KULTHEA CHRONICLE

The Official Newsletter of GemStone III

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In Upcoming Issues:

Lord Hexxon returns after a research expedition to the exotic east, with more tales of precious artifacts

Further adventures of Gallenod's cast of characters in Part 2 of Melting Stone

More tales of origins, life and death in Kelfour's by its illustrious citizens; more antics from that frenetic furball, Kelfour's Kitten; how to create the perfect sorcerer; detailed highlights of Hot Summer Nights events, contest winners, Gladiator Game rankings and much, much more!

From the Editor's Quill: A late summer's fantasy

by Gira Gavilan

It gives me great pleasure to take advantage of the slow, lazy pace of summer in order to offer our readers something of a change of pace in this edition of the Kulthea Chronicle.

In this issue, we focus more on those inner musings, what makes us tick, what brought us to the lands and what keeps us here. Several of the stories are personal narratives of one sort or the other, some are fables that contain the seeds of truth, and others may be offered up as truth and yet contain within them much that is fanciful and fabulous.

It is this very merging of fact and fiction, reality and fantasy, that beckons us to leave our everyday world behind and return time and again to the lands and inhabitants of Kulthea. I hope this issue sheds some light on this process or, at the very least, brings a faint smile to your lips, helps you pass the warm Indian summer days more enjoyably, and perhaps even inspires you to put quill to parchment and attempt your own personal stories for us here to beguile our readers with in future issues. ❖

Summer Heatwave Strikes Kulthea!

Summer just wouldn't be the same without those two fortnights of frenzy known as Hot Summer Nights. This August was no exception. A plethora of events, quests, contests, and prizes marked the occasion, with happenings both announced and unannounced occurring almost nightly and at all hours. Care was taken to insure that all the citizens of the land, regardless of their geographic origins, got to partake of special events in equal measure.

This year's version of HSN was graced by the creative talents and boundless energy of a whole new crop of Assistants and GameMasters, including Banthis, Cyper, Talisman, Shadel, Qei, and Issigri. They all got a chance to show their stuff and, much to their credit, they survived.

Veterans like Fawn, Elvanion, Kygar, Miriani, Giacomo, Marvelin, Eldron, and Gira drew on their past years' experience to reprise popular events, tweak them and come up with new twists on some rather venerable quests, competitions and challenges.

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News Briefs...

Fraudulent Merchant Uncloaked

As we have been warning lately in these very pages, with so many new tradespeople and foreign merchants capitalizing on the boomtown frontier economy of Kelfour's Landing, let the buyer beware! Indeed, it came to pass recently that a scoundrel passing himself off as a master weaver was caught selling defective goods and deceiving the honest populace with his extravagant claims. It seems the inferior cloaks, which had been sold in a variety of colors, were fabricated out of third-class wool and began to come apart at the very seams without warning. They were sold for about 600 silvers apiece to trusting, unsuspecting consumers.

The mayor, outraged and rather chilly due to the early and untimely demise of his prize new garment during a speech in windy Town Square, ordered the Constable and his deputies to take immediate action against the felonious weaver and his alleged accomplices. The local authorities and the powers that be reimbursed the victims of this deception, in recognition of the fact that it is in fact the responsibility of the town's officials to screen and license vendors and to police commerce within our fair precincts.

Mysterious Oracle Appears Around Town

For a time, townsfolk reported the otherworldly appearance of an oracular presence in our midst several weeks back. A cloud of thick, acrid smoke floated from place to place, providing a portal which led into smoke-filled room. No, it was not the mayor's office; it turned out to be the resting place of the oracle. Standing in the middle of the dark room, the oracle spoke in portentous riddles about any objects placed upon it. The owners of the items sought to fathom the purpose, intent and properties of their possesions, but were often puzzled by the oracle's cryptic and rather ambiguous pronouncements. However, most seemed to be satisfied that they had been privileged to receive such knowledge. As suddenly as it appeared, the oracle vanished after about an hour.

Lots of Creatures Were Stirring... and Even A Flow Storm or Two

Disturbances of many grave kinds seem to have increased within the past two months throughout the lands. Some attribute it to a strange alignment of the moons, others to a decline in the general morality and goodness of the inhabitants, while others see the hand of the unlife and various nameless dark forces at work. Be that as it may, we can here only report the fact that indeed many strange, new creatures have been encountered lately across the map of Kulthea, and contended with in battle. They have tested us sorely, and yet the resourceful citizens have managed to stem the tide.

Among the new sightings are Stone Gargoyles. Lord Blades was the first to sink his blade into one and he promptly dispatched it with a mighty blow. The next few creatures seemed better prepared and put up a greater struggle. While not that difficult to hit, they were very tough to damage (probably due to being made of stone) and were a long time in dying. They seemed resistant to spells as well. A number of hapless adventurers died in the course of vanquishing these stone behemoths, either by the creature leaping on them or toppling over and falling upon them.

