to Kruz. "The line for admittance is just to your left there."



Kruz slammed his hand down on the table. "I have waited long enough! If you do not allow me entry within the next few seconds, I will chop off your head and lodge it firmly within your backside!" He reached for Hewer, his mighty battle-axe. And, like had happened before, the ring grew hot and it felt like the bones of his hand had turned to powder. Kruz grimaced in pain, but the civil servant seemed not to notice.

"Now, now, sir. There is no need for violence." The administrator turned to the guards. "Wardens, if you would please escort this gentleman inside." He handed a small chit to one of the sentries.

A second carefully approached Kruz. "Sir, if you would come with us, please." Kruz nodded curtly, removed his hand from his weapon, and followed the two Wardens. The ring quickly cooled.

Imperium was a twisting warren of narrow streets. Large signposts stood at every corner, many seeming to contradict the previous ones. Those on the thoroughfares fell into one of two categories: the residents, each of whom wore a hat similar to that of the man at the gate, and people who looked completely lost and bewildered. Kruz was welcome of the guides, though it dawned on him that he had no clue as to their destination.

"Where are you taking me?" asked the warrior.

"To the Bureau of Operational Oversight. We take behavior such as yours quite seriously."

Kruz realized that he might be in trouble. "I never meant...I mean, I did not intend to actually kill that man."

"Nevertheless." The Warden lapsed into silence. Kruz thought briefly about simply running, but

when he spotted a fountain that he was sure they had passed twice already, he suspected that without guidance, he would be lost in this urban labyrinth within moments. He could not even tell in which direction lay the front gate.

It wasn't long before they drew up to a sturdy oaken door set in an otherwise unremarkable building. A small brass plaque mounted beside the entrance read, "Bureau of Operational Oversight, Intermediate District 4, Director L. Withershins."

One Warden knocked quickly on the door, and, without waiting for an answer, opened it and stepped inside. The room beyond was quite small, with barely enough space to fit its inhabitants: a stocky man and a flimsy desk. The Warden placed his chit on the desk, stepped out, and gestured for Kruz to take his place. The champion had to duck his head, but he crossed the threshold. The Wardens closed the door behind him. The room seemed even smaller once deprived of the light from outside.

The plump man behind the desk glanced down at the voucher and clucked his tongue. "Violation of line protocol. Not good, not good." He held out his hand. "May I see your entry permit?"

"What?"

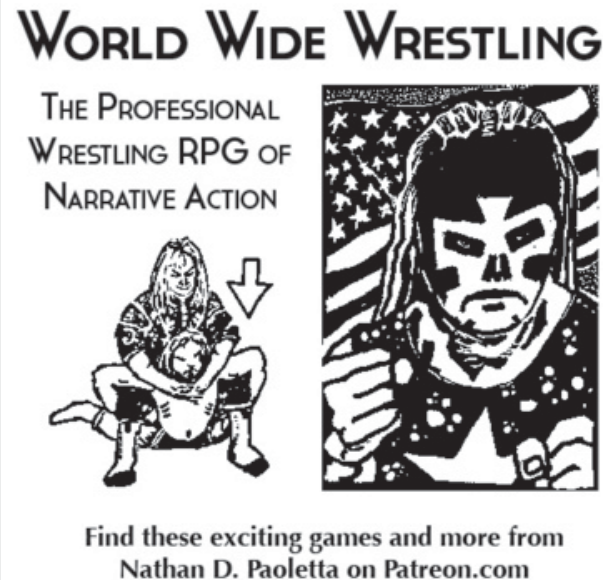
"The permit that allows you to enter Imperium."

"I do not know what you are talking about."

"They didn't give you an entry permit at the gate?"

"They did not."

Withershins clucked his tongue once more. "Oh dear, oh dear. Before I can process your citation,



I need your entry permit with all your pertinent information." He begin ticking off on his fingers. "Your name, your place of origin, your reason for visiting, the length of your stay, and so on."

"I am Kruz the Dauntless! I hail from the nomads of the Burning Brushlands! And I only wish to remain in this confounded city for as long as it takes to remove this cursed ring!" Kruz slammed his fist on the desk. The band started to warm. Kruz sheepishly removed his hand.

"Sir, please refrain...did you say curse? So this is an emergency?" The director looked hopeful.

Kruz nodded. "Yes. An emergency."

"Ah, then we can dispense with the entry permit in favor of a Warrant of Special Dispensation. Excellent, excellent!" He dug around in his desk and retrieved a small slip of paper, which he handed to Kruz. It was covered with intricate writing.

"And this is...that?"

"Oh no, oh no." Withershins chuckled. "That is the form you need to take to the Department of Exigence to receive the Warrant of Special Dispensation. Then, you can return here for your citation." He saw that Kruz looked confused. "The Department of Exigence is located in Major District 1." Kruz blinked. "It's the tan building just behind the statue of Founder Malohalora." Kruz simply stared. The director sighed. "There are signs. I would take you myself, but I don't have prior authorization to leave my desk at this time." He nodded toward the door.

Kruz slowly turned and stepped outside, his mind in a fog. This city was unlike anything he had faced before. Even his dealings with the eldritch assassins



of the Starlit Thieves' Guild were straightforward in comparison. He hoped that a dragon would swoop down and begin roasting the citizenry so that he would be back on firm footing.

But no, if that were to happen, he would still be powerless. The Gem of Tranquility would make sure of that. His only hope for removing the fell trinket would be to persevere.

