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# WORLDBUILDING MAGAZINE

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With special guests **Sean Fallon**, CEO of Smunchy Games,  
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Analysis • Art • Interviews

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Prompts • Stories • Theory

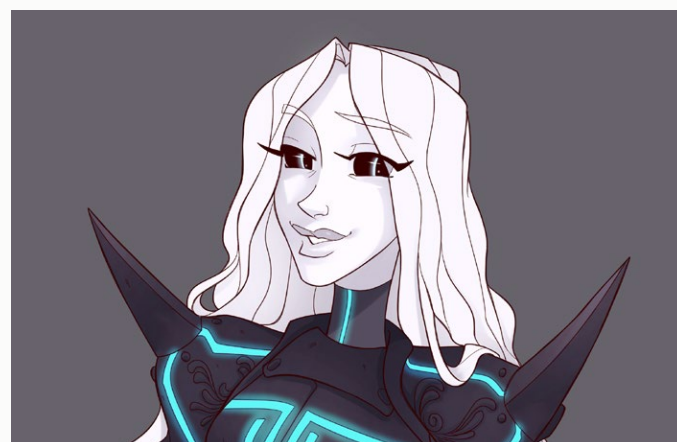




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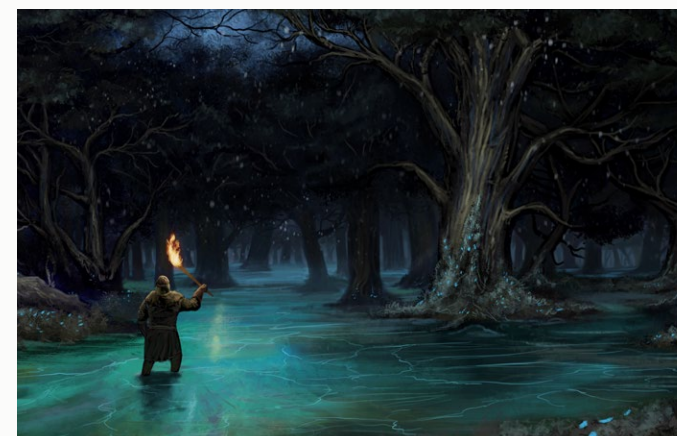
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# SHOWCASE INTERVIEW: JAY HOWARD'S FUTURE FRONT

INTERVIEW 

*Interviewed by Aaryan Balu*

*Jay Howard has been creating Future Front, a science-fiction universe set thousands of years in our future. This is how he describes himself and his work.*

Hello! I'm Jay Howard, I am the author of *Unit-1*, a story that takes place in the *Future Front* universe. This is a universe that I've been working on since I was 7 years old, so it's about 20 years in the making.

Future Front is a large world, taking place around and about the [Virgo Supercluster](#), the patch of space our Milky Way galaxy inhabits as a sort of intergalactic neighborhood. It starts in the 3600s [CE], following a nuclear apocalypse on Earth, the rebuilding of society, a Fourth World War, and eventually war with an alien race known as Varrocks. Though, after a galactic collapse and dark age, the Terran Soviet Union forms out of a reconstruction effort across the galaxy.

*What are the Big 8?*

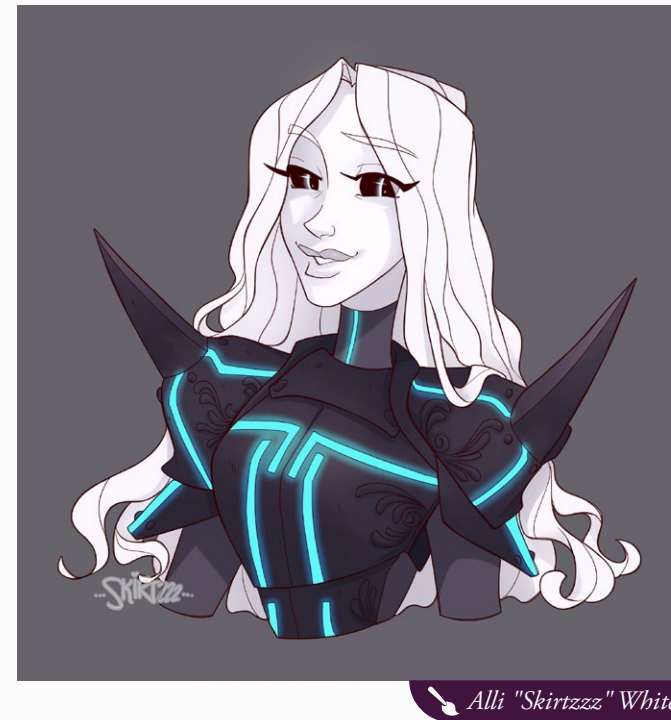
The Big 8 are the major intergalactic superpowers that formed and gained power following the end of the Evon war and the Markone Crusade. Unit-1 [the titular character] figures out how she was made and makes trillions of "children" based off of her own DNA. Initially, she wanted to just live in peace, but mental health problems, and the fact the Evon swarm was making gains against the

Virgo Alliance, prompted her to launch a crusade. She was so brutally effective that she slaughtered the Evons' queen, freeing them, but she continued the killing. The other four powers that rise out of this are descendants of differing A-unit models that Unit-1 made and of Evons who survived Unit-1's hate-fueled crusade against them.

*Who is Unit 1, and why do they have such a focus in the world/story?*

Unit-1 is an A-unit, a human based life form that mimics just about every conceivable facet of human biology, but with strictly inorganic components. This cybernetic biology was developed by the Terran Soviet Union to be an ace in the hole against the all-organic Evons. Evons can assimilate just about any form of life that is organic, and their developments in countering robotic lifeforms have made repelling the invasion very difficult. Unit-1 was designed to solve this problem, which she did. Ruthlessly. Her actions alone change the course of intergalactic history forever.

The other A-unit models she creates also develop galaxy-spanning civilizations of their own. Unit-1 is responsible for about half of all major historical events after her activation.



Alli "Skirtzzz" White

*What can you tell us about the Varrocks?*

I used the idea of "primitive people thrust into a stellar civilization." Prior to their enslavement by the technologically superior Lakura clan [of Varrocks], they were maybe an early bronze age society at most. How the Lakura got that tech is unknown, and many Varrock historians (and conspiracy theorists) suggest someone gave the Lakura lasers, guns, and bio-modification systems.

In terms of their inspiration, I used the Mongols and their nomadic lifestyle, as well as Polynesian religious influences and Indian culture and society.

*What kind of elements did you draw from those sources?*

Varrock clans build these "movable cities" where they can pack up and move as "the tides of the desert" make an area less desirable. This was inspired by Polynesian culture, which had a huge emphasis on stellar navigation. The Varrocks also valued the Wagupi, an apex predator that served as both

a ruthless guardian and a beast of burden, above all else. Much like how Mongolian culture treated horses, the Wagupi was a holy animal. Abusing or stealing it was a crime considered punishable by death.

Indian aesthetics and cuisine and Hinduism heavily inspired the garb and food of the Varrocks. I also had fun with their deification of celestial bodies in their solar system, even translating it into Terran Soviet society.

Varrock philosophy is built on themes of non-permanence, which actually causes conflicts during later eras.

*What about their physiology?*

Varrocks evolved from a herbivorous, endoskeletal arachnid. Their ancestors basically spun plants into a silk sack, injected them with venom, and drank their nutrients before they went to sleep during the night. They can't eat meat very well, despite the fact that their bodies assumed a humanoid form over the eons, and overhydration was a very serious issue for them.

*Why did the Lakura subjugate them? What was that phase of their history like?*

A portion of a Bronze Age society has the power to subjugate entire peoples with impunity thanks to vastly superior tech—and they don't want to work. That was their justification, anyway. It was a dark time for the other Varrocks, and their tribal/clan cultures survived only in secret. Resistance was very difficult and took nearly a century to pull off. The Lakura were so dependent on the slaves and their tech that they stagnated too much and their slaves overthrew them. The Varrocks have been extremely anti-authoritarian ever since, and very pro-decentralization.

<sup>1</sup> The American empire forms after the American people resist and repel European occupation. However, Europe is gearing up for a full scale invasion. Siberia is invaded by a rogue general from the confederacy of China, and the Western Pacific is getting worried. Japan and Manchuria side with Siberia for security. The Middle Eastern states are on their own side, and the African Union is desperately trying to maintain the peace with banking muscle and giving Europe phosphorus. But it all fails and the world descends into war. During this war, Kitov makes a name for herself as a premier armor general against invading Chinese forces.

<sup>2</sup> A swarm of alien creatures with unknown origins. There's a very wide range in what Evons look like. The overminds are humanoid with bio-suits, their skin is a grey-green color mixed with acute jaundice, and their eyes are yellow irises within orange sclera. The drones are bulkier, encased in bio-suits, and their appearance depends on what species the drone belonged to before it was assimilated. Recon droids have scanned twenty-three different galaxies behind Evon lines, and all except for two are devoid of any life whatsoever. It is theorized that the Evons invade, assimilate, and consume everything in a galaxy and move on to the next one, like locusts.

<sup>3</sup> The Lakura Clan had previously subjected the rest of the Varrock race using their advanced tech. After a revolutionary war, the Lakura were deposed, and forced by a newly formed confederation of tribes to atone for their sins by performing great service to the rest of the Varrock people. They were sent out to go investigate a world the Varrock religion spoke about at length, claiming that it would be a friend, or an enemy, one day. Lakura explorers usually played it safe and never interfered with human activity. However, a more extremist faction began raiding humans to rebuild their empire again.



*Going from there, how does humanity get embroiled with the Varrocks?*

Most Lakura just studied the Humans from afar and tried to control information so that they were in control of the Varrock species' first contact event, hoping it redeemed their clan.

During the American Expansion into space, Lakura extremists started raiding Earth ships and using their passengers as slaves or subjects for experimentation. Lakura explorers were rather far removed from Varrock society geographically, so it was quite a few years before American forces found a Varrock that wasn't Lakura. By that point, the American public and most of its government were clamoring for war. The emperor didn't want to declare it, but he was afraid that by maintaining peace he'd be forcefully replaced with someone a lot less restrained.

Eventually, the Imperial Senate voted to declare war, the emperor approved it, and America sent its forces to invade. The war dragged on for fifteen years, with Varrocks utterly confused as to why these aliens were attacking. The Varrock Confederacy's elite special-ops units started searching caves that American hostages were rescued from. The Americans noticed the clan responsible for the darkest period of slavery in history, the Lakura clan, was responsible for the raids and kidnapping.

*What about after the war?*

After relations had mended between humanity and Varrocks, and reconstruction completed, a golden age of prosperity and development bloomed. New species were found, and some even contacted the human and Varrock civilizations pre-emptively. During this time, however, a woman known only as "Xenia" made a notorious name for herself as a ruthless pirate. She particularly targeted European vessels, causing Imperial and Confederate forces to pursue her religiously. She had amassed enough

wealth that she could buy out the properties of an entire star system.

*While humanity went to war with the Varrock, did the Lakura watch from afar? How did this war fare for both sides?*

The Lakura were immediately pursued by the rest of the Varrock clans, and many were killed or imprisoned. The Varrocks lost the war, but the Americans deployed to the Varras system were too exhausted to care that they won. Civilians on both sides were not happy, but the veterans were just glad to be done and played a crucial role in mending relations during the reconstruction. Varrocks retained independence on the condition they release Lakura inmates and hold proper individual trials for crimes against humanity. Varrock society didn't like the trials part, but the absence of imperial occupation or control was a relief.

*Can you elaborate more on Varrock philosophy?*

Yeah! So there's this idea of impermanence that guides everything. If times are good, feast; if not so good, be frugal. The idea is that life has no schedule, no deadlines, and can change at any moment. The planet will change on its own terms, and thus you must make do rather than make the planet submit. Even impermanence is impermanent, as the winds of life will not always blow, and stability is a time of learning and preparation for storms ahead.

There's a sort of optimistic stoicism to Varrocks. Some cultures confused it for ignorance or stupidity, but the Americans fighting them knew it meant that if you didn't kick their ass sufficiently, they would still think they had a chance. The biggest effect that the Varrocks have had on Americans—post war—is pushing them to democratic structures with frequent elections. Power is a temporary thing, and the winds of law must reflect the winds of life, lest they collide and create great storms.

*How does that system work out for the Varrocks?*

Pretty good. The Varrock Confederate Council was pretty good about addressing problems that could result in catastrophe, but if an issue was non-essential or low-priority, nothing ever got done. The laws were so lax, though, that most citizens could just do the tasks themselves. The economic boom following the reconstruction was so big that it was said that one single market grew to planetary proportions.

*What causes the peace between humanity and Varrocks, and where do they go from there? How do Evons play into this?*

Evons are much later, like 4100's, but there is some foreshadowing of them during the Peace Era of the late 3600s.

The Human-Varrock peace was at first an absolute quagmire. Extremists claimed the emperor had lost his spine and that the Confederacy let itself be conquered. The counter-insurgency was pretty extensive, but they were overwhelmed by piracy, who saw the insurgents' raids as a move on their turf. About half of all insurgents just signed on as mercenaries for the Confederacy and empire. Very generous trade legislation made peace between the two species so absurdly profitable that post-war racism just faded out in about 40 years.

A big boon for their peace was the introduction of Marijuana into Confederate markets, as well as a certain type of fruit that could be distilled into a spirit with medicinal effects into Imperial stores. Both products were so lucrative that they often lobbied against war-hawk politicians. Most of those companies were veteran-owned, so when they spoke against inflammatory rhetoric, most Human and Varrock voters/citizens tended to side with peace ideologically.

*Where do we start seeing the shadows of Evons and the next challenge for humanity?*

The shadows of it start during the end of the peace era. Organic ships pop up on the outskirts of the galaxy, but they are very small and they leave after about a week each. It turns out they were scouting

vessels for the hive to see if there is a large enough biological presence to warrant an assimilation effort.

*How does that come about and develop, and how does it get us to Unit-1?*

Even scout vessels probe the galaxy for a few decades. The Terran Soviet Union's intelligence links up with the intelligence community of the Jidoro Concordat (another member of the Virgo Alliance) after their war with each other ends, and they discern this mystery force is also landing on planets with contacted primitives, right before said primitives just vanish from their own planet. The Evons then start sending "emissaries," mutated women designed to look like the sexualized ideal. These women emit pheromones and spew lines of propaganda about how their race, the Evons, are totally fine and just want to contact alien peoples. However, one of the emissaries gets pregnant, and her body is consumed by mutation. Her spawns, with voracious appetites, eat her from the inside and run amok, spreading the infection and forcing the Concordat to let the Terran Soviet Union nuke the place.

At that point, the Evons are deemed hostile, and after 6 years of war, John Gregorson's Cybernetic Biology project is approved for final development and implementation by the TSU Defense Congress. Thus Unit-1 is born, and our story begins!

*Can you tell me a little bit about Unit-1's story and her relationship with Gregorson?*

Yeah! So, Gregorson is her creator, and the two form an overt father-daughter relationship. As she struggles to pass the early entrance exam for the Star-Fighter Pilot program, she goes to him for personal advice as well as to learn how to adult and find herself individually.

Gregorson's experience as an airborne infantryman and biologist means that, in terms of the worldbuilding, he makes tons of technical developments for various armies in this universe. His work on crops resulted in a special property of jackfruit that another team of Terrans figured out could be used to make cheaper, more production-friendly Kevlar. The Terran Soviet Union and Jidoro

<sup>4</sup> After the 4th world war, the Imperial Federation of American States started colonizing the stars. The Emperor hoped that through more expansive mining and resource gathering operations he could stabilize Earth's resources enough that politics would calm down. It took two decades, but Europe's phosphorus crises ended and Earth stabilized. However, unidentified vessels started attacking trade ships and haulers, often kidnapping the people inside. The Imperial navy tracked these raiders down over 70,000 light years to a small cluster of very primitively colonized worlds, watching the transport ships land and empty cargo into caves.



Concordat didn't use it since the armor didn't meet the specs demanded by their war doctrine. The Orasians and Humans loved it, and they're seen wearing vests made of jackfruit Kevlar in books two and three.

Unit-1 becomes an ace pilot, and she's sent around the Alliance as an elite trainer for both Terran and foreign star-fighter pilots. Her exploits even inspire a young Terran woman to enter the Army Air Corps: Air Superiority division, something that was closed to women for years due to the physical requirements. When Unit-1 begins her Crusade against Evons, however, Captain Isandra Devaire must face her childhood hero in the air, to the death.

Another interesting thing: a scientist named Doctor Nicollo Galt has been reverse-engineering some of Gregorson's work so that the Human Conservatory Armada can make its own A-Units. His plan is to use the Herpes virus that causes cold sores to act as a carrier for a genetic override, turning all of humanity into A-units bit by bit until the Evon swarm can't assimilate, or even compete, with the HCA. He also may or may not have aspirations to depose and change the HCA high command with a more male-friendly government, among other...non-consensual government changes across the universe.

*What's your favorite aspect of the world, and some of the inspirations you draw from?*

Honestly, my favorite aspect has to be the asymmetrical nature of warfare in my world. I drew a lot of inspiration from *Command and Conquer*, and my experience in Military Intel. While not as extreme as the "Rapid Brute Force" doctrine of the Terran Soviet Union vs. the "Adapting Overwhelming Numbers" of the Evon Swarm, real militaries have entirely different war doctrines that highly depend on their history and environment. For example, the USA relies on air superiority as a form of artillery so that spec ops can neutralize strategic targets, while Russia depends on mobile, amphibious ground assaults to push you out while using air power as a mostly defensive posture.