Several large explosions have rocked town recently. The cause is difficult to pinpoint, but it is speculated that the tremors have been originating from the direction of that cursed and forbidden realm, the area around Castle Claedesbrim. After one particularly severe shock, townsfolk sighted a coal black wolf loping through the Town Square, warning the citizens that heralds had been loosed to wreak havoc. The heralds were said to have been dispatched by Lord Siarl, who is rumored to be holed up deep within the ruins of Claedesbrim.

Apart from tremors and explosions, flow storms of black, swirling clouds have also been sighted originating to the west, in the vicinity of Claedesbrim. The outer edge of the storm was felt in the karnelin stomping grounds, and citizens promptly set out to investigate. Stone gargoyles, sentinels and heralds poured forth out of the eye of the storm and set upon

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KULTHEA CHRONICLE

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SIMUTRONICS CORPORATION

Bloodsmythe's Bestiary

Hangin' Out with Wraiths, Marmots & Orcs

by Bloodsmythe Hunter (assisted by Dirtbeard Oakenheart)

When ya's feelin' down an' wants a pick me up, what does ya do? Now that depends in part on who ya is. Iffin ya's a human, ya sits about in the town square gossipin'; iffin ya's a halfling, ya sits aroun' in the Town Square stuffin' ya cute little face with tarts; an' I ain't even gonna talk about the kinda unnatural shenanigans a elfie engages in. But iffin ya's a dwarf, ya heads down ta the local inn fer a mug a grog an' a good bar fight.

Now Helga's is all right an' propper fer ya city folk, an' I suppose Waysides is alright fer small children an' the old folk, but fer a body what spends his days trampin' aroun' in the muck walkin' all the way ta town is too much like werk ta be contem…er contempta…ta be thought a. 'Sides! Why head ta town when the best inn in Kulthea is right smack in tha middle a hill country. That's right, the Hangin' Inn! War else kin ya fight over good brew with a orcie what's found his way ta the wine cellar fer a nip, play fetch with a rat what's bigger than a plump furfoot, an' mix it up with barroom brawlers from Hell?

Some folk calls 'er the Hangin' Inn, some folk calls 'er the Abandoned Inn, but no matter how ya calls 'er, she's jes what a tavern crawler like me is lookin' fer. Ta find her, ya heads out ta where the hill trolls stomp. Even the city folk kin' guide ye thar. The Hangin' Inn squats right aside some bushes.

Inside ya kin find wraiths in the attic an' dark orcs in the basement. Marmots run all o'er the place an' gots a bad habit a runnin' in an' bitin' ya when ya's dukin' it out with one a them orcs er wraiths. Upstairs through the lookin' glass ya'll find a nice crystal what mages jes loves ta play with. Ta get thar, fiddle with the mirror what's upstairs south a them damned elfies from beyond the pale what folks call wraiths. The room with the crystal's a nice place ta rest, an' if ya fiddles with the crystal jes right, ya might find out a thing er two 'bout stuff ya's holdin'. If ya ain't go no learnin' on the magic sights an' sounds a the crystal jes try comparin' the things ya got ya knows about with the ones ya doesn't.

Watch out for the nasty spells the wraiths in the attic can cast. They can fry an adventurer.

Far as huntin' here goes, I finds I loves ta wear me rigid leather armor an' roam the place. Seems as the orcs don't come out so quick iffin ya don't kill the wraiths an' vice versy too. Lots a huntin' groups likes ta sit in the attic an' fight wraiths, long as they gots a cleric with em. Watch out fer them ol' nasty spells that the wraiths hae got, though. They all kin fry sword swingers what isn't careful an' ya fraidy cat elves will be runnin' in circles without ya fancy weapons when them nasties cast that fear spell. Best bet is ta parry up an' pray iffin ya see em draw inward ❖

Here are some statistics Dirtbeard passed along to me, prior to passing out. (It seems he found a cask of something hidden in the cellars of the old inn and did some in-depth research on it.)

	Wraith	Marmot	Dark Orc
Level	15	10	12
Approx. CPs	240	150	196-224
AT	AT1	AT4	AT12
Attacks/OB	short sword/90 coldball/75 lightning/75	bite/85 claw/65	scimitar/85
DB	85	70	95
Round Time	8-10 seconds	8-10 seconds	8-10 seconds
Skin	talon/55 silvers	pelt/45 silvers	ear/55 silvers
Treasure	level II chests	none	level II chests
Special	drain, spells*	none	none

*Wraiths cast *Fear, Word of Stun, Cold Ball* and *Lightning Bolt*.

Face To Face

An Afternoon's Amble by the Seaside

An Interview with Lady Fawn Starstone by Jerusha Monfjoy

I was walking down Faetherquel, trying to squeeze in some gem selling before my appointment with the Lady Fawn. Halfway to the shop, I heard her voice in my head saying that she was ready whenever I was, and to holler when I got myself set. Cringing at the thought of being teleported ("yanked" is actually how I think of it) somewhere, I hollered back that I was ready…sort of. Somehow, I figure that if the Lords of Orhan wanted me to whoosh places, they would have, in their infinite wisdom, made me a user of magic.