It took Kruz several hours to wind his way through the city, following the guideposts as best he could, eventually reaching a light brown structure adjacent to a plaza containing a statue of willowy lady with an upturned nose. It was another hour of waiting in another line before Kruz reached another man behind another desk. He handed the paper to the man, whose nameplate identified him as Registrar A. Halfpace.

Halfpace sucked in a breath through his teeth. "I'm afraid you're in the wrong building."

"What?"

"This is the Department of Expediency in Major District 11." He handed the form back to Kruz. "You want the Department of Exigence in Major District 1."

"But I was told...the statue..."

Halfpace exhaled noisily through his nose. "Ah, I see the confusion. Outside our building is the statue of Founder Mohaloraho. The statue outside the Department of Exigence is an entirely different memorial." Halfpace clucked his tongue wetly. "Look, I can see that you're new here." He then proceeded to lay out very specific directions for Kruz.

It wasn't much longer before Kruz arrived at an almost identical-looking plaza, though the statue in this one was of some kind of lord. Kruz was certain that he walked the length and breadth of the city at least twice by this point. The sun blazed high overhead and he was glad to step inside the relative coolness of the building. He was further glad to see that he didn't have to wait in a line at all.

Vice Auditor L. Yarborough gave him a kind smile as Kruz stepped up to her desk, but she didn't say a word. Her hands were folded in front of her on the table. He placed the paper in front of her. She didn't take her eyes off of Kruz, though her look was still genial. Kruz coughed slightly and started to speak. She interrupted him with the barest shake of her head. Kruz, his brow furrowed, looked around the room. It was empty except for the two of them.

"Is someone...?" he began, but once again, she briefly shook her head. She notched up her grin, and there was a hint of apology in her eyes. Kruz slowly took back the slip of paper and made to leave. Just before he stepped through the doorway, Yarborough coughed politely.

"Apologies. Sincerely. Was honoring one-minute work stoppage in the name of the Founders. Mandatory," she explained. "Now, your form?" Kruz presented it. "Warrant of Special Dispensation?" she asked.

"Yes, the director said that I must have one."

"Apologies," she said again, as she placed the paper in a small bin. "Form incorrect. New forms issued last week. Easier to read."

"What?" Kruz roared.

"Return to Bureau. Get new form. We can then proceed." She continued to beam at him.

With a bellow, Kruz kicked the wall. The ring seared his flesh, and his leg went completely limp. He staggered, crashing into Yarborough's desk. She let out a yelp of surprise and ran over to help the warrior to his feet. He stood unsteadily, pain still coursing through his shin and thigh. Kruz waved off her queries about his fitness and lurched outside.

The hours it took to walk back to the Bureau provided time for feeling to come back into Kruz's leg. He silently promised himself that he would wring Withershins's neck directly after he had the bauble removed from his hand. In fact, he would leave a trail of carnage throughout the entire city, once freed of this curse.

Withershins greeted Kruz with a clap. "Splendid, splendid! You have the warrant, I take it."

"No." Kruz stared balefully at the director. "You provided me with the wrong form."

Withershins was taken aback. "My, my, that is most unfortunate. I am so sorry for that. Let me see if I have..." he rummaged through his desk. "Yes! I believe this is it!" He produced another slip of paper. To Kruz, it looked identical to the last one. Withershins scanned it quickly. "Of course, of course. This is much more comprehensible." Kruz snatched it from his hands and stalked from the building.

Yarborough was still smiling when he returned to the Department of Exigence, giving no signs that she had ever stopped. Once again, the office was empty.

Kruz said, "I have the correct form."

"Form?" Her eyes were glossy.

"For, um, Warrant of Special Dispensation."

"Apologies. No longer issuing warrants. Now Department of Expediency."

"What?" His raised his voice.

"Department of Expediency now in charge of warrants. Find building in Major District 11 next to statue of—"

"No. You will give me the warrant."

She shook her head. "Apologies. Orders from the Prime Administrator."

Kruz narrowed his eyes. "Then he will give me the warrant. He will tell me how to remove this ring. And he will thank me for not killing all of his citizens."

Yarborough's smile faltered slightly. "Appointment required to enter the Tower. Six to eight weeks minimum."

"He will want to see me straightaway." Kruz gently stroked the haft of his axe. He expected to feel a jolt of heat from the Gem of Tranquility, but it did not come. He smiled. "This Tower. Where is it? I do not recall seeing any spires in your cityscape."

"No tower. Just name of the Prime Administrator's offices under Imperium."

"Of course."

Gloaming was upon the city when Kruz reached the entrance to the Tower, which was a set of unadorned stairs almost hidden behind a stall selling stationery



to those with the proper clearance. The steps led down several flights, with only the occasional torch to light the way. Kruz's footfalls echoed forlornly as he made his way deeper and deeper under the city. He finally came to a simple wooden door. No guard stood before it. No lock barred its opening.

Kruz stepped inside the cathedral-sized room beyond, peering forward through the gloom to see the far side. He could make out yet another desk with a figure sitting behind it. The faint sound of a quill nib scratching across parchment floated through the air.

After a moment, the Prime Administrator looked up from his work and called out. "Halllooo? Could you perhaps come a bit closer? My eyesight isn't what it used to be."

As Kruz made his way across the floor, he noticed that the walls were lined with bookshelves filled with thick tomes, their spines etched with spidery writing. The Decrees and Edicts of Imperium Vol. 23...Vol. 86...Vol. 517...Vol. 4,090. They stretched up to the ceiling, what had to be the entire history of Imperium laid out in rules and regulations.