You learn a lot about how warfare actually works while serving, and I went absolute ham with that aspect of my world. Later on, the Virgo Alliance has gotten so synchronized militarily that member nations have entire divisions dedicated to performing joint operations with each other's military. Over time, I imagine species-wide (or even nation-wide for more inclusive civilizations) gene-mod sets will be created and implemented just to make their populace more biologically fit for service according to their strategic doctrine. For instance, the Terrans carry heavy weapons but also need to have enough speed to keep the pressure. So, they get modified to have much more pink muscle development, as opposed to straight twitch or red muscle separately.

*Any other aspects you want to touch on, or last tips you want to give to some worldbuilders with a bit less experience up their sleeve?*

For worldbuilders with less experience, I would say, take things to their logical conclusion, even if it's small, subtle stuff. Technical depth in how your world works is where you find the craziness that makes your world special! 🧠

*This interview was edited for Worldbuilding Magazine.*

*Thanks to Jay for joining us!*

*If you would like to be a Showcase interviewee, click [here to apply!](#)*

# THINKING SIDEWAYS ABOUT EXPLORATION

*by Robert Meegan  
Art by Anna Hannon*

The very first explorer was almost certainly some pre-Cambrian creature who wondered what was on the other side of the pond. Sadly, its name and what it found have been lost to history, as it appears that few, if any, of the denizens of that era kept journals. The spirit of adventure that this pioneering individual displayed, as well as its disdain for documentation, persisted as one of the Whatcheeriidæ crawled out onto dry land roughly a hundred and fifty million years later.<sup>1</sup> While we laud these feats as great achievements today, it's likely that the peers of these early adventurers expressed skepticism regarding the value of their endeavors.

The next major outbreak of exploration, at least with regard to humanity, took more than three hundred and forty million years to organize. Anyone who has ever attended a project kick-off meeting can imagine the pitch:

*"We've been sitting in this rift valley for far too long. If this band is going to evolve and stay ahead of the other australopithecines, we need to branch out and fill other niches. I've talked with some of you and I know that most of you are on board with the concept, so today I want to focus on the overall plan.*

*"It's summed up rather nicely by our mission statement: To boldly go where no hominid has gone before. The goal is to send out exploration teams that can find new places for us to live. We've seen it before—all it takes is one lousy star falling out of the sky, and boom, the whole species is wiped out. If we can get some range between our tribes, we'd have a lot better chance of surviving.*

EXPLORATION 🧭  
HISTORY 🏰  
STEAMPUNK ⚙️

*"The plan is simple. We'll start by moving across Africa, with particular emphasis on coastal caves in the south and some bits in the northwest. After that, we'll be moving out across Asia Minor. We plan on splitting the team at that point, with one group going into Europe and the rest going east to Asia. The Asian team will spawn satellite teams to tackle Australia and Polynesia. We're also hoping that they will get to the Americas in the later stages, but that will be driven by time and budget constraints.*

*"Speaking of which, there have been some questions about the schedule. We're looking at a nominal duration of about a million years, but that could extend to a million and a half, depending upon how many ice ages we hit. Our intention is to use crowdfunding for the initial phases, but we hope to be revenue-positive with the media rights. Any of you who want to help, but aren't really keen on walking, could do us a big favor and invent written language. That would go a long way toward moving the book deal forward."*

And thus began the most successful project in human history. Any bit of land that seemed even remotely inhabitable was discovered and settled. Not only was this accomplished without any navigation tools—such as compasses or sextants—but all evidence indicates they were able to do it all without a single white board or sticky note. Historians and project managers are united in their distress regarding the lack of records as to how this was achieved.

This period of prehistory is fascinating, but its use as an example of worldbuilding is probably best

<sup>1</sup>To be fair, any creature whose first experience of dry land was What Cheer, Iowa, for whom the family of tetrapods was named, would probably crawl back into the ocean and never speak of the incident.



left to those authors who aren't all that good with dialogue or to gamemasters who have players with a strong aversion to the interaction side of role-playing. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Jean Auel did pretty well with the end of this era in her *Earth's Children* series, for those who are looking for a challenge.

The idea behind *thinking sideways* is that we have the vast toolbox of the history and science of our Earth. If we bend and twist that information, we can build rich worlds that still feel real. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing, but so are most power tools. The advantage of reaching into our toolbox while worldbuilding is that we're far less likely to cut off a finger or lose an eye. As we think about how to make exploration a part of the framework of our world, we're going to use one of the best tools available: the vast library of books available in the public domain. Many of these can be found through Google Books or Amazon Kindle for little or no cost.

### TIME AFTER TIME

Once the initial bout of exploration and settlement had wound up with the arrival of humans in the Americas, the exploration industry slowed significantly. There was a steady expansion as the map of the world was slowly colored-in. A long period of forgotten adventures followed as Polynesian navigators sailed across the vast Pacific Ocean, discovering its myriad islands. Even a region as inhospitable as the Tibetan Plateau was settled over twenty thousand years ago, demonstrating that humanity was intent on finding and populating any place available.

The last two leaders of exploration into the unknown were two Norsemen. Ingólfr Arnarson sailed to Iceland in 874 CE and established the settlement of Reykjavík. Actually, there is good evidence that there had been Norse visits prior to Ingólfr, and that the Irish had been there even before those excursions. However, Ingólfr had the foresight to discover what they had not: the value of a good publicist. While the others may have gotten there first, they had not taken the extra step of making certain that their names were written into the sagas. It's in the details that the stuff of legend is made.

Later, in 986 CE, Erik the Red explored and settled Greenland. Once again, the island had been previously inhabited by Inuits, but Erik took Ingólfr's lead and went one better by enlisting the help of a marketing team to help with branding. Erik looked at the desolate landscape around him and decided that "Greenland" was going to sell much better than "Slightlyicefreeland."

This final burst of island exploration largely brought an end to the discovery of "new lands." Obviously, there was continued expansion into previously uninhabited areas, but these were generally driven by population pressure, climate changes, or political expediencies. The territory that was being occupied was not terra incognita, but rather terra minus desiderabilis—land previously unwanted.

It was at the start of the fifteenth century that something unusual happened: a reasonably prosperous western European nation found itself

simultaneously at peace and under the rule of a competent king. What's more, this king had a surfeit of sons; the third of whom was particularly intelligent, interested in maritime matters, and (as a third prince) not required for matters of state. This man, Infante Dom Henrique—or as he is known to the English-speaking world, Prince Henry the Navigator—changed the course of human history by creating a fleet of ocean-going ships built for the purpose of exploring the west coast of Africa.

In doing so, Portugal started what is unironically known as "The Age of Discovery." The fact that virtually all of the places being "discovered" were already inhabited made very little difference. Even in the most benign circumstances, being the first European to discover the Mississippi River is a little like being the first Texan to attend the Hook Norton Film Society's annual potluck dinner. While the intruder might have a story to tell upon their return home, the locals would just as soon forget the whole affair.

If all that happened was a few explorers wandering around already populated areas and then quietly leaving, the process would have been reasonably acceptable for most of the native inhabitants. Unfortunately, exploration was just a polite term to describe conquest, looting, and exploitation. This epoch of pillage gradually shifted in focus to colonization and genocide—a period that gradually trickled to an end with decolonization in the latter half of the twentieth century, leaving behind vestiges that still remain today.

So where does that leave a worldbuilder? If you're starting from scratch, it would be possible to say that your world has vast areas that remained completely uninhabited until the present. Based upon our sample size of one populated planet, that seems highly unlikely. Virtually every corner of our world was explored and occupied before we even got around to agriculture or metalworking. Clearly, the drive to know what's over the horizon is wired very deeply into intelligence.

### ICE, ICE, BABY

If we think a bit sideways, there were two parts of the Earth that were still virtually unknown and unpopulated as late as the beginning of the twentieth century. The north and south polar regions maintained their uninhabited status by the simple virtue of being uninhabitable.

In the north, permanent residency ended at the edge of the Arctic Sea. The Inuits, Aleuts, Chukchis, and other indigenous people of the region might hunt or fish among the floes or on the ice pack, but they dwell on solid land. The northern ice is in constant motion and offers no nutrients for plants or animals. Even thick ice might fracture at any point, opening a lead that dumps a tent into the freezing water. Ice floes crash into each other as well, raising walls of ice as high as ten meters that impede travel.

Even today, the region is only accessible for part of the summer in ships strengthened against the ice, and all attempts to tap the oil and minerals that lie beneath the sea have been foiled by the whims of nature. Building a drilling platform that can





withstand a hundred kilometer-per-hour wind for hours on end is no trivial matter, but it has been done. Building one that can survive being struck by a hundred-thousand-tonne iceberg driven by the same wind is a feat that has yet to be accomplished.

Given the conditions and the lack of obvious value, what inspired explorers to head north beyond the frigid coasts? Two practical reasons accounted for many of these expeditions: the first, and foremost, was the desire to discover a passage that would be navigable by ships either northwest, along the North American coast, or northeast, along the shores of Russia. These would greatly shorten the trip between Atlantic and Pacific ports. Even if they were only open for a few months each year, the time saved, not to mention the avoidance of tropical climates, would allow for the transportation of goods that spoiled quickly. The possibility of moving armies and navies more rapidly didn't escape the attention of those nations with interests on both sides of the globe.

A second reason was the belief that there was solid land in the region of the north pole. This belief was driven by those who felt that there needed to be a counterbalance to the recently discovered Antarctica as well as the records of those who had ventured into the north and had seen the rocky cliffs of the great island on the horizon (ice ridges that had been raised a hundred meters or more above the water). Any land discovered would certainly make establishing a permanent settlement easier and might even have valuable resources.

In the south, the situation is reversed. Instead of a frozen sea surrounded by barren coasts, there is a frozen continent surrounded by both a sea of ice and some of the most treacherous stretches of storm-tossed ocean. As a result, there are even fewer practical reasons to venture in the region. Unlike the arctic, there were no obvious economic benefits to exploring Antarctica. Even today, it's unknown what mineral value the continent holds, and there is little potential for economically extracting anything. There is precisely one respectable deepwater anchorage on the continent, and in a good year it might be accessible for three to four months.

The one highly impractical excuse for why anyone would explore either polar region is the very nature

of humanity. There are always those with the need to be first, to test their limits, to go where no one else has ever been. It's a silly, crazy explanation, but it's the reason why our ever-so-distant ancestors explored the world before they even bothered to domesticate an animal.

### HOLDING OUT FOR A HERO

To the eternal joy of worldbuilders and storytellers, the polar explorers were a wonderful collection of characters. There were national heroes and utter scoundrels, and the two categories were not mutually exclusive. Most of them were born adventurers. If they hadn't gone to the poles, they would have found some other place to wander. They came from all over the social spectrum, but mounting an expedition was an expensive task. It required government support, wealthy sponsors, or both.

Many people are familiar with two examples of the heroic polar explorer, but it's worth examining them and their careers to see how we could use them as archetypes for an adventuring theme. The first is the dashing Captain Robert Falcon Scott, of the Royal Navy, who is best known for arriving second at the south pole and then dying on the return journey. The second is Roald Amundsen, who is remembered as the man who beat Scott to the pole, but whose polar exploration spanned both ends of the Earth.

It's important to note that Scott is always referred to as Robert Falcon Scott, because saying that Bob Scott was the leader of the second expedition to reach the pole and that he bought the farm on the way back changes the tone from heroic tragedy to low comedy. Scott's reputation, while he was alive and for decades after his death, was that of the ultimate British officer: good-looking, brave, possessed of a stiff upper lip, and with all the right connections. Since then, that reputation has experienced more ups and downs than he ever did. The most reasonable way to think about this is that he was every bit the hero, but that he wasn't all the best at tying up the loose ends. When you're going to trudge 2,500 kilometers across a frozen wasteland, somewhat vague instructions aren't sufficient.



Robert Falcon Scott

Roald Amundsen was at the other end of the spectrum. Born into a family of sailors and shipbuilders, he had taken to the sea in search of adventure. The Norwegian explorer Fridtjof Nansen was his personal hero, and he was fascinated by the loss of the Franklin Expedition which had attempted to find the Northwest Passage. With relatively little experience and no resources, he set out on his own expedition for that purpose in a small fishing boat with six other men. While Scott had vast resources for his explorations, Amundsen begged and borrowed money literally until the day he sailed. The expedition took three years to make the passage, but that was a result of the team collecting scientific data for two years in the region of the north magnetic pole. This research turned out to be more significant than the passage itself and it had the additional benefit of exposing Amundsen to the native Inuit people who lived in the area. From them he was able to learn a great deal about how to handle dog sleds, construct snow houses (igloos), and most importantly, how to dress for life in the arctic.

Upon his return he—like many explorers—partially financed his next expedition by writing an account of the expedition. In the days before reality television, these memoirs were enormously popular. For a modern reader, they offer a rather unusual insight into how a 20th-century European viewed a virtually neolithic hunter-gatherer society. While a few passages are cringe-worthy in 2019, Amundsen was largely impressed by the locals that he met. His memoir of the south pole is equally entertaining. In it, he explains how he heard the news that the north pole had been reached by Robert Peary and that Ernest Shackleton had failed in his attempt to reach the South Pole. With this information in hand, he decided to take his planned exploration of the North Atlantic and Arctic Oceans and go to Antarctica for his own race to the pole. He did this without telling his backers, Robert Falcon Scott (whom he knew was planning his own mission), or any of his own crew (with only a couple of exceptions). He delightfully hand-waves away the rather negative opinion among polar professionals and the public with the excuse that Scott's expedition was a scientific endeavor, so Amundsen wasn't *really* stepping on his toes.



Roald Amundsen



So, how do we, as worldbuilders, make use of deliciously flawed heroes braving incredible dangers in places that are far outside the bounds of where most average people would voluntarily live? Dan Simmons turned the failed Franklin Expedition to find the northwest passage into a master class in horror through his novel, *The Terror*. To make our world different, we're going to go sideways in another direction.

### WHERE EAGLES DARE

What we want is a genre that can handle the Victorian and pulp eras, without being too constrained. Something that looks a whole lot like steampunk. Not feeling it yet? What if I told you that Amundsen made the first aerial crossing of the north pole, flying from Norway to Alaska on an *airship* built by an eccentric Italian genius? Yeah, I thought that would do it.

The first thing that we need is a reason for people to be wandering around the poles. I mean, sooner or later someone will get around to it, simply because that's what people do. But, it's more interesting if there is a reason other than random curiosity. Despite my lifelong fascination with Antarctica, I think that the arctic offers more room for worldbuilding because it's dynamic, with the constantly shifting ice pack opening and closing passages, potentially making any anchorage into a trap. The thousands of islands provide diversity that an endless ice sheet lacks. The possibility of actually walking back to civilization, if beset by some disaster, allows for complications to be thrown at your characters without guaranteeing their untimely demise.

A good starting point might be vague hints at some sort of aetheral anomaly. Perhaps there could be reports from fishing and whaling vessels of strange changes in the aurorae. Various scientific and arcane societies could sponsor research missions. Some of these could disappear mysteriously, while others come back with bizarre accounts of what they've found. This would be an opportunity to introduce new creatures or intelligent species, with the otherworldliness that frozen environments offer.

After multiple adventures collect tidbits of information, the evidence could point to a previously unknown island deep in the arctic ice—perhaps at the pole itself—setting off a frantic race to discover, recover, or destroy the source of the mysterious emanations. Terrible, blinding blizzards, cold deep enough to freeze alcohol solid, and perpetual darkness can all factor in.

Sadly, there are no female archetypes to draw from, as polar exploration in the heroic era was fundamentally a male pursuit. The prevailing zeitgeist was that gallant men of iron will set out to conquer the vast unknown, while dainty women stayed home to practice more *lady-like* pursuits. To twenty-first sensibilities there is no particular reason why this should be so, considering that Inuit women got along quite well (and I can attest from personal experience that women have been very successful as scientists and support staff in Antarctica for many decades). The only obvious reason for their absence in the early expeditions appears to be their lack of facial hair. Virtually all of the explorers had truly righteous mustaches that undoubtedly provided great moral support in trying times. Robert Falcon Scott was one of the few exceptions and Amundsen had gone clean-shaven on the fateful rescue mission that cost him his life. You can draw your own conclusions.

### THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND

“Okay,” you might say, “polar exploration is fun, but it doesn't really satisfy dreams of empire.” There isn't the opportunity to employ vast armies and fleets. The characters are writ large, but the scope is somewhat limited. Was there some other period of exploration that we could add to our steampunk world to make it make it a bit more grand?

After the Age of Discovery and the period of overt slave trading came to a merciful end, the European powers spent about a half-century falling over themselves to claim huge chunks of Africa as colonies. While the earliest efforts were limited to establishing trading ports and coaling stations for naval vessels, exploration opened up the center of the continent to European interests. Unlike the conquistadors in South America, who were

highly focused on transportable wealth, the initial exploration of the African interior by Europeans was much more random, almost meandering.

For the period that we're interested in, many of the first explorations were concerned with the Sahara Desert and the regions immediately to the south. The European nations naturally felt that if there were commercial opportunities, the shortest and simplest route would be across the desert. After all, various tribes of Bedouins, Berbers, and other native peoples have been traversing the area for centuries, and whatever these “primitive” people could do, modern Europeans could do better. Accordingly, an expedition was funded by the British government, under the leadership of James Richardson. Richardson's claim to fame was that he had traveled south from Tripoli to Ghat, a city in the middle of the desert, and made it back alive. His account of this trade center on the trans-Saharan caravan routes piqued official interest and his survival implied a hardiness that would no doubt come in handy.