Suddenly, in the short time it takes to draw breath, the world grew blurry and indistinct, and then became clear again. When my wits had regrouped, I took a look around. Smiling in absolute delight, I thought to myself, "All right, all right…so being yanked isn't so bad when you get to see places like this."

I was standing at the waterline in a sheltered cove. Tranquil and secluded, warm and blissfully peaceful. Early summer sunlight found its way in from the rocks above, illumining the pristine waters, making the creatures below the surface seem like brilliantly glowing jewels. Smiling in greeting, Fawn welcomed me to her sanctuary. She looked, as usual, absolutely lovely. Her long, golden blond hair was held in place by delicate, blue coral combs laced with freshwater pearls. A tiny aquamarine pendant shimmered at the neckline of her white silk poet's shirt. Her calf-length skirt of seafoam green and slim, misty-grey kidskin boots completed the ensemble. I nodded my appreciation of her choice of clothing.

"Nice outfit, it suits the area," I grinned. She smiled again, her blue eyes dancing, as she splashed a handful of water over me. "Thanks!" she said, giggling. I ducked, laughing. "So, this is your resting place?" I asked. She nodded and pointed to an oddly shaped boulder. Upon closer inspection, I saw that, from my vantage point, this boulder looked amazingly like a young deer, resting peacefully by the water's edge.

"Only part of it," she replied. "Want to see the rest?" I nodded, and smiled. How I love tours! We climbed up the boulder, and set foot onto a secluded beach. My eyes widened at the beauty of the place. Water, bluer than I have ever seen, white sand, and no one else in sight. I thought to myself, I could get used to this.

Climbing up a wooden stairway brought us to Fawn's cottage. The expansive balcony, which fronted the building, gave an unforgettable view of the cove to the west, and Town Square to the north. Cookies and lemonade sat waiting on a low white table next to a hammock. Shading one end of the balcony, an ancient, gnarled tree provided a respite from the sun. Inside the cottage, she had her workroom, a sleeping loft, and, most intriguing to me, her clothes closet. I have never, ever seen so many clothes in my life! Riding habits, burnished breastplates, frocks, exquisite ball gowns, and scads more. Fawn smiled impishly at me, as I reveled in all the finery. This closet was absolutely crammed full. And I had thought my locker was bad!

"I love it!" I exclaimed, in delight.

Fawn giggled, and said, "I know that I'm known at least in part for my wardrobe, so…"

I grinned, nodding my head. Heaven knows I would be, if I had the chance. "Clothing is such fun," I replied. She nodded back to me, and we shared a giggle over the joy of raiment, for isn't there truth in the old expression, "What could ease the heart like a satin gown?"

Fawn asked, "Now, where would you like to sit and visit?"

Smiling in greeting, Fawn welcomed me to her sanctuary. She looked, as usual, absolutely lovely. Her long, golden blond hair was held in place by delicate, blue coral combs laced with freshwater pearls.

I smiled, as I took a parting glance at her closet. "Ah, anywhere you wish. I'm easy."

She considered. "Hmm, what say you to the balcony?"

"By the cookies?" I asked, grinning hungrily.

She nodded, and led the way back outside. The hammock was rocking slightly in the gentle ocean breezes, as

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So, You Want to Be a Gladiator?

by Gallenod Varynesti

[Gallenod took a break from story spinning long enough to run the Gladiatorial Games and dash off this account. The rules for each edition of the Games can differ, but the general principles, the electric atmosphere and the spirit of mayhem remain constant.]

He gripped his sword a little tighter as the Controller pointed a blue tonak staff at him. Things blurred for a moment, and then he found himself on the hard-packed sand of the Arena. He examined his surroundings briefly–a bare pit, 30 meters in diameter, filled with shards of broken metal, ragged pieces of cloth, sand stained with the blood of countless victims. A shattered shield lay at his feet.

His opponent appeared moments later. A mage, he noted. The young wizard smiled nervously, looking around. Probably a newbie. But still a mage, and still very dangerous with that metal wand he was holding. This was going to hurt, even if he won.

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Tired of the routine? Hunted trolls until you can smell them in your sleep? Looking for something a tad more intelligent than a steel golem? Ready for a real challenge? Have we got a deal for you!

The Kelfour's Landing Gladiatorial Games offers you the opportunity to pit yourself against the most difficult and dangerous opponents you will ever face in your life–your fellow adventurers. Arena combat is a little different from what you may be used to though, so you should know the rules before you enter.

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He studied the mage, thankful that this was only Batch #5 Magic users didn't come into their full power until well past Lord level, so he had a decent chance if he was smart. And lucky; he'd rather be lucky than smart, any day. Smart people could still be killed by bad luck. Lucky people didn't have to be smart.

