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Welcome to the eighteenth issue of Explosive Runes!

The ER staff has undergone another change within the last couple of months. RonarsCorruption has stepped down as editor in chief due to an abundance of RL work. We wish RonarsCorruption all the best in his new opportunities and we thank him for all the hard work he has put into making this an excellent publication. He will continue to provide material and support for the new staff and we look forward to his contributions.

I, EngrInAZ, have now assumed the role of editor in chief.

In this issue, with the rebranding of the site emphasizing the growth of RPGs, we are focusing on material beyond the realm of fantasy. We have included material relating to Modern, Comic Book Superheroes, and Far Future settings. We have also added a new feature, Out of the Box, which will review a new RPG system each issue to give the community options for new systems to run.

We hope you enjoy the new material and features, expanding your RPG possibilities and introducing some new gaming ideas to help our community grow.

Now get out there and roll some dice!

~EngrInAZ

Editor-in-Chief: EngrInAZ
Assistant Editors: RonarsCorruption, Grogg Tree, Dirkoth, Solomon777 & jj_wolven

Cover Art: Fil kearney
The Podcast

The RPG Crossing Podcast is still going strong. Led by the always enchanting RoBi, you should probably go on over to our sister publication and take a look!

Authors

The RPG Crossing community loves to support all of our published authors. Not just here in Explosive Runes, but also site-wide.

We've compiled a list of all site authors (that we know of) and all of their work, right here on the site.

From full novels to gaming aids and adventures, go and take a look, you won't regret it!

If you have published something you'd like to share, send a PM to Birched to be included.

Our own Medesha has published another adventure!

You can find her masterpiece (Chapter 1: "The Worldwound Incursion") available through Paizo TODAY! It is available in Print Edition or as PDF.

New Moderators

Arucard
EngrInAZ
Zeppo007
zevonian

Four stand-up members have volunteered to take on the duties of staff-hood. Next time you see them around take a moment to thank them for their willingness to give up some of their precious free time to help make RPG Crossing the great place that it is!

ER Contributor

Are you looking to get a writing or art gig? Want to help make RPG Crossing a very special place? Then get your work put in Explosive Runes and enjoy the satisfaction that comes with a job well done. For more information about this, please contact EngrInAZ.

Community Supporter

Community Supporters are one of the backbones of RPG Crossing. Not only do they enjoy a variety of special privileges, their annual contribution is a big part of what makes all this possible.

Join their ranks! Click HERE to find out more about being a Community Supporter!
Post of the Month

Despite our name change, the Post of The Month competition is still running strong on RPG Crossing, and it continues to highlight some of the finest work by site members on a monthly basis.

The 2013 Winners:

January: schmev!
February: Sassafrass!
March: Sir Alex!
April: DukeofTuring!
May: irishking7777!
June: Toba!
July: Admin Chuck!

(Clicking on the name of any of the winners will take you directly to their winning entry.)

Easter Egg Hunt

This year, fewer of you found the eggs because we have returned to the old-school way of hiding the eggs, and not hinting at where they were!

Despite that, our top hunter discovered ten distinct eggs, of the twelve hidden across the entire site! Which is pretty amazing, but even more amazing is that the Easter bunny got away!

The 2013 Winner: Duderk!

Hall of Fame

Another year has come and gone, and the Hall of Fame is welcoming its newest inductees to their new front page spot. This year, 13 eligible games were nominated for Hall of Fame 2013 status by the general membership pool. The first round of voting shrank that list to six, and after a close round of voting by our Community Supporters, four games were left standing to join the hallowed ranks of the Hall of Fame.

The 2013 Class:

Forgotten Realms: Shadows of Amn
DM: idilippy
The Last Romance
DM: Hydra-X
Birth of the Superhumans
DM: Daygamer
Heroes of Fallcrest
DM: hvg3akaek
In the library lives a monthly challenge to write a short story started by the wonderful Klazzform a few years ago and more recently picked up by Aethera. Each month a theme is posted, along with three additional challenge elements that are optional, just for the challenge of incorporating random items into your story. We have great stories submitted each month, so come visit us on the forum!

For 2013, we're trying out a quarterly prize system. So far it seemed to garner a bit more interest in the competition, for who doesn't like winning a prize? The next three-month site subscription will be awarded for the Spring (March, April, and May) quarter at the end of June, with a winner selected from the winners of each month's competition. If you want a chance at the Summer prize, enter a story today!

The four entries that won December, January, and February were placed in a poll, that a quarterly winner might be decided by popular vote. The prize was a three-month Community Supporter subscription to RPGCrossing, with all the pretty features that go along with it!

Winter 2013 Winner

Wishing Stones
by The Jaded (January 2013)

A masterful depiction of a not-so-happy ending. Wishes (as every GM can tell you) may well have guidelines, and few are explained before you make the wish. But if you had the opportunity and knew the risks, would you still make the wish?
He didn’t rein in his horse’s gallop until he was out of town, past the last of the outlying farmhouses. Even then, he slowed only to a brisk trot, still a dangerous speed for a horse to take at night. There was no moon, but the stars were painfully sharp, staring daggers down at his back as he rode.

He stopped and dismounted stiffly at the top of a rise in the land over which the road continued to the west. As his mount cropped a few mouthfuls of dew-dampened grass at the side of the road, he looked back in the direction he’d come. Even in the deadest part of night, the castle glowed brilliantly, the yellows and oranges of watch-fires reflecting off its smooth white stone walls and towers. The upper levels’ windows also glowed, but in the softer hue of hearths burning low. The early spring air was cool, but not cold enough to produce frost.

The rider’s eyes picked out a single glowing spark high in the castle, the light in a place he knew all too well. “I’m sorry, love. I must know.” He whispered. The words condensed into a visible vapor in front of his lips, then dissipated, and the only ears that heard them belonged to the horse.

He gave his mount a few more minutes to chomp away at the grass, then led it back onto the road, mounted, and rode on. The castle vanished behind the terrain, and the man was alone with just his horse and the accusing stars for company.

The queen woke with a start, trying to determine what had awakened her. The fire had burned low, and it barely gave off enough light to illuminate the tiles of the floor around it. The rest of the opulent room was swallowed in darkness.

She turned over, reaching across the expansive bed to where her husband should have been, but he wasn’t there. “Kade?” She whispered into the darkness, but she didn’t need to wait for the silence to respond to know she was alone.

Not to worry, she told herself. The king had trouble sleeping sometimes, and would usually wander about a bit to settle his nerves. Caused by stress, perhaps. He’d be back.

She drew her hand back toward herself, and it brushed something stuck between the silk sheets. Something stiff and dry - paper?

The queen, now fully awake, and pulled the object toward her, then got up and lit a taper from the embers of the fire. It was an envelope, addressed to her. She broke the seal with her long, thin fingers, and started to read.

I saw the stranger standing at the edge of town, right in front of the old dolmen gate that’s always been there. He was looking up at the pair of words there engraved. A lot of travelers do that. People love mysteries.

I almost sidled up to him to distract him, get a chance to snag that fat-looking purse at his side, but as I approached he turned in my direction and I saw the sword. I sent quick thanks to God for small mercies - even if I
were desperate I wouldn’t try to cut the purse of a nobleman. They can do whatever they want with us lowly commonfolk, and they could make you die really slowly.

“You there.” The nobleman called across the street. I saw that he was of perhaps early middle age, with graying temples and beard. He was dressed in a well-made but worn blue cloak, held in place with a gold chain at his breastbone.

I realized after watching for a second or so that he was calling to me. “Me, m’lord?” I asked, not knowing what else to say.

“Aye. Come here a moment.” He beckoned in a friendly manner, but we both knew that was an order that could be enforced on pain of death. I trudged forward, keeping my head down, like we’re supposed to.

As soon as I got close, he pointed up to the words on the stone. “Tell me what they say about those runes.” He told me.

The man’s heavy purse swung within reach of my clasped hands, and though I knew it would be full of gold I dared not touch it. “Many things, m’lord. There’s magic in the dolmen, to be sure. None have ever managed to break it, even with good tools. Some say it is a doorway to the fell realms, or to lost Eden, or to another world, and the words are a spell of sealing.” I took a breath. Maybe if I gave him a good enough explanation I’d get a coin for my trouble, and if I cooperated he’d probably leave me alone, coin or no. “But others say it is an anti-spell, that the dolmen breaks all enchantments. It’s even said that our fair queen was under a terrible enchantment as a maiden, and that it was the power of this place that broke it. But I was only an infant at the time, m’lord.”

The man nodded. “Yes, I have heard that tale myself many times. But what do the runes mean?” He pressed.

I shrugged, keeping my eyes on the grassy space around the dolmen’s base. “I’m sorry, m’lord, I don’t know. Never heard anyone say they could read ‘em.”

He sighed. “All right.” His hand went into his pouch, and my heart leapt. He took out two coins - one silver, and one gold. The gold one would get me three weeks of good food and drink, at least, and the silver perhaps three or four days of the same. “For your trouble.” He tossed me the silver coin, and held up the gold one. “If you find me someone who claims to be able to read them by nightfall, I will be generous.”

I bowed several times and thanked him, backing away until he lost interest in me. That gold coin, still held loosely between his fingers, called to me. All I needed to do was find him some crazy old man, and he’d give that to me. Sure, noblemen are bad news, but I thought this was a simple matter. Get batty greybeard, get coin, get out of the vicinity. Eat for three weeks without working or cutting purses.

I darted around the bend and headed for the Three Timbers. The bar attracted plenty of crackpots and oddballs, I just needed to grab one and get him over to the dolmen by sundown. On the way there, though, I heard hoofbeats approaching, and habitually dove out of the road and into a narrow alley -
anyone on a horse was important enough not to stop to avoid trampling me.

The horses slowed and stopped not far from my alley, and I heard the clanking sounds of several mail-clad men dismounting. Probably not all knights - just one and his retainers. Though one is bad enough. A knight deprived of a war to go charging gloriously into is worse than said war, if he lives nearby.

“Gather them all.” A stern voice directed, and iron-shod feet stomped around to carry the orders out. What was it this time?

A few heads poked out of buildings, and at the direction of hostile voices people gathered. Probably an edict from on high to be told to the peasantfolk. Didn’t sound like they were being overly violent about it.

“Hear ye, hear ye, we bear a proclamation from the palace of His Imperial Majesty, Adonis the First!” The authoritative voice called out. “I regret to announce that his Imperial Majesty has disappeared! He vanished from his bed in the dead of night and has not been seen since! Since His Majesty is an accomplished warrior, it is likely that he left of his own accord, but none could be found who could explain his errand. Any peasant who brings to the court any news of his whereabouts will receive four coins of gold in payment, tripled if the information leads to the King’s return. Pray regularly for your monarch’s safety. That is all.” The knight fell silent, and the crowd began to murmur.

This was interesting. Missing king, reward for information. Why would a king run away? He lived a pampered life, married to a woman purported to be most beautiful in the realm, if not the world. He was wealthy beyond measure and literally owned not only the entire kingdom, but its inhabitants. Even the noblemen. I knew if I were in that position, I wouldn’t let anything take me away from it.

Then I remembered the strange nobleman by the old runed stones, and my heart leapt. Could I really be so fortunate?

As soon as I heard the knight and his retainers ride off, I snuck out of the alley and headed back to the dolmen. There was nobody there, of course. Probably off buying a house to spend the night in alone. I’d seen nobles do that before, and burn it to the ground when they were through. Strange people.

Still, I went back to the Three Timbers and ducked inside. I asked around a bit, broke my silver coin up into a nice pile of coppers and half-coppers and passed a few around to loosen tongues. Everyone knew a guy with “the real story” of the ancient dolmen, but I had a devil of a time finding anyone willing to claim to know the meaning of the runes.

Even my usual go-to crackpots, Jorg Halfgait and Moris Blackeyes, didn’t want to go there. Moris told me that even he knew the runes were unknowable. That was strange, because the week before Moris had been telling me how his great-grandpappy had married a true-to-life witch and that the magic in his blood made him capable of great and terrible things.

Eventually, I settled down across a corner table from an old, gray-bearded man in a hood. Hoods indoors aren’t that strange, what with all the smallpox survivors hiding their scars, and the veterans hiding their gaping eye sockets, so I didn’t think too much of not being able to see his face. He had a gnarled cane leaning against the table, and at my offer of a half-copper he took a rattling breath and spoke. “Sure, I know what they say.” He wheezed. “Didn’t think anyone cared to anymore. Who’s askin’?”

I shrugged. “A curious nobleman handing out coins. He’ll probably have at least a silver in it for you.” I said, not mentioning my own gold. Best not to have to share.
“Nobleman.” The old man replied thoughtfully. “Hmph. Finally...” He muttered to himself. “I’ll come along, but not until near sunset. Damn heat’s no good for old folks like me.”

It wasn’t hot that day, but I didn’t press the issue. That gold coin was practically mine. “Done.” I agreed.

“What’s your name, son?” He asked. I was twenty-four then, hardly a child, but one generally lets one’s elders use their own words for you.

“Bandt.” I replied. A lie. One never uses one’s own name in a town where one cuts purses.

“Good name, that. I’m Lifarne.”

“Pleasure doing business with you, Lifarne.”