## Virtually all of the explorers had truly righteous mustaches that undoubtedly provided great moral support in trying times.

Richardson took along a German named Heinrich Barth, who had traveled across North Africa and in the Middle East and spoke Arabic fluently. They set out from Tripoli in January of 1850 and became the first Europeans to cross from the Mediterranean to central Africa in March of 1851. Richardson died a few days before reaching Lake Chad, which marks the southern edge of the desert. Barth sent Richardson's journals back to London and proceeded to continue the expedition on his own for four and a half more years, returning to Tripoli in September of 1855, having covered more than 19,000 kilometers. Barth was a brilliant observer and obsessive note-taker and he published a staggering five-volume treatise on the geography, cultures, and languages

of the Saharan and sub-Saharan regions. At this point, it's necessary to note that Barth possessed a magnificent mustache and mutton chops, while Richardson was clean-shaven, providing further proof that the proper facial hair is of critical importance when taking up the exploration business.

Further east, there was a grand search for the source of the Nile. This was every bit as intense as the race to the poles—and every bit as pointless. Whatever the value of knowing the Nile's source might have been, it certainly couldn't have been worth the effort and lives that were expended. Nevertheless, it was an all-consuming passion for men like David Livingstone, Richard Francis Burton, and Henry Stanley. Eventually, they decided that the source was Lake Victoria, ignoring both the obvious question of where the water in the lake came from and the obvious answer of “all the rivers that flow into it.” One secret to successful exploration is a certain ambivalence when it comes to inconvenient details (see Frederick Cook, Robert Peary, and Robert Byrd in the polar division for further examples). The British government was willing to fund these activities because they supported the primary British interest in Egypt and east Africa, which was maintaining the trade routes to its far more profitable Indian territory.

Central Africa was of little official interest, but there were a goodly number of explorers whose contributions can best be summed up by the subtitle of the 1894 book, *Daring Deeds In The Tropics: “A Thrilling Narrative of Remarkable Adventures, Terrible Experiences, Amazing Achievements and Important Discoveries of Great Travelers in Southern Climes, Richly Illustrated. Giving Graphic Accounts of Great Mysteries for Thousands of Years Unsolved, Terrible Experiences of Starvation and Death, Torturous Overland Journeys Through Grand Primeval Forests, Describing the Wonderful People and Customs of Strange Countries Unknown to Civilization.”*

(Seriously, how could you not want to read that book?)





Livingstone was one of these great travelers. Despite being a missionary, he was not particularly good at religious conversion. As an explorer, his record was decidedly dubious. Livingstone's recordkeeping was terrible, his navigation spotty, and his attention to detail best left unsaid. He also had the misfortune to spend his time among people who found themselves caught between Arab slavers to the north and Zanzibari slavers to the south. Admirably, he did what he could against these raiders, but he had little leverage beyond righteous indignation.

Henry Stanley was an interesting character. Born in Wales as John Rowland and orphaned while very young, at the age of seventeen he traveled to America and changed his name, claiming to be related to a family of cotton traders from New Orleans. After being hired by the *New York Herald* for the express purpose of finding David Livingstone, which he rather famously accomplished, he went on to lead an expedition that explored most of the length of the Congo River. He was successful in proving that it could be used as a transportation artery from the Atlantic coast deep into the heart of the continent, but he was no Ernest Shackleton and roughly half of his party died in the effort. Nevertheless, by 1878 Stanley had painted in the last blank spaces on the map of Africa.

This news had a profound effect that echoes to the present. It's worth noting that the exploration

of Africa had not found great wealth. The resources that we know Africa to possess today were both unknown and unappreciated at that time. Crude oil hadn't been found and was in little demand. Gold and diamonds had not been mined in any quantity. Commercial production of uranium, platinum, nickel, cobalt, and the rare earth metals were a century in the future. The exportable products were timber and ivory, with the first suffering from relatively low value and the second from limited supply and demand. The only thing that Africa had in abundance was land. The problem was, and still is, that this land is not particularly fertile. Unlike the deep topsoil of the American Midwest

or Ukraine, the earth under the savannah is thin and neither holds water nor allows for deep roots. Large-scale agriculture using 19th- and even 20th-century practices was simply not practical.

Despite this, King Leopold II of Belgium looked at all that space and saw the one thing that his tiny country lacked: land. He contracted with Stanley and used him to gain the trust of the local leaders in the Congo region. This trust was used to get the Africans to sign treaties giving Leopold control of their land. Through clever diplomacy, Leopold was then able to get international affirmation of his new empire. Of course, now that the dam had burst, so to speak, everyone wanted in. What became known as the "scramble for Africa" took place as countries vied to seize as much of the continent as they could. In the end, the Berlin Conference of 1888 formally divided the spoils between the major powers of western Europe.

Following this, it would be eighty years before the last of the African colonies gained independence. As the European countries soon learned, governing this territory would cost far more and the returns would be far less than expected. In particular, Belgium's grab of the Congo proved to be a financial and moral disaster. The colonial period across the continent resulted in tens of millions of deaths and indescribable suffering.

## MAY BE A PRICE TO PAY

We can certainly give our world endless deserts to slog across and vast jungles to cut through. That would provide some variety from just wandering around on ice sheets. It's not absolutely necessary to actually have anyone act upon the things that they find. Everything could remain trapped in a golden age of random meandering.

But let's go *full sideways*. Instead of ignoring the racism and exploitation of colonialism, why not use it to force our characters—and by extension, our players or readers—to confront moral dilemmas? The best worlds are those that challenge our expectations and provoke thought.

What if Richardson dies when he accidentally disturbs an ifrit in the desert heat? Perhaps Barth's volumes include sections discussing the necromancers who resurrect the dead to do their bidding. That would go a long way toward explaining the Voodoo cults on the Caribbean islands where African slaves had been settled.

The recently translated Rosetta Stone allows a team of French, English, and Egyptian archeologists exploring the Great Pyramid of Giza to read an inscription that tells of amulet of great power buried "where the waters of life are born." This sets off a frantic search for the source of the Nile as the three countries each seek to claim the prize.

On the Serengeti, a handful of hunters return with the news that elephants aren't the only creatures with tusks, and that some of the others are more than willing to hunt humans. Others talk of natives riding on the backs of lions and of apes that use weapons.

It's hard to imagine that the colonial powers—who were so eager to squeeze every last bit of blood out of the native population when the stakes were rubber and lumber—wouldn't be even more greedy and cruel when the potential gains are exponentially higher. As the "civilized" nations build airships, dreadnaughts, and land cruisers to carry men and weapons to use against these new threats; a group

of old men and women gather in a circle and begin to chant. It's a song older than language, one passed down through ten thousand generations. And while they sing, ancient things begin to waken.

The scientific and philosophical societies of the world would undoubtedly fund expeditions to learn more about these previously unknown phenomena. Will the explorers seeking knowledge and power survive the searing deserts, the freezing wastes, the steaming jungles, and the peaks where the very air abandons them? Is even the most magnificent mustache enough to save them? 🐘

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# PROMPTS

 RESOURCE 

- What problems exist in your world that require special skills to resolve? For example, if magic exists, what industries or institutions form around it?
- What is life like in rural parts of your world? How do opportunities for residents in small towns differ from those in cities and metropolitan centers?
- What events have upset the status quo throughout your world's history? These might be revolutions, technological breakthroughs, or economic booms or busts. What were the consequences of these events?
- What's the strongest liquor available for public consumption in your world? What's the strongest one unavailable to the public?
- How do religious groups involve themselves with the public sector, if at all? Aside from leading people spiritually, do they participate in society, operate on their own, or govern the people?
- How are craftsmen viewed in your world? Are artisans, such as silversmiths, highly regarded—or are they just cogs in the machine?
- Who works for the government? Are there layers of professional bureaucracy, or are decisions made by a group of citizens who hold other occupations? How would one obtain one of these positions—through a vote, appointment, hereditary succession, or some other means?



Eduardo Prim on Unsplash

- What kind of social mobility exists in your world? Can the child of a farmer go on to learn a new profession, or are they destined to work the fields? What barriers exist to making this kind of transition? 🌐

Want more writing and worldbuilding prompts? Join us on [Discord](#) or [Twitter](#)! Every Wednesday we release a new prompt for worldbuilding and writing. Work on it in private or share your responses with us.

## EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW: SEAN FALLON OF SMUNCHY GAMES

Interviewed by Adam Bassett

*I had the pleasure of speaking with Sean Fallon, also known as Smunchy. His team at Smunchy Games are working on multiple titles now with several releasing in 2020, and more in the pipeline. We spoke about the origins of his company, of his flagship title [Paths: World of Adia](#), and worldbuilding with characters. Here's what he had to say:*

I'm Sean Fallon, also known as Smunchy, and the founder and CEO of a tabletop games publishing company called Smunchy Games. We publish tabletop roleplaying games, card games, board games, and miniature wargames. We also have a community that connects a lot of the development, design, publishing, and writing talent together in the tabletop industry.

I'm married to my lovely wife and co-founder of Smunchy Games, and we have four awesome children, two girls and two boys. We live in the beautiful central Texas area, and I really love chocolate, peanut butter, and chicken nachos. Not always together at once though.

*I'd like to first hear about how all this began. How did Smunchy Games get started?*

Smunchy Games was founded initially, funnily enough, by accident. It started off with a world that was built by myself, my wife, and my brother-in-law 16 years ago (roughly around this same time, too). We poured our hearts and souls into this world as we would regularly sit together late at night, chatting about a world we had only visited in our imaginations.

It wasn't until January of 2015 when I got truly serious about Smunchy Games as an endeavor. It was when a few of my friends found some of the things

 INTERVIEW 

 TABLETOP GAMING 


I had been writing and said, "Smunchy, you need to publish this. The entire world needs to know."

Naturally, being the business guy that I am, I immediately began quickly validating the world I had. Every single person that I spoke with (over 300) said that my world needed to become a game. At that time, however, it wasn't a tabletop RPG, but instead, a card game.

Smunchy Games was formed.

*You mentioned "quick validation." Could you explain what that is and how you went about it for this world? Also, how did you find these 300+ people to discuss it with?*

Quick validation is when you have an idea or something that you want to sell but need to know if people are interested in purchasing it in some shape or form. Typically you want to have a good idea of what type of product or service you're pitching first, unlike me, where I was taking a large risk and only pitching a world and nothing more.



A lot of these people were found in coffee shops, game stores, restaurants, social media, the place where I had worked, conventions, conferences, and meetups. Everyone with their own thoughts and opinions. More or less, you're really only trying to aim for 10 people to say they're interested or would buy something along those lines. In my situation, I went an extra 10 miles to really confirm this, as it would be a 7-10 year journey to where I wanted to be.

*So what came up during this early validation phase for what would later become Paths? Did you get any feedback that affected how you produced it?*

Yeah, there was a ton of feedback that greatly altered my original thoughts on producing it. Some of the feedback blew me away, because they are things I would have never thought about ever if I didn't share this and validate it with people.

Some of the most consistent feedback I had received was the following:

- “My children would love this. When can I buy this?”
- “My kids would be so into this. Maybe they will actually play a tabletop game with me.”
- “My son hasn't stopped asking me for three days to read a book about *Paths*. Is this going to be a thing? How can I buy it? Apparently necromancer elephant people get him to do his homework. I'm fine with this.”
- “This is magical. Why is this world so magical and different? Why do I like it? I don't know. But I want it.”
- “This has to be a game. You can't just settle for a book. Think about the new generations coming up, Sean, remember when we were kids? What's going to be their go-to games?”
- “So. When can I buy this?” (This cracked me up.)

Children, between the ages of 13-17, were constantly brought up when it came to what we now know as *Paths: World of Adia*, and I was shocked by that. Especially because it wasn't something I had thought about, but it had made a lot of sense.

I didn't see it, but I, my wife, and my brother-in-law had created a world from the worlds and stories we

had loved growing up and still regularly take part in today. We were now the ones to pass on the things we loved, to the next generation coming into age. While we knew it would still greatly influence our peers, friends, and family—we hadn't thought about how much influence this would have on younger generations.

*That's awesome. Before we get to development, though, I'd like to explore the world of Adia a bit. Can you share some inspirations for creating it?*

Yeah! A lot of the inspirations for the world of Adia were mostly pulled from the things I love to read and play. Some heavy hitting examples were: *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Hobbit*, *Narnia*, *The World of Warcraft*, *Diablo*, *Magic the Gathering*, *Dungeons & Dragons*, and *Warhammer*.

However, the inspiration pulled from these sources were interpreted with reactions from “This is amazing” to “Let's break some tropes,” which is partially why Adia feels familiar while being extremely different from a world perspective. I mean, what if there were Orcs that aren't barbaric, strong, or savage? Instead, we could have Elves that are barbaric, strong, and savage!

We, purely as fans of fantasy, have grown tired of the same old thing. Yes, we still want our magic, we still want the adventure, we still want familiarity, but there comes a time when you can only see the same elf, dwarf, human, and goblin in the same scenario time after time after time. It's important as worldbuilders to be a little adventurous, especially if you plan to go to market with your story or game. Knowing this, we kept some familiarity, broke some tropes, and introduced some new concepts into the world of fantasy—such as a form of necromancy which isn't seen as evil, but is instead viewed as good.

Necromancy in Adia is rather unique. While you still have your typical forms of undead and necromantic crafts, death itself and undeath were never created originally by the Fire Eternal, the deity of this world, to be “evil.” Death was meant to be a means to an end, a hero if you will, to rescue the living from pain and suffering. By Death rescuing the living, they were meant to live with the Fire Eternal in the heavens.

Necromancy was never supposed to be a thing in the first place, until The Abyss had His way and stole Death's scythe. With it the craft of Necromancy was born and assigned to His Lich, the generals of His undeath and demon armies. When they were released upon Mavayadan, the Liches slaughtered the people of Adia, turning the once peaceful land into nothing more than a battlefield of death and mayhem.<sup>1</sup>

At first, they didn't know what to do. It wasn't until the Fire Eternal spoke with the Dwarven king and told him to pick up arms and fight that Mavayaden fought back against The Abyss. When they did, a Death Angel was born, retrieving Death's Scythe for Death himself and acquiring the power of Necromancy for the Fire Eternal. This new power allowed the Fire Eternal to create his Necromancers, who could raise their spectral undead to fight with free will, and with it, use Death's spirit magic as a weapon.

One of the darkest secrets that people don't know about Adia is that the Liches regularly walk the planet, blending in like normal people.

*That's not ominous at all. Of all the places in Adia you've created, what is your favorite?*

I would have to say my favorite place in Adia, if I had to hang out there every day, would be the Fire Crest Elves' port city of Shamradaer. It's both beautiful and comforting, to me. It is a city where promises are important and family means more than life itself. You can often smell different meats cooking over a fire, hear metal armor being hammered out by blacksmiths, or see beast hasters training with their hydra and other pets they've tamed. Hymns and water drumming can be heard from the fishermen and women at the south port, where many different races of people come and go. The river and cool breezes will keep you cool on a warm day, or put you to sleep sloshing against the banks at night.

The people of Shamradaer are friendly, and the Chieftain—Dathmar Andeoshen—is one of the kindest forms of royalty and upper status that will

ever walk the lands of Mavaydan and the world of Adia. Great food, family, and friends—that is where I would want to be.

*So, as you began to develop this, I believe you said it was a card game? Paths is certainly not that any longer, so can you tell us a bit about that early development process?*

It started with a good year of development and playtesting. We had at the time 50-100 playtesters playing the card game formerly titled *PATHS*. It was more or less a dueling card game, similar to *Magic: the Gathering* or *Hearthstone*. Through every iteration, we had more and more asking to have the world and story of *PATHS* involved in the card game.

We introduced a bidding system, story cards, hero characters, event cards, scenery—everything and anything you can think of that would be in a tabletop RPG put into a strange battle card format.

While it worked, it wasn't exactly fun. Until finally, we had multiple people telling us that they love the cards, but they just want to play an RPG. The story and world were too good to hide (their words). This is how we naturally transitioned into what you know today as our "GM-in-a-box" modules.

*And what's GM-in-a-box?*

GM-in-a-box is a story adventure that more or less replaces the traditional Game Master telling the story of an RPG game session.

Like a game master, the GM-in-a-box adventure has everything you need to play solo or with a group of friends. We even gave the GM-in-a-box its own Game Master guide, named Boxie. He will pop up from time to time throughout the cards, just like a Game Master would through narration. With this, you are still free to create your own characters from the Player Guidebook, just like a traditional RPG, offering both new and familiar experiences.

GM-in-a-box modules are optional, so you by no means have to use them unless you absolutely wish

<sup>1</sup> Mavayden is a continent in the world of Adia.



to. *Paths: World of Adia* brings a lot of flexibility compared to other tabletop RPGs in that way. You are free to experience both the familiar and the new.

*I'd like to touch on more recent happenings. I know you had a Kickstarter recently, but the game is still in production as of now. Can you tell us a bit about that?*

These last two years have been an insane roller coaster, to be honest. Everything from appointing new development and writing teams, growing those teams, and developing the company—all the way to gaining some serious traction in the tabletop roleplaying gaming space and taking *Paths: World of Adia* from a small hobbyist game to an extremely serious contender. It was only recently that the team and I finally received some time to breathe. April of 2019 was when we launched the kickstarter for *Paths: World of Adia*, and while it was going to fund, I had actually canceled that project for many different factors—major factors in some cases, but one in particular that was deeply concerning to me. We all know that the shipping cost on items to

Europe can be insanely expensive, but this was too far over the top for me to justify.