The Prime Administrator was a frail old man, his skin as thin and crinkled as the paper on which he wrote. A heavy pair of spectacles perched on the bridge of his nose, and what was left of his hair was as white as snow. His robes were yellowed with age and smelled of mildew. He peered at Kruz's approach and finally spoke when the warrior stood directly in front of his desk.

"I don't get many visitors to my office, young man. I would stand to greet you, but..." He shifted in his chair, and Kruz heard the all-too familiar sound of

rattling chains. He glanced over the desk to see the Prime Administrator's ankle chained to the desk.

"You are kept in irons?" Kruz asked.

"All part of the position," the Prime Administrator said, as if that were a sufficient explanation.

"But are you not in charge of this city?"

"I am simply the Prime Administrator. It is a title that must be held by someone in service of..." He gestured toward the shelves, and then leaned in. "You see, the laws run this city. They are alive," he whispered.

Kruz realized that he must be in the presence of a madman. But perhaps a madman that could help him. "I require the knowledge to remove a curse. If you do not have that wisdom, then I require all of the proper forms to procure it."

"I'm afraid that I cannot help you," the Prime Administrator said. A faint chiming sound could be heard in the distance.

"And why is that?"

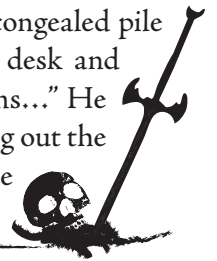
"It is the end of the workday. Perhaps you could come back tomorrow?" He put his quill on the desk and stared past Kruz, his eyes quickly becoming unfocused.

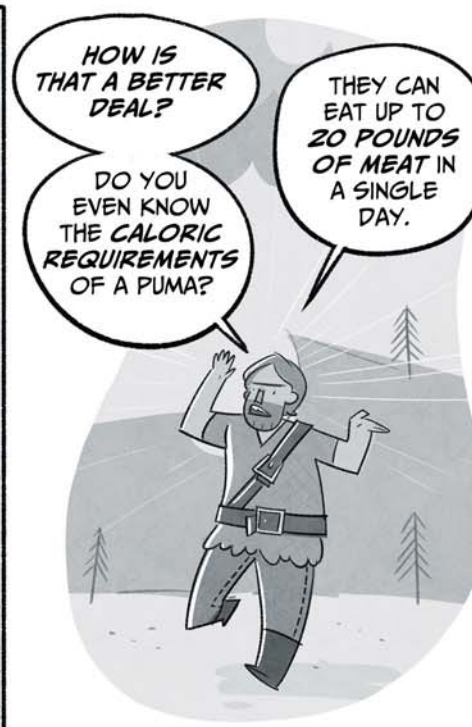
"No." The word was a block of lead, but the Prime Administrator gave no sign of hearing. Kruz waved his hand in front of the old man's face. Still, there was no response. Kruz tapped the old man's shoulder, once, twice, three times with increasing force. He drew back his hand to slap the Prime Administrator, and the Gem of Tranquility sent a tingle up his arm and turning his shoulder numb.

Something finally broke within Kruz. He had traveled hither and yon this world, besting monsters and villains, rescuing the helpless, and securing his legacy in the process. But this place of bureaucrats and petty officials had finally prevailed over his willpower. The ignominy coursed through his veins.

He bellowed in rage, and with the ring growing ever hotter, his jaw turned to dust. He attempted to grab the desk and overturn it, but the flesh of his hands became as empty gloves. He turned to slam his body against the bookshelves in an effort to make some kind of impact on the room. He managed no more than a wet splat. The ring now glowed white, and every last bone in Kruz's body simply evaporated.

In the morning, when light returned to the Prime Administrator's eyes, he saw the congealed pile of skin of viscera in front of his desk and sighed. "Another busy day, it seems..." He picked up his quill and began filling out the paperwork, in triplicate, to have the mess cleaned up.







SORCERESS BLOODY SORCERESS

A game for 3+ players to be played in a half hour by Epidiah Ravachol

Illustrated by Manuela Soriani

You will need a pewter goblet, the stem of which is fashioned after a serpent with seven tails and three heads that wind up the cup. Each of the serpent's mouths should be swallowing an egg made of precious stone: one opal, one peridot, and one lapis lazuli. You will also need two six-sided dice, one the color of Rage and another the color of Envy, and three sheets of paper.

TO DINE WITH ONE ANOTHER

The youngest player rolls the dice, noting whether the Rage die or the Envy die is higher (or if there is a tie), and reads aloud the appropriate section below. This sets the scene for the evening's intrigue.

Envy: At the Table of Beral

As the great oak doors opened, a chill silence wafted across Beral's candlelit hall. One by one, the guests, already speaking in near-conspiratorial whispers, placed their meat back upon their plates and quietly stood, heads hung, as the young kingling, uninvited and unannounced, entered with his entourage. With a thin smile, Beral waved servants into action, who made busy preparing places for their new guests.



Rage: At the Table of the Kingling

The stout city walls have been besieged for all these weeks. The people boil leather and hunt rats for sustenance. Yet within the palace, a gleaming splendor remains, and you have all, once again, been invited to the table of the young kingling. He has spared little expense for this, the last of the great feasts. Question not the sour taste in the wine nor the nature of the meat. The kingling demands your merriment and to deny him is to court death.