“And with you, Bandt.” The old man agreed, and I thought I saw a shadow of a toothless smile under the hood.

I helped the old man to the dolmen just as the sun began to kiss the top of the hills. He seemed to know the way, I was just there to speed up the process and give him someone to lean on. The nobleman wasn’t there, and I wondered if he’d be coming at all. It was the middle of autumn, so I hoped the old man would make this quick. No theatrics. The night would soon get cold.

A lantern bobbed around the corner. I saw a worn blue cloak, and looked down submissively, waiting for the man to address me. I snuck a glance at the old man, and noticed he was pointedly doing no such thing. I cringed, hoping the noble was in a charitable mood.

“Aha, you came through.” The nobleman said, as if there was never any doubt. I muttered an agreement and stepped aside. “Well, old man, can you read the letters on the stone?” The noble asked impatiently. There was a gleam of metal in the lamplight, and something small and round landed on the ground near my feet. My fingers recognized the gold immediately, and I bent down to grab it, then backed away a few steps. I had meant to leave, but I was curious, too - I wanted to know what the runes meant.

The old man set his cane against one of the great uprights and cast off his hood. I winced as soon as I saw his face, because his eyes were milky and should have been sightless. But he was looking right at the nobleman. “I cannot read them, but I need no sight to tell you their meaning.” He offered. “That should suffice.”

The nobleman’s hand went to his sword. “If you plan on deceiving me...”

“Such as I are not capable of raw deception, little knight.” The old man intoned, and in the moment he was speaking he seemed to loom over the man in blue, though in reality the “little knight” was the taller. I thought I
saw a spark of greenish light worm its way up the stone, but reasoned that it must have been a firefly. “We may trick, but the trick is always in your interpretation, not in our words.”

I suddenly sensed that of the two, I should be more frightened of the blind old man. And from the body language of the noble, he understood that as well.

“Very well.” The nobleman nodded, as if understanding the meaning of the old man’s cryptic words. Perhaps he did. I don’t know what all nobles know, only that it’s more than the rest of us. “Proceed.”

“The words there engraved for the ages are spoken thus: Lifarnae Belisothiar.” The words, with their unfamiliar inflections, seemed to be echoed by a second, whispered voice as Lifarne spoke them. Again, I saw greenish motes of light rush up the sides of the dolmen stones – perhaps six or seven. They were gone too quickly to count. “The literal meaning of the phrase is difficult to translate into this small language, but ‘wish-granted becomes guardian’ is close enough.”

The noble nodded, as if this meant something to him.

“When first you came to this place, Kade Adonis, you were on a quest of great importance, and the least player in it. Your chances of coming home were small. You heard an old man speak of the power of wishing under the stones, so you stopped here and stood below the dolmen, and made a wish. Do you remember?”

The knight nodded. “I do. Twenty-five years ago.” I was busy thinking that the nobleman’s name was Adonis. As in, King Adonis. Could it really be?

“Twenty-five years ago to the day, in fact.” Lifarne wagged a bony finger at Sir Kade. “On the verge between equal day and night, you stood right there and wished to be the one to rescue the princess and break her curse, despite all the odds. Fate determined that you did. And fate has returned you here this night.”

“It has been nagging at me all these years.” Kade admitted. “Did I triumph because of the wish, or did I triumph because of my own skill?”

The old man chuckled. “No way to know, little knight.” As darkness grew, Lifarne seemed less and less frail. “But time is short, and you must know something else.”

“And what’s that?” Sir Kade asked impatiently.

“The cost of your wish, of your life these past years.” The old man exclaimed. “Wish-granted becomes guardian. The price is listed right there for all to see.” I saw a few more green sparks course along the stone, and this time Kade noticed it too.

The Knight backed away from the dolmen as a green spark made it all the way up to the runes, and stayed there.

“I am the guardian!” Lifarne exclaimed, tossing away his cane. “But not for much longer. You will take my place, and guard until another wishes, and returns. All who wish return in time.”

Kade tried to back away, but the old man cackled and made a tugging motion in the air, and the King fell to his knees. “You can’t leave now, little knight. It’s already begun.” More sparks coursed through the stones, not just green anymore - I saw yellows and whites and the occasional red. Most of them went up to the runes and stayed there, but a few popped out of the stone and drifted toward the knight.

I stood still, paralyzed by fear, just an observer. I didn’t want to call attention to myself.
“I have been the guardian for one hundred and twenty-two years and six months, little knight.” Lifarne said, and his voice cracked as he did. “I am long overdue my release.”

I looked over to Sir Kade in time to see two drifting white sparks approach him. He tried to cover his face, but they burrowed between his fingers and he fell writhing to the dirt, crying out in pain. “Your eyes will learn to see the strands of fate as they burn.” The Guardian intoned. I couldn’t think of him as Lifarne anymore.

The magic swirled so brightly it hurt my eyes, and I finally turned away, still hearing the agonized cries of the king. Then everything was black. I turned back around. The stones were dark, and Sir Kade was motionless on the ground. Lifarne, trembling, tried to lean against the stones, but missed and fell over into the grass. I rushed over to him.

“What are you?” I asked, kneeling down next to him. He was frail again, frailer perhaps than he was before, and I had a suspicion he wasn’t going to get back up.

“Nothing... anymore.” The Guardian gasped. “If you want...” I had to lean close to hear him. “There’s still... still time to wish tonight. You could be... anything. King... even. But I... don’t suggest... it. Price... is too...”

His head lolled to the side, and his breathing stopped. I stood, facing the stones. I could wish for something, and it would come true?

Despite everything in my rational mind screaming against it, I stepped forward, under the stones. As I did, Sir Kade Adonis stirred. I saw in his face unseeing, milky eyes, and wondered how long I could avoid the same.

“Don’t do it, man. That’s my life.” He called out, as if seeing into my very intentions. He tried to get up. “Don’t...”

I smiled wickedly. The man’s pleas had made up my mind for me. I imagined the queen of the kingdom, the most beautiful woman in all the world alone, weeping by herself in that giant palace, and something in me turned over. “But it looks like you’re going to be busy, Guardian.” I put a hand on each of the uprights. They felt warm to the touch. “I wish to be mistaken for King Adonis and take his place on the throne.” I said aloud.

The new Guardian, screamed in rage, and tried to get at me, but he was blind and still not even capable of standing. Laughing, I dodged past him and ran off into the night, somehow certain things were about to go my way.
A Role of the Dice

The cleric stalked the alleys of Sigil, tailing the suspicious figure he had seen in the bar. Surely, he knew more than he was letting on. However, just as Jane was preparing to admit she was wrong, the figure began casting a spell, in a dark alleyway far from the street. A plane shift! If she could just follow him, perhaps the whole mystery could unravel then and there. But to do that, I needed to roll a natural 20 - the only way I could follow the figure's motions exactly. To Jane, it was worth the risk, all worlds were at stake.

The dice however, disagreed, and a moment later, Jane found herself in the chaos of Limbo, to shortly be swallowed up by a swirling vortex of magma and never heard from again.

And it was awesome.

-An Agent of Agency-

People have many different reasons to play games like Dungeons and Dragons or Pathfinder - for fun, to play games with their friends or to embark on fantasy epics like they read in their books. But that doesn't address the fundamental reasons people reach out to the game in the first place. Some play games because they were invited to a social event or because they wanted to try their hand at collaborative storytelling - but others come to the hobby to escape.

Why do roleplaying games offer such a great escape? The answer is simpler than one might expect: it's because they offer their players control. And not just control over which color of shirt to wear that day - real control, control over lives, kingdoms and worlds.

This control over the greater scope of things is called Agency, and is something many gamers feel they lack in their own lives. They might lack control because of strict parents, dead-end jobs, poor school performance, few friends or any number of other things that are effectively out of a person's control. And so, to get that control back, they reach out to fantasy worlds, where the fate of millions of people rests on decisions as simple as 'do I let the suspicious figure walk away?'

In these worlds, characters are literal forces of change, and they do so at the player's whim. Sometimes, this change is small scale, like saving a man from a hungry wolf or choosing which quest to undertake first - and other times, such as in Jane's case; players are trying to stop an alliance between the demon lords whose collective armies could destroy all worlds.

Further unlike in the real world, your actions often immediately have tangible and often even measurable outcomes. Where in the real world you might hand in a test, or build a house or throw a ball, and you might not know if you did well or not until long after the fact - if ever. In the game world, you know that you rolled a 17 on that test, so you probably passed; you took 10 building that house so it's just fine, and you hit and did one point of damage with the ball. Even when you don't know immediately whether a result worked out or not, you often know: I rolled poorly, so I probably didn't succeed.
An Agent of Chaos

So why, if people choose to play a game for the control it grants them, do so many people choose one that relies so heavily on dice? One where nearly every action is ultimately decided by a random element? For excitement! If you know there is no way you can fail, fighting monsters is only fun for so long. Plots can only hold your interest for as long as you find out how they will unravel. By adding an unknown element, you take away that certainty, and you no longer know if you’re going to win every time. You might lose, and that threat of defeat makes everything so much more exciting.

Better yet, Dice don’t add just any old amount of chaos to a situation; they offer a very controlled sort of chaos. Each dice roll offers a precise measure of failure and success, one that can be manipulated by the player. A basic d20 roll will never give you a number lower than 1, or higher than 20, unless you manipulate it. In sense, by adding this element of chaos, you simply add another opportunity for control.

The dice and their numbers are tangible things, in terms of the game. The odds can be manipulated, altered and changed. The wizard and the fighter roll the same dice to determine if they’re going to hit the goblin, but the fighter’s probability of success is better. By choosing to play as a fighter, a hitting the goblin. They’ve controlled the way the game is going to play out for them. The fighter can still miss, so each swing brings with it an element of uncertainty, but it’s a very controlled level of risk.

In this way, players can not only manipulate the game’s overall scope through their agency, but also individual events by means of choosing races, classes, feats, skills, magic items - and everything else. A player who wants to control combat absolutely can. A player who wants to control social situations? No problem! All they have to do is build their character in a specific way.

Why Add Chaos?

Yet still, even though there can be control that has been added through the chaos of dice, there isn’t a perfect measure of control. Why add chaos at all? Instead of adding a chance of failure, you could simply insert chaos in the way things are accomplished. The dice could define the style you use instead of whether you succeed or fail. They could be used to determine how well you succeed, rather than measuring if you succeed.

The dice introduce a lack of agency to a game that people play to gain agency in their lives, and that’s perfectly all right. In fact, it's better than just alright - it's great. Too much agency is not much different than no agency at all. When you have complete control, then you're not truly engaged. And ultimately, being engaged in the game is why people come back to games like Pathfinder, or Star Wars or GURPS.

As much as gaming is about escaping or playing or even socializing, an element of these games will always be about accomplishing things. About overcoming challenges and succeeding in the face of impossible odds. Some players will come to the game because they want to kill dragons that metaphorically represent the draconian rules they feel hold them at bay in real life, and the victory over them is all the sweeter when it's not assured. After all, if they wanted a fight they would win every time, they might write a book instead.

Instead, they choose to play a game where there are rules already in place for success and failure, and a sprinkling of random chance. They choose to take control of the life of a great hero or terrible villain - except when they give that control over to a roll of the dice. After all, it's more fun that way.

You can follow Michael on twitter! @ronarcorruption
Isaac alternately paced as well as he was able and stirred the soup on the range oven with a plastic spoon. The others would be back soon, he knew. He hated being alone in the compound, even though it happened fairly often. Ever since the accident and the loss of his leg, he couldn’t go out with the others. Luckily the compound needed plenty of things done from the inside, and one didn’t need a leg to operate the telepresence rig, or Isaac would be dead weight.

A hissing wind had picked up out there, and Isaac staggered out of the galley to peek out one of the round, pressure-sealed windows. Hutchinson Ridge, a huge wall of broken ice, was only visible as a vague black shape through the wind-blown dust, a storm blowing in from the Gradell Sea. The dust, of course, was tiny ice crystals, not earth-like dust. On Europa, water ice was about all there was to see.

“I see it. Right over the ridge. We’ll be careful.” Alice’s voice came back. “See you in a few, Isaac.”

“Yup.” Isaac put the remote back in its holster and went back to check the soup, listening to the hissing of ice-dust pounding the side of the compound grow in intensity. The powers that be had detected that particular hazard of Europa, so he didn’t worry that much - the gentle abrasion would take decades to put the compound in danger.

Then the domed ceiling creaked, and Isaac, startled, looked up. Of course he couldn’t see anything. But it had sounded like there was something shifting its weight up there, something alive. He shook his head and tried to put that out of his mind. Europa was, by all indications and measurements, thus far lifeless, except for the expedition.

The garage, sensing the mobile’s return, started equalizing pressure with the thin Europan atmosphere, a sound that made Isaac jump yet again. He was always like this at the end of the day, he knew - jumpy. He had jumped at the chance to go on this mission because he did well in close quarters with others, but after the accident he often found himself all alone in the cavernous compound for twelve or sixteen hours at a time.