After receiving a tremendous amount of feedback from Europeans on shipping and price costs in general, we took that feedback seriously and canceled the project, letting everyone know we would re-release at another point in time. While this was a big reason for us canceling, there was more that was locked away in my mind as I felt we were missing something or that I could have done something better. So even with all of these lessons learned, we had realized that a lot of the classes, system, and gameplay at that time—while tested—clearly weren't tested well enough. This forced us to re-develop all of the classes from the ground up and even change some of the very core rules.

Kickstarter, while we canceled, was stressful planning and allowed us to get the exact feedback we needed. Honest, brutal feedback from the public, which otherwise they wouldn't have given to us if we weren't asking them to purchase our product. This helped tremendously. Setting us back on track allowed us to re-shape the game to be better, and more fun. It has even given us more time to chat with retailers and distributors across the globe.

Development through 2019 has been amazing since then. It's even more amazing knowing we're continuing into 2020 with the release of an official playtest, and we'll launch the finished product in the third or fourth quarter of next year.

*That's great to hear. How will this experience affect future releases? Will you continue to use Kickstarter, and if so, how will your tactics change?*

We will continue to use Kickstarter, for sure. This experience has dramatically affected future releases because there is a shift in price that many may not know about. From the cost of material to the cost of shipping. Planning for these to shift and change every year will help you in the end when planning out your kickstarter accordingly.

Most importantly, it proved a validation theory that most marketers don't really consider true until it happens to them—and that is the theory of honest feedback. The purest form of feedback that someone will give you about your product is when you're asking them to pay for it, especially if that person doesn't know you.

From here on out, we've been able to get a release schedule under us, something that we are regularly tweaking in order to make sure that not only are deadlines are met, but that we don't kill ourselves while doing it either—reducing that crunch.

*So for anyone considering a kickstarter, what advice would you give them? Obviously some of what you learned was specific to Paths, but what did you learn that could apply to other crowdfunding efforts?*

There is a lot of crossover for sure. I'd say one of the biggest lessons learned here, especially when it comes to kickstarter—don't do it alone. I'm not saying this because people feel like they may not be able to do this on their own due to marketing or business knowledge—no. I'm saying this because if you're alone, it's going to be extremely difficult to get out of your own head.

Now, to be fair, if you're someone who has been doing marketing for 10 years and know the ropes, that's fine. But understand that depending on your goal, it's really important to check with a peer that knows their stuff too.

I'd say for those that plan to run a kickstarter for the first time, make sure you've quick validated whatever it is you're doing, and before you upload anything to kickstarter—start learning about marketing and how to do so effectively. After that, I would immediately jump into trying to understand your audience—the people that you're trying to sell to.

Kickstarter has changed a lot over the years, meaning the quality that you're beginning to see on kickstarter is at an



*The Port of Shamradaer by Anton Ninov*



*Entrance to Shamradaer by Anton Ninov*



all-time high. This unfortunately means that anyone coming to Kickstarter with a few sketches and a couple of paragraphs will more than likely be looked over if you're unknown or new.

Beyond that, make sure not to overwhelm those looking to back your project. Too many pledge tiers and too much information is a cognitive overload that will make people quickly turn away from you. Be sure to reduce that page for better results in the end.

*That's great advice. Thanks! Now, could you tell us a bit about what other projects you're working on beside Paths?*

We have quite a lineup to be honest. Let's start with *Fray* since it's such an awesome and, honestly, rather addictive little card game. This card game can be played standalone, or within the world of Adia during a *Paths: World of Adia* RPG session! This card game has truly blown my socks off at how simple it is to pick up when learning the rules and how much depth and strategy there is when playing it.

*Parselings* is what we like to call a "deck-building word magic RPG" system and setting. The words you use in the game are how you—and your teammates—are able to create magical things that happen when playing through a setting. More importantly, while dice are still a thing the game master will use when playing, a deck of cards are used for skill checks and other mechanics. Leo Cheung has done an incredible job in both designing this game and illustrating the amazing artwork that he has for it.

*Necromancer 3086* is a Dungeons & Dragons 5th Edition module setting all about humans losing their lives on Earth and traveling through space to a

new, seemingly undiscovered planet called Yunsertia. On the spacecraft, the Bone Cults of the Nahcronim were formed. The Nahcronim, or Necromancer in English, were created through a new chip board threaded with magic called "The Hollow." From here, the human bone cults were surprisingly greeted by an ancient civilization known as the Vampen Ires, or for short, Vampires.



Chieftain Statues of Shamradaer by Anton Ninov

Wars have been waged on the humans by the Vampen Ires. The Vampires see humans as savages for making tools, or homes even, out of their once loved ones' bones and for their pure lack of fundamental technologies, where they are so far behind as an intelligent race. The Vampen Ires plan to extinguish humans from the face of Yunsertia. This is where the call for Vampire Hunters is made. Surprisingly, not only humans have answered this call, but some Vampires have, too.

*Fray, Parselings, Tide Breaker, Shadow Tantrum, Trafaultree, Rift Shifters, Necromancer 3086*; each project currently in development. Some will be launched on Kickstarter next year (2020).



Akkenta with his Death Magic Skeletons Chasing down Jungle Uwakuun by Leonardo Giordano

*That's a wide lineup. Congratulations! Now, before we head out, is there anything else you'd like to share with us?*

I think the last thing I'll touch on is worldbuilding. While I believe a lot of the readers will agree with me, some may not necessarily know or feel how important it really is.

Worldbuilding is the absolute center and life source to any form of entertainment you know to exist in the past and today. I say this because while storytelling is important, without worldbuilding, there would be no story to tell. You see, even in some of the most basic forms of story, there is still a world that needs to exist. Even here in our everyday lives, we are continually building our own micro-worlds and telling our stories in a larger world that has already existed. This, to me, is both incredible and also daunting to really take in and to convert into a formal train of thought—and I don't think I'll ever truly know everything there is to know about this as I am just one person, but gosh, I am ever thankful that I get to be a part of this world and story. Don't stop worldbuilding!

*Any worldbuilding tips for us?*

I always start with a character. This character allows me to understand their emotions, who they are, why they are what they are, why they do what they do, and how they do it. From there, it allows me to start branching out into this new world that my character lives in, and really lets me develop everything else as I go.

A little known fact, but Adia actually started with my first character, Akkenta—a Tuskaar merchant, now Necromancer, chosen by the Fire Eternal.

*Alright, I suppose you're going to make me ask: what was the story of Akkenta about?*

The Tuskaar are essentially elephant people that live in the Tassradan Jungle. Both a quiet and rather scary place, if you're not a Tuskaar.

Akkenta, like his father and brother, was once a part of the Trader's Colony in Half-Tusk village.



Akkenta's mother and father both died to a Paradisian attack near the end portion of "The War of Tusk and Feather" and the beginning of "The Great Faction War."<sup>2</sup> Thus, both Akkenta and his brother Bongani were left to continue their family's mercantile trade.

Many years later, Half-Tusk village was ambushed by Courser Knights and Warriors, slaughtering the village and burning it to a crisp. Bongani's life was taken as a Courser arrow pierced his heart.<sup>3</sup>

This was the same night when a demon was executing his plans while disguised as a Tuskaar elder, knowing that the Fire Eternal had chosen Akkenta. If the demon got to him first, he felt that Akkenta would turn from the Fire Eternal. Instead, Akkenta gained new Necromantic powers from the Fire Eternal, slayed the demon, and raised his people back from the dead as undead spectrals with free will. Although, not all were able to come back as the Fire Eternal is the one to choose who does and who doesn't.

This ambush, however, was an act of war and could lead to much bigger things in the end. 🍷

You can learn more about Smunchy Games on Sean's [website](#), [Twitter](#), or join their [Discord](#) server to meet the team. Keep an eye out for [Paths: World of Adia](#) in 2020!

This interview was edited for Worldbuilding Magazine.

Special thanks to Sean for taking the time to speak with us!

<sup>2</sup> Paradisians are a race of avian people in Adia.

<sup>3</sup> Coursers are a race of canid people in Adia.



Akkenta's transformation into Necromancy by Jamethy

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# R/FANTASYWORLDBUILDING

## LET'S GET TO WORK



# THIRTY-THREE TALES OF WAR | STORIES FIVE THROUGH SEVEN

by Emory Glass

*Thirty Three Tales of War is a collection of flash fiction pieces that follow thirty-three anonymous individuals living during the Candrish Civil War. Stories One through Four appeared in [Volume Three](#). [Issue Two: Technology](#) of Worldbuilding Magazine.*

## V: PRIESTESS

FOG had gathered in the valley overnight. It clung to the trees, the ground, the air: a blood-white cloud so thick it choked the morning sun. A village stood beneath these mountains once. Mavska. Most knew it as the sole settlement for spans and spans. A lantern in the gloom. It, like the sun, had succumbed to darkness.

A priestess stood where the village once had. The fog curled away as she whispered to the Void, revealing a field of flattened wheat to her north. In her hand, a red candle. On her lips, a prayer.

She walked amidst broken bodies and the shafts of spears, lone shoes with no feet to wear them, and scattered, dented shields. The ground, glutted with filth and blood, threatened to suck her in with every heavy step. Yet, she carried on.

Nine times she paced the field until black blood saturated her leather turnshoes. Black blood, not red. All this had begun with the redbloods. Then the caste-whore queen. The priestess turned her mind from such treacherous thoughts. There was work to do.

In the burlap sack at her side she collected things for the dead: beads and talismans, iron *tadril* coins, scraps of tattered banners and cloth. She kissed each item and set it delicately in the bag. A quiet joy quelled the mournful murmurs of her soul. Here laid her altar. So many souls returned to their mother, the Seamstress of Souls, here in this very field. How lucky was she to be Her priestess. How lucky were they to find their path home.

At the tenth turn of her pacing she paused and raised her candle skyward. The flame trembled. Searching for the stars beyond the fog, the priestess bowed her head.

"In anger you called to Her, She who avenges your wounds."

Tendrils of fog slithered across her lips.

"In sorrow you prayed to Her, She who felled your friends and foes."

A hole in death's cloak. She cast her sight to the sky. "In death you came to Her, She who ends all things."

Red wax pattered against her feet. The candle hissed as it melted onto her palm. She knelt and set her sack at her knees, reaching inside to find the first offering; she kissed the helmet she collected from within, pulling sticky blood and tissue away as she withdrew her lips. "In her sight," she whispered.

One by one she drew their possessions from her bag and arranged them on the ground. When each item laid about her in a circle, she took a bundle of sage from her skirt pocket and lit it with the last flicker of

HIGH FANTASY 

DARK FANTASY 

CULTURE 

the candle. She placed the bundle in the palm of a worn leather glove.

"Rest now, sweet children, and be at peace, for in hope the shards of your soul ran to Her, She who will set them free."

A divine pulse shuddered across the valley. Gradually, the fog thinned until it was nothing more than crisp autumn air. The priestess stood. Hundreds of spears and work-hardened swords quivered up to their hilts in the bloody ground. How lucky were they to no longer suffer. Hundreds fell here, but this battle did not end the war. Thousands had drawn their last breath the two years past. Thousands of souls, shattered. Her countrymen, her friends.

Yet, the priestess lifted her arms to the sky. The Seamstress' mercy was a gift to them all, no matter which side they fought and died for. And, for that alone, she was thankful.

## VI: PROSTITUTE

IT took one hundred and fifty *tadril* to get out of Kandrisev. Could be Rendroxja. Or the Brisian Empire. Or wherever else the both of them could afford, as long as it wasn't here. Since the war came, nowhere in Zoldonmesk was safe. Any woman with two good arms and legs would be conscripted to the Red Queen's army when the Rosehearts passed through on their way to Chovrek, and neither she nor Osa intended to fight.

The prostitute counted out their savings, squatting on the wooden floor of the brothel's cramped sleeping quarters. Mostly, they had saved onepieces: little rings of copper with holes punched in the middle. A trio of fivepieces—silver triangles with the same sort of hole—rested quietly under her foot so the nosy ones wouldn't get any ideas. The true prize was a circular, silver tenpiece punched with a triangle. It grew sweaty clutched in the palm of her hand.

There they had it. One hundred and fifty *tadril* coins. This small fortune represented two years' savings, but not all her own—over half belonged to Osa. They'd skipped breakfast and lunch every day and shared most dinners, which mostly consisted

of a small bowl of bone broth and a slice of hard bread. Sometimes, they'd forage for berries and wild vegetables. On her nameday, Osa had gifted her a fist-sized hunk of hillwalker cheese. It was the most delicious thing she had ever tasted, but she managed to make it last three months. They mended their own dresses and shoes. Sometimes they'd mend things for the others at the price of one *tadril* per seam. They were rarely choosy with their clients, only refusing ones with diseases or bad reputations. Anything to get out of here before war came.

The prostitute pushed all their coins into a pile and began stringing them along a cord. Zoldonmesk was their motherland; they'd never been outside its borders, or even very many places within, but the region had never felt like home. Even less so now that its mountains were stained black with the blood of her sisters and brothers.

She didn't understand much of what was going on, but the Upperbirths she serviced sometimes let things slip. Pillowtalk was great for learning—probably better than a fancy education. The only bit that mattered to her was knowing that the Red Queen was ransacking every settlement in Zoldonmesk for young women to fight in her war. Whatever ended up happening, she didn't care. As long as she and Osa were together someplace that didn't run the risk of getting both of them killed, politics didn't matter at all. There would always be work as long as there was loneliness, no matter if they had to go to the ends of the world to find it.

She finished stringing the coins and tied the cord to the inside of her underskirt. Osa had an appointment tonight. The moment she was done, the two of them were leaving. She reckoned they could get as far as Yaroshev if they walked through the night. From there, they could decide where to go.

The Mistress wouldn't be happy to lose two of her whores, but neither she nor Osa were the best on offer, anyway. Lately, the boys had been getting more visits. Even the most expensive girl hadn't been called on in almost a week. It was a good thing Osa had started making them save up when she did.

The prostitute sat on her bed, folding the skirts of her dress underneath her as she did. Part of her knew

she'd always miss this place, dingy as it was, but mostly she was excited to explore the world. All she'd known was her little town.

The door opened and a girl came in. It wasn't Osa. The door opened thrice more, and each time it sent her heart flutter with anxiety. None were Osa. They just went to bed or to bathe. Finally, *finally*, that sweet moment came when Osa poked her beautiful head through the door.

"Coming?" she asked with a grin.

The prostitute hopped off the bed and scurried off.

## VII: NEZHDOYA

BRASS mirrors told no lies. Her snow-white hair was plaited, a crown of flowers placed upon her head. A golden shawl embroidered with navy blue thread rested upon her gently sloping shoulders. A matching black-and-gold gown handcrafted by the finest weavers in Chariv completed the ensemble. Half her face was painted white, as was the custom. Everyone would tell her she was beautiful, and she was. Mirrors always told the truth, yet in her heart she felt ugly as a pig-herder's wife.

She had jewels. She had money. The ritual blade was buried safely in the folds of her wedding gown. Very shortly she'd have her very own husband, and then it was off to Tizan, Ålsia as soon as the reception ended. There was no need for her to fight in the war. She was doing her duty in other ways—ways she was more capable of surviving. She was no fighter. Besides, was marrying someone she'd never met not also brave?

Still, something felt as if it were missing. She couldn't quite put an image behind the thought. Nevertheless, she let the maidservant standing at attention near the door lead her into the temple's main hall. The side she entered from was painted deep shades of night-blue. Silver ornaments and mirrors dotted the walls and ceiling. The other half was yellow as the sun with golden baubles to match. Six rows of benches rested on either side of the temple. All of her betrothed's family sat in the night-half, while hers took up the sunny side. She left the maidservant at the door and walked alone to

the centre aisle, where her mother and father waited. They each took one of her arms and led her to the altar head.

Her heart thumped. The husband they chose for her, a whiteblooded man named Bancak, seemed kind, if a bit bland. He was Ålsian nobility, apparently, and wanted to be a scholar. That was all she knew. They had only ever spoken once through an opaque screen. Her stomach lurched as they came to a stop in front of the altar. She kept her gaze firmly on the altar, not daring to look anywhere else. What if he was mean, or ugly?

A priest and priestess—the man in gold, the woman in blue—stood behind the altar. Two pots of face paint sat atop it: one white, one black. Her parents withdrew to the light side of the altar as Bancak's parents led him down the aisle. Her heart beat in her throat when she saw him. He was as attractive as she could have hoped. Locks of hair black as pitch stopped just short of his upturned ears, and his sea-blue skin was flawless. His nose left a bit to be desired, but that wasn't the end of the world...

"Let us begin." The priestess raised her hands to the ceiling. "Who is the Sun, giver of life?"

As they knelt, she and Bancak replied in unison, "Sila, whose white light we kneel under as we commit our souls to His brilliance." She glanced at him. He kept looking ahead.

The priest raised his hands. "Who is the Moon, giver of death?"

"Yusri, whose stars we ask to bless this union." Their voices melded into one.

The priestess took the pot of white face-paint and handed it down to her as the priest gave Bancak the black. Her knees ached against the rough stone floor. She looked to him for some sign of suffering in solidarity, but saw none. The sound the ceramic pot of facepaint made on the tile floor between his knees rang in her ears like the *shwing* of a sword drawn from its sheath.

"How long have your souls searched for one another?" asked the priestess.

"From when we were born, forged in His brilliant light."