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Combat is arranged in "batches" of levels, to give people an even chance. The batch level breakouts for this edition of the Games were:

Batch 1: 1-3
Batch 2: 4-6
Batch 3: 7-10
Batch 4: 11-14
Batch 5: 15-19
Batch 6: 20-29
Batch 7: 30+

Next time around, if the town keeps growing as it has recently, we will probably limit Batch 7 to levels 30-39 and add an 8th batch for characters level 40 and higher.

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The swordsman wished this were a melee, instead of single combat. Mages died quicker in melees, he mused. Too many targets for them to focus all their energy, and the arms users generally banded together to kill them first. He smiled at that thought.

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Within each batch, there are three types of events–single combat, melee, and team combat. Single combat is one-on-one battle, skill versus skill. There is no way to win this by luck.

Melees are some of the most spectacular, though chaotic, events. The current participation record for a melee is 23 people all trying to kill each other at once! The action can be positively mind-boggling.

Team fights pit groups of two or three working in unison against each other. Arms and magic users may try to combine the best elements of their skills to defeat their opponents. Team events are generally won by the team with the best group tactics.

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The swordsman considered his options. Thanks to the new rule

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KULTHEA CHRONICLE CLASSIFIEDS

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PUBLIC NOTICES

Fighters Unite! Join your own Fighter's Guild Category. The Kelfour's Landing Fighter's Guild category is where you will find the good fighting skills and fighting comrades you want. Join in the debate to help add your input in creating the greatest guild in all the land. Type m1048;6 at any main CEnie prompt and then follow directions to request access to private guild category 10. Be there! (Sponsored by the members of the Fighter's Guild category.)

Need a message delivered in a hurry, reliably and on time? The Kelfour's Runners are hustling for you. Look for our representatives in all parts of town and remember, it will be worth your while! When it absolutely, positively has to be there via knight!

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(Kelfourian Gladiators, continued from page 5)
changes, he and the mage were very limited in what they could bring into the Arena. Each was allowed magic armor, and one wand, which was useless to the swordsman. He felt slightly better than the last time he had competed, though. In a lower batch three months earlier, he hadn't been allowed to wear anything magical. He'd become so accustomed to magic that going back to plain steel, leather and wood left him feeling a bit vulnerable. He supposed the mage felt the same, though.

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You may only take a limited number of magic items into the Arena. Participants in all batches may take a single magic wand; no other magical items are allowed in Batches 1-4. Batch 1 is limited to wands that cast *Shockbolt* or *Touch of Disruption*. Batch 2 may add golden wands to those. Metal wands may be used in Batch 3 and higher.

Magic armor or shield may be used starting in Batch 5. Both may be used in Batch 6. And finally, magic weapons may be used in Batch 7.

Remember, only "normal" weapons are allowed in Batches 1-6. New gladiators are often confused about what is and is not a magical weapon. Any weapon that has a bonus to hit, does more damage than normal, or does special critical damage is magical. This includes all mithril, eog, laen, and shaalk weapons, and drake falchions. It also includes weapons with any temporary enchantment on them, like *Magic Edge* and *Essence Blade*. If you aren't sure if your weapon is legal, have a Controller or GameMaster check beforehand.

However, that doesn't mean weapons have to stay normal. Once combat is open, those with the *Magic Edge* or *Essence Blade* spells may cast them freely on normal weapons.

Most spells are allowed in the Arena, providing they don't have the potential to cause damage to the spectators. *Gall Wind* is allowed, for example, whereas *Firestorm* is not. If you have a question about a particular spell, please ask before you fight.

Rubbed, drunk, or other charged magical items are only allowed in the Grand and Royal Melees, specialty events which will be explained later.

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He shuddered; submitting yourself to the Arena meant giving up control over some of your actions. Once combat began, they would have a few moments of control before the Arena would force them to fight. It was almost as if, once released by the Controller, the Arena sands hungered for blood so much that it made you go into a frenzy.

The Controller stepped forward, raising his staff. A hush fell over the

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(Hot Summer Nights, continued from page 1)
Together, old and new staffers worked long and hard to make this the best HSN ever.

What made it even more worthwhile was that there were events to delight and entertain all levels, professions, tastes and species of adventurers. Auctions, merchants, dragon ship quest groups, scavenger hunt, GM dunking, torkaan skinning, to name a few, were aimed at everyone regardless of level or wealth.

As of this writing, HSN is still going strong. In our next issue, we will have details on specific events, winners' names, eyewitness accounts and whatever else interesting crops up between now and then.

Till then, try and keep cool, but don't forget to join in on the annual Hot Summer Nights in Kulthea this time next year! ❖

Love and Depths

by Flamenquilla Delabarca

Twas by the banks of deep Glaedesbrim
That the fair elven maid first set eyes upon him,
A high man rogue with hair of spun gold,
His fair face reflected in waters so cold.

Across the black waters so wide and so deep
She heard his lone call but, alas, could not keep
Her footing secure on the chill, slip'ry bank
And 'neath the swift currents the elf maiden sank.

Eyes wide and chest heaving, he quickly dove in
And braved the cruel currents of dark Glaedesbrim.
He emerged from the depths soon clutching his prize,
The elf maiden's tiara, of marvelous size.