Another creak of the dome spurred Isaac to limp over to the window overlooking the garage entrance. Jupiter’s bulk was only visible as a vague orange glow through the
dust blowing over the ridge, and below it the lights of the mobile shone out from somewhere on the Gulf of Blades. The tracked vehicle was slow, but it was designed for reliability and safety, not for speed. As it trundled closer, Isaac saw that its roof bore a pair of oblong, boxy containers, and knew that Ginny and Jorge would want to take their meal to the analysis room.

The mobile inched into the garage, and its outer doors rolled shut. Isaac heard the pumps restoring its air pressure. Leaning heavily on the wall, he stomped toward the entryway, eager to greet the others.

A gust of wind more severe than usual slammed into the dome, and Isaac heard the comm tower’s metal framework creaking audibly. It would be one hell of a storm, he decided, but didn’t worry about it too much. The compound was designed to take it and worse.

The doors to the garage groaned open, and Alice stepped in, sniffing the air. “Isaac, I don’t know what you’re making but it smells delicious.” She complimented him.

“It’s nothing.” He dropped his eyes in mild embarrassment. “But come on, let’s eat, it should be done by now.”

Except for Ginny and Jorge, the rest of the team ate quietly in the tiny mess hall. As they had been in each others’ exclusive company for almost three years now, the silence was not uncomfortable, but instead familiar, comfortable. Isaac did not fail to notice that Alice had taken a seat across from him.

As soon as her bowl was empty, she broke the silence. Though it was spoken quietly, her question was audible to the other four men and women present. “What’s bothering you, Isaac?” She asked. “You seem a little... I don’t know. Shaken.”

“I don’t know, Alice. I just think being in here all day by myself is getting to me.” Isaac clinked his false leg against the table. “I’m happy I’m still useful to you all after this. But the silence, the emptiness... It gets to my nerves sometimes.” Harold and Nischa nodded in solemn empathy. It wasn’t that Alice was prying - Isaac knew that, as mission commander, she was just doing her job.

“I understand, Isaac. We’ll try not to be gone too long tomorrow, only a few hours.” Alice replied.

The wind continued its roar. “Unless that mess doesn’t let up, of course.” Milo pointed out.

“Yeah.” Alice agreed. “This one sounds pretty bad.”

Returning the stack of empty bowls to the galley, Isaac stopped at the window looking over Hutchinson Ridge. He saw nothing out there, and at first he thought the shutters were closed, until he realized that the ice dust had piled up on that side of the compound deep enough to cover the window. It didn’t bother him too much - he wouldn’t be the one to go out there and blow it off in the morning.

The rest of the expedition had wandered down into the lab wing, where Ginny and Jorge would probably be explaining all the amazing things they had learned from the ice samples. Isaac found that sort of thing hideously dry, but he preferred being bored in company to being alone.

“... The concentration of those silicate shards is up thirty percent from yesterday’s sample.” Ginny was saying. “So we’re getting closer.”

“Mean shard size was also up eleven percent.” Jorge offered helpfully. “Bigger and more common.”

“But still no idea what they are?” Alice asked.
"Ah, no." Ginny replied. "Their structure is highly irregular."

"Maybe -" Tricia started to theorize, but was interrupted when the lights dimmed in time with a blast of wind so severe that the compound groaned.

"Never done that before." Alice pointed out. "Harold, opinions?" Harold pulled out his view slate and punched in some commands to the computer. "Hard to say, but it looks like that mess is too thick for me to talk to the weather sat." He held up the slate for everyone to see the "signal error" message he had received.

"We'll be all right."

"If you say so, Harold." Alice replied doubtfully."No way I'm going to be sleeping through that. Anyone up for a game of chess?"

"You're on." Nischa replied, rolling the "r" sound, the only remaining trace of her once-thick accent. Close proximity with the other seven members of the group had robbed her of what Isaac had considered a very pleasant-sounding mode of speech. "My skill at that sport is unchallenged among us."

"Chess isn't a sport." Isaac pointed out for the tenth time.

"Of course it is, dear. You just use a different muscle group." Nischa replied, her counterpoint as repetitive as Isaac's argument. The exchange was a common ritual associated with the game of chess, and hearing it seemed to put everyone at ease.

The team retired to the wide, high-domed common room, and Alice pulled a gamepad out and set it on one of the flimsy coffee tables. Fiddling with its settings, she got it to display a chessboard, flipped it so that the white pieces were on her side, and made her first move.

The rest of the group watched the game in silence. Alice, playing aggressively, seemed to be dominating the board early on, but Nischa whittled down Alice's pieces over time. In the end, Nischa won, but neither had many pieces left on the board.

"Two out of three?" Alice asked as she tapped the "concede" button.

"Okay." Nischa agreed.

"Umm, guys?" Tricia was sitting in one of the big massage chairs, looking up at the thick glass pane at the domed roof's apex.

"Relax, folks, the compound is rated for two fifty at this pressure." Harold spoke to everyone, but he was looking at Tricia.
Isaac followed her gaze. At first he saw nothing - the pane showed nothing, and he didn’t understand. Then he understood. The unmoving, grayish-white slate was ice dust. “It usually just blows past. Why is it staying put now?” He asked of no-one specifically.

“Wind speed is... hmm. Thirty-one and falling.” Harold read off his display. “But the sensor up on the ridge is still reading one-twenty.”

“We’re in a snowdrift.” Alice summarized.

“Under.” Isaac pointed out.

“The dome isn’t designed to hold weight! What if -” Tricia looked hysterical.

“We’d get alarms if the weight was trouble. It’s just ice dust. We’ll be fine.” Nischa pointed out. This seemed to calm Tricia down a little. “Next time the wind picks up it’ll clear us off.”

“I hope that’s before tomorrow, or the garage must stay shut.” Jorge pointed out. “That stuff will flood the garage.” The rest of the expedition nodded in agreement. Damage to or loss of the mobile would mean no excursions to pick up supply shipments, no more science projects, no nothing. There were enough spare parts in the facility to build two more mobile crawlers, but assembly could take days, to say nothing of shoveling out the garage.

“Not keen on a vacation, Jorge?” Isaac asked him. “It might be for the best. What’s it been, three weeks since we took a day off?” His mind grabbed onto the idea that maybe being “snowed in” would mean he would have company all day long for a change.

“This isn’t a resort, Isaac.” Alice pointed out cautiously, moving a pawn on the chessboard to start the second game.

Isaac, annoyed at the mild condescension the expedition commander was giving him, tapped his false leg against the wall. The aluminum rang slightly. “I think I know that, Alice.” Not wanting to say anything he’d regret, he limped out of the common room as fast as he could, and headed for the bunkroom he shared with Harold. “Not a resort?” He repeated under his breath as he navigated the cramped access tube to the dormitory wing. Of all the insensitive...

“Isaac, wait.” Alice jogged up behind him, but he kept going. She could easily keep up with his peg-legged gait, and they both knew it. “I’m sorry, I know -”

“Alice, save it.” Isaac interrupted her. “Three years we’ve lived in close quarters, I know it was thoughtless and not malicious, and I know you regret it. In fact, I -”

He broke off as the access tunnel creaked loudly around him. “What -”

Alice hit Isaac from behind at full speed, and knocked him over. The pair bowled over the threshold into the dormitory wing, and Isaac’s ill-fitting prosthetic slipped off and rolled away.

“Alice, what the hell -” Isaac tried to protest, but his sentence started about the same time as a groan from the tunnel. There was a pop, then the frightening hiss of escaping air, and the pressure doors on both sides of the tunnel slammed shut. “…Crap.”

Alice rolled off Isaac’s back and pulled her remote off her belt. “We’re all right, what about you guys?” She spoke into it. Only static replied.

Isaac fished out his own remote and pulled up a diagnostic. “No use, looks like the wind knocked something loose out there. The tower’s not responding.”

“Dammit.” Alice stood up and pressed her
face to the glass in the pressure door. “Tunnel just failed.”

“Alarms?” Isaac asked.

“Only in the domes.” Alice pointed out. “The tunnels are supposed to take more than the domes do anyway.”

“Damn.” Isaac looked around for his prosthetic, not seeing it. “Where’d my leg go?”

Alice turned away from the window. “What do you mean?” She saw what he meant. “Oh.” She looked around for a moment. “It might be on the other side of the door.”

“Should have had Harold glue the thing on.” Isaac sat up and leaned on the wall. “I suppose I have you to thank for this.”

“Isaac, I’m -”

“It was a joke, Alice. You saved my life just now. I’m not going to fault you for losing a bit of aluminum. Help me up.”

She complied. Europan gravity made Isaac’s greater weight no problem, and soon she was easing him into a sitting position on his bunk. “How long do you think they’ll be fixing the tunnel?” Alice asked him.

“Hours, I expect.” Isaac replied. “It’d be easier if I were in the telepresence rig. Milo isn’t as quick.”

“Yeah.” Alice sat down next to him. “And with the tower out we’re -”

“Useless.” Isaac finished for her. “Get comfortable.”

“You know, ever since the accident we’ve barely spoken.” Alice said after a short silence. “I’ve been avoiding you, I think.”

“And I you, I suppose.” Isaac agreed. “It’s not that I blame you for the -”

“You don’t have to. I do that perfectly well myself. We knew about all the blind crevasses already, I should have told you.”

“I would have known already if I’d been on the main radio channel like I should have been.” Isaac pointed out. “Rather than listening to the newsfeed again.”

“Everybody knew you were doing that. I knew. I should have -”

“Alice, don’t blame yourself.” Isaac put his hand on her shoulder. “We can share the blame perfectly equitably.”

She made a sort of sniffing, dejected chuckling sound. “But not the consequences.”

“No.” Isaac agreed. “Count yourself lucky, the rest of us do. I’ve tasted your cooking.”

That elicited a bit more laughter. “I suppose.” She conceded. “It’s just so hard to look you in the eye when I know I was at least partly to blame for your leg.”

“Try it now, then. Get some practice while no-one is looking or cares.” Isaac shifted away from Alice and turned to face her. “I don’t blame you. I did, initially, but I don’t now.”

Alice turned to look at Isaac, but her eyes
made only furtive contact with his before darting away again. “You look good, you know.” She said quietly. “You’re doing better than anyone could expect.”


This proved to be another laugh line for Alice. “Isaac, how can you do that? Make light of even that?”

“It’s my way. The eye contact, Alice. Where’s the old you? The woman who thought herself God’s gift to spaceflight on the way here? The woman that was large and in charge, the woman who - ” Isaac broke off before he said what he was thinking: “the woman who I thought I loved.” That was all ancient history, and things had changed since the expedition had landed.

She tried again, and this time got a full five seconds before she looked away again. “You really don’t blame me?” She asked.

“Nope.” Isaac shrugged. “You don’t believe that?”

Alice stood up and walked to the other side of the small chamber. “People aren’t like that. Forgiveness isn’t that easy, it’s - ”

The sounds of whirring motors against the outer wall made both look in that direction. “That’ll be the rig.” Isaac pointed out uselessly - Alice would know that too. “They’ll have us out before too long.”

“I know.” Alice paced back toward Isaac. “I... I wish I could believe you.”

“You will, when you forgive yourself.” Isaac moved as if to stand, but stopped when he remembered that he was without his leg. “I wish you would.”

Alice stopped, and made eye contact again. This time, she held it, looking into him for something Isaac couldn’t guess. She opened her mouth as if she were about to say something, but shut it again and leaned in to plant a light kiss on his cheek. Isaac was surprised by this, but not at all unhappy about it. Then she whirled and stalked out the door into the rest of the dome.

“Wait, Alice - ” Isaac called after her, and her footsteps stopped just out of sight. Perhaps, he considered, their real or imagined chemistry wasn’t as relegated to ancient history as he had thought. This idea both excited and terrified Isaac.

“Not sure I’m ready to forgive myself just yet, Isaac. But thanks for being... like you are. I am not sure we’d keep ourselves together without you. I’m not sure I would.”

“I’m glad to help, Alice, any way I can.” Isaac replied.

If Alice heard, she didn’t respond. Isaac didn’t hear her footsteps stomping away, and wondered for some time if she had slunk off or if she was still standing there, just outside the door, waiting for him to say something, and if so, what it was.
When last we left our heroes...

I don't know if there is anyone who wouldn't want to play some kind of superhero.
-Jennifer Morrison

During the last installment of Explosive Runes I touched on some good advice for Horror Games... now with the re-branding of RPG Crossing, we wanted to touch on the broad spectrum of gaming that happens across the site – not all of it is just typical fantasy.

In this particular installment I'm going to discuss in detail one genre that is rather near and dear to me and ties in nicely to one of the most recent RPGX Podcast, Comic Book Superheroes!

Comic book hero games (commonly called Supers) allow us a chance to really dig into our guilty pleasure centers and get our Marty Stu/Mary Sue on, stretch physics to the point of whatever is convenient to the plot and really focus on what games are supposed to be about... having fun! That's not to say you can't have your quasi-real world settings like in The Watchmen or your Gritty Dark 90's characters like Spawn, or anything of the sort, but the one thing about comic books that makes it different from typical fantasy games is that going over the top isn't something out of the ordinary, or that needs 20 levels of gaming first... no, in the land of Supers the wacky and obscenely unrealistic is par for the course right out of the gate!

So let us as GMs get down to the nuts and bolts, discuss a bit about what makes and breaks a super hero game as well as how to run one well.