That was her cue. She drew the brush from its pot and dabbed it against the unpainted half of his face until it was thoroughly coated in white. He winked, or she thought he did. She hurriedly stuffed the brush back in the paint.

The priest spoke next. "And where will they wait until night drives them apart?"

"To the Moon, to rest until we may be united again."

Bancak placed his brush against her face. The paint was cold and thick. A little shiver raised gooseflesh on her arms. He took great care with his brushwork, making sure to keep the paint off her hair, lips, and nostrils.

The priest and priestess said at once, "You have united your hearts in the Sun's white light; your union is forged in the brilliance of His gaze. Bring your bodies together in Moonlight and your union is sealed amongst Her stars. Together, let the glorious Mysteries bring harmony to your minds and souls."

She swallowed. Now for the bloody part. Less bloody than a battlefield. That was her sole comforting thought. She slid the ritual blade from her pocket and placed it in his hands.

"Who will follow this woman's soul on her journey to Mother Moon?" the priest asked.

"I will," Bancak said. He gave her a reassuring look.

Trust. That's what relationships were built on. She wasn't trapped by this. Her parents had chosen a good man, and she knew she could trust their judgement. They never beat her, never condescended, never treated her as anything less than their daughter. Perhaps they weren't the upper crust of Upperbirths, and perhaps she should have been fighting in the Yellow Queen's war because of it. Once he cut her hand, she would no longer be *nezhdoya*. She didn't need a queen to free her. She wasn't chained. Besides, only she could help herself.

Slowly, she extended her palm, looking only at it. He took the knife and gently, gently pressed it against her skin, dragging it all the way down to her the base of her middle finger. She sucked air through her teeth at the sting. Drops of black blood beaded from the wound and landed on her thigh. He handed her the knife, blade pointed at himself.

"And who will follow this man's soul on his path from Father Sun?" asked the priestess.

Her breath caught in her throat. This was her duty. She had been born for this very thing. Chosen for it. Marrying now meant her family didn't have to send her off to war. They weren't important enough for their nezhdoya to be safe from conscription. The Yellow Queen needed bodies. She was young and healthy. Better to bear children than a blade. She glanced up at the priest. Her feet begged her to stand up and run.

"I will."

She cut his hand the same way, only his blood was white. They clasped their palms together and let the blood mix into grey.

The priest and priestess spoke together again. "Rise now with the Sun and Moon as your witness, and together be woman and man."

They stood to jovial cheers and applause from their guests. She and Bancak walked down the aisle together in the autumn sun.

There. The hard part was over. Now it was just her and him, man and wife, until the Moon reclaimed their souls. Still, a part of her called for something that wasn't there. She slipped away from the greetings and congratulations to take a moment and think. There wasn't much more that she could ask for, at any rate. He was a powerful Ålsian nobleman. It was her duty to her family and nation, and at the very least she would never want for anything material again.

She looked across the temple courtyard to see her husband talking and laughing with some Ålsian women who appeared to be his younger sisters, or maybe his aunts. Curious, she made her way to them.



"Sister," one of the women said, nodding. "I am Ozbekar."

"I am Judit," said the second.

"Florkos," the next woman said with a grin.

The fourth barely looked at her, but said "Emezyal."

"Naqlora," the last said with a smile.

The bride took her husband's arm. "So many sisters. Did they all grow up with you?"

The women burst into laughter. Bancak chuckled, but said nothing.

"She's like you, Florkos, so innocent," Ozbekar giggled. "We're Bancak's other wives."

Her cheeks flushed as the world crumbled beneath her feet. Her grip on Bancak's arm loosened. She stared at Ozbekar, praying it was a joke. "W-wives?"

"Oh, Ozbekar, you've scared her to death." Judit took her hands. "Don't worry, young one. I know it must all seem so strange to a Candrish girl, but it's not so bad. We aren't catty about it. Ozbekar was his first wife, and you won't be the last. Some men in Tizan have as many as ten!"

"Ten?" she asked, barely loud enough to be heard.

Judit said, "We'll have many celebrations at home—tournaments, a wives' day, a week of feasts and drinking. You'll get used to this, I promise."


"Gods know I had to," Naqlora said.

"Naqlora is Məzhaq," Ozbekar clarified. "They only take one spouse, like you Candrish women. She's a special case."

All she could think was to run. How could Bancak ever love her when there were five other women that came before? A tear slid down her cheek. She cast her eyes upon Bancak, who looked more amused than apologetic. This wasn't funny. It was the exact and total opposite of funny. Ten wives? Nine more

for when he got bored? How could her parents betray her like this? No one ever mentioned to her that the whitebloods took more than one wife. Never, not once. She excused herself and hurried off toward the temple doors. There was a sword atop her father's fireplace. She could take it. She could go to war if it meant this marriage would be annulled. Her heart skipped a beat.

No. She couldn't. All her belongings were being brought aboard Bancak's ship at that very moment. With the setting sun she'd be aboard that ship, sailing away from anything she'd ever known. 🐙



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# THE PROFESSION OF ADVENTURING

by *Psycho Romeo*  
Art by *Emily Harrenstein*

One of the things I learned from my RPG groups was that the players loved when I—as the Dungeon Master (DM)—named the things that they've done that I considered impressive. I found that awarding bonus experience at the end of a session based on these events would incentivize the players to try to do more cool things in the future. But can we insert this incentive and gratification into the game mechanically? Instead of bonus EXP, can we reward the players with something real and tangible in-game? We'll be answering these questions as we explore the topic of the *Profession of Adventuring*.

## Instead of bonus EXP, can we reward the players with something real and tangible in-game?

One of the least interesting stats I see in RPGs ends up being the diplomacy, charisma, social, or charm stats. Characters that invest in charismatic stats often take it because it happens to also be the stat that increases their combat ability or because they've been designated as the official “speaker” for a party, handling most of the social interactions that they encounter. These stats are almost seen as a waste to have on other characters as it can likely be covered by the more specialized ones. On the other hand, this is not the case with combat stats. Generally speaking, an entire party will be asked to participate in combat, and the entire party will benefit from any number of them being stronger—there is no *covering* in these situations.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT 🧑  
TABLETOP GAMING 🎲

### HOW DO WE MAKE CHARISMA MORE APPEALING?

While designing and running homebrew RPGs, I often dabbled with the idea of bringing social conflicts and violent conflicts equal in terms of importance, such that all characters could feel like they were getting something useful by investing in a social stat. I tried having more frequent social encounters, giving each of them more tangible and lasting effects, but this made the party want to pump up and hide behind the “speaker” even more. I tried things such as forcing a “non-speaker” into a conversation more often. (“You've been quiet back there,” I would say to our less socially inclined players, “what do you have to say about this?!”) However, the party started leaving everyone else behind and having the speaker go alone. Both of these approaches achieved the opposite of what I was aiming for. I even tried designing systems to elevate a social encounter to that of a combat encounter mechanically; however, this ended up being too taxing to prepare for every session and too complex to work with on the fly. Defeated, I let this topic go for several years.

It wasn't until I started developing a bronze-age RPG with a coworker that I had reconsidered this topic again. We were talking about what kind of activities a party of adventurers would engage in when they visited a village. This was new territory for me, since my work predominantly had been within the sci-fi genre. Space travel was rampant and people would visit new worlds all the time; and these worlds were ready to receive, feed, and house travelers. However, for a world of isolated villages that rarely received visitors and mostly stuck to themselves,





how would they react to a group of battle hardened strangers walking down their street? The conclusion we came to was that this would be the most exciting thing to happen to them all year. These strangers would be like celebrities.

### ADVENTURERS AS CELEBRITIES?

The villagers live simple and boring lives. They see the same faces, play the same games, and solve the same problems in the same way year after year. Enter a group of adventurers, with their battle scars, gigantic axes, monstrous boar tusk jewelry, and their scent fresh of blood and flesh. Everyone would leap out of their homes to see what these new people from the outside world were all about. Children would gawk—starstruck or frightened with curiosity—at how awesome these guys look, dreaming of growing up to be just like them.



And how would the adventurers themselves act in response? Imagine Keagor the Berserker, seven feet tall with biceps the size of pumpkins, seeing seven-year-old Leo, wide-eyed and staring in awe. Keagor might sit on a bench against the well, beckon little Leo over, and place him on his knee. “See this one?” he asks, pointing at an old wound on his left cheek. “This one was from the Old Hag of Greenwaters. She conjured blades of bone and had I been a hair slower,” he gestures with his hand to slit his throat, “she would have taken off my head.”

We realized that this is part of what the *Profession of Adventuring* would be. An expedition into the dangerous wilderness as the party moved from one village to another. And when the adventurers arrived in each new village, they would sit around a fire, weave a story of their exploits, and amaze the townspeople. In exchange for the bronze-age equivalent of premiere movie night, they would be given provisions, lodging, and status. I realized this had been the answer to the problem I gave up on a few years back. As questers, the players want to finish the job quickly and efficiently. But by inserting the expectation of needing to entertain the village, the players' focus changes to wanting to make a spectacular show of what they're doing. They become excited to regale the tale they'll have of the battle, and it becomes as fun as battle itself. And best of all, it was coming through as a social interaction.

### HOW DOES THIS HELP A DM?

Role-play makes a tabletop RPG interesting, and it's why we have human DMs instead of machines. It's satisfying when a player becomes so immersed in their character that they begin making the decisions the character would make, instead of what may be the more intelligent decisions the player might want to make. And when we see this behavior as DMs, we typically must conceive of a way to reward it. As mentioned before, my solution to this was to award bonus experience to player characters that did awesome things at the end of the session. However, with the *Profession of Adventuring*, the players start making more sub-optimal choices in the interest of creating a cooler story, such as using a less damaging but flashier attack or by spending inventory space on kill trophies instead of more worthwhile loot. And they

do it to get real, tangible in-game rewards from the villages they come to: “Great story Keagor! With 13 charisma and +2 storytelling, you gained 10 plus... [rolls]...5 fans and earned the rank of Budding Star throughout the country. You enjoy a night of the finest pleasures the village can offer and wake up feeling rejuvenated.”

In the same vein, this is what makes charismatic stats worth something to Keagor the Berserker. Investing in a non-combat stat might make the fight against the Old Hag harder, but boy would he be able to blow the minds of the village folk when he came back with her head. The gash he earns from being slightly weaker in that fight would only make that story even more incredible, and potentially earn greater rewards down the road. What I had previously considered an underwhelming stat had become integral to every character in a party as they step into the light to brag about their exploits. This drove out the problem of the one singular “speaker.” Besides, I've always loved the concept of things like battlemages or evasion tanks and similar oxymoronic archetypes, so being able to provide a mechanically sensible way to play a charismatic berserker was a huge plus.

Finally, it was great to see the players in the storytelling seat. The subject of these events already transpired, taking a lot of the pressure off the players as they worried less about being sharp-tongued or figuring out what to say. Instead, they can focus on telling everyone how cool they saw themselves, which is easy and fun to talk about. So if you're looking to give your session a little extra kick, or want to let your players drive your content for a bit, consider leveraging their own desire to be awesome. 🌌





# ART SHOWCASE: KEVIN CATALAN

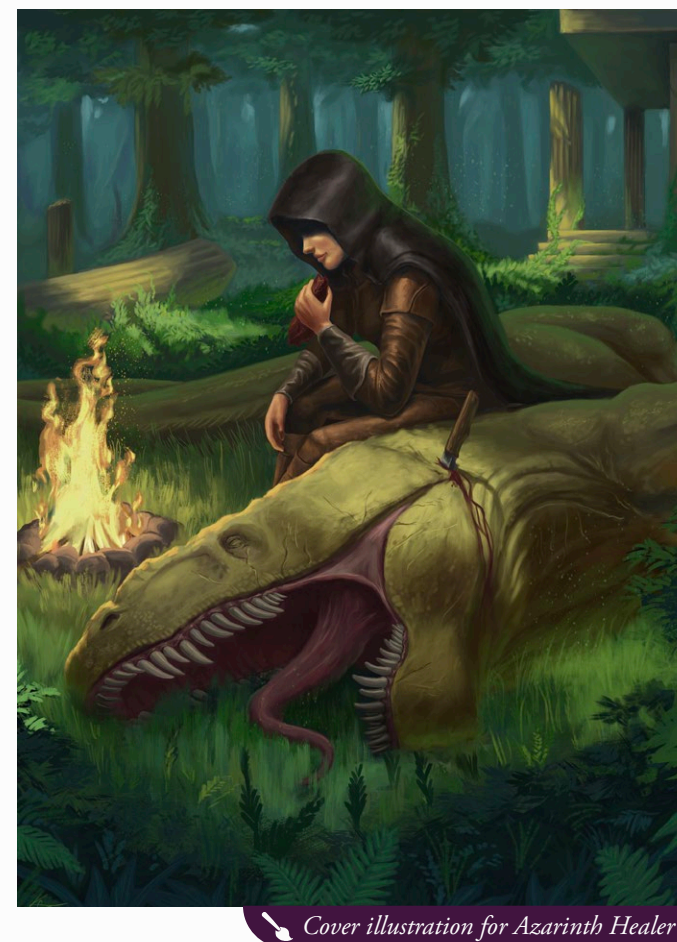
Curated by Zaivy Luke-Aleman


ART   
INTERVIEW   
FANTASY 

*Kevin Catalan is the artist behind the cover of Azarinth Healer by Rhaegar. We met up to talk about his artistic process and upcoming projects.*

Hello, my name is Kevin Catalan, and I am a freelance illustrator and concept artist. I'm from a small city in Georgia called Rocky Face and have been drawing my entire life. I have a passion for fantastical art and aim to create worlds that can immerse the viewer. I have a BFA in Illustration from the Savannah College of Art and Design, and most of the art I make is digital.

I've always had a fascination with stories of other worlds inhabited by unique beings and creatures. I grew up playing games like Legend of Zelda and Metroid, and I would always go and try to draw my own creatures that would fit in those worlds. With the internet, I'd spend hours just reading up lore on the wikis. But for me, there was something about making worlds that don't exist and being able to offer anyone a story or a visual experience that they just wouldn't be able to have in real life. Giant monsters, dragons, dinosaurs...they're all just so cool, so I wanted to draw them as much as I can.



 Cover illustration for Azarinth Healer

*What are some of the worldbuilding ideas behind these illustrations?*

Overall, I tried approaching my world mostly from a visual perspective. The initial idea was to use it to make a portfolio with art that is all part of the same project so it would be consistent. I quickly got so excited while making it and decided to try and build a world completely. I'm designing my world as if it would be for my dream game. It takes elements from several of my favorite video games and book series as well as my own ideas. I love gritty, realistic dark fantasy, so that is the overall vibe of this world, which will be filled with all sorts of dangerous creatures and hazards. And it will have a balance of realism and high fantasy. I'm still pretty early on in all the writing, so what that means exactly, I have yet to figure out.

*What are some things unique to this world that you're building? The Ferid Reborn quickly comes to mind, but maybe you could elaborate on these qualities.*

So this world would ideally be for some kind of RPG. The player gets to choose from a list of classic RPG classes like warrior, fighter, mage, cleric, etc. For me, I'd love to expand on various aspects from some of my favorite games like *Dark Souls* and *The Witcher*. I'm making more types of magic, new kinds of biomes or levels to explore, and of course—my favorite part—unique enemies. It would be a hostile world but still habitable with towns, cities, and castles. And a certain concept I'm playing around with is the presence of the ruins of a Mycenaean- or Atlantean-like civilization. It would be cool for the player to explore underground dungeons and learn about what happened to these people as well as earn artifacts, weapons, and armor.

The last, somewhat unique aspect of this world are the angels. While I'm still in the process of writing the creation story, all that is left of the divine beings, which may include gods, are the angels. And these are really Lovecraftian, cosmic beings whose nature is mysterious. But I still want to play with the classic imagery of winged humanoids. We'll see how that goes.

*Sound like fun! I'm looking forward to seeing how that develops. I also want to talk about the technical aspects of your art. What tools do you use to craft your work?*

This past year, I've been working almost exclusively in Procreate, an app on the iPad Pro. Before that, I made all my digital artwork on Photoshop CC using a Wacom Intuos pen tablet. I don't really do any kind of traditional drawing anymore except for occasional sketching in my sketchbook. I work mostly in graphite. I've just gotten so used to digital art, and its efficiency and flexibility are what really matters to me.

*And when you're creating your art in your tablet, what is the process like?*

I always start out with a line sketch. Depending on how comfortable I am with the subject, it'll either be really clean and detailed so I don't mess up during the painting process, or it will be really fast and loose because I can paint confidently. I have somewhat of a classical painting process; I don't really use different layer modes like 'multiply' or 'overlay,' and I paint as if I were on canvas using





the eyedropper tool to help blend my colors. The process also lets me work on fewer layers so it all doesn't get over complicated. I have a pretty large library of art from lots of my favorite artists that I always refer back to when learning how to render certain textures or items.

*What advice can you give to people looking to do work similar to yours?*

Study your fundamentals. I know that's incredibly vague but when I say that, I mean when you have an understanding of how to draw things in perspective, render light on form, or imply texture, it really makes all the difference in the world. It doesn't matter how good you are at shading and rendering; if your initial drawing of a fish isn't done well to begin with, it won't look good. But if you know what you're doing, a simple sketch of a fish will look fantastic. Another example is anatomy. You can't fix anatomy with all the shading in the world. So I think that would be a good place to start for people aiming to create realistic work similar to mine. That being said, I still have an incredible amount left to learn myself.