Tie: At the Table of the Sorceress

Once received, the invitation—delivered through the song of a magpie—cannot be ignored. And so, with trepidation and outright dread, the guests gather to the table of the sorceress, high upon her drafty tower. Green and purple clouds obscure the setting sun and threaten the roofless party with ill weather. The bones of the sorceress herself rest as they always have upon her throne at the head of the table, removed from the sumptuous feast that is spread before her guests.

The player to the left of the youngest player then takes the first sheet of paper and writes “Motif” across the top of it. Then they write one image or detail from what was just read aloud that sticks with them. This is the first Motif sheet. There should be room enough left on it to write more such details as the game goes on.

THE DEMANDS PHASE

Now the player with the dice picks another player to hand the dice to, making a demand of them in the process. When you make a demand of a player, you ask them to show or tell us something about one of the guests listed below. At this point, no guest is portrayed by any particular player. Should you wish to make a demand about a guest that has already answered one, you need not make that demand of the same player.

The first demand about each guest should be one of the two listed with that persona. Once a demand about a guest has been answered, any new demands made about them must be invented by the player making the demand.

Answering Demands

You are handed the dice as a demand is made of you. Roll them immediately. They will tell you the tone of your answer.

If the Rage die is the higher of the two, your answer should be agitated, heated, raised, passionate, or wrathful.

If the Envy die is the higher of the two, your answer should be conspiratorial, cold, mocking, or envious.

Ties belong to the sorceress (see below).

You are free to invent all that you wish to about the guest, their personality, their history, and their relationship with the other guests, as long as it does not contradict what has been said before. Revel in it.

“Show us...”

A demand that begins with “Show us how...” should be answered with a description of what the guest is doing and saying right now. These descriptions are true. They are what is happening. Even if what the guest says during them might be untrustworthy, their actions are real.

When answering such a demand, you may also tell us what other guests are doing in reaction to the primary guest’s actions. But do not drift too far from the guest the demand was made of. It is their actions that we are most interested in.

Keep such answers short. A moment with the guest is all we need.

“Tell us...”

A demand that begins with “Tell us how...” should be answered with a tale that the guest is currently telling at the table. This is usually a tale of something that has indeed happened. The tale, like the narrator, may be untrustworthy, but it cannot be entirely fabricated. Listen closely to these answers, as some truth exists within them.

When answering such a demand, you may describe how the guest is acting and how other guests react to the tale. But do not abandon the tale. We are here for the gossip. Regale us!

Once you have finished answer the demand, hand the dice to another player and make a demand of them. Continue this cycle until the first Motif sheet is filled (see below).

Beral—Draped in rich garb, Beral is a rival to the throne and seven years the kingling's elder.

Show us how you snub the kingling's authority.

Tell us how you once saved the kingling's life before it became apparent that he would ascend to the throne in your stead.

Tali—Dressed perhaps too well, Tali is Beral's servant and suspected lover.

Show us how your familiarity with Beral draws disapproving glares from the kingling.

Tell us of when you first met both Beral and the kingling and how they vied for your affections.

Arei the Bold—Old but hardy, Arei is a sea captain who seeks the kingling's patronage.

Show us how you take it when the kingling once again dismisses your ambitions to sail into the uncharted eastern seas as frivolous.

Tell us of the most wondrous land you have discovered while sailing under the generous patronage of the previous king.

Skarup—Nervous and sullen-eyed, Skarup is the kingling's beleaguered advisor.

Show us how you attempt to calm the kingling when Beral refuses to toast him.

Tell us about the strange beasts the kingling has purchased for the royal menagerie against your advice.

Karoon—Meek and plainly dressed, Karoon is of noble birth and the kingling's betrothed.

Show us how you present your grandmother's sacred sword as an extravagant gift to the disinterested kingling.

Tell us how Tenysle gave you shelter from the elements when you first met.

Tenysle of Highlands—A distant cousin to the kingling, Tenysle finds excuses to remain in his court and close to Karoon.

Show us how you steal glances at Karoon when you are sure no one is looking.

Tell us why you have suddenly become more and more interested in your cousin's court as of late.

Anun Don—The weight of many years hangs heavy on Anun Don, who has been Karoon's guardian since Karoon's birth.

Show us how you encourage Karoon to attract the attentions of the kingling.

Tell us how you tricked the kingling into agreeing to marry Karoon.

Lendri Ekore—A stout and ebullient merchant, Lendri has a mercurial temperament.

Show us how you finagle more food from your host.

Tell us why the kingling had your brother executed less than a month ago.

Fenat the Reviled—Stoop shouldered, Fenat was once a proud and honored knight who now does little more than collect the kingling's taxes.

Show us how you carry out the kingling's command to punish a servant clumsy enough to splash some wine.

Tell us how you earned your place of honor among the knights of the realm in days before the kingling's coronation.

Northgazer—Robed in silver and purple, Northgazer is the court astrologer who has read the kingling's doom in the stars.

Show us how you can read the fate of anyone but yourself in the stars.

Tell us what dark imports you have read in the kingling's stars.

You may add to the cast should this list be depleted. When you make a demand for a new guest, give the guest a name and an occupation. The initial demands should be:

Show us how you suffer the indignity of the kingling's sardonic toast.

Tell us what has transpired between you and the kingling that makes you so fearful to be in his presence at this moment.

Demands may not be directly made of the sorceress or the kingling.