History

Fate rarely calls upon us at the moment of our choosing.
-Optimus Prime

The first thing I would say to a new Supers GM is that if you haven't already; go read a bunch of comics. Jump into a comic shop and chat with the owners (or at least join a comic book supers forum or two) to see what a discussion of your likes and tastes leads them to recommending for you in the ways of reading. Chances are with an industry that's nearly a century old that there are at least a dozen lines of comics that cater to whatever your interests are. Comic books aren't the only source material, of course: animated shows, movies, video games and more are all great resources, too. But despite that, why do I still recommend the books? The reason is pacing. Comic books run out plotlines that escalate quickly and read easily, which is what you're going to want for inspiring your PBP Game. Also like comic books, you're going to want to use a strong hybrid of images to supplement words when possible, so expect that you'll spend lots of time on images searches to prep for your game. If you find you're having trouble getting just the right picture for a character, consider using Hero Machine.

If you're not already familiar, the two major
comic book moguls are DC and Marvel. There are lots of other publishing houses, too, but those two have lots of history and are by far the largest. For some random reading and inspiration feel free to exploit the Marvel and DC Wikis as much as you should already be exploiting TV tropes for inspiration. You'll notice these two brands have strange histories where things sometimes seem to make more sense than others and how some characters and plotlines will seem more or less appealing to you. This usually has to do with the “age” that particular comic originated from. Most commonly, these ages are broken down into typical terms like “the gold age” and “the silver age”, each of which represents major social and policy shifts that affected the writing and publication paradigms of comic books and is ultimately reflected within the medium. It's good to familiarize yourself with what these ages signify so you can better define your setting genre for your particular game.

That is not to say you can't go and color outside the lines, and indeed many people have. The ages mostly just reflect the most popular trends of their time... There are plenty of niche ideas that rarely get expressed in comics or that touch on very specific themes like The Boys or The Maxx, etc. You and your players are free to explore as many strange themes as you'd like with heroes, including ones you think up yourself, like with any RPG format.

The difference between 'Watchmen' and a normal comic book is this: With 'Batman's Gotham City,' you are transported to another world where that superhero makes sense; 'Watchmen' comes at it in a different way, it almost superimposes its heroes on your world, which then changes how you view your world through its prism. -Zack Snyder

### Introductory Setting Questions

Now that you have some idea of how supers universes work, let’s look at some general questions you need to answer for your players up front:

- What causes people to gain super-powers? Consider what kinds of origins are available... Magic, Technology/Gadget, Mutation, Training, Psi, Cosmic, etc.
- What is the scale of the game and hero influence? Local, Regional, Global, Universal, Extra-dimensional, etc.
- How long ago did people start gaining super-powers? How have super-powered people affected the world they live in?
- What is the common thread that binds the PCs together?
- Is the setting an existing Supers world? A new one? An Alternate-Earth scenario? What are the major differences between the game timeline and what players expect (especially in an Alternate-Earth)? What is the typical tech/magic/super power level of average society?
- What is the Lethality Level? What kinds of enemies and Villains should the PCs expect?

Why do we lay this out up front? The breadth and dynamic of characters that can be created in superhero games is incredibly huge from The One Above All to Squirrel Girl, everything in between and beyond. We're not just worried about character concept here as GMs (though we should be concerned about that) but also power level. PCs in the same series should be of roughly the same scope, otherwise you have problems like why Superman can't go to Gotham and similar damaging story paradoxes.

### Team Dynamics

Team balance, of course, leads us directly into the discussion of team dynamics, which
comes into play any time you’re running a game with more than one player in it.

The first thing to remember is that while the power level and theme needs stay the same across the game overall, that doesn't mean you can't move even wildly outside the normal scope for a particular story-line, as happened to Jean Grey during the Dark Phoenix Saga. You should note that despite the drastic increase in the character’s power during that story arc, when it concluded the status quo was more or less restored.

Look at the typical teams of superheroes to see how some different dynamics might work out - or just study some Cast Calculus. What we're getting at here though is you need a unifying theme for the characters that makes sense within the scope of the setting you've defined and the type of campaign you want to run.

This unifier can be a their power source, such as in the X-Men where they are all mutants, it could be a special Agency or specific mission that draws them together, like the Justice League, or it could be that they are all victims of circumstance X. The key thing is that you'll want this unifier to be worked in before you start because unlike typical heroes, supers tend to have less of a need to band together unless you ramp up the stakes really fast. You do want to do that, of course, but not before establishing the baseline of normal for the story. Too fast a start and you risk a game at a breakneck pace and that collapse under its own weight as the stakes rise increasingly outside the bounds of a willing suspension of disbelief. For sake of game longevity and skipping over the boring off camera stuff, have their origins collide before you start the game. You'll already have a tougher time than usual making them care about working together since as supers they are predisposed to being more powerful and independent than is typical.

Another team dynamic to consider is that when you create side characters, create ones that can interact with all of the party members... avoid characters that are too specific to one character in the party. This lets you keep the focus on the party and the conflicts and challenges they face, rather than sorting through and accounting for an NPC cast of hundreds.

At this stage don't worry too much about
what the "campaign" is going to be, for now you can just have a basic theme in mind for your characters that fits your GM agenda, then organically grow the story around the characters. This is especially important with Supers campaigns because unlike a fantasy epic, the characters here ARE the story, they are the rockstars, they are the Newspaper Headline Creators. Let them shine and make that happen; adapt the game around them. Luckily for you this slipshod form of writing is not only OK for supers, it's also expected for the genre. It's a rare occasion that a comic book story is especially deep and philosophical, so don't try too hard, instead find new and interesting ways to grow the world around the characters. A classic example was the creation of the Mutant Registration Program and the Sentinels in the X-Men books. That grew out of a need where too many mutants were running around with dangerous powers within the books that made the typical in-world pedestrian scared, creating an entire story-arc.

_I believe there's a hero in all of us, that keeps us honest, gives us strength, makes us noble, and finally allows us to die with pride, even though sometimes we have to be steady, and give up the thing we want the most. Even our dreams._

_Aunt May, Spider Man 2_

**RPG Systems**

OK, so you have a concepts and a rough idea of what you're looking for in a team, now we need to pick a system (if you haven't decided already) that is going to fit your needs. Some of the most popular RPG systems for supers are Mutants and Masterminds 3e, GURPS 4e with suggested Supers Supplement (and possibly others like Magic, etc), Aberrant, Heroes Unlimited and suggested Ninja's and Superspies add on, Marvel Superheroes, Icons, or Fudge/Fate depending on what kinds of games you want to run (each runs distinctly differently). There are always tons of other RPGs that you can adapt to, or even that are designed for, Supers... but those are some good starter points for you to sink your teeth into. Chances are if you look through those you'll see something you like or figure out enough about what you like and don't like to find the perfect system for you.

For a free option that will allow you to pick up any player on a PBP board, also check out D20 Hero SRD.

**Supers Story Telling**

_Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point._

*C.S. Lewis*

Keep in mind that in the first adventure, like with any RPG, the players are going to be getting a feel for each other, the rules, the GM style and their characters... so keep the first adventure pretty simple and light. Make sure the players are reasonably on top through most of it and get a chance to use all of their main powers at least (but try to avoid having a Plot too tailored to the party) During this first adventure, also try to discuss each character’s background if you can, allowing the other players to see where the different characters come from. At the start of the adventure, jump to action right off the bat, make something happen that demands the attention of the supers. When ending the first adventure, make sure it's grandiose and ends with a metaphorical big bang to start the game off on an exciting note, with promise of interesting things to come.
More than any other genre of game, Supers games follow the rule of cool. They’re larger than life characters and worlds, where physics are meant to be bent. Sometimes, something really interesting and fun may make your rules/physics lawyers explode with rage, but don’t sweat that stuff... sure it’s not realistic that anything in a superhero game would or wouldn’t happen in real life. In a Supers campaign, if it's cool and furthers the story or makes the game more fun you should consider pushing the rules aside for it. Remember the MST3K Mantra... "It's just a show; I should really just relax."

That doesn't mean you give your characters carte blanche to win the RPG on a natural 20, but it does mean that you shouldn't be scared to put together extreme scenarios. Maybe have the cops show up and surround the building faster than their response time should be, or have the hero defusing the bomb or hacking the computer come down to a decision at the last second, or have hundreds of people survive the wreck of that building that was smashed into by the party meat shield. Push more for fun and excitement in your Supers games, even if you have to power through rules lawyers to do it.

On that note, you should aim to shorten create plot arcs instead of epic campaigns with your supers. After each arc, consider if the stakes could be ramped up slightly for the next one, so the status quo more or less returns to normal after taking into account PC growth. In this fashion, much like a comic book, your adventures should be episodic and your arcs can span several adventures - but the difference between the arc and the campaign is that while each arc ends, a campaign keeps taking all history into account. Once an arc is done, it can be laid to rest while you find some new story to tell. Remember with supers it’s more important to be reactive than proactive as a GM. Let the PC heroes shine.

That said, in a game with loose physics especially, there are times you are going to have to make judgment calls... and give your players a hard ‘yes’ or ‘no’. Aim to make decisions that make the game fun for you, and for the players. How do we resolve this fairly you might ask?

I would suggest the use of a hero point mechanic. You can hand out a point to a player whenever they go above and beyond for the rule of cool, and maybe when they level up. These points can then be spent on any number of things you decide ahead of time, from specific bonuses (+1 cumulative to any dice roll) to more open ended options where the player can dictate how an action will work out in a more freeform sense. It's worth mentioning that the more freeform your game is, the closer and mature your players should be as a group. If you do want to be more freeform, consider having everyone in the game learn the Johnstoning Technique and use it to create the rules for dictating a scene.

And now that you've given the characters the tools they need to be awesome, it's time for you to go forth and create a respectable Rogue's Gallery. (To be continued next issue)

WoLT is the Head GM of Eternity's End, Created and Runs the PBP GM Academy, Created the PBP New Member, Player and GM Guides and has over 20 years of RPG experience.
Marcus paced back and forth in the small one-room jailhouse, lit only by the fire in the small fireplace. His plain brown eyes stormed with emotion under his close cropped black hair and the sound of his dark leather boots bounced off the stone walls. He wore a black sleeveless shirt emblazoned with an orange sword on the breast and a scimitar hung from his belt, marking him as a guard in the employ of Duke Viam’Bellator, Lord of Jericho. His pacing took him to the only window in the jail and he stopped to peer out like he had done a thousand times since his relief had not arrived. The light of the moon revealed snow blanketed hills for the first time in history and the cobblestone road that led from the jail, a holding area for new prisoners, to the prison a mile away was invisible. The snow fascinated the young guard as much as it irritated him and he stood captivated for a moment. He was staring out at history, albeit cold wet history that made travelling a pain, and all he could think about was the lateness of his relief. Some were contributing the unnatural weather to the Sorcerer Kings of the north and their plans to conquer Jericho. The city was almost in a state of panic over such a display of power. He muttered the same curses he had muttered every time he paused at the window and turned around, the sound of his boots once again filling the air on his ten step march to the bars of the cell that took up half the building.

“Today of all days! Damned Sorcerer Kings! What am I going to do? Alayna is going to kill me.” Saying her name filled his head with images of the beautiful Potter’s daughter. He had been courting her for months and had finally saved up enough of his earnings to buy her a ring. What better time to consummate their love than on the eve of an invasion? A heavy sigh escaped his lips and he lost interest in pacing. He turned and walked over to the fireplace across from his desk, the only things of interest in the small jail other than the cell and the window by the door, and poked at the logs burning within. Right now Marcus was supposed to be on bended knee at the fountain in the center of the renowned Gardens of Heaven holding the ring out for Alayna to take and he was missing it because of snow! She wouldn’t understand that he couldn’t leave until his replacement got there. He could already see the hurt look on her face and imagine the silence he would have to live with for weeks. Another sigh carried him over to his desk and he picked up his thick black cloak from where it was hanging on the back of his chair. After fumbling with it for a moment he pulled the ring from a concealed pocket and dropped his cloak onto the desk. The firelight danced inside the small emerald set atop the golden band. He had chosen the ring because the stone reminded him Alayna’s eyes.

“A smooth voice said from under a raggedy blanket in the back corner of the cell, causing Marcus to jump and almost drop the precious loop of metal. The young guard had forgotten that there was a prisoner waiting to be processed in the cell, an easy thing to do since the rough looking man behind the bars had been asleep for the entirety of his shift. The prisoner stood up and stretched, the light of the fire throwing shadows across his body and face. “I tried to give a woman a ring just like that not too long ago. Beautiful, she was, and full of a fire no man could quench.” A small smile appeared on the shadowed face as he leaned against the back wall of the cell. “Oh but I
tried, though. I was convinced that I would be the one to tame her.” The smile slowly disappeared and his voice filled with what could only be pain. “She proved me wrong, of course. Took my ring, my freedom, and my heart along with it.”

Marcus, having recovered from his scare, eyed the man for a moment before nodding. He had learned from his time at the little jail that most criminals were just men and had long ago given up any misgivings he may have had about talking to them. “A sad tale. Mine may be heading in that direction because of this damned snow. I’m supposed to be proposing right now.” He slipped the ring back into his cloak pocket and sat on top of his desk. “The only thing I was told when I took over this afternoon is that you turned yourself in. What’d you do to land in prison?”