The rogue smiled to himself as he shook his fair head,
"A fool for love is much better off dead!"
With that he proceeded to gaze o'er the shore.
Soon a fair maid approached and he called out once more. ❖

(Kelfourian Gladiators, continued from page 6)

Arena. Swordsman and mage gripped their shields more tightly. Suddenly, the Controller tapped the ground with his staff, and the Herald shouted, "Combat in the Arena has opened! Attack at will!"

The swordsman moved, but not quickly enough. A ball of icy cold slammed into him, freezing his left thigh. He stumbled slightly, thanking the Lords that his ring mail had absorbed the brunt of that attack, and moved in for his attack, drawing a slash across the mage's side. He saw the mage wave the metal wand again, and braced for the impact. He only need hold on for a few more seconds, and then he'd have his chance.

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Parrying in the Arena is different from regular combat. No combatant is allowed to parry higher than 80% at the beginning of a match. Once combat has begun, you will have approximately 10-15 seconds before the maximum parry allowed in the Arena is dropped to 30%. In that time, you may try any offensive or defensive spellcasting you desire. However, there is no warning when the parry drops. It is wise not to be in a round time when it does.

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It was almost as if the Arena sands hungered for blood so much that it made you go into a frenzy.

Fumbled! The mage's cold ball glanced harmlessly off the sands and dissipated against the invisible shield that protected the spectators! The swordsman knew he had three seconds before the wand recharged. Wait for the parry, or take his chances now? His mind raced, knowing that hesitation and indecision in this sandy crucible had only one result–death.

He attacked, feeling the point of his rapier puncture the mage's right forearm. Briefly stunned, the mage reeled back. But it was enough. The swordsman felt the Arena take hold of him and the mage, feeding them with the frenzy of the spectators and the bloody hunger of the sands. He lunged again, his sword piercing the mage's chest.

The cold ball took him by surprise. The mage managed one last, desperate shot at point blank range. The swordsman felt his chest freeze solid, then shatter, even as the mage's heart was tearing itself apart on his sword. Then, blackness…

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Worried about dying? Don't be. Thanks to the magic of the Arena, death is never final there. Healing, however, is another matter. If "killed," your lifeless body will be carefully dumped like a sack of potatoes in the Infirmary, where the healers will cheerfully piece you back together.

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The swordsman vaguely felt the impact as his body hit the table. Insult to injury, he thought, though he felt no pain at this point. A Lord Healer looked at him, smiled, and tended to the chest and leg wounds. Another healer was busily engaged with the mage.

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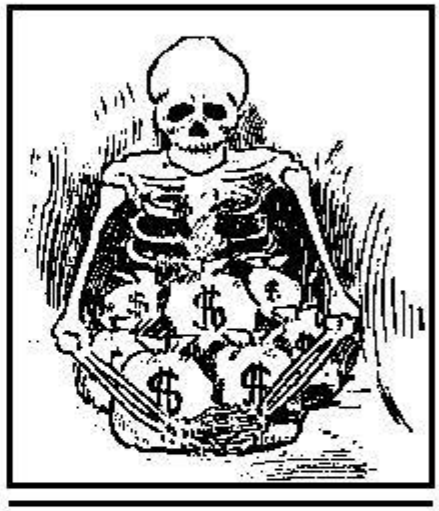
Commentary

The Value of Life

by Roltas Talanon

I have a question on my mind. It has been brought to my attention that the gods of Kelfour's Landing, namely Eissa, take pity upon the souls of fallen adventurers. It has been brought to my attention that an adventurer, thoughtfully providing for the future, can make offerings to Eissa and in turn gain the goddess's approval in the form of a resurrection. It has also



There are other things that people would rather have than their life, like a shield, or a new sword. Is a life worth more than a shield?

come to my attention that many clerics in the land can raise the dead, and that this is a very common practice.

The Low Cost of Dying

Also, I spoke with a friend who had been in town only two weeks and had died three times. I wanted to ask him how dying three times in two weeks felt, considering that most people only die once in a lifetime, but I was afraid it might be a touchy subject so I refrained. After further investigation, I discovered that people who are new in the land can die as often as they like

(Continued on page 8)

(Value of Life, continued from page 7)
with no fear of disappearing from the face of Kulthea. Personally, I would like to die zero times, new or not.

My question is whether this frequency and relative acceptability of death (relative to my homeland of Dythra, where once you die it is commonly accepted that you are gone) tends to give us warped ideas on the value of life.

Scarcely Dead, Scarcely Rich

One concept from my homeland involves a phrase titled moderate scarcity. Moderate scarcity is the idea that there is a limit to everything, and that if there were not a limit to something, it would be valueless.