Ties Belong to the Sorceress

The first time a tie is rolled during the Demands Phase, the sorceress makes her appearance and we find out who she is. If the first roll of the game was a tie, then you began at the sorceress's table (see above) and she needs no entrance. In this instance, she is a lich queen, long dead but still meddling in mortal affairs for her own secret purposes. Her tones are eerie, unsettling, threatening, or dark.

The number on the tied dice determines your sorceress, her entrance, and her tones. Read her entrance aloud and then have her answer the demand in the other guest's stead. When answering demands, she uses one of her own tones.

THE SORCERESSES



The flames upon the candles leap to life and take on new, bolder hues—a shower of sparks that flares to a crescendo and then extinguishes, leaving the only light in the room the glowing figure of the sorceress in the doorway. Pulses of blue, purple, green, and orange radiate from the gems that line her gold headdress and prismatic robe.

Sorceress: The sorceress has a keen interest in protecting the innocent and punishing the guilty.

Tones: Fabulous, weird, bold, or warm.



Green smoke billows in from the doorway. Beneath the arch stands the sorceress in her suit of silver. She removes her curious glass helmet, revealing dark, close-cropped hair and a tawny face that crinkles with a warm smile. On her hip, she wears a crooked wand from which she can project an unbending beam of purple death.

Sorceress: A traveler from a distant planet trapped upon this world, the sorceress is making a home for herself.

Tones: Serious, comforting, jarring, or lost.



Three ravens fly in and peck at the feast. It is an omen that chills the guests. An uncomfortable quiet chokes the party. The moon-pale sorceress in her ivory robes slinks into the room, shadows clinging to her hem. She bows to the kingling, who nods to her with a malicious grin.

Sorceress: The sorceress has been summoned by the kingling by means of a ritual, but she does not know why.

Tones: Dark, vengeful, restrained, or leisurely.



A laugh like the chime of a bell spills from a corner of the room. Motes of blue-and-green light settle like dust on the invisible frame of a child, never fully revealing the sorceress, but giving her form as she moves through them. Her laughter, though beautiful, offers little comfort.

Sorceress: Inquisitive and unabashed, the sorceress genuinely delights in the intrigues of mortals.

Tones: Playful, eerie, mocking, or treacherous.



The doors creak open and the sorceress enters with long, sure strides. Her face is a dark, weathered map of the ages, but she has the strong, graceful bearing of youth. Behind her trail gossamer gray robes that melt into the stone floor. With a grim nod to her host, she takes a seat. It matters not to her that no invitation was extended.

Sorceress: Generations old, the sorceress remembers a time before anyone's ancestors were here and she knows, with patience, she will see a time when no one's descendants remain.

Tones: Solemn, stern, mischievous, or enigmatic.



A bear suddenly hangs heavily in the doorway, causing guests to scurry to the far side of the hall, drawing weapons and arming themselves with table knives. With bright, intelligent eyes, the sorceress studies them, before easing down onto all fours and prowling into the room. When she greets them in a human voice that echoes richly in their skulls, the guests are no less startled.

Sorceress: Rarely concerned with human affairs, the sorceress has cried in the vernal pools that the events of tonight could have a far-reaching effect on her people.

Tones: Wild, feral, stubborn, or abundant.

If a tie has already been rolled and we already know who the sorceress is, then the sorceress remains the same and answers the demand in the guest's stead. She does so in one of her tones and is unapologetic about the interruption.

Like the kingling, direct demands may not be made of the sorceress. She only answers them if a tie is rolled. After you have answered a demand as the sorceress, hand the dice to another player and make a demand of them as usual.

The Motifs

The first Motif sheet is created following the first roll of the game as described in the "To Dine with One Another" section. There should be room left

on it for three more entries. As players are making demands and other players are answering them, all players should be listening attentively. When you hear another player say something that inspires wonder or dread, write it down on the Motif sheet.

Do not wait for permission. To be recorded, a motif needs only to be spoken by one player and found worthy by another player. The moment this happens, write it down.

The moment the first Motif sheet has three entries beyond that first one, the Demands Phase ends and the Accusations Phase begins.

THE ACCUSATIONS PHASE

The player holding the dice when the Demands Phase ends shall play the sorceress for the rest of the game. If the sorceress has yet to appear, roll one die and find the corresponding sorceress on the chart above. This is your sorceress. Read her entrance aloud now.

The Death of the Kingling

Now that you have a player for the sorceress, that player reads the following aloud:

Tipping his goblet over, the kingling begins coughing violently.

The sorceress's player places the dice in the goblet and then flips it over onto the table so that none may see the results. Then, the sorceress's player continues reading:

Falling to the floor, the kingling spasms twice. Blood-red foam bubbles from his mouth. He perishes before our eyes, the apparent victim of a cowardly poisoner.