The shadowed face replied, “If she’s any type of decent she’ll understand after a glass of wine or two.” He shifted against the back wall before answering Marcus’ question, “Why I’m here is a long story.”

“Until some of this snow clears, I have nothing better to do. Just skip the ‘I’m innocent’ bit if you would. There’s nothing I can do for you if you’ve already made it here.”

The shadowed face stares back at him and no response seemed forthcoming. After what seemed like an eternity, Marcus opened his mouth to steer the conversation in a different direction. Before he could get a word out, the man behind the bars spoke, his voice dripping with reluctance, “Well... I’m not one for lying so you won’t hear me saying I’m innocent. I turned myself in a few days ago, expecting to be executed.” His forehead wrinkled once more in thought as he continued, “I guess I should start from the beginning. Before everything happened I was a guide and a trapper in the Great Forest just north of Jericho. I was pretty damned good at it too. Never got anyone lost and never met an animal I couldn’t track and bring down. Until Jacquelyn, that is.”

Marcus turned his head slightly and interrupted. “Jacquelyn?”

“Yeah, Jacquelyn.” The prisoner said, his words laced with the same note of pain heard moments before. “A black leopard, the rarest of prey in the Great Forest. She was going to make me a very happy man.” His tone became distant and filled with a sense of awe when he continued, “I remember the first day I saw her. I was roaming about checking my traps and there she was, just standing there in the middle of a path staring at me, her amber eyes weighing my soul.” He chuckled at this, “For the first time since I was old enough to hunt, I froze. The most beautiful creature I had ever seen in my life was less than twenty five yards away and I couldn’t move. That was also the first time she slipped my grasp. When those eyes finished their inspection she turned and padded off into the trees, disappearing before I could think to go after her.”

Another shift against the wall and the prisoner crossed his arms over his chest. “After that day I had no desire to hunt anything but her. Tracking and trapping her filled every waking moment of my life. I tried everything that had netted me a catch
before, then traps a thousand times more elaborate than I had ever tried. I even though of trying the violent traps some of the other men employed, though I never did.” Sadness once again crept into the shadowed man’s voice. “She was too crafty for me. Every time I threw out bait she took it but somehow avoided the trap. It turned into a game but Jacquelyn had been hunted before and knew what she was doing. I had one trap left up my sleeve, though. A trap I had never had to use before and one I was sure she would never expect. Its bait had proven itself throughout history as effective.”

Fully captivated by the story, Marcus waited as the pause stretched on into forever. When the story finally resumed, it was in a low tone filled with a mixture of sorrow and anger, “I decided to set my trap the day the snow first started falling. I thought maybe it was a sign of change and luck, an assurance of good things to come. The first flakes that touched my face ignited a need for action that I had never felt before. I was deceived. When I went into the forest there was already a trap there. It was almost identical to mine and she was walking right into it! It was sure to catch her. I saw the other tracker watching her and that’s where everything goes fuzzy.”

A heavy sigh sounded from behind the bars and the man continued, “Next thing I remember is standing over the other tracker’s body, a bloody hunting knife in my hand. The snowflakes falling on my face mocked the fire they had birthed in me earlier and I knew their cold kiss was the only I would ever feel. When I looked up from the gory mess at my feet Jacquelyn was standing there, those eyes weighing me again, except this time I saw that I had been found wanting.”

Just then the door reverberated under the heavy blows of someone on the other side, causing Marcus to jump again and almost fall from the desk. His relief had finally come! He runs across the room, the prisoner and his tale forgotten, and flings open the door.

Standing outside is his replacement and three other guards. Behind them the snow has been trudged through and no more has fallen to replace it. “Marcus, by the Halls of Solomon, move out of the way! This blasted snow has me soaked through!” His replacement roared.

Marcus did as asked, chuckling, “They made you walk in front the whole way out here, Jaunt? I’m surprised your old bones even let you walk out the door!” He glanced around as the others file in, one of them walking over to the cell. “They taking him to the prison? Why not wait until in the morning?”

Jaunt sniffs at the joke, a stern look flashing across his aged face. “I volunteered, I did! Damned youngsters bet me two Ashers I couldn’t do it.” The older man watched as the prisoner was retrieved and manacled. “Duke wants to deal with that one personally and I don’t blame him one bit.

Did Jeb tell you what he did when you took over?”

Marcus shook his head and turned to watch the man being led out of the jail by his three escorts. As the prisoner passed the firelight fully illuminated a man that could only be described as beautiful. Lean muscle rippled under his thin and torn clothing, long dark hair fell around his shoulders, and when he looked at Marcus his gray eyes froze him where he stood. “Don’t let your woman slip your trap, lad.” He mumbled before being shoved out the door.

“Well, he killed the Duke’s son, he did, and over a woman! Apparently gray eyes there was quite a playboy until he started courtin’ a woman from up north, you know the ones with the dark skin you have to pay extra for at Madame Sherry’s house. Was after her for a couple months without knowin’ that she had caught the attention of the Duke’s youngest. She didn’t say nothin’, o’ course, just took his presents and words with a
smile. The day the Duke’s youngest proposed to her in one of those romantic clearings in the Great Forest, this fella’ comes runnin’ out the trees and stabs him to death!” Jaunt explained, happily taking up residence in front of the fire. “Duke’s gonna have his hide for sure.”

Marcus stood there stunned, staring at the door the man had just been led out of as the story clicked into place. “Speakin’ of propsin’, ain’t you got somewhere to get to! You better hurry! Alayna isn’t the type to like tardiness.”

Marcus nodded at Jaunt’s words, putting the prisoner out of his thoughts. He ran over to the desk and grabbed his cloak, yelling a goodbye as his feet carried him out the door and into the snow towards the woman he loved.
The Monomyth of Set Pieces

Many of you have probably heard of Joseph Campbell's monomyth, or the heroes’ journey, where essentially every heroic story ever can be expressed as part of the same simplified series of events. But when it boils down to it, there are a lot of things that appear in one story after another.

These ideas are commonly known as tropes - recurring themes in literature, for good or ill. This article is going to give you — tropes, and how to apply each of them to three different settings; Modern, Mad Science, and Far Future.

Modern
Ellen's Corners is home to no more than a hundred people, who center around a gas station and convenience store at an intersection of highways between major cities. The only computer in town, sitting in the corner of Phil's Fill Up usually remains off and dusty, and most people don't listen to anything but their own local oldies station run by the retired musician Carlson. Surrounded on all sides by stretching fields of wheat and corn, many of the townsfolk have taken to hunting the plentiful coyotes and rabbits nearby, having regular competitions to see who can bag the most in one day.

Mad Science
Sarravik is a city in a bubble, quite literally. A fine mesh stretches across the sky between the huge arch over the city and the very clearly defined city limits. It's not dangerous on its own, but they've been known to run an electric current through it to occasionally keep out undesirable huge vermin. The city was founded thirty-some years ago by now mayor Thomas Sarra, who wanted to get away from everything. As a result, the town is mostly self-sustaining, with huge hydroponics tanks, water recyclers, and fourteen foot tall stilt-walking security officers. The security rarely has to do anything other than watch visitors to ensure they don't meddle with the safety of the town, so many rooftops feature extendable balconies so the townsfolk and security can chat and gossip.

Far Future
Station V88X2 was built originally with the intent to establish mining colonies in the Omorts system, it was promptly abandoned once it was fully settled after a secondary survey of Omorts II and III revealed a much poorer supply of Helium that had originally been hoped for. Yet, the station survived. It's captain, Captain Markas White and many of the essential crew had taken the spot out here because of its intended isolation, and they're
As everyone well knows, knowledge is power, so the trade in knowledge is always a critical one to control. People and organizations in this trade are always involved in every conflict, usually not aligned to any one side, but instead to the ever-popular dollar.

**Modern**

Anonymous is a name that everybody has heard of. A vague, formless force on the internet, with hundreds if not thousands of members skilled in hacking, subterfuge, and making great leaps of logic to get to the root of any matter. But while their online personas form the face of the group, few even consider that they are being secretly sheltered and encouraged by a small group of individuals whose very existence has been erased from every record that has ever been made.

**Mad Science**

Tortitha Elgramman styles herself as just any other arms dealer, buying and selling the tools of the trade from any corner of the world that will take her. However, underneath her ice rays and repeating sonic lancers is a more subtle trade. Everything she sells has been subtly integrated with arrays of recorders and sensors, which her network of spies remotely watch, and channel the information back to her in her submarine base, where she sells details of every war she has seen to the highest bidder.

**Far Future**

Worm is most often mistaken for a virus, probing and infecting every computer it can reach, all across the known galaxy. Only a few realize its significance, as it copies every document and every record it touches into a titanic database hidden in an unknown depth of space. Worm is truly an AI of great power, originally created as a perfect spy – only to become too smart for its original creator, and taking over his information operation. If you need something, all you have to do is outsmart a machine with a brain larger than most spaceships.
Industry

This is something that spans all of human history, from cotton clothing inspiring so much medieval trade, to the construction of spaceships in the far future. Everything needs to be built somewhere, and it's always interesting for a party to delve amongst huge machines, throngs of workers, or even into an abandoned warehouse. I mean, honestly, what setting has never used an abandoned warehouse?

Modern

 Builders League Tools is a massive, international company who produces construction-grade equipment at competitive prices. They have factories across the globe - some crafting wooden handles, some smelting metal - or this one, assembling mining supplies, such as picks and shovels. The majority of the plant is taken up by huge machines that automate most of the process, sorting tools, attaching and spot-welding pieces. Above the series of machines is a series of catwalks, just above the dusty hanging lights - and always just a little too dark - that lead to the third floor offices, where a half-dozen managers oversee the employees who look after machine maintenance and product quality assurance.

Mad Science

The Buglabs are 'affectionately' named such by their employees - because that's what they grow. Huge insects, insect-hybrids, insect-like machines and everything insectoid you might ever want. The lab is, in theory, secret - but with over a thousand assistants working there, in and out every day, it's more like a city that appears not to have a proper trade. Around the perimeter of the laboratory, four fifty-foot long metal plated centipedes lie dormant just below the surface, far larger than anything else made there. Both to keep things in, and to keep them out.

far future

Ozco, the name for quality stations. Come visit our largest shipyard at the fourth planet in the Cyri System, where you can see our skilled engineers control teams of precision robots to build your custom orders. We do extensions, too - all of our systems are designed modular, so you can add crew quarters, shield units, or even docking bays for automated control drones. It's all assembled in zero-gee, so if you want to inspect the work as it's being done, be sure and bring your space suit!
Taking a steady breath Martha took off at a jog again, not quite as fast as before, but they had already set off the trap she hadn't wanted be triggered from them messing around with stuff, only to be tripped up (har, damn tripwire the 'hound had stumbled across like a buffoon), and so her initial rush was no longer quite as necessary. So she thought.

At the sudden drop off in the path the pair drew up short with matching yelps of surprise as a pebble was kicked tumbling into the furnace blast rising from the pit in the ground. "Feck!" Martha drew her hand across her brow and immediately regretted the sting of salty sweat where the stones had scraped it. Her right hand clench tighter inside of her locked gauntlet, futile though the equally sweat soaked grip was when it came to holding onto the decaying hand, the enchanted gauntlet the only way she could touch it without her skin immediately corrupting corroding and sloughing off in all sorts of colorfully disgusting ways. Still, whether it did anything or not, her knuckles were pale inside the protective gauntlet. She was not losing the most valuable loot of the century. Centuries, maybe. If this was real, if this was actually the lost hand of Vecna like all the crazy cult freaks were absolutely convinced it had to be, she was currently holding onto a historic relic the Beholden cultists would pay enough gold for her to retire comfortably from exploring and returned to be the richest woman the clan had ever seen.

Of course, she didn't believe it was the real
She caught the sound of hissing rock and a muted yelp off to the side, and then her breath left her chest in a disrupted ack when the cornered edge of the opposite side smashed across her throat. The flash of the quarter a second she threw her arm up and all her weight behind it, desperately trying to drag herself forward. Somewhere, Maria was whining. "Shiza," she muttered as she felt the stone bricks shake. Lava bubbled. "It's gonna burst." Her voice sounded fainter then she felt. Suddenly, she felt something warm and wet dripping all over her face. Blindly, she groped in the air above her head, and as soon as her fingers locked on the collar encircling a neck of short fur, Maria finished pulling the fighter out of the way of a deadly fall. Martha grabbed the dog's head in both hands. "Never doubted you." The heavy exhalation faded out into a whistle, and she looked down at her hands, and then looked at the ledge she had just been pulled from, heat waves obscuring her view too closely.

Vecna's hand. A locked gauntlet guaranteed not dropping it. They did nothing about the parts not in its hold being broken apart like the decomposing flesh and brittle bone it was, to join the burning ores and sediment in the molten crevice. Another rumble shook the labyrinthine underground. Glancing at the tiny bit of the hand left in her own, she took off at a dead run, her companion yowling frantically right beside her as the sound of crumbling stone joined in the racket. Somewhere, a boulder was coming for them to crush them flat, and as they ran Martha caught a glimpse of something immense and huffing casting its ugly shadow on the wall of an offshoot branch. This infernal place was like the land of endless adventuring clichés. "Run just bloody run!" she screamed as she threw herself around a bend with Maria at her heels.