An example is the currency of Kelfour's Landing. It is assumed that there is a limited supply of silver in the lands. Can you imagine if there were not? Right now a wooden shield from Aznell's armory costs 23 silvers. If everyone in the land had as much silver as they wanted, do you think Aznell would still sell his wooden shield for such a paltry price? No. In fact, he wouldn't sell it for any amount of silver (unless it was for all the silver in the realm, and then only if he really liked silver) because now silver is valueless. You might as well be trading dirt or air.

We must then determine the moderate scarcity of life. Is life scarce? Let's look at the ways it's given to us.

If we give offerings to Eissa, we can live forever, more or less. I am told there is a limit to the number of "lives" you can have at any given time, but you can always get more when you fall below that limit. Looking at it this way, life is not scarce and thus cannot have any value. However, the offerings which are used to gain these "lives" are scarce. I am told the basic equation involves silver (the idea of a basic equation for lives bothered me a bit, but I won't get into that) and, as we all know, silver is not in limitless supply. Also, you have to walk to the altar where you can get these "lives." Thus we see that, in the end, life is still a scarce and precious commodity.

Clerical Help

Another way we get life is through clerics. Clerics will raise the dead for no fee, so the problem of money is not there, as in the above situation. However, there is a limit to the number of clerics. You may be dead, but there may not be a cleric there to raise you. Also, will clerics always be willing to raise you? If you died every 15 minutes, I doubt there is a cleric in the realms who would be willing to raise you each time. Clerics have a limited amount of life that they can give to a dead person, too, and so they cannot raise people an unlimited number of times within a set period. All these reasons add up to life from clerics being a moderately scarce boon bestowed upon the dead.

Moderate scarcity is the idea that there is a limit to everything, and that if there were not a limit to something, it would be valueless.

I will leave out the unlimited number of times people who are new in the land can die because it is a minority issue and doesn't affect most people in regards to life and death. It is safe to say that life means very little to new people, being that they have an unlimited amount of it. Dying does cost them pride, however, and items, which are scarce, but life itself is not scarce; they will always come back, equipment, pride, or not.

Theory of Relativity

This brings me to the next issue at hand. We have seen that life is scarce (except for people new to the land), but is it relatively scarce? It is true that life is scarce, but just about everything is. We know that life is worth something, but what is it worth? Everyone in the land, with a lot of work, could have the limit in "lives." But people don't. There are other things that people would rather have than that seventh life, like a shield, or a new sword. Is a life worth more to an individual than a shield?

These are the issues that we need to deal with. When people care more about losing their items than the fact that they are dead, perhaps we should reexamine our values as a society. Maybe I should look into exchanging one of my unlimited new person lives for some money. I still have some debt to pay off. Just something to think about, if you have the inclination. ❖

Mages' Academy

by Ahira Hammerfist

I humbly submit these excerpts gleaned from *The Further Teachings of Ahira Hammerfist*, first presented at the Kelfour School for Exceptionally Gifted Young Mages (the KSEGYM). Gifted here is meant in two ways, those who have shown great promise in their chosen professions and who also happen to have extremely wealthy parents. I find if my students are not constantly worried about getting out into the wilds and hunting their way through school, they can better concentrate on lessons such as these:

Look on the Bright Side

"Contrary to popular opinion, hunting with a group of sorcerers and either spending half the hunt dodging bits of exploding limbs or running from the demons they summon, which then elude their control, is not the most unpleasant task a mage can be faced with. What could be worse, you ask?

"I can think of several other experiences, such as having a greater gargoyle rip your limbs from your body one by one while it recites, 'she loves me, she loves me not.' That, under certain conditions, could conceivably be even worse."

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The Most Impressive Race

By Cybela Azarial

Once upon a time, in a kingdom kind of close to here, the King decided to try and find out which race was truly the most impressive. He sent out flyers promising 10,000 silvers to the one person of any race who could perform the most impressive feat. A date was set and word of the outlandish proposal soon spread throughout the land. By two weeks before the competition, the King realized that he would have far too many applicants to be able to watch them all himself, so he sent his royal advisors out across the land and told them to narrow the field down to the most impressive of each race, and bring them to the great hall of the palace at the appointed time.

The day of the competition was dark and cloudy, and the hall of the palace was soon packed. Villagers and farmers, merchants and wandering adventurers had all arrived to see who the winner of the contest would be. The royal trumpets sounded as the final contestants made their entrance into the hall.

Leading the way was a huge high man. His shoulders were so broad that he had to turn almost sideways to get into the room. Well-worn armor fit him perfectly and many a lady sighed as he sauntered past. Long dark hair and eyes as blue as the bay at dawn smiled as he walked proudly to stand in front of the King.

Behind him, far enough behind him to not get overlooked, came a regal elf. His long blond hair was intricately braided and sea-green eyes stared imperiously over the watchers gathered round. His robes were embroidered with strange symbols that seemed to change if you stared at them, and the hem swept regally across the floor as he made his way gracefully to stand beside the fighter.

Only the most alert noticed the next contestant enter the room. Most of the observers gasped as they noticed that standing beside the mage was a tall, thin man dressed in the softest of skins. His hair was a sandy brown, braided simply down his back, and his brown eyes sparkled merrily as

he watched the crowd's reaction. His features seemed to be almost elf/almost not and only the slight tilt to his ears revealed him to be half-elven.