*Solid advice. Are there any pieces featured in this issue you'd like to give us some more insight to?*

Sure, one of my personal favorites is the three-eyed mage, Martinson (*above*). I made the first sketch of him back in 2016 and ended up liking it so much I made several more sketches of him until I finally decided to create a full illustration. He's a necromancer that has gone mad and is somewhat immortal. The skulls that wrap around his neck don't really have a purpose, and the third eye is a mutation he mysteriously had. The painting was made in Photoshop, and my aim was to practice making a full, card art style image (which I don't do as often as I should) and to practice lighting, hence the bright magic coming off his hands. I'm hoping I can make another painting like this soon.

And he wasn't originally going to be a part of my world, but as I develop it more, I think I might be able to fit him in. He's around 10-12 feet tall and that would make for a cool boss fight.

*It seems like your world has this balance between these bright landscapes and dark, mysterious places. Why don't you tell me a bit more about that. How does it relate to the story of your world?*

I think, over the past year or so, I've been really liking bright saturated art, and it was something that I wanted to implement into my own art. The thing



Fetid Reborn |

about dark fantasy is that it can sometimes get very dull and bleak very quickly. And I would like to be able to use color to offset that and to add some flavor to classic fantasy tropes. The fetid reborn, for example, are very iridescent, and I plan on making more creatures similar to them be even more saturated with color.

*Oh, that sounds like a fun twist to classic dark fantasy. I'd love to see how that turns out. I know you're still in the beginning of creating your story, but would you care to describe the storyline a bit more?*

I kind of start making this world by creating some characters, creatures, and sketches of locations. I just created places where a player can explore and simply fight stuff. I'm still in the process of writing an actual narrative. But I'm hoping that while I flesh out the world, it'll be easier to write a story from it. One potential idea is that there is a fallen angel in a sunken, Atlantean city that spreads a corruption known as the Rot all around. It's pretty cliché, and I wouldn't want it to be the main story, but it is an

idea I want to play around with. And then there's also all the stuff going on with the Angelic church in the capital, Raendor. The church is starting to get involved with some pretty dark experiments in their goal to achieve transcendence. But we'll see how all that develops.

I think what excites me will be getting to the unique areas and encountering the various foes that would stand in the way of the player on their quest. The "late game," if you will. There's something about my process where I feel like I have to start simple by designing stuff like the common people, soldiers, small enemies, and the "tame" locations. I'm excited to get to designing the dungeons, ruins, really powerful creatures and villains, and, hopefully, some crazy cosmic entities that don't make any sense.



*Awesome! Thank you so much! Is there anything else you'd like to say to our readers?*

Thank you very much for showing interest in my art. It really encourages me to continue pursuing this project. It's all very exciting. I'm always open to talking about art if anyone wants to or if anyone has any questions. Thank you for having me! 🌜

*Kevin Catalan can be found on his [website](#), [Instagram](#), or [Behance](#), where he posts his artwork.*

*This interview was edited for Worldbuilding Magazine.*

*Special thanks to Kevin for taking the time to speak with us and share a bit about their work. If you have an illustrated world of your own, [apply for one of our future art features](#).*



## STAFF PICKS

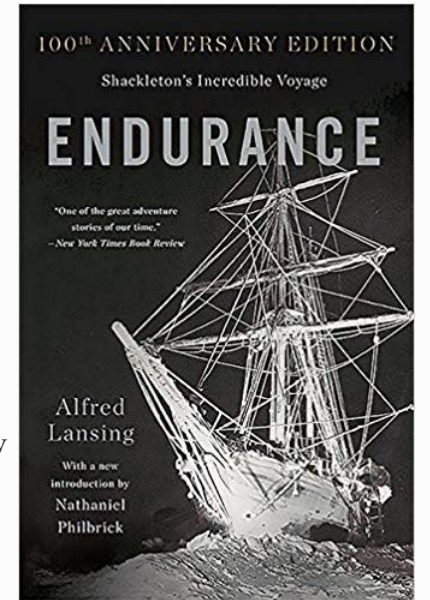
**Title Name:** *The Wolf of Wall Street*  
**Director:** Martin Scorsese  
**Media:** Film  
**MPAA Rating:** R  
**Picked by:** B.K. Bass

*The Wolf of Wall Street* is the amazing true story of Wall Street trader Jordan Belfort, played by Leonardo DiCaprio. Based on the autobiography of the same name, this film is so over the top you might think most of it was embellished. In fact, Belfort's rise to power and the life of 1990s corporate decadence is mostly true! If you've ever wanted a peek behind the closed doors of the stock market, don't miss this movie!



**Title Name:** *Endurance*  
**Author:** Alfred Lansing  
**Media:** Book  
**Picked by:** Robert Meegan

Not merely the greatest adventure ever written, this is the true story of how Ernest Shackleton set out in 1914 to cross Antarctica, only to see his ship crushed in the ice. Through amazing navigation and sailing skills, as well as limitless courage, all twenty-eight members of the crew managed to return to safety. Lansing used the original diaries and interviews of the crew to write a book that will keep you reading well past your bedtime.



**Title Name:** *Extremities*  
**Developer:** Wendover Productions / Sam Denby  
**Media:** Podcast  
**Picked by:** Adam Bassett

Wendover Productions, run by Sam Denby, works to explain how our world works through short and informative videos. *Extremities*, a podcast that first aired in June 2019, explores the most extreme places people live. Season one explored Pitcairn Island, a remote island in the South Pacific with a population of about 50 people. Season two discussed Svalbard, a Norwegian archipelago with highly unique international laws. As Sam discusses the history of how people came to settle in these remote locations and how they live today, worldbuilders may find inspiration in these seldom discussed locations.



# BLOOD FOR MONEY: THE ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION OF THE MERCENARY PROFESSION

by B.K. Bass

Art by Adam Bassett

*“Diplomacy without arms is like music  
without instruments.”*

— Frederick the Great,  
Prussian King (1712-1786)

Everybody has likely heard the phrase “the world’s oldest profession” associated with prostitution. However, that phrase originates from the 1889 short story “On the City Wall” by Rudyard Kipling. While there are ancient references to the occupation of prostitution, such as brothels in ancient Rome and biblical references like King Solomon’s “three hundred concubines,” there are even older references to another profession: the mercenary soldier.<sup>1</sup>

What if prostitution isn’t the world’s oldest profession? One could assume that as far back as the paleolithic era, individuals would engage in violence not to ensure their own survival, but rather for a share of the spoils resulting from said actions. The same could be said for trading intimate favors for food, shelter, or other gains. So, the mystery of the world’s oldest profession may be lost in the shroud of the past. What one cannot deny is that as long as mankind has existed, we have been killing each other for a variety of reasons; be they the protection of our own property and communities or some sort of personal gain.

Some may argue that killing for personal gain is nothing more than murder. While this is an interesting question to explore, we’ll leave that aspect to the philosophers. Rather, we will be exploring the history of the profession, and how it evolved from an ad hoc phenomenon in the bronze age to an international establishment by the fourteenth century CE. We will establish what defines a mercenary, explore the history of the

occupation in Western cultures throughout the ages, and identify some landmark trends from the history of this profession. Then, we will look at how we can apply what we learn in our worldbuilding.

## WHAT IS A MERCENARY?

From the rogue sellsword to companies of trained soldiers fighting to fill their pockets, the term *mercenary* can bring a lot of images to mind both from our own history and the fictional worlds we enjoy spending time in. What is the line in the sand that separates the greedy scoundrel from the professional soldier? According to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, a mercenary is a “hired professional soldier who fights for any state or nation without regard to political interests or issues.”<sup>2</sup>

From this, we can say that our lone sellsword is as much a mercenary as a member of an organization specializing in warfare-for-hire. There are quite a few synonyms for mercenary in the English language that would apply to the individual: *gun for hire*, *soldier of fortune*, and so on. When it comes to organizations, the term *mercenary company* comes to mind. Another common term from history is *free company*, used from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> centuries CE for private armies who sold their services to various entities. The word *free* in the name refers to the fact that they were free of any political allegiances.<sup>3</sup> No matter what they are called though, a mercenary can be considered any entity which fights for profit rather than allegiances or ideals.

HISTORY ▲

WARFARE ⚔

POLITICS ■

## ANCIENT SPEARS FROM EASTERN LANDS

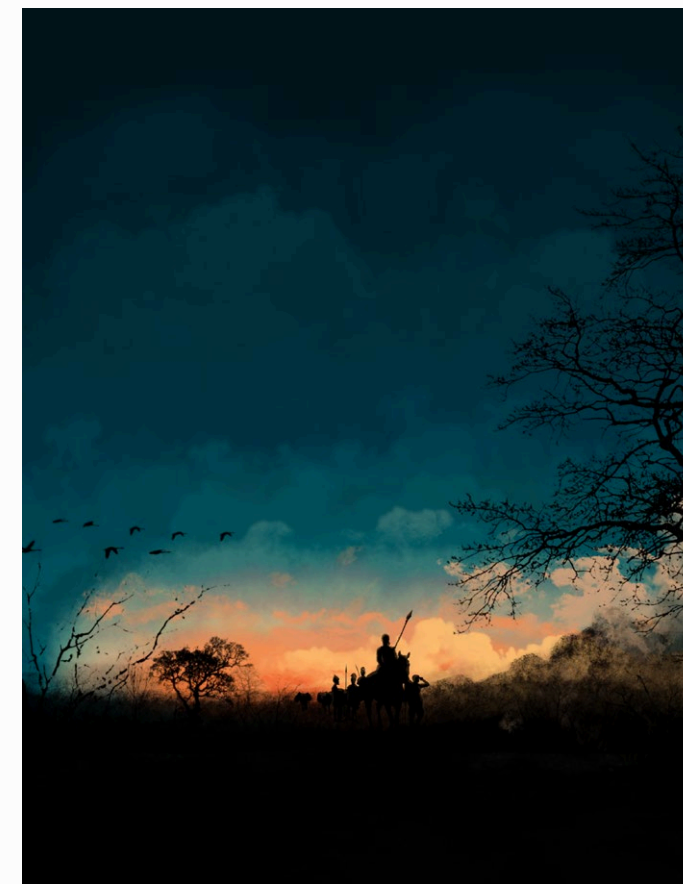
The earliest recorded references of mercenaries come from the *Amarna Letters*, a series of three hundred and fifty tablets dating as far back as 2500 BCE. The first of these were discovered in 1887 CE in the ancient Egyptian city of Akhetaten. Archaeologists discovered the letters were correspondences between leaders of Egypt, Babylon, Hatti, Mitanni, and Assyria; among others. These cultures controlled the eastern Mediterranean, ranging from modern day Egypt to Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. In the Amarna Letters, a group of mysterious nomads from the far east are described by various individuals from across the region. There are numerous references to them ranging throughout the area.<sup>4</sup>

These people were referred to as the *Apiru* by the Egyptians, the *SA. GAZ* (one who smashes sinew) by the Sumerians, and the *Habiru* by the Akkadians. The word Habiru is closely related in Akkadian to terms for plunderer (*habbatu*) and murderer (*saggasu*). The Akkadian *saggasu* is derivative of the Sumerian *SA. GAZ*, and typically referred to small bands of men who would sell their services as warriors.<sup>5</sup> This connection may be circumstantial at best, but a word is a powerful thing. In a time where organized languages were still developing and people were trying to make sense of the world around them, naming an entire culture of nomads wandering into your land would not have been done without some thought behind it.

We can also assume from the other monikers associated with the *Apiru* (plunderer, murderer) that their arrival in the Middle East was not a pleasant event for anybody. Likely, instead of suffering these warlike nomads to wreak havoc on their own lands, rulers would have sought out opportunities to direct the aggressions of these nomadic marauders towards an enemy state in exchange for the promise of reaping the spoils of war. The first documented account of such an occurrence dates to 2350 BCE. King Sargon of Akkad hired upwards of five thousand men from the borders of his kingdom to police his own lands. He did not wish to quell uprisings with his own troops, which would have led to his own people fighting amongst themselves. Rather, he chose to task outsiders with the grim work. Likewise, Egyptian

kings hired Medjay Numidians for the same purpose, and by the time of the New Kingdom from the fifteenth to eleventh centuries BCE, the Medjay had become the police force of Egypt.<sup>6</sup>

By the fourteenth century BCE, the *Habiru* once again appear in the historical records. By this time, they had established themselves as recognized mercenaries and fought for many kingdoms in the Middle East. Even the renowned biblical general David was said to be a member of the *Habiru* tribe. By 1050 BCE, mention of these people ceased and they seemed to have disappeared.<sup>6</sup> However, some believe that the *Habiru* did not disappear from the face of the earth, but rather these plunderers and mercenaries settled into an agrarian existence in the region of Jerusalem. The similarities between the names “*Habiru*” and “*Hebrew*” are remarkable, and there are other aspects to consider as well. The settlement of the Hebrew is thought to have occurred around 1200 BCE, which would coincide with the last mention of the *Habiru* just fifty years later. Also, there are several references to the *Habiru* as being fugitive slaves, a narrative that is strikingly similar to the Exodus story of the Hebrew people.<sup>7</sup> Many do not wish to consider the origin of the Israelites to





be a marauding band of nomads pillaging their way through the ancient world for over a thousand years before settling down, but the evidence to support this theory can not be discarded out of hand.

### SWORDS AND SANDALS

For anybody developing a setting with a bronze age society, there are a few key take-aways here that can help us consider mercenaries in a swords and sandals setting. They can also give us some insight into the interactions of political entities during this era.

First of all, we see more than one example of leaders not wishing to set their own people against each other. Hiring foreign mercenaries to put down rebellions, or even simply to act as a police force, makes sense in a lot of ways. Preventing infighting among the populace is one advantage to this, and the impartiality of a policing body that is not interacting with their own neighbors and families would be another.

Secondly, one might take the example of the Habiru as the birth of a mercenary society being one born out of the need to divert a hostile force. Faced with the encroachment of violent nomads into his lands, a leader may see the only way to preserve the peace in his own kingdom may be directing these people against another political body. Perhaps he will even provide them with the means to victory, or simply promise greater spoils in other lands.

We also see more of the political landscape from the example of the Amarna Letters. Despite being small, remote cultures that have been newly established and that speak different languages; there is a historical precedent for diplomatic discourse between them. Not only did these leaders engender peaceful relationships between one another, but they also used these letters to spread news across their growing domains and share information with their neighbors.

Finally, the possible evolution of the Habiru people into the Hebrew culture is an example where an entire nomadic warrior culture might undergo a dramatic transformation and settle down into a more sedentary existence. Perhaps they might be tasked to deposing the enemy of their patron and find themselves suddenly occupying a space in which they feel they

can make better lives for themselves. On the other hand, they could simply wander into a land that is unsettled and which provides the necessary resources for them to support themselves without pillaging others. This cultural shift in itself would make for a fascinating narrative.

### PHALANX FOR SALE

As ancient history gave way to classical antiquity, kingdoms grew and their borders began to press upon one another. Warfare became a more common part of life, and the need for professional soldiers increased. Nowhere was this truer than in classical Hellas (modern-day Greece), where the various city-states were at almost constant war with one another.

Indeed, it is said that every man in the Hellenic world was required to be either a soldier or a sailor in addition to his primary occupation. Even the famed poet Homer bore a pike at the Battle of Delium in 424 BCE. This resulted in an entire populace that had a secondary occupation to fall back upon should times become tough, and so they did for the ancient Hellenes. First inspired by economic pressure and agricultural hardships, and later from the political ramifications following the First Peloponnesian War, many fled their homeland in search of opportunities abroad. Hellenic men sold their services as warriors in lands as widespread as Persia, Egypt, and even Syracuse.<sup>8</sup>

Yes, Hellenic men fought for Persia despite generations of conflict between the two cultures. Even in the fifth century BCE, when all the Hellenic world lived under the shadow of encroaching Persian aggression, there are records of Hellenes serving with their cultural rivals. Aesop, Herodotus, and Aristotle have all written of these warriors who fought for the enemy. The result of this situation varied for the participants. Oft times the profession of the mercenary was respected, and those who survived battle could return to their old homes with their newfound fortunes. Other times, such as with the case of the mercenary general Xenophon, those who fought for the enemy would be exiled from their homes.<sup>9</sup>

We can see from these disparate receptions that the profession of the mercenary during the classical





period was not universally recognized or respected in the Hellenic world. Indeed, it was not until the campaigns of Alexander the Great from 334 to 323 BCE that both the armies of Alexander and the Persians used organized units of mercenaries in great numbers. Even then, there was still not a specific word to represent the profession. A common term used was *mithophoros*, which simply means “one who serves.” Other terms used were *epikouros* (guardian) and *xenos* (foreigner).<sup>10</sup>

If the mercenary was not a recognized profession, why did so many Hellenic men choose to take up the spear abroad rather than simply settling new lands? Many argue the only thing needed to create an environment for mercenaries is the threat of war, men desperate to better their situation, and someone willing to pay them to fight. The Hellenic region is one of rough terrain that is not ideally suited to widespread agriculture, and during the classical age bred a population that the land was unable to sustain. This led to an abundance of wage-earners who were unable to support themselves and their families. Perhaps more than this, the constant state of war both from within and without the region created a need for professional soldiers. None were considered more professional or desirable than the Hellenic hoplite phalanx. This demand created opportunity for the desperate to better themselves not only through daily wages, but through plunder. Indeed, a man who survived several years of service as a mercenary might find himself enriched enough to live comfortably for the rest of his life.<sup>11</sup>

### BORN OF NECESSITY

In studying the classical Hellenic world, we can see a situation that was ripe for the development of the mercenary profession. In our own worlds, perhaps the profession of the mercenary is likewise not a widespread or recognized establishment. Drawing inspiration from the stories of the Hellenes, we can see that there are two primary factors that can give birth of the mercenary occupation: desperate people and a need for more soldiers.