Well, Martha Sandtracker hadn't become the halfling champion for the past four years running by being weak and scared.

"You ready girl?" She rested her hand on top of Maria's head in a ginger manner. Maria whuffed. "I know girl." A couple pats of the dog's head, and she braced herself, the coonhound mimicking her lowered stance in anticipation. "Mark, two, three, go!"

Trusting the relic of a hand to her leather covered chest, she prayed fervently that they could both make this jump like she thought they could. The blast of hot air was unexpected, the actual force of it disrupting her ability to guess where she was going to land when she had to shut her eyes against it. She really hoped what didn't make them happy was cooking her alive and molten rock. Shushing her panting coonhound uselessly, she shifted forward and peered over the edge. A crack in the earth, just like that. Of course, this place would be built over a lava pit. Of course it would. Why wouldn't it be? It had everything else, she should just be grateful she hadn't already been decapitated or eaten by the giant spider or cleaved in two by the undead left in fractured pieces littering the halls of the underground maze. "I really would like to retire," she whined to herself and she took a step back. Not that it needed saying, but that was some intense heat coming out of there.

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legitimate artifact. She was perfectly happy to play along, however, if it meant she was going to be paid off handsomely for it. Whatever made the believers happy, yeah?

She was perfectly happy to play along, however, if it meant she was going to be paid off handsomely for it. Whatever made the believers happy, yeah?
Two days later, her normally ruddy complexion still looking like she had been through a coal oven with faint burns on her cheeks and a determined pale black smear above her left eye that she still didn't know what strange crumby rock had hit her head, Martha Sandtracker stood in the small temple of the cultists, glaring eye to eye with the converted cleric had hired her to find the famed holy relic to keep with them as proof that they were literally closer to Vecna than anyone else in the city.

She pulled out a bag of black and ashen grey dust and dumped it out, part of it smeared together with a putrid liquid into a thick paste inside the bag she had carried it in, and she turned it inside out to wipe that on top of the altar too. She wasn't smiling. "You know what dead men always say about trifling with gods?" she asked sharply before the charismatic but otherwise useless cleric could say anything; not that she would've been afraid if he could cast her to the underworld, but knowing she could shove her shortsword through his heart before he could say 'please' didn't weaken her fire either.

"They're dead, they don't say anything!" the apoplectic follower snarled at her. "That's why we paid you to find something that —"

"Ya damn right. They don't say anything about it. And I think we'd all be better off if we took that advice to heart, and didn't have anything to do with 'em." Her eyebrows shot up emphatically and she spun around to go rejoin Maria waiting outside on the streets.

"Return our gold," the cleric demanded loud and cold at her retreat. Martha didn't turn around, though she paused in place while she answered him. "Not a chance. I'm happy to help whoever, but you only asked for the return of your relic, and I'm afraid that's what you got, what's left of the thing. If it ain't up to snuff, I think that's a personal problem for you and your folks. Now if you'll excuse me, I need to take a cold bath for the next ten years."
Royal Animal  by trebane

Despite the claims of druids world-wide, ancient legends persist of animals that could talk and think like men. Animals capable of rational thought, speech, and extraordinary activities normally only associated with the more intelligent of creatures. In truth, such creatures exist. A royal animal is just that: royalty amongst its kind. A royal animal is not a magical beast; it is not a creature that excels through magical might, it is not a supernatural creature, except perhaps in the sense of its advanced ability to think and reason. A royal animal is much like the other animals of its kind, apart from usually being much larger and vastly more intelligent. A royal animal, however, is of a different breed; royal animals do not interbreed with their lesser kin. Such pairings would result in grossly deformed or monstrous creatures which, thankfully, are always sterile.

INTRODUCING ROYAL ANIMALS

A royal animal may be introduced into a campaign in any number of ways. In any case, the DM must be careful of how he goes about it. For example, most players, when encountering an intelligent wolf, will assume the creature is a worg or winter wolf (depending on its coloration and size). While the template and subtype above assume that royal animals have always existed, some methods of introduction could include already existing magical effects. For example, rather than becoming a magical beast, a familiar could gain the royal subtype (but not the template), and increase in Intelligence as its master increases in power. If the master were to die, or the familiar released from service, the animal would simply lose the royal subtype. Furthermore, the awaken spell could also be used to make royal animals. Rather than the animal becoming a magical beast, it instead gains the royal subtype (but not the template). A more powerful version of the awaken spell could be devised that would actually apply the royal animal template to a standard or awakened animal, thereby creating the much stronger royal animals.

WHY INTRODUCE ROYAL ANIMALS?

Many fantasy sources refer to animals that are intelligent beyond the normal ken of such creatures, but simply applying the ‘magical beast’ to any such creature is a terrible misnomer at best. Many of these creatures are no more magical then a standard rock, they’re simply more intelligent. Take the animals from the Narnia series of books by C.S. Lewis. While these animals are typically larger, braver, and fiercer then standard animals, they rarely possess any actual magical qualities that separate them from the dumb beasts. The royal animals in this document are more directly based on the royal animals presented in Jane Lindskold’s Through the Wolf’s Eyes novel, and its sequels. The books detail the impact such creatures could have on not only a single campaign, but an actual setting or world.
Creating a Royal Animal

“Royal Animal” is an inherited template that can be added to any living corporeal animal of Tiny to Large size, hereafter referred to as the base animal. While this template may be applied to reptilian animals, it is most commonly found in mammals.

**Size and Type:** While most royal animals are notably larger than their unintelligent kin, the royal animal retains the base animal’s size category, unless it increased due to Hit Die advancement. A royal animal retains the animal type and gains the royal subtype. The royal subtype is described below.

**Hit Dice:** Increase the base animal’s Hit Dice by 4, using the standard advancement for that animal. If the base animal does not possess an advancement entry, it instead retains its size category and gains 4 additional hit dice. Some animals have less than 1 HD. If the base animal has 1/2 HD or greater, round up to 1 before apply the extra 4 granted by the template. If the base animal has less than 1/2, round down to zero. A royal cat, for example, would have 5 HD, while a royal rat would have 4 HD.

**Speed:** As the base animal, except all movement speeds it already possesses improve by 10 feet.

**Armor Class:** The royal animal’s natural armor improves according to the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Natural Armor Increase</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tiny</td>
<td>+2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>+5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>+7</td>
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**Attacks:** A royal animal retains all of the attack forms of the base animal. Readjust attack bonuses based on the new Hit Dice and size change, if applicable. Animals have a base attack progression equal to 3/4 of their Hit Dice.

**Damage:** Damage dealt by the royal animal’s attacks increase only if it changed size category.

**Special Attacks and Special Qualities:** As the base animal. Improve any save DCs according to the creature’s new Hit Dice, size, and any increases to ability scores.

**Abilities:** Increase from base animal as follows if the base animal is a carnivore or insectivore: Str +4, Con +2, Int +8. Increase from base animal as follows if the base animal is an herbivore: Dex +2, Con +4, Int +8. Increase from base animal as follows if the base animal is omnivore: Str +2, Dex +2, Con +2, Int +8.

**Skills:** Recalculate skills based on the royal animal’s improved hit dice, Intelligence score, and the royal subtype. Treat any skills the base animal possesses as class skills. All other skills are considered cross-class.

**Feats:** As the base animal, except that the royal animal gains Alertness as a bonus feat, and it may gain additional feats based on its Hit Dice. If the base animal already had Alertness as a bonus feat, or from its racial Hit Die, replace it with a different feat for which it meets the prerequisites.

**Challenge Rating:** As the base animal +2 if the animal remains the same size through Hit Die advancement. The animal gains a CR of +3 if it increases by one size category.

**Alignment:** Royal animals are intelligent, rational creatures. They usually have a neutral component to their alignments, but they’re very rarely true neutral. Pack or herd animals tend towards lawful alignments, while largely solitary animals are often chaotic. Royal animals of all types are frequently good aligned.

**Languages:** A royal animal retains the ability to ‘speak’ with the base animal on a simplistic level, and all royal animals are capable of speaking a unified tongue (royal animal tongue) as well as Common. Any royal animal is capable of learning the languages of other creatures, provided it has sufficient Intelligence or spends the necessary skill points.

**Advancement:** A royal animal advances as the base animal, or by character class. A royal animal must complete its standard Hit Die advancement before it may enter a character class.
THE ROYAL ANIMAL SUBTYPE

Royal Subtype: A subtype that can only be applied to creatures of the animal type. Unlike a regular animal, an animal with the royal subtype has an Intelligence score greater than 2. Royal animals retain the animal type’s d8 HD and base attack progression, but instead have 4 skill points per HD (plus their Intelligence modifier). A royal animal is treated as an animal for all spells and effects that affect animals, except as follows: An animal with the royal subtype cannot be made an animal companion. A royal animal cannot become a familiar, unless the spellcaster possesses the Improved Familiar feat and is of at least 3rd level or greater (only animals that could become familiars before this subtype was applied can become familiars with the Improved Familiar feat). A royal animal can become a special mount, but the character’s level is treated as –3 for all effects that govern that character’s special mount.

The *awaken* spell does not have an affect on royal animals as they are already intelligent.

**Mechanics: Other RPG**

**Creating a Royal Animal**

“Royal Animal” is an inherited template that can be added to any living corporeal animal of any size, hereafter referred to as the base animal. While this template may be applied to reptilian animals, it is most commonly found in mammals.

**Size and Type:** While most royal animals are notably larger than their unintelligent kin, the royal animal retains the base animal’s size category, unless it is increased by some other means. A royal animal retains the animal type and gains the royal subtype. The royal subtype is described below.

**Speed:** As the base animal, except all movement speeds it already possesses improve by 10 feet or its equivalent.

**Armor:** The royal animal’s skin or hair is thicker and tougher, giving it a bonus to its armor of defense. This bonus is greater for the larger Royal Animals.

**Attacks:** A royal animal retains all of the attack forms of the base animal. Readjust attack bonuses based on the new Hit Dice and size change, if applicable. Animals have a base attack progression equal to 3/4 of their Hit Dice.

**Damage:** Damage dealt by the royal animal’s attacks increase only if it changed size category.

**Special Attacks and Special Qualities:** As the base animal. Improve any save DCs according to the creature’s new Hit Dice, size, and any increases to ability scores.

**Abilities:** All Royal Animals are significantly more intelligent than their lesser kin, usually on par with humans. Increase any intelectual base attributes accordingly. In addition to all of them being slightly tougher, they also have increased abilities based on their tendencies; carnicores are stronger, herbivores are more agile, and omnivores are slightly stronger and slightly more agile. Increase their relative attributes accordingly.

**Skills:** With their increased intelligence, Royal Animals are able to learn skills as a human does.

**Alignment:** The increased intelligence and awareness of a Royal Animal to see beyond their instinct. While most remain neutral, some do have adjusted morals.

**Languages:** A royal animal retains the ability to ‘speak’ with the base animal on a simplistic level, and all Royal Animals can speak a Common language, if one exists, or a local language. Additionally, any royal animal is capable of learning the languages of other creatures.

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Hello All.

RPG Crossing’s Official Sourcebook, better known as the “The Crossing” is the sourcebook of RPGCrossing, created through the DNDOG Sourcebook Project. The Crossing contains optional materials that have been submitted by the gamers, discussed and balanced by gamers, and voted on by the RPGCrossing Sourcebook Staff, also consisting of gamers here at RPGCrossing. We’d like to thanks everyone who contributes to our Sourcebook, recognized at the end of each of their submissions, as well as the current Sourcebook Staff (aerondor, ji_wolven, Makenshi, TheChuck, Zhefonyll) and all of the rpgcrossing.com members who contribute to the discussion.

I would also like to re-invite everyone to participate in the Sourcebook, either by submitting material options or participating in the balancing discussion of open materials.

Submission: Please go HERE

Discussion: HERE
Colors... we see them every day of our lives (or at least, most of us do). We know them and can picture them in our minds. No matter who you are, or where you live, you are taught that milk is white, the sky is blue, and grass is green (unless, of course, you are on Vulcan, in which case blood is green, the sky is red, and the grass is brown). We probably have a good idea of lime green, red-orange, teal, peach, and if you had Crayola crayons as a kid, maybe even burnt sienna. Because many of us are table top gamers, you may actually know what color pewter is, which puts you ahead of 30% of the population.

Colors are so important; we probably use them each and every day somewhere in our RPG experience, whether it's the black eyes of the succubus, the white hair of the Elven mage battling her, or the grey stone walls of the castle with the green ivy trellises they fight inside. Or, it could be the silver sheen of bullet, the dark brown of the leather belt our hero wears, or the bright flash of red deep in the throat of the T-Rex set to rend you limb from limb. But, no matter what species you are or the planet you are from, sooner or later in your RPG career you are going to run out of colors to use to describe things and most likely will fall into the same unimaginative pattern of having "streaks of red blood coating the dark gray walls" or "green ichor sprayed all over Commander Cody, under the burnt red of the Martian sky".