A loud giggle pierced the silence and the watchers turned to see a halfling stumble through the door. Bright red hair stood up on his head like a flame and kelly green eyes twinkled as he giggled once more before starting up the aisle. A short brown tunic and calfskin breeches rustled as he tried to be serious but the moment was soon lost when he spotted a small child eating a cookie near the front of the room. His stage whisper begging the child for just one bite brought a smile to even the King. The child brightly offered the cookie and the little halfling, brushing cookie crumbs off his face, straightened in front of the King.

The last figure in the contest stomped noisily down the middle of the room. A well-sharpened battle axe gleamed over his shoulder as he mumbled and muttered all the way to the front. With a quick gesture, the dwarf flung his beard over his shoulder and glared at the King.

"Well, I'm here, get on with it. Ain't got all day." The dwarf stretched and dropped the axe to the floor at his feet.

The King sighed as he noticed the chip the heavy axe head had just made in his main reception hall floor. With a gesture he indicated to the high man. "Very well, you may begin."

The high man slowly removed his shirt, muscles rippling smoothly as he stretched and preened for the ladies. (In fact, several of the ladies fainted and had to be removed from the room.) With a slow, seductive smile he removed several long bars of iron from his pack and began to bend them into the most wondrous shapes. First, he crafted a horse, mane blowing in the wind and legs arched in flight. His next creation was a farmer with his back bent under a heavy sack. The third rod he fashioned into a crown fit for a high man king. The high man approached the throne and offered the farmer to the King's counselor. Kneeling in front of the Queen, the high man offered her the horse and, with a flourish, he presented the crown to the King.

The King smiled as he accepted the crown from the strong hands of the high man. The Queen blushed prettily and the audience stood and applauded enthusiastically. As for the other contestants, the elf simply stared with

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(Most Impressive, continued from page 9)
a very condescending look on his face, the half-elf smiled at the high man, the halfling led a small group of children in the front row in an impromptu cheer, and the dwarf's expression never changed.

The high man stepped back and the elf stepped regally in front of the King. With a slow, deliberate gesture he smoothed the folds of his heavy robes and looked slowly around the room until the audience had grown silent again.

"That was quite a show but I feel confident you will enjoy this one far more." The elf's voice was like silk in moonlight as his nimble fingers began to draw shadows in the air.

They slowly took form and the crowd held its breath as silver flowers blossomed and died in the air before the King. A single rose grew slowly, blush pink to deep wine, and then became the silken smile of an elvish maiden. Long hair twirled about her

The elf's voice was like silk in moonlight as his nimble fingers began to draw shadows in the air, which took form.

as she slowly formed in front of the King. Soft music began to be heard in the background as the maiden danced slowly and seductively before the King. Long hair and sparkling eyes bedazzled the crowd and had the Queen flashing a sharp look at the elven magician. With a slow smile and the last beats of a song half heard, the maiden sank into a curtsy before the King and continued to sink until a puma stood in her place. The puma roared once and leapt straight towards the King, only to disappear into a cloud of gold dust that settled on the King's shoulders.

The audience went wild as the magician bowed slightly to the King. The King glimmered in the light of the torches as he smiled back approvingly. The high man looked as though he were quite uncomfortable, while the half-elf simply stared at the spot where the maiden had danced. The halfling was whistling and catcalling to the magician until finally the half-elf leaned down and put his hand over the little fellow's mouth. The dwarf's stoic expression stayed the same.

The half-elf stepped up on the dais and turned to smile at the audience. He began to speak and told of the wonders that only someone of his profession could know. He moved slowly as he spoke, drawing pictures in the air before the crowd of dragons' halls full of gold with doors that could not be opened. He paused before a town matron and smiled deep into her eyes as he asked her how she would have gotten the gold. With a blushing smile she shrugged her shoulders and he continued tales of high adventure. Tales of chests of gold and jewels meant for kings, with poisons strong enough to kill manticores hidden in the locks. Castles long abandoned full of promise and danger, that only the bravest and most agile could survive. He finished his story back where he had started on the dais in front of the King. The crowd muttered as neighbor asked neighbor if this were truly the best representative of the half-elf race. With a grin, the half-elf bowed to the King and began to make his way back to other contestants.

"Oh, wait, I seem to have forgotten something." The half-elf smiled as he flipped his cloak back to reveal necklaces, earrings, bracelets, even an iron horse and an iron crown, tied to the lining of his cloak with small, delicate bows. He bowed low as murmurs of "That's my necklace" and "How did he do that?" began to sweep the room. Stepping back to the dais he untied the horse and kneeling, presented it to the Queen much as the high man had. The crown he removed and spun on one thin finger before tossing it to the King with a rueful grin and a casual nod of his head.

"Would it be gold instead of iron, I might have been happy to lose this contest." The half-elf bowed deeply and returned to his position among the contestants.