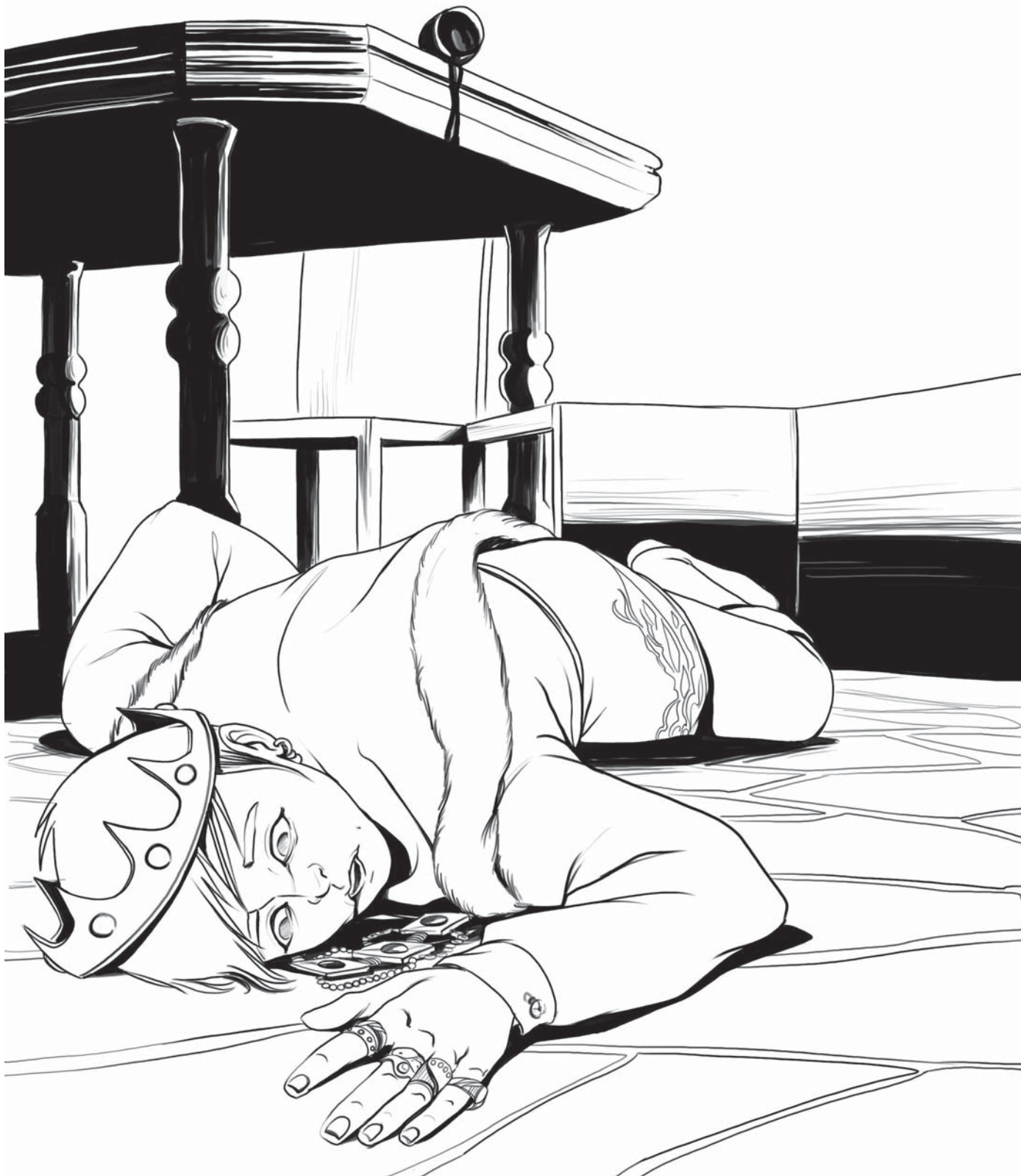
Starting on the sorceress's player's left and proceeding clockwise, all players must now choose a guest to champion. This will be their guest for the rest of the game. They will speak for them and tell us what the guest is doing. They will strive to protect their guest and to avoid being executed for the murder of the kingling.

The tone is now suspicious. Each player may now play as if they were their guest, freely making accusations. Nothing said by a guest in this phase needs to be true! None may narrate what another player's guest is doing, but they may narrate what an unattended guest is doing as long as that guest is not giving testimony.

During this phase, the sorceress is unconcerned with making accusations, and none are brave enough to level accusations at her. She will listen quietly and question when she sees fit. Perhaps seeking the truth. Perhaps seeking mayhem. Perhaps with motives inscrutable.

The Motifs

The player to the left of the sorceress's player then takes out the second sheet of paper and writes "Motif" across the top. As before, when you hear another player say something you find worthy of a motif, write it on this second sheet. Listen for moments of deception, betrayal, and corruption. At least two of the new motifs must shed light on an entry from the first sheet. The Accusations Phase ends when there are at least four entries written on this sheet *and* at least two of those entries shed light on entries from the previous sheet. Once *both* of these conditions are satisfied, the Accusations Phase ends and the Judgment Phase begins.



THE JUDGMENT PHASE

The sorceress's player should write "Suspects" across the top of the third sheet and number 1 through 5 down the side of it. Then the sorceress asks the guests the following questions in whatever order she wishes. The sorceress's player records the answers in order, so that the answer to the first question asked is written next to the 1, the second answer is next to the 2 and so on.

- ♦ Who gains the most from the kingling's death?
- ♦ Who is most likely to have had access to poison and the kingling's drink?
- ♦ Who hated the kingling most?
- ♦ Who is the least likely to be responsible for the kingling's death?
- ♦ Who is the most craven?

Feel free to argue about the answers. If consensus cannot be reached among the guests, the sorceress may demand a vote. The sorceress herself may not vote, but she breaks ties.

The answers to these questions must be guests. They cannot be the sorceress or the kingling himself. No guest may be the answer to more than one of the questions. They will likely be guests championed by the players, but they do not have to be.