When you run out of color descriptors to use, or you can’t think of a new way to describe your scene, dip into the well ahead and sprinkle a few new colors into your gaming circles. The following is a rainbow of colors you probably didn’t even know were colors. If you knew all of these, you are a very learned individual. In that case, have you ever thought about writing for Explosive Runes!?!?

**Malachite:**
A rich, vibrant green color that comes from the carbonate mineral known as Malachite, or copper carbonate. Historically it has been a very popular color, because it is deep, rich, and resists fading. Thrones were sometimes painted in malachite, to resemble the famed Jade thrones of Eastern legend.

**Umber:**
A brown earth color that is darker than both ochre and sienna. Gary Gygax used this earth tone brown as his inspiration for the umber hulk, the dark brown creature running through tunnels under the soil.

**Gamboge:**
Think of something just a little darker than spicy mustard and you have gamboge... brownish yellow. The color is a yellow pigment that is somewhat transparent, despite its dark tint. The color is named after the gamboge tree, which is known for its yellow resin.

**Fallow:**
As a color, fallow is a pale brown color. As a word, it is one of the oldest color names to ever exist in the English language. Though not a considered a “pretty” color by some, the pale brown is named after the color many would see when looking into fallow fields, as well as the soil, which was often sandy. The word fallow, to express the color, was first recorded in 1000 AD.
**Falu:** This color is a dark red tint (very similar to brick red) that was a prominent color used on wooden barns and cottages throughout northern Europe, and brought to the US by immigrants for their homes and barns. The purpose of the deep red color was to mimic the color of more expensive brick homes. The color originally came from a copper mine at Falun, which is located in Dalarna, Sweden. This color has also been around for a long time, since the 16th century to be exact, and today is still used.

**Sarcoline:** This shade is another named for flesh-colored (if your flesh is generally pale, and pink-tannish). Think of Band-aids or elastic gauze wraps and you are in the right ball park.

**Greige:** An actual (old) word meaning grey/beige. It’s been around almost as long as Falu and Fallow. Greige is a great word for dirty castle walls, dungeon floors, and the like.

Dunsmoor led his team through the cold, greige walls of the ancient tomb, his torch giving off a pitiful, gamboge light.

Now that we’ve discovered seven (likely) new colors you can add to your lexicon, let’s look at some alternate color words you can use instead of the plain, old red/green/blue palate when describing your world. Red for blood is classic, but why not toss in a few different words every so often, for fun. Whether it be gems, tapestries, ships colors, uniforms, exotic plants, or animals in your world, toss these in occasionally to spice up your color pallet.

- **Green:** verdant, emerald, chlorochrous, smaragdine, viridian, or virescent.
- **Blue:** azure, indigo, cobolt, azuline, cerulean, mazarine, sapphire, or smalt.
- **Red:** vermilion, crimson, carnelian, scarlett, auburn, cardinal, cinnabar, flammeous, kermes, madder, or sanguineous.
- **Black:** ebony, atrous, melanic, or nigrine.
- **Brown:** sienna, fawn, badius, beige, brunneous, burnet, filemot, ferruginous, sable, or sepia.
- **Yellow:** xanthe, citreous, flavescent, icterine, jessamy, lutescent, meline, or ochre.
- **White:** argent, albicant, leucochroic, or niveous.

Like any good chef, remember to spice lightly!
Rolemaster: A new game for the ages
By Gir

In the beginning
The genesis of the table top role-playing game was the table top miniature war game. The creation of Chainmail and then D&D under the guidance of Gary Gygax, hallowed be thy name, moved the genre from a player controlling massive arrays of units to controlling only one. Despite this change the game incorporated the large charts and complex math of its war game brethren. Over time the game continued to change and evolve. Eventually the charts and math that dominated the early days of role playing were removed in favor of a more streamlined approach. Still one game has tried to hold onto the legacy of its predecessors.

Rolemaster then
Rolemaster started off back in 1980, a mere 6 years after the creation of D&D, as a toolkit system which allowed a broad scope of rules that could be used in various other systems. While the flexibility of the rules set it apart from games of the day it still retained the complexity and grittiness that players of the day enjoyed in their miniature war games which was something that the D&D of the time had started to lose.

Over the years, new games came out with more refined rule sets such as Gurps or even AD&D 2nd ed. These systems offered the player quicker and faster game play by doing away with some of the older war gaming stand by’s. Games like Rolemaster soon were called Skillmaster, Chartmaster, Critmaster, Mathmaster or Rulesmaster for its reliance on such requirements. Although, perhaps unkind to the system, the slander was not entirely untrue. Such things, in my opinion, are part of the charm of the Rolemaster game though.

Rolemaster now:
As of the writing of this, Rolemaster has gone through four revisions and they are, like so many games, trying to rebrand themselves to the next generation with their new, still in beta, Rolmaster Unified or RMU edition. The game is available for free from the ironcrown web site and the developers are trying to create not only an updated version for new fans but also a version that will have all the “charm” of the old game many of us grew up on. With the stellar descriptions of the game as Rulesmaster or Chartmaster however, I am sure you are all curious why this is a good system to play and not simply something you should avoid.
Skillmaster & Mathmaster. The game is a skill based game through and through. All a player's attacks, magic, and actions are based on skills. This approach reduces the cookie-cutter quality that some games have and allows the player the ability to make a truly unique character each and every time they play. Want to play a mage who is a sword master? Not a problem. A thief who does magic and is good with dual weapons? Easy. Or perhaps a little old druid gnome who has an affinity with poisons, dabbles with dark magic’s, and is also an expert at martial arts. Not a problem. The only limitation in creating a character is the player’s own creativity.

The other nice thing is that there are too many useful skills to be a master of them all. Perhaps a character is a master with the sword but they have no ranks in move in armor which means they are slow, no ranks in grapple so a young monk can drop them to the ground till they scream uncle, or perhaps no ranks in perception so they can’t see the obvious right in front of their face. Even a high level character cannot be a master of everything so what you walk away with is a unique character experience every time.

Transitioning from other games into a more skill centric game is easy. In fact Mr. Monte Cook used the idea of the Rolemaster skill system when he helped put together D&D 3.0 system (Skill mod=Ability mod + Rank + Mic Mod).

Chartmaster & Critmaster. The combat system, like the skill system, is a bit more robust than what you find in other games as well. For instance in D&D you have three action types you can perform per round (either a full action, or a standard and a move). In Rolemaster you have 100 action units each round, each action you can perform has a point value that subtracts from the total rounds action points, and the player can do anything they want with the points they have.

Combat in the game is a simple roll of a 1d100 plus a character’s offensive bonus minus the enemy’s defensive bonus. Again, although the names are changed we do the same thing when we roll in D&D (1d20 + weapon bonus + modifiers). It’s the inclusion of the old school war gaming charts and tables that really set this system apart from the rest and this really starts to come into full effect when you are in combat.

The nice thing is that if a player has ever played battleship they will be great with the charts in the game. Simply put, one rolls a combat roll, finds the number on the chart, goes over to armor class, and is left with a number that shows damage, critical type, and type of damage. For instance on a roll of 100 a long sword does 11BP against a person in no armor or 11 points of damage and a B puncture critical. Each type of armor provides more protection and lowers not only the critical but also the damage that can be done. The same attack on someone in plate, for instance, only does 6 points of damage, but no critical.

The game’s damage model, one must realize, is almost entirely run by how critical attacks, which are not uncommon, affect the character. A player will still do damage, however, the each type of damage, piercing for instance, has a crit chart with 100 effects ranging from ‘Funny bone strike damages nerves, leaving whole arm tingly’ to ‘Foe gives off lots of smoke and muscle and tendon burns.’ Roll high enough on the crit
One great thing about the system’s rules is that the legacy toolkit style allows one to easily adjust or change rules to fit their play without much if any trouble at all. For instance aspects of the initiative and resolve system in the game do not fit my DMing style and I have changed them to fall more in line with how the BattleTech system works with no issues at all.

**Conclusion**

What can I say, I love to role play. I cut my teeth with D&D first edition and went on from there. I have played a lot of systems in my time and through them all I find I still have a special place in my heart for the Rolemaster system. At times it is that that friend who is a bit of a jerk but is also your best friend. There are aspects of the system I love and other aspects that I toss out and don’t speak of.

At the end of the day I would say if you are into playing a new system that has a bit of that old school charm and gritty combat you should give Rolemaster a try. The beta, at the moment, is very much a diamond in the rough, but if you can power through some of the grime and grit I feel you will find something that is, at its core, a very unique and fun gaming experience. If you all decide to give it a try feel free to PM me if you need some help with rules. I’m **Gir**, and **Shorn**.
Suggested Party: 4-6 players, level 5.

Rules System:
This adventure is written to be used with D20 Modern Roleplaying Game System. Adventure Summary: This adventure takes place across three parts. The first will introduce the tragic disappearances that have begun plaguing the peaceful campground since the players' arrival. Evidence leads the players to uncover what appears to be some sort of large animal trap. At the site of the trap, they are confronted with a large Sasquatch. It is very aggressive and the players will be forced to kill it, before it kills them.

In part two, the players will continue to search for the source of killings. The Players are confronted by a man named Jacob. He is a Native American Spirit Guide. He warns the players that the nature spirits have been angered by the recent groundbreaking of a resort hotel. He claims that it is being built on an ancient burial ground.

At Jacob's request, the players go to the construction site to talk to the man in charge. When they go out to the construction site, they discover a caged and sickly looking baby Sasquatch. At the construction site, the players are confronted by the greedy resort executive Mr. Simmons. He explains that he stumbled on an ancient Sasquatch breeding ground where they had started building the resort. Now, instead of the resort, he is planning of running the world's only Sasquatch Sanctuary. The players are offered the choice to take a bribe or not. Depending on their choices, two different encounters can occur.

Adventure Hook: The characters travel to a remote campground in the southwest for a little rest and relaxation. Their vacation starts out rather normal but quickly changes.

The Setup:
READ: It is your first night at your campsite, it is late, dark, and you have been sitting around the fire enjoy a drink or two. In the distance the frat party that has been carrying on since before you got here continues with no sign of stopping. Suddenly, the general tone and clamor changes dramatically. First, it was hooting and whooping of a typical drunken party accompanied by the occasional chain chant of,” Chug, chug, chug”, and then it becomes screams, shouts, and crying.

Part 1
The Frat Party:
READ: You arrive at the campsite of the Frat party shortly after the screaming dies down. Every college student has a look of utter fear on their faces. Many of them are sitting on coolers or lawn chairs staring into the night.

The players at this point can begin to question the students.

Skills Challenge
Gather Information
DC10: There are two students missing.
DC20: Something attacked the party; it was hairy and very large.

Survival
If a player has ranks in the Survival and the Track feat they can make a check to locate any tracks.
DC35: If a player succeeds in the check, they find the tracks immediately, and deduce the following: one very large, bipedal animal attacked the frat camp. Victim drag marks and tracks head off to the North. If the players fail, they can still learn the information but it takes well into the morning to locate the tracks, and they cannot receive the benefits of a full night’s rest. Regardless of when the players find the
tracks, they are unable to follow them more than a few hundred yards.

Meeting the Law Man:
After the leads at the campsite dry up, a local sheriff approaches the players to question them about what happened last night.

READ: A large burly man approaches you as you return to you campsite. He is wearing the typical uniform of a small town sheriff and has a thick handle bar moustache. He spits a mouthful of tobacco juice on the ground as he eyes you suspiciously.
Sheriff: “I am Sheriff Branson. Y’all wanna tell me what went on here last night?”

If the player mentions anything about a large hairy creature attacking the frat party, the sheriff will immediately jump to the conclusion that the attack was a result of a bear. He is now ready to close the case. If the players don’t mention the large hairy creature, he continues asking the players the following questions:
- How much did you have to drink last?
- How did you know the victims?
- Was there anything odd going on at the Frat party?

Skills Challenge
Diplomacy:
DC20: The Sheriff becomes very talkative and explains that there were several other attacks last night spread throughout the campgrounds. One person is missing at Campsite E2. One person is missing from Campsite W2 and 2 people are missing from the Frat campsite S2.

Research:
DC15: After finding a map and plotting out where each attacked campsite sits within the campgrounds, the players discover that the campsites make a rough semi-circle around the central forest of the park. Each attacked campsite is the closest to the edge of the woods.

Into The Woods
READ: The woods at the center of the park are unnaturally dark. Sounds of moving animals can be heard in the distance. Since this part of the campground is rarely traveled on, the undergrowth is thick and hard to move through. The heat from the summer day is oppressive even under the shade of the trees.
After roughly an hour, the players come to a clearing in the woods. At the center of the clearing is some kind of large trap. It looks handmade and a little shoddy. It could possibly be used to catch bears or some kind of other large animal. Piled on the ground beside the trap is a collection of fruits and raw meats.

Skills Challenge
Disable Device:
DC20: The trap is disabled and no longer a threat to anyone.

Combat Encounter level 5 (1500xp)
Adult Male Sasquatch x1
Combat Map A.

READ: Just as you begin to leave the clearing a large ape like creature enters the clearing through the tree line directly in front of you. He immediately charges at you. You have no chance to run away.