For some, throwing their lives into danger in return for the promise of coin might—by itself—be a worthwhile prospect. For most however, self-preservation is a very powerful motivator. For farmers

and herders to suddenly leave their homes and fight in distant lands for a foreign army, there must be a motivating factor more powerful than simply the accumulation of wealth. The threat of starvation, political ostracization, or simply the lack of no other options would all be more plausible reasons for an individual to willingly face the hardships of warfare and put their lives in danger.

Also, and potentially more importantly, there needs to be a demand for these men. While desperation might be the catalyst to drive men to sell their services as soldiers, war is the environment which provides the opportunity for professional warriors to attempt to better their situation. Constant war, more so, causes situations where populations have been depleted and armies cannot be reinforced from their own citizenry. What other reasons might there be for a state to hire mercenaries in your world? This could be a great way to flesh out a culture or create an interesting narrative element. Are the people a pacifist culture, and therefore unable or unwilling to fight? Is the location of the war unsuited to the citizenry of the state, such as some sort of off-world crusade in a science fiction setting?

Combining these two factors, a perfect storm of supply and demand created the first professional soldiers for hire in classical Hellas. In our own worlds, should we wish to birth the profession of the mercenary, a similar combination of desperation and necessity would be an ideal environment to breed our own fledgling mercenaries.

### THE NEW CITY

While the Hellenic poleis were fighting amongst themselves and staving off repeated incursions by the Persian Empire during the Peloponnesian Wars, another culture was growing in northern Africa. Called Qrt-ḥdšt by its Phoenician founders in Tyre, the name translates to “new city.”<sup>12</sup> From this name, we can assume this far flung colony was likely seen as a new Tyre in the west.

Romans knew the new city as *Carthāgō*, and today we refer to it as Carthage. Contemporary historians place the founding of Carthage in the late ninth century BCE, around 814 BCE according to Timaeus of Tauromenium (a city in Sicily) and 825 BCE

according to Marcus Junianus Justinus Frontinus of Rome. The city grew into a central hub of trade for the western colonies of the Phoenician Empire over the next two and a half centuries. After the fall of Tyre to Babylon in 575 BCE, the colonies were cut off and Carthage became the center of the empire’s western holdings; the heart of a new empire in practice, if not in name. Over the next three hundred years Carthage would support the former colonies, and what began as a disparate collection of isolated settlements grew into a de facto empire. While the city remained focused on mercantile endeavors, they fought wars over the years against the likes of Syracuse, Sparta, and Epirus.<sup>13</sup>

What may have lead to the prominent use of mercenaries by Carthage? It was likely caused by the dichotomy of a mercantile city focused on trade finding itself at the heart of an empire constantly at war. By the time of the First Punic War with Rome in 241 BCE, the Carthaginian armies consisted of large numbers of hired soldiers representing a broad variety of cultures, languages, and backgrounds. The system for hiring, training, and controlling the mercenary forces was all handled by the Carthaginian generals; leading to a generally hands-off approach and little direct supervision of the hired soldiers. Their loyalty was ensured in part by the promise of plunder from successful battles, and by retaining hostages in the form of family members of the mercenaries themselves. This informal system of control failed in 240 BCE and lead to a mercenary uprising that would last three years, conquer much of North Africa, and nearly threaten the security of the city of Carthage itself.<sup>14</sup>

The conflict that ensued would come to be considered one of the most brutal of its era. An army of 20,000 mercenaries had been victorious in Sicily against the Romans, but returned to Carthage after the treaty was signed to end the First Punic War. The coffers of the city were already strained at this point, and after paying war reparations to the Romans, the Carthaginian senate found that it could not pay what was due to the mercenaries. The army openly attacked the holdings of the empire, and over time other malcontents joined their ranks. The rebel army swelled to 50,000 men by the height of the war. Although there were a number of atrocities committed by both sides of the conflict, the one that

ended the war illustrates the reason why the Romans would later call it the Truceless War—a moniker given to the conflict because there was no desire by either side to negotiate a peace. Hamilcar Barca, father of the famed Hannibal Barca who would later march his own mercenary army over the Alps to invade the Roman heartland, trapped 40,000 men of the rebel army in a canyon called “The Saw” in 239 BCE. Here, he starved out the rebels until they surrendered. Following this, he had every last man executed; then defeated the remainder of the turncoat mercenaries at Tunis.<sup>15</sup>

## ...THERE ARE TWO PRIMARY FACTORS THAT CAN GIVE BIRTH TO THE MERCENARY POSITION: DESPERATE PEOPLE AND A NEED FOR MORE SOLDIERS.

After the end of the Truceless War, Hamilcar Barca set about reforming Carthage’s system of recruiting, training, and overseeing their mercenary forces. Rather than administrating solely through the central government and generalship, Hamilcar established a Carthaginian officer corps to decentralize these tasks. Each group of mercenaries would be assigned a commander who would not only lead them on campaign, but also oversee distributing their pay; which would help to solidify their loyalty to their commander. He also ensured that they were occupied with constant battle far from the center of the empire thanks to his conquest of Iberia. Through these reforms, Hamilcar ensured the mercenary armies of Carthage were well organized, loyal, and had their aggression directed away from the Carthaginian heartland by the outbreak of the Second Punic War in 201 BCE.<sup>14</sup>



## COIN, ALLEGIANCE, AND PACIFICATION

There are a few lessons to be learned from the Carthaginian's early experiences in fielding a large mercenary force. It may not be enough to simply say our fictional culture employs mercenaries. Rather, we should consider how they are paid, how their loyalty is ensured, and what the consequences may be should the system break down.

While it is obvious that paying mercenaries is important, the type and manner of payment is an important topic to consider. The promise of plunder was not original to the Carthaginians. Looking back at the Habiru and Hellenic mercenaries, we see that this was a common method of remuneration for military service. The mercenaries were also due a salary, however, and it was when this could not be paid that the army rebelled. Will our cultures rely more on payment of a set salary or the promise of plunder? Will men willingly risk their lives on the chance of fortune, or would they be more likely to serve for a steady income?

This branches out into another factor to consider: what is the economy of the employing state like? Carthage was a mercantile empire focused on trade, and therefore had at its disposal a healthy economy from which to hire foreign soldiers. Looking back again to Hellas, where the economy was so poor that many citizens hired themselves out to the enemy of their homeland, we see a need to rely upon the native population rather than mercenaries. If we're to say our fictional state is hiring mercenaries, we need to ensure their economic situation enables them to compensate those that fight for them.

As far as securing the loyalty of the troops, one would hope that steady payment might be enough. However, Carthage's early attempts to ensure this through taking family members of the soldiers as hostages opens a door to considering other options. The short leap from here would be any assortment of threats of reprisal, from the direct family member to even an attack on the mercenaries' homelands. We might also consider some other form of collateral to be held by the state and returned upon completion

of the mercenary contract. This could be an item of value or perhaps even a certain amount of currency.

Finally, we might wish to consider the consequences should the system break down. The story of the Truceless War is an incredible tale of brutal warfare. Exploring a similar idea in our own narratives would make for some gripping storytelling. On the other hand, what might be the consequences should a group of mercenaries fail to carry out their end of the arrangement? Would they then be hunted down by the armies of the state? Also, if the state is relying on a large mercenary force, are they able to field a citizen army large enough to achieve what Hamilcar Barca did? Could the employees become the conquerors instead?

## THE GLORY OF ROME

According to legend, Rome was founded by the brothers Romulus and Remus in 753 BCE. The city quickly grew to become an influential force in the central Italian peninsula. Contact with the Etruscans around 600 BCE brought with it cultural influences and advances in trade, and from these Rome would quickly grow from a trading town into a thriving economic powerhouse. In 509 BCE the last Roman king—Tarquin the Proud—was deposed following a tyrannical twenty-six year reign, dominated by constant construction projects that taxed the citizens of Rome both in coin and labor. Following this, Lucius Junius Brutus established the Roman Republic, a political body that would soon change the face of the world.<sup>16</sup>

For most of its early history, the Roman republic relied on a citizen militia for waging its wars of conquest over the other Italic tribes, and even through the Punic Wars. When Gaius Marius was appointed Consul in 107 BCE, however, he reorganized the Roman military in what is known as the Marius Reforms. The military became a force of full-time professional volunteers, who served in exchange for a regular wage. As the territory of the republic expanded, it had to rely more and more upon volunteers from conquered lands to bolster its ranks. These *auxiliaries*, although drawn from people not of Roman heritage, still served as members of

the Roman military and served under the politician-generals of the Republic in the same way as soldiers from Rome did. They came from lands which had been absorbed by the Empire, and the men were taught the Roman ways by their commanders and peers; or *Romanized*. In essence, these former foreigners were now members of the Roman Empire and were fighting for their new political overlords.<sup>17</sup>

Over the next two hundred years, Rome would continue to enlist foreign warriors into the ranks of the auxiliary, but it would also begin to employ foreign mercenaries. As the Empire reached its extreme northern border with the building of Hadrian's Wall in Britannia circa 122-128 CE, we see the first evidence of this. There have been archaeological artifacts found across England in Bicester, Burgh-by-Sands, Carrawburgh, Cirencester, Glossop, Hexham, Manchester and Papcastle of Frisian soldiers—natives of the Germanic Rhineland—who fought in and occupied this land. The empire had never successfully conquered lands east of the Rhine River, and the Frisians were known by the Romans as *transrhenana gens*, or “the people on the other side of the Rhine.” These were foreign fighters who had not be subjugated by Rome, but rather had volunteered to fight for the Empire in exchange for pay and plunder.<sup>18</sup>

As the Roman Empire grew, it became impossible for the citizens of Rome to provide armies sizeable enough to police and defend territory spanning from England to Egypt. During the rise of the empire, Roman citizenry contributed around sixty-five percent of the imperial soldiers. By the fifth century CE, this had been reduced to around one percent. While Romans still lead the armies of Rome, the soldiers consisted of Germans, Goths, and other foreign soldiers. Some were Romanized members of the auxiliary, while others served as mercenaries. This reliance on foreign soldiers became part of the downfall of the empire. When Clermont was besieged by the Goths in 471 CE, there was no Roman army to defend the city. Sidonius Apollinaris, Bishop of Clermont at the time, chronicled the siege and the city's rescue by the arrival of a small cavalry force lead by Ecdicius. He did not have to ask in his chronicle what had become of the Roman army that was supposed to be defending Clermont, because the Goths *were* the Roman army.<sup>19</sup>

## EVERYBODY WANTS TO RULE THE WORLD

Rome faced a situation similar to that of Carthage during The Truceless War, but on a titanic scale. Eventually, their mercenaries turned on the state. Why even bother, then? Again, the mercenary profession was born of necessity. Rome simply became too large; an empire consisting more of foreigners than actual Romans.

If we want to include a massive empire in our own worldbuilding, we need look no further than the Roman Empire for an important lesson in the building of our imperial army. There's not going to be enough citizens from the heartland to maintain an effective army across this wide swath of territory. Even if every able-bodied man had been handed a weapon and sent to the frontier, there would have not been enough manpower to effectively secure the borders and police all the land within them. And, this would have effectively gutted the heart of the empire of farmers, craftsmen, theologians, scholars, and politicians.

Let's take a hypothetical empire and call it the Hykorian Empire. When developing the history of it, we can assume that Hykoria was once a city-state or small kingdom. Let's say the empire grew by conquering the land around it over a thousand years. Perhaps the people from the early campaigns now consider themselves Hykorian, but what of those recently conquered? Do those in the land of Jurani, subjugated just a hundred years ago, consider themselves Hykorian or Juranian? How are the Juranians viewed by those in the heart of the empire, who can trace their lineage back a thousand years to its founding? Like Rome, Hykoria will need to enlist Juranians into their army. The larger our empire, the more “foreign” troops will be part of the army. Whether they be mercenaries, conscripts, or volunteers is up to us to decide, but the ramifications of a multi-ethnic and multicultural military force must still be considered.

<sup>16</sup>\* For more about the feudal system, see my article "Feudal Economics" in Volume 3, Issue 5 of Worldbuilding Magazine.



## RISE OF THE MERCENARY COMPANY

After the fall of the Roman Empire, Europe was cast into what would become known as the Dark Ages. During this time, tribalism grew to dominance once again and military organization was focused more on local events than the global stage. Individual warlords would rally those who lived near them, and armies consisted primarily of farmers who would trade the pitchfork for the spear in times of need.

This tendency to organize military efforts around local militias rather than professional soldiers continued into the middle-ages, and eventually grew into the *feudal system* which governed both the economy and military of Europe for nearly a thousand years.<sup>1\*</sup> Under the feudal system, wealthy landholders were expected to arm themselves with the best equipment they could afford, often including horses, and provide service to whichever lord they swore allegiance to. The peasantry who lived under the rule of these landholders likewise were expected to take up arms when the lord called them to do so. This system created a core force of well-armed and well-trained soldiers consisting of the nobility and their own household guard, supported by a more numerous citizen militia. As there was no central organization for training troops—and each man was armed with what he could afford—the majority of the armies of the early medieval period consisted of poorly-armed men who were more skilled on the fields of a farm than the fields of battle.<sup>20</sup>

This focus on local allegiances changed in the tenth century as state leaders started turning their attention to more global affairs. The Norman invasion of England provides one of the first documented examples of mercenary service since the fall of Rome. Duke William of Normandy hired soldiers from Brittany, Flanders, Champagne, and Italy in preparation for the invasion. His son, William II, would go on to be referred to as “*militum mercator et solidator*”, or “a great buyer and purveyor of soldiers.” The shift from hiring individual warriors to organized contracting of mercenaries may have first occurred in 1101 CE. Robert of Flanders provided Henry I of England with 1,000 Flemish knights for service in England and Normandy, for which he was paid a fee of five hundred pounds sterling. This likely

makes Robert of Flanders one of the first professional mercenary contractors in history.<sup>21</sup>

For over five hundred years, the medieval knight ruled the battlefield. They were armed and armored with the best equipment money can buy, trained their entire lives for battle, and fought astride massive warhorses. In the fourteenth century CE, all of this changed when gunpowder grew to more prominent usage in battle. While the common man could hardly compete toe-to-toe with a knight, a cannon or musket could easily even the odds. No longer was wealth and training the deciding factor on the battlefield. It was now firepower. For the next two hundred years, war would change drastically. By the Military Revolution of the sixteenth century CE, armies had grown from thousands of men to tens of thousands, and cavalry charges had given way to ranks of musket-armed infantry as the primary force on the battlefield. As battle demanded more men, and war transformed from short local affairs to international struggles of attrition, professional mercenary companies were founded in a new market where nations offered contracts for thousands of men at a time. During this age, the Swiss, Germans, and Italians all became purveyors of entire companies of professional soldiers for foreign powers.<sup>22</sup>

It's very appealing to insert companies of thousands of mercenaries into our fantasy worlds, even should they be set in the Bronze, Iron, or Dark Age-inspired societies. The Unsullied and The Golden Company of George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series immediately spring to mind as examples of organized mercenary companies and contractors in such a fantasy setting.

However, we should take a moment to reflect on what birthed the formation of such companies in our own history.

Warfare throughout history was dominated by those with skill at arms. Lifetimes of training were required to become a competent warrior, and those with little skill in these matters rarely had a long career at it. Also, what necessitates a large force of mercenaries? Massive battles across an international stage fought by men who could be trained in months rather than years created a shift in military history that birthed the modern mercenary company.

If the kingdoms or states in your world are waging small local wars, there may not be a need for a mercenary contractor to provide an entire army. On the other hand, should a peaceful nation be suddenly invaded they might encounter such a need. Does this happen often enough that the mercenary company already exists, though? Is there a demand for this often enough to keep them in business? While it's easy to simply say yes, we also need to say why. To say there are free companies readily available for hire in our world requires us to set a political landscape that necessitates their existence in our worldbuilding before we establish the immediate need for them in our narrative.

## FROM SELLWORDS TO GUNS FOR HIRE

We can see from this brief history of the mercenary that the profession has evolved slowly over time. At first, there was not even a name for it, and tribes of nomads who pillaged the land to sustain themselves were directed to other realms. Soon, men of the Hellenistic world found themselves in a situation where their only marketable skill was holding a shield and spear. As time moved on, great empires grew and found that their own citizens were not enough to maintain their armies. Eventually, new wars of conquest arose that led to the hiring of mercenaries so that a duke might conquer a kingdom. Finally, the military revolution caused by the prevalence of gunpowder—and even larger global empires during the colonial age—bred an international market for large numbers of professional soldiers.

There's a common theme permeating all of this: *necessity*. The Hellenes needed to leave home and work to survive. Carthage was cut off from Phoenicia and needed to rely upon foreign warriors. The Romans needed more men than available to man a growing frontier. William the Conqueror needed more men to invade England. The imperial powers of the colonial age needed thousands of men to further their wars of attrition.

While one would expect the birth and evolution of any profession to simply rely upon supply and demand or the opportunity for wealth, the profession of the mercenary is another affair entirely. This difference lies in the inherent risk of the profession.

Farmers, potters, and cobblers do not face a regular risk of death in the pursuit of their work. Mercenaries do. War is an ugly, exhausting, and dangerous affair. Death in battle is often slow and painful. Worse, death after a battle could result from weeks of suffering from lingering infections. Anybody who sees mercenary work to be “easy money” should consider these things, and we as worldbuilders should also bear them in mind when deciding whether to include mercenaries in our fictional worlds.