Once all the questions have been answered, it is time for the sorceress to pass judgment. The sorceress's player should peek at the dice under the cup and secretly note the result. Then, with all the other players standing an equal distance from goblet, the sorceress's player reveals the dice.

Guilty?

Behold the dice as they reveal the guilty party. Subtract the lower die from the higher die. This is the number of the guest listed on the Suspects sheet who is guilty of poisoning the kingling. If the dice are tied, then the sorceress is the guilty party and everyone else is in grave peril.

Execution or Escape?

Once they are revealed, everyone but the sorceress's player may attempt to grab the dice.

- ♦ If the player championing the guilty guest snatches the dice before anyone else, then they must roll the dice and show us how their guest slips into the night unpunished.
- ♦ If the player championing the guilty guest grabs the dice, but another player touches their hand before they can roll the dice, then this other player's guest is the hero. They must roll the dice and show us how they help the sorceress execute the guilty party.
- ♦ If the player who grabs the dice is not championing the guilty guest, they must roll the dice and show us how they are wrongly executed by the sorceress.
- ♦ If the player who grabs the dice is not championing the guilty guest, but another player touches their hand before they can roll the dice, then this other player must roll the dice and show us how they executed the wrong guest.
- ♦ If the dice are tied, the first to grab the dice must roll them and show us how they sacrifice themselves to the sorceress's wrath so that the others may escape with their lives.

- ♦ If the dice are tied and no one grabs the dice, the sorceress's player must roll the dice and show us how she destroys the entire dinner party.
- ♦ If the guilty guest has no player to champion them, then the sorceress's player must roll the dice and show us how she executes whomever she wishes.

When answering the Execution or Escape demand, follow the tone of the highest die. If you roll a tie, the tone should be one of the tones belonging to the sorceress. If possible, your Execution or Escape narrative should echo one of the Motif entries.

Epilogue

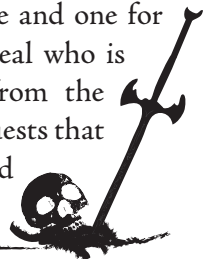
If the player narrating the Execution or Escape demand fails to echo one of the entries on the Motif sheets in a satisfying way, then the first player to find a way to do so may offer this echo as an epilogue. Either way, your tale is done.

Less Than Six Players?

When you choose the guests to champion at the beginning of the Accusations Phase, go around twice so that everyone but the sorceress's player has two guests to champion.

More Than Nine Players?

During the Judgment Phase assign two guests to each answer: one for the Rage die and one for the Envy die. When the dice reveal who is guilty, subtract the lower die from the higher one, as usual. Of the two guests that match this result, the one assigned to the higher die is the guilty one.



THREE DOZEN REPASTS NOURISHING & NEFARIOUS

A miscellany by Epidiah Ravachol

- A long, tough worm that, if swallowed whole, will keep you nourished for days as long as you drink enough alcohol to keep it unconscious.
- Dried fruits and cheeses rolled into balls and delicately wrapped that are often traded between pilgrims on the road as a sign of friendship or submission.
- A drink made from milk and clay that eases the hunger pains.
- At the Feast of the Forge, every dish is served in fire or upon a bed of hot coals.
- A tart cookie served solely at wedding orgies and considered mortally sinful to consume otherwise.
- A salted flatbread served with mint and fermented milk.
- A paste of olives and smoked meats packed in oil and wrapped in palm leaves.

- Held to this world by chains of silver, the Carving Beast can feed a hundred souls every night but its meat offers no nourishment to those who eat it within earshot of its pitiful howls.
- A salty and sour soup made from parsnips and fruit juices.
- The Feast of the First Dawn is a meal said to be enjoyed by the gods upon the first day comprised of foods no longer found in the world, but have been long sought after by the adventurous.
- Salty-sweet blood candies, the best of which are made from tigers.
- A dish of hot peppers, nuts, and dried fruits drizzled in spiced oils.
- The pickled heads of game birds eaten whole and favored by wealthier travelers.

- The juice of a cactus fruit that numbs the tongue and steels the gut, making less digestible foods tolerable.
- A yellow and green nut with a granite shell that can only be broken by tremendous force, but is said to erase the regrets of all who taste the bitter meat inside.
- The Children's Feast is a day of cakes, jams, and candied fruit in preparation for lean times.
- A honeyed cinnamon cake soaked in wine.
- A roast of game meat served with root vegetables and pickled tongue.
- Salted fish and sea bird pounded flat and stored in bricks that could feed a prudent traveler for a week.
- Overripe fruit that addle the senses and drizzle sticky, sweet juices down your chin.
- A sweet, thick, dark red alcohol made from an otherwise inedible fruit colloquially called blood wine.
- The fruit of a tree where lovers have hanged themselves must be picked with gloves and is said to induce a cathartic night of tears in any who taste of it.
- The Executioner's Feast is a broth warmed in the carcass of a fresh kill.
- Beetles fried in goat butter and served with raw sweet onions and peppers.
- Serpents' eggs, boiled and dipped in wax to preserve them for long journeys.
- A cake so delicate it will dissolve on your breath.
- A bitter brew made by roasting beans in a campfire, crushing them, and letting them

steep in a water bladder for three days of travel.

❧❧❧—The Three Thousand Feasts begin with a grain of rice every minute proceeding to one of three kinds of seeds every two followed by a single cherry every three.

❧❧❧—A tiny orange pepper of searing spiciness that plunges those who eat it into a prophetic euphoria.