Handling combat: The Sasquatch will only attach the player whose character is physically the largest, until they are at half health. Then he will move on to the next largest and so on until it makes it back to the largest. At this point, the Sasquatch will randomly attack players.
If the trap has not been disabled the Sasquatch will use it push back attack on players until it has pushed one of the players into the trap.

Skills Challenge
Knowledge (Life Science and/or History):
DC15: This large ape-like creature appears to match the descriptions commonly associated with the fabled Sasquatch AKA Bigfoot, or Skunk Ape
OUT OF THE WOODS?

READ: You emerge from the woods to find everything pretty normal. People seem to be going about their business as if nothing happened. As you return to your campsite, you are greeted by some of the college students. Most still seem shaken and are downtrodden as they pack their things into their vehicles.

At this point, players can choose to believe they have solved the problem and go about their everyday business or they can go to the sheriff with news of their discovery.

If they go about their business
READ: Everything seems to have solved itself until later that night. Much like the night before a commotion stirs at campsite S2. This time instead of parting college students it is a young family, and the newest victim is their 9 year old daughter. It appears that she had been pulled out of her tent and drug into the woods. A distinct trail of shredded tent and camping gear leads directly north into the tree line. Once again the sheriff questions you the following morning. This time around he is less than happy to deal with you. He takes you to the station and questions you until you tell the truth. (Proceed to "If they go to the sheriff")

If they go to the sheriff
READ: It takes a lot of convincing, but the sheriff reluctantly agrees to come to the clearing in the woods to see the Sasquatch you were forced to kill. When you arrive at the clearing, you find it deserted. There is no Sasquatch body and no trap. The field is empty and there is no sign whatsoever of any kind of struggle. Upon seeing nothing in the clearing, the sheriff becomes very angry at you for wasting his time. He threatens to charge you with filing a false Police Report, regardless of whether you filed a report or not. He demands you leave town by tomorrow morning.

Skills Challenge
Diplomacy:
DC35: The Sheriff agrees to give you twice as much time to leave but warns you not to cause any more trouble and to stay out of the woods.

PART 3

READ: Shortly after you return to your campsite you are approached by an older looking Native American man. He introduces himself as Jacob, a Native American Spirit Guide. He explains that he had heard about your run in with the sheriff over the police scanner. He then point blank asks you what you found in the woods. He sits and listens intently to your tale. After a moment of thought, he exclaims that things were worse than he had originally thought. He then begins to tell you of a resort that is being built to the North of the campgrounds. He explains that it is being built on an ancient burial ground and that the land used to belong to his family. They had failed to produce a deed and eventually lost it to the resort company in a legal battle. He then tells you that he believes the Sasquatch will continue to spirit away people until the resort company stops defiling the land. He begs you to go to the resort and try to talk some sense into them.

THE CONSTRUCTION SITE

READ: As you approach the construction site, it is clear that they had recently broken ground. Not much in the way of constructing had yet been done. Only a circle of prefab construction trailers stood in the middle of an area that had been leveled by earth movers. As you pass between the trailers, you enter the inner circle and see sitting directly in the middle of the trailers a cage. Inside the cage you see an extremely small version of the Sasquatch that attacked you earlier. It is most likely a baby. It is lying on its back posed in what appears to be a very uncomfortable position. It is barely moving and without a really good look one could easily assume the poor thing was dead. Mounds of uneaten fruit and raw meat lay outside of the cage but within reach of the Sasquatch. Before you can do much of anything you hear an approaching vehicle pull up and stop just outside of the trailer circle. A man in a fancy looking suit emerges from between the trailers and yells for you to freeze. He is followed by 2 other men who are holding handguns pointed directly at you. The man in the suit introduces himself as Mr. Simmons and explains that shortly after breaking
ground they discovered that they were building on an ancient Sasquatch breeding ground. They Squatchmated the baby while the mother was away looking for food, and then moved it here for safe keeping. He explains that it is his plan to capture the rest of the Sasquatch family and turn the resort into the world’s first and only Sasquatch Sanctuary, complete with a breeding program. He then offers you a large amount of money (Wealth Bonus increase +6) to just walk away, say nothing to anyone, and simple go about your lives.

If the you take the Bribe

READ: Mr. Simmons smiles wolfishly at you and signals for one of his men to go get the money. Moments later, the man returns with a brief case full of money. He offers to let you count it but assures you that it is the amount you agreed upon.

Mr. Simmons shakes your hands then asks you very coldly to leave. As you begin making your way back to the campsite, you are confronted by three Sasquatch. These Sasquatch are noticeable smaller than the first one you encountered, the two smallest ones being only half the size of the one leading the group.

Combat Encounter Level 6 (2,100xp)
Adult Female Sasquatch x 1
Juvenile Sasquatch x 2
Combat Map A.

Much like last time, the Sasquatch will attack the largest member of the party but this time they will continue to attack the player until he reaches 0 hp. At that point, they will attack the next largest party member repeating the pattern of the first encounter.

If the players manage to subdue and not kill any Sasquatch they can then sell it to Mr. Simmons for +2 wealth bonus increase per head.

If the players refuse the bribe

READ: Mr. Simmons’ demeanor changes the moment you refuse his offer, clearly he is not a man used to being told no. Without warning, he motions for his men to attack you.

Combat Encounter level 7 (3,000 xp)
Hired Gun x 2
Combat Map B.

Mr. Simmons stands back as his 2 hired guns begin firing their weapons at you. Each hired gun will fire at the closest player to them and continue to fire until they are dead.

READ: Once you have dispatched Mr. Simmons men, he yet again offers you a bribe. This time he offers you the bribe money and the baby Sasquatch in exchange for his life. Unfortunately for him, he is not given a real chance to negotiate. Three Sasquatches emerge from between two trailers behind him. These Sasquatches are noticeable smaller than the first one you encountered, the two smallest ones being only half the size of the one leading the group. The lead Sasquatch picks him up and throws him against the trailer. Within seconds, the smaller Sasquatches are on top of Mr. Simmons beating him into a red paste. The larger Sasquatch looks at you tentatively, then at the baby, then back at you. For a second, that seems forever, it sizes you up. It then slowly turns and rushes towards the cage. With a few heavy blows, the cheap cage is shattered to pieces. The Sasquatch picks the baby up in its arms and begins moving back to the other Sasquatches. The other Sasquatches have finished killing Mr. Simmons and ripping apart the prefab trailers. While holding the baby, momma Sasquatch also joins the other Sasquatches. In no time at all, the trailers are no more than heaps of wood and metal. While busting up one of the trailers, a Sasquatch found a safe which they heaved onto the ground cracking it open and spilling its contents onto the ground. Inside the safe are the bribe money and the deed to Jacob’s land. As they leave, the Sasquatches drag the bodies of the resort men away.

Aftermath

If the player refused the bribe

READ: When you return to your camp you find Jacob waiting for you there. He asks you what happened. He is amazed by your story and very grateful that you have helped protect the Sasquatches. He asks you to keep their existence a secret.

If the players return Jacob’s Deed

READ: Jacob’s eyes begin to tear up and it almost seems that he may hug each of you. He vows to keep the land pure and allow a safe place for the
Sasquatches to breed for as long as his family still breathes.

If the players took the bribe

**READ:** You and your piles of money make it back safely to your camp. As you are packing up your things, Sheriff Branson shows up at your campsite. He is being very friendly and even helps load the last of your things into your vehicle. With a wink he informs you that Mr. Simmons had called him and asked that Branson give you a warm farewell.

**Rewards**
If the players took the bribe

**XP Gained:** 7800
**Wealth bonus gained:** +8 plus +2 for every living Sasquatch sold to Mr. Simmons

If the player refused the bribe

**XP Gained:** 8700
**Wealth bonus gained:** +8

**NPCs and Monsters**

**Adult Male Sasquatch:** CR5; Medium Monstrous Humanoid; HD 5d8 plus 3 (toughness); HP 23; Mas 10; Init +1; Spd 30 ft; Defense 16; touch 11; Flat-footed 15 (+1 Dex +5 natural); BAB +5; Grap +5; Atk +5 melee (1d8 Slam); Full Atk +5 (1d8 Slam) +0 (2d8 Bite); FS 5 ft by 5 ft; Reach 5 ft; SQ Scent, Low-light Vision, Knock-back; AL none; SV Ref +5 Fort +1 Will +5; Ap 0; Rep 0; Str 11 Dex 12 Con 10 Int 8 Wis 12 Cha 7.

Skills: Climb +6 Jump +4

Feats: Toughness

Special Traits:

- Scent (Ex): This ability allows the creature to detect approaching enemies, sniff out hidden foes, and track by sense of smell. Creatures with the scent ability can identify familiar odors just as humans do familiar sights. See **SRD**

- Low-Light Vision (Ex): A creature with low-light vision can see twice as far as normal in poor lightning conditions. The creature can still distinguish colors, even in dim lighting.

- Knock-back (Ex): Whenever this creature makes a successful melee attack the player must make a DC 15 Strength check or be forced to Slide 5 feet away from the attacking creature.

**Adult Female Sasquatch:** CR4; Medium Monstrous Humanoid; HD 4d8+4; HP 20; Mas 12; Init +0; Spd 30 ft; Defense 14; Touch 10; Flat-footed 14 (+4 natural); BAB +4; Grap +4; Atk +4 melee (1d6 Slam); Full Atk +4 (1d6 Slam) +2 (2d6 Bite); FS 5 ft; Reach 5 ft; SQ Scent, Low-light Vision; AL none; SV Ref +4 Fort +2 Will +5; Ap 0; Rep 0; Str 11 Dex 10 Con 12 Int 10 Wis 12 Cha 7.

Skills: Climb +5 Jump +3

Feats: Multi-Attack

Special Traits:

- Scent (Ex): This ability allows the creature to detect approaching enemies, sniff out hidden foes, and track by sense of smell. Creatures with the scent ability can identify familiar odors just as humans do familiar sights. See **SRD**

- Low-Light Vision (Ex): A creature with low-light vision can see twice as far as normal in poor lightning conditions. The creature can still distinguish colors, even in dim lighting.

- Knock-back (Ex): Whenever this creature makes a successful melee attack the player must make a DC 15 Strength check or be forced to Slide 5 feet away from the attacking creature.

**Juvenile Sasquatch:** CR3; Medium Monstrous Humanoid; HD 3d8; HP 12; Mas 10; Init +2; Spd 30 ft; Defense 15; Touch 12; Flat-footed 13 (+2 Dex +3 natural); BAB +3; Atk +3 melee (1d4 Slam) Full Atk +3 melee (1d4 Slam) -2 melee (1d8 Bite); FS 5 ft; Reach 5 ft; SQ Scent, Low-light Vision; AL none; SV Ref +5 Fort +1 Will +3; Ap 0; Rep 0; Str 10 Dex 14 Con 10 Int 8 Wis 10 Cha 7.

Skills: Climb +4 Jump +2

Feats: none

Special Traits:

- Scent (Ex): This ability allows the creature to detect approaching enemies, sniff out hidden foes, and track by sense of smell. Creatures with the scent ability can identify familiar odors just as humans do familiar sights. See **SRD**

- Low-Light Vision (Ex): A creature with low-light vision can see twice as far as normal in poor lightning conditions. The creature can still distinguish colors, even in dim lighting.

- Knock-back (Ex): Whenever this creature makes a successful melee attack the player must make a DC 15 Strength check or be forced to Slide 5 feet away from the attacking creature.
**Hired Gun** (3 Fast Ordinary, 3 Tough Ordinary); CR5; Medium human; HD 3d8+6 plus 3d10+6 plus 3 (Toughness); HP 42; Mas 14; Init +3; Spd 30 ft; Defense 19; Touch 19; Flat-footed +16 (+3 Dex +6 Class ); BAB +4 ; Grap +5; Atk +7 ranged (2d6 Beretta 92F); Full Atk +7 ranged (2d6 Beretta 92F) +2 Ranged (2d6 Beretta 92F); FS 5 ft by 5 ft; Reach 5ft; SQ none; AL none; SV Fort +5 Ref +6 Will +2; Ap 0; Rep +2 ; Str 12 Dex 16 Con 14 Int 13 Wis 10 Ch 8. Starting Occupation: Military (Class skills Drive and Knowledge tactics)

**Shoddy Bear Trap:** CR2; Mechanical Trap; Proximity Trigger, Manual reset; Single Target; never miss; DC 15 reflex save avoids; 2d8 damage; target becomes entangled and immobile (but not helpless)DC 15 Str check negates; Search DC 0; Disable Device DC 20; Purchase DC 10.

Skills: Balance +7, Drive +9, Knowledge (tactics) +9, Profession +9, Tumble +7

Feats: Personal Firearm Proficiency, Toughness, Point Blank Shot, Double Tap.

**Combat Map A**
Combat Map B
Um, are you heroes?

Why would a child need heroes?

My brother stole my tart. He's a monster!

Show us where your trouble is, little one.

You say he is a monster?

Monster? Can I bring ale?

That's yer' brother?

Ulf we need back up. Back who?

No! We don't back up someone. Someone will back us up!!

It is ok Elistar, I will send Bertha back to town with a message.

Am I the only one seeing the flaw in this plan?