There are three sets of questions we need to answer if we want to put believable mercenaries in our worldbuilding:

First, why do these men willingly put their lives on the line? What economic, sociological, or personal situation has propelled them to the most dangerous and unpleasant pursuit of a wage? How often do these circumstances occur?

Second, why does the state have need of them? Is the standing army not large or skilled enough? Or is there simply no standing army? Why are they at war, and what do they stand to protect or gain that justifies the expense of paying the state's treasure to these independent soldiers?

Finally, what can go wrong? What happens when the mercenaries aren't paid, or the plunder promised doesn't live up to their expectations? What if they decide that attacking their employer would be more lucrative than carrying out their contract?

If you answer these questions, rather than simply inserting mercenaries into your world based on the “rule of cool,” you will end up with a more detailed tapestry of a political and economic landscape that justifies them. I advocate that exploring our own history is an essential guidepost to creating believable settings, and I see speculative fiction as a lens through which we might study the human condition. By studying our past, we can better establish living worlds for our readers and/or players to immerse themselves in. And through that immersion into these fictional worlds, we might learn more about our own world and ourselves. 🍷



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# ASK US ANYTHING

by B.H. Pierce

This *Ask Us Anything* is presented by a senior member of the Amalgamated Order of Interdimensional Persons, Percival Aluminus Illumnius, Adjunct Professor of Gateways, 3423 WestNorth Street, Dunny-on-the-Spire.



ACGrad

*How do I make magic hard to obtain?*  
— Anonymous

Ah magic, creator of worlds and annihilator of consistency. Given that magic is such a broad topic, it should be near impossible for you to receive a useful answer. But fortunately, you asked me. To make magic hard to obtain, you must know three things about it: its **Nature**, its method of **Transmission**, and the **Culture** it is practiced in.

Are the powers of magic just another law of reality in your world, like gravity or thermodynamics? Do they operate on their own until some practitioner comes along to harness them? Or, rather than a

product of nature, is it a product of reason? Created by the sentient beings of your world to serve their purposes? Both these examples conceive of magic as an inert force, but what if it is not? Can magic itself think? Make choices? Decide who is blessed with power and who is not? This sort of magic, Active Magic we'll call it, can make itself hard to obtain by its very **Nature**, unlike magic that is another law of reality.

If you do not have Active Magic, then you must look to **Transmission**. How is the power, or the knowledge of how to harness magic, passed from person to person, if it is at all? One easy way to do so is to make magic an inborn thing. You either have it or you don't. Along those same lines is Bloodline Magic; only those descended from X dragon or Y god can wield their power. If magic is far more accessible than that, then perhaps it can only be harnessed by people who make a supreme mental effort, those who spend long hours meditating on or studying the higher mysteries in life. Making magic inherent or earned by extreme, time-consuming effort will go far in making it difficult to obtain.

But suppose these two pieces of sage wisdom are not enough for you. Your magic is everywhere and easy to access by most of the population. There is one limiter left, the **Culture** the magic is practiced in. Magic is power, and there is nothing a society likes more than concentrating power in the hands of the worthy few (by their standards at least). If magic can be taught to anyone, then it can be denied to anyone. The vast majority of humanity is capable of reading and writing, but for millennia, that skill was denied to many by anything from explicit policy to the simple lack of time for any but the most well-to-do

people. Society may permit some to practice magic but not others, seeing the banned methods as dangerous to public order. Certain groups may be denied the study of magic so they do not use it to rise up against the state.

There you have it. Magic may be limited by its very **Nature**. Its **Transmission** could be limited by it being an inherent gift or extremely difficult to learn. The **Culture** of your practitioners will have rules and regulations about who may do what. If none of this advice works for you then...send me more information about it. I am intrigued.

*Is 100 years enough time for cultural evolution?*  
— Anonymous

Yes and No. Cultures are forever evolving from month to month, year to year, and decade to decade. So yes, in the strictest literal sense, but also no in the practical sense. Are you keeping up? Good.

For clarification, the speed at which your culture evolves will depend on the lifespan of those who live in it. If the people of your culture are any flavor of immortal, then it will generally change at a slower rate as the leadership can remain in place for much longer. After all, if they are in no danger, there is no need to race the flow of time. Also, if the environment they live in is very stable—if they want for nothing—they will not have much need for change. So, to best answer your question, we will assume that humans are the baseline and that the world is earthlike. By earthlike, I mean prone to earthquakes, weather shifts, plagues, and other catastrophes that will send a culture scrambling to survive.

A culture is a living thing. It evolves in response to changes in its environment. So, if your culture were to experience a natural disaster such as a famine, it would have to change to adapt to the new situation of having less food to go around. A human-driven event like a war will force a society to evolve. Nothing motivates people to change quicker than an outside threat. The human-driven event doesn't even need to be external. New ideas or new technologies from within can drive a society to evolve away from norms that are now out of date. If you want to know how your culture will evolve, look to the forces that are behind that change.

Another aspect of this is the degree of evolution. It can be small-scale and local, like the construction of a new type of temple or the introduction of a new musical style. Or they can be culture-wide and on a massive scale, like a complete revision of the society's code of laws or the death of 1/3rd of the population. It is important to remember that massive, culture-wide evolutions do not happen quickly. Take for example, the French Revolution. It cast down the old feudal regime, beheaded the King of France, and sparked a war that would consume Europe for a generation. But at its end, the brother of the beheaded King sat on the French throne. It would be another fifty years before France would make the full transfer from a Monarchy to a Republic.

To sum this up, yes, 100 years is enough time for a culture to evolve, provided it has sufficient motivation to do so. But 100 years is not enough for a culture to change to something completely different from its starting point. From our previous example, France started the 19th century a Feudal Monarchy and ended an Industrialized Republic. Despite these seismic changes, the language, gender norms, and





religion of France was the same in 1800 as it was in 1900. Time and change will force a culture to evolve, but some very core aspects may remain the same for longer.

*How would Planetary Rings affect cultures and religions of people living on that planet?*

— Tristen

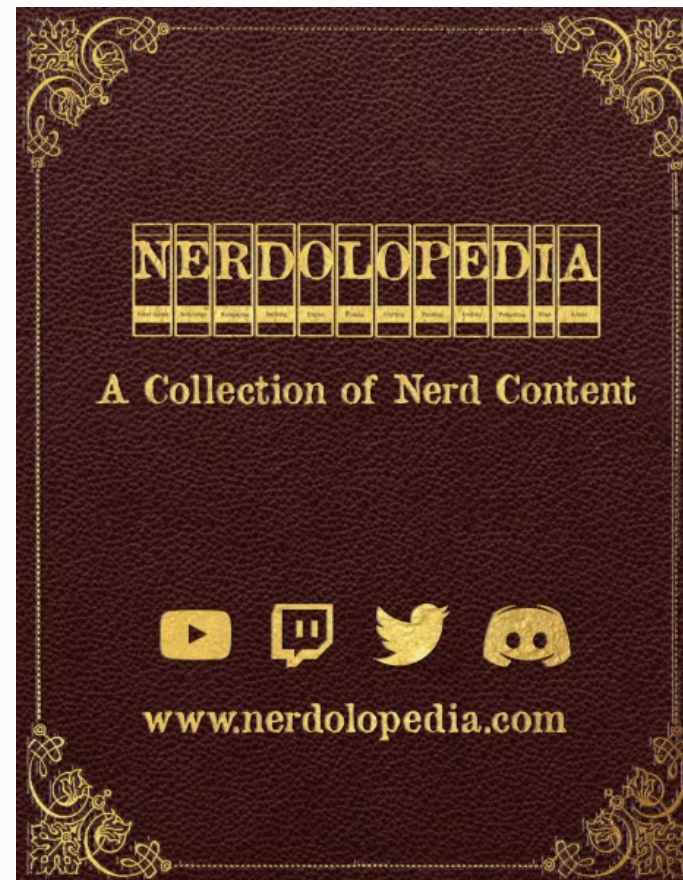
I've saved the slipperiest question for last! Cultures and Religions are extremely varied things and can pull inspiration from the strangest places. It is impossible to say with certainty what meaning they would infer from a heavenly body like a ring system. So rather than saying anything for certain, we will examine what rings would look like at different latitudes and rampantly speculate. For fun!

Now assuming these rings orbit the equator and are seen through an earth-like atmosphere, they will be narrow at the equator and grow wider the closer you get to the poles. Here are some lovely examples to help give you a visual clue. We can see that when standing at the equator the rings would be nothing more than a thin line of light arching from one end of the horizon to the other. Further north or south at 15° latitude, the rings dominate the sky, rising high overhead, but you are still able to see the whole ring from top to bottom. At the tropics, the rings form a graceful arch with the shadow of Earth slowly tracing across it as the day goes by. At 40°, we can see them dipping lower on the horizon, but are still quite impressive. When you reach the Arctic Circle at 60°, they are nothing more than a glow on the horizon, never rising, never setting.

Now that we know what the rings look like, let us rampantly speculate, starting with the equator. The long thin line divides the sky cleanly in two. Given that people are very aware that the stars move through the sky, the astrology of a culture would likely think it was very important when certain constellations crossed that line. It would also be a boon to navigation, as the rings very clearly show which way is east or west. Even further, the thickness of the rings would change depending on how far north or south you go. This would give a seafaring culture close to the equator an easy way to determine their latitude.

As the rings grow wider to dominate the sky between the equator and the Arctic Circle, a society could infer many things about them. Perhaps they would believe the rings are the residence of the gods. The shadow of the earth on the rings at night would make telling time after dark simple. A culture capable of travelling long distances from north to south will undoubtedly notice that the rings get thinner and thicker depending on which direction you're going. As the Greeks calculated the circumference of the Earth using the shadows of obelisks, perhaps they could do the same with the Earth's shadow on the rings? In high latitudes around the Arctic Circle, the splendor of the northern lights coupled with the low glow of the rings would certainly influence the mythology and storytelling of people who live in those areas.

As stated, it is hard to decide just how this heavenly body would inspire those living under it. People are creative creatures after all. 🐉



## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

With this issue, we're putting a close to Volume 3—our 2019 issues. We've hit a number of milestones this year, and I feel the quality of our work has never been higher. It's both a blessing and a curse, as now we're vetting content more intently and striving for this high bar we've set for ourselves! So, I'd like to once again thank our staff, guests, and partners who have helped to create Volume 3 of *Worldbuilding Magazine*. These are the folks who made all this possible, who volunteered their time to keep us going. I could not be more proud of what we've accomplished together.

2020 is set to be a wild year as well, as we've already got plans in the works for new issues in Volume 4. *The Arts* and *Ancestry & Lineage* will arrive in February and April respectively, coming with a fresh new redesign of the magazine's layout. We've got more on the horizon, and will share that news with you as soon as we're able to. We expect some of it will be very soon.

I could go on about all of this. The magazine has been a part of my life for over two years now and it's easy to ramble on about it. Instead, I'll leave you with this vision for the future and suggest that if you would like to get in touch with us, an [email](#) or joining our [Discord](#) server will do. We're not too difficult to get a hold of, and if you're interested in helping us write, edit, illustrate, or manage content—we'd be very grateful, and will absolutely will be in touch. The magazine is run on volunteer efforts and the more help we can get the better the result will be.

So, in conclusion for this last issue of 2019, thank you to everyone who made it possible. Thank you to the readers who motivate us to keep doing better.

Happy worldbuilding, everyone.

— Adam Bassett

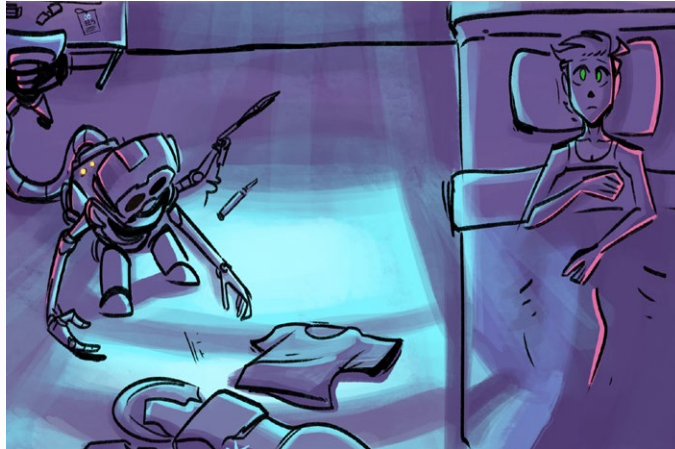
Vice Editor-in-Chief



# MEET THE STAFF: AHMED ELGHARABAWY

Curated by ACGrad

Art by Ahmed ElGharabawy



*Please introduce yourself! What is your role for the magazine? What work are you most proud of?*

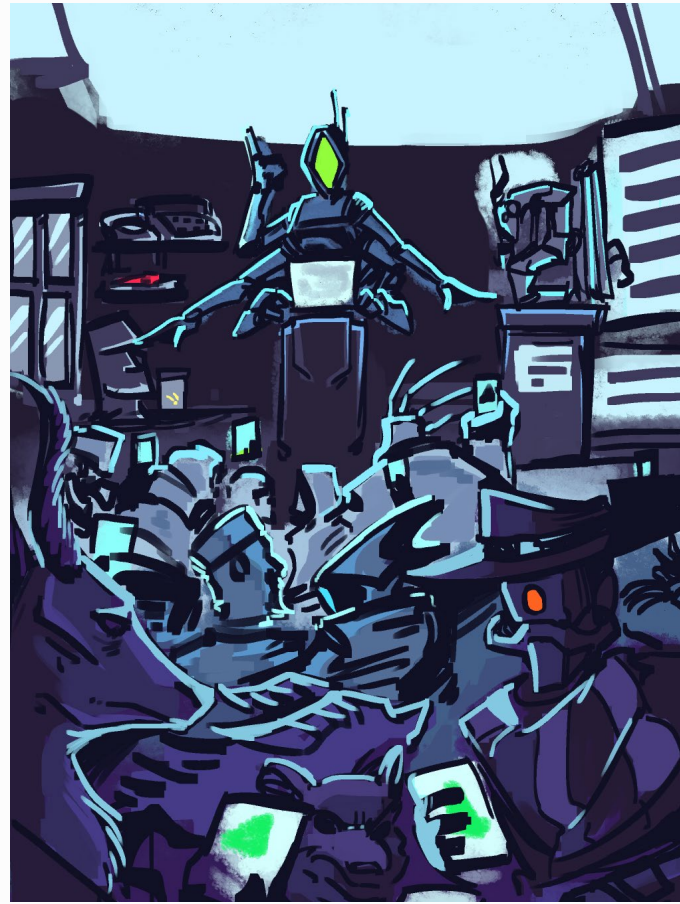
Hi! My name is Ahmed ElGharabawy. I go by “Pharaoh” or “Red Pharaoh” on most sites. I hail from Cairo, Egypt, and I’m one of the artists for *Worldbuilding Magazine*.

My best piece to date, that I’m most proud of, is the cover art for the previous issue, “Economics.” I have never done a piece of this scale before, and I still can’t believe I did it, all thanks to the support of the other staff members. Outside of art, I’m most proud of my progress in worldbuilding/storytelling over the past year.

*What kind of worldbuilding do you do? What is your world like?*

I’m creating an expansive universe in hopes of telling a larger story within multiple, interconnecting comics.

My world is an Alt-history Earth, with hard sci-fi elements intermixed with cosmic horror. The main story takes place in the near future, when artificial intelligence is first announced to the world, and the events that follow.



*Do you have any suggestions for worldbuilding artists and storytellers who are just starting out?*

Being somewhat new to it myself, I don’t have much to offer at the moment. But there is one thing I had to learn the hard way that I can pass on. That is to “hold nothing sacred,” no matter how much you were enamoured by the original idea or how much time and effort you’ve poured into it. Sometimes ideas no longer work once you’ve evolved the areas around it, and no “minor changes” can make it better. By then, it is easier to scrap the idea and start anew with a fresh perspective. It’s a hard decision to make, but it’s sometimes necessary. Definitely mull it over though, if you ever feel that way.

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Kevin Catalin — Featured Artist  
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2019 was a busy year. We hit new milestones, improved the quality of our work, and met some incredible people along the way. None of this would have been possible without our staff and guests who volunteered their time to help each issue be written, edited, illustrated, and published. We would like to take this time to thank everyone involved with Worldbuilding Magazine in 2019:

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- Joshua Lorimer
- Katrina Schroeder
- Koray Birenheide
- Lianness
- Lisa Galbraith
- Lithish
- LieutenantDebug
- Maciej Aureus Gajzlerowicz
- Matthew Myslinski
- Martha Wells
- Maximillian Scharffetter
- MedwedianPresident
- M. E. White
- Michael Kayser
- Mick Gadaleta
- M. Kelley
- M. S. Jenkins
- Noah L.
- Ondřej Hrdina
- PsychoJuliet
- Psycho Romeo
- Quasar
- Rose Brady
- Robert Meegan
- Sean Fallon / Smunchy
- Sean Mihaly
- Stian Oversen
- Strongly\_O\_Platypus
- Skyler Armstrong
- Susan Stradiotto
- Tanner Staheli
- Taylor Frymier
- Tina Hunter
- Toombs
- Dr. Trent Hergenrader
- Tristen Fekete
- WithBestIntentions
- Wynter
- zalseon
- Zaivy Luke-Aleman

*Anna Hannon*

*Tristen Fekete*

*deificat*

*Ahmed ElGharabawy*

*Adam Bassett*

*deificat*