❧❧❧—A spicy nut stew that brings tears to the eyes of the uninitiated.

❧❧❧—A decadent bowl of sweet and tart berries collected from three continents and frozen upon southern glaciers.

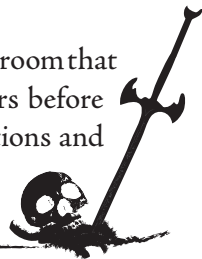
❧❧❧—Hardtack.

❧❧❧—A spider venom boiled and served in a sweet liqueur to the Silent Emperor's lovers to test their loyalty.

❧❧❧—The Feast of the Lost, where all the guests gather from far around to discuss the news of the world while collecting sumptuous plates of meats and fruits and then wander into the wilderness so that they may eat in solitude.

❧❧❧—Cooked sweetbreads left to chill and served in warm milk.

❧❧❧—Lady-of-the-Copse, a mushroom that is eaten by certain warriors before battle to stir up hallucinations and blood-rages.

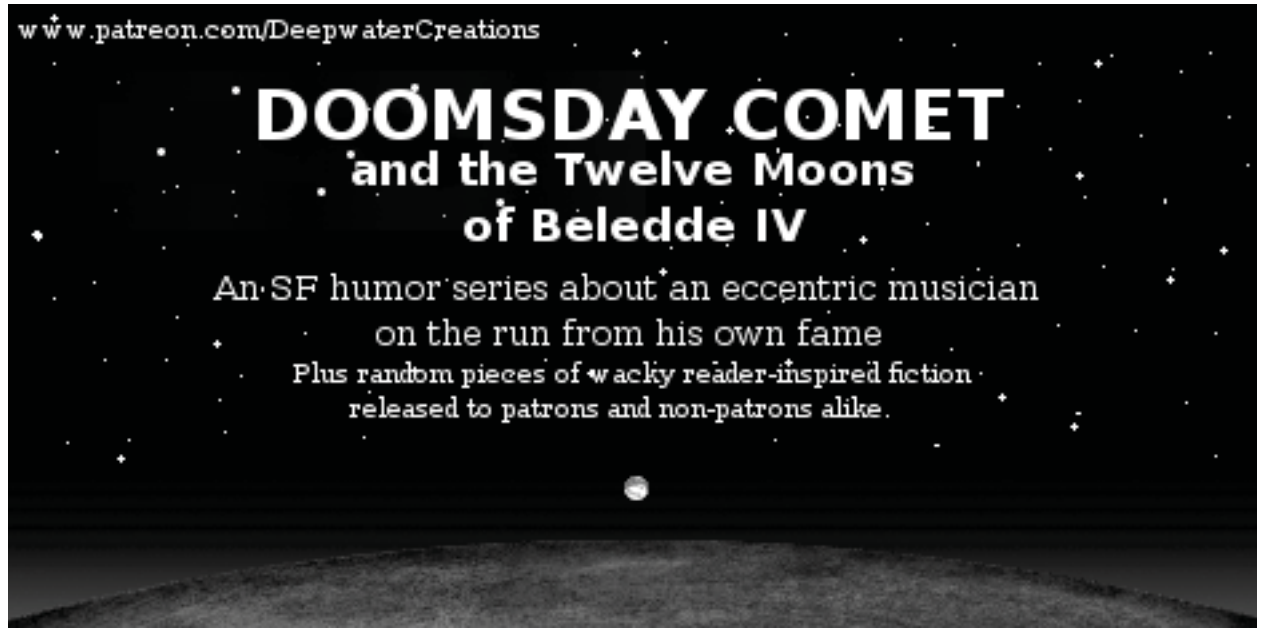


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THE REALMS

You do not take up sword and spell to tag along with someone else's adventure. You do it to change the course of your destiny. To mold the world to your wants and desires.

Listed below are the stories, games, articles, and miscellanies in this issue that represent worlds available for you to craft your own adventures in. If you should so desire, you may take the characters, settings, and situations from any of these, create something new, and submit it to *Worlds Without Master*.

By default, any submission to *Worlds Without Master* is not part of any shared world. Creators have the usual controls over their creative properties. The following options exist only for creators who expressly want to take part in this endeavor.

Additionally, the following agreements exist solely between the creators and *Worlds Without Master*, and do not govern the creators' rights in regards to any other publication.

The Free & Chaotic Realms

Anyone may submit material using the characters, settings, situations and any other part of this body of work as if it were their own as long as they also agree to make their work part of this Free & Chaotic Realm. This is as open as it gets, with the only curation being the *Worlds Without Master* submission process.

The Curated Realms

Material submitted using the characters, settings, situations and any other part of this body of work will be sent to the original creator or the creator's designated curator for approval before being accepted by *Worlds Without Master*. If accepted, this new material is bound to that particular curated realm.

Other Shared Realms

Groups of creators who wish to find their own agreement on how to share their worlds are welcome to do so however they wish.

Edicts

Creators are welcome to make up a list of rules other creators must follow while using their works. These rules are set in stone. Worlds Without Master will not accept any work that appears to violate an applicable edict that is not also created by the original creator.

More about the realms policy can be found at: WorldsWithoutMaster.com/realms.

"Three Dozen Repasts Nourishing & Nefarious" belongs to the Free & Chaotic Realms.

"Day of the Coward" belongs to the realms curated by Epidiah Ravachol. Its edicts may be found at: WorldsWithoutMaster.com/edicts.