The high man glared at him and pointed to an earring tucked deep inside the cloak. With a smile the half-elf returned it to the mighty warrior. The elf was smiling smugly until the half-elf handed him a small broach of gold inset with fire opals. At that the smile quite vanished from the magician's face to be replaced by a look of profound gratitude. The halfling was all over the half-elf by this time, asking him questions and offering pointers, while the dwarf watched it all without once moving in any way, his face a mask.

The halfling looked around expectantly before realizing that he was the next contestant. With a merry grin he skipped to the front of the room and took a seat on the steps of the dais. He pulled a small lute out of his backpack and with nimble fingers quickly checked the sound of the strings. With a smile he waved grandly at the audience, although he lost control of the lute in the process. With a giggle he picked it up and tuned it once more.

"I don't know how I can top those three. I wouldn't want to be the one having to decide because I thought they were all the most impressive. But, I'm here and food is free, so I guess I'll sing for my supper." The halfling's eyes shone brightly as he began to strum the strings of the lute quickly.

His nimble fingers fairly flew over the notes as he began to sing of a

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(Kelfourian Gladiators, continued from page 7)

"A double kill!" exclaimed the healer. "They're still adjudicating!" The swordsman nodded, not sure what that meant.

Then, the Prizemaster marched in, smiling broadly. "Congratulations, young man. You killed your opponent marginally before he killed you. You win!"

The swordsman felt a momentary swell of pride as he accepted the silver. His mind felt clearer, and all around looked at him with a little more respect.

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Winning in the Games means silver, experience, and fame. Winning any event in Batch 1 will earn you 600 experience, 2,000 fame, and 2,000 silver. Winning a preliminary match, singles or teams, in Batch 1 is worth 20% of the final prize. Higher batches multiply your winnings by the batch level.

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The swordsman wandered back out to the Arena, phantom pain still in his chest, though the healers had taken his injuries. The mage moved next to him and whispered, "Maybe we can team up tomorrow, OK?" The swordsman nodded, and smiled. The two regarded each other as potential allies now, when five minutes earlier they had been intent on killing each other. Such was the camaraderie of the Arena.

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Due to the number of people who participate, the Gladiatorial Games usually run for an entire weekend. Day 1 is generally reserved for single combat, as these events take the longest. Day 2 will start with the melees, brutal affairs that tax the healers in the Infirmary to the limit of their power. Then come the team fights.

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The swordsman studied the odds on the tote board. He placed a small bet from his winnings on a bard against a sorcerer at 6:1 odds. The sorc won, he lost. Another preliminary match over. He hoped someone else would get to fight the sorcerer in the next round. The attendants were still picking up the widely scattered pieces of the bard.

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Betting is a major part of the Games. Hundreds of thousands of silvers have changed hands in a single fight! Fortunes are made and lost betting on favorite gladiators. Single combat and team fights rarely offer long odds, but guessing correctly in a melee can bring in a huge windfall. The current Arena record is someone who won a pot at 61:1 odds!

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The Controller was announcing the next matches. The swordsman noted that the sorcerer was facing a mage. His own opponent was another arms user. The world blurred again, and he found himself facing his opponent in the Arena. Without a word, they saluted each other with their swords. The crowd called out their bets until the Controllers closed the betting. The Senior Controller tapped his staff on the ground, and the Herald cried out loudly, "Combat in the Arena has opened! Attack at will!"

The two circled, each casting a minor defensive spell. Combat between arms users was frequently a waiting game. Suddenly, the swordsman felt the Arena calling and lunged forward, hoping his thrust would score first blood.

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Tactics are an important part of gladiatorial combat. Is it better to wait and cast defensive magic, or launch an all-out attack from the start? The answer is, it depends. Sometimes, moving first can be deadly if you miss. Sometimes, if you don't move first, you never move again.

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(Most Impressive, continued from page 10)

tavern keeper's daughter. The girl had grown up good and proper, but when her father died, he left the tavern to his cousin. Now the cousin was not a nice sort of fellow and he began making all kinds of rude approaches to the innocent young maiden. When the maiden realized that all her cousin was interested in was a quick toss in the hay, the story took a comic turn.

First, the dashing cousin cornered her as she cleaned the fireplace. Quick thinking and a closed flue helped her put him off. (Not to mention kept him rather busy for quite a while repairing smoke damage.) Soon she was spilling beer and locking him in closets, quite by accident. By this time the halfling had the audience in stitches as his expressive face danced and smiled and sneered. Finally in a fit of desperation, the young maiden escapes to the wine cellars to hide and there she finds a dusty scroll tucked in an empty wine cask. The ardent suitor finds her there and as she reads the words of the scroll, suddenly a blinding flash of light fills the room.

At this point the halfling paused as the audience waited impatiently. The King leaned forward on his throne and motioned for the halfling to finish. The halfling's small fingers found the beat again as he sang of the small grey ass that stood where were the cousin had been. He finished the song with the maiden selling rides on the ass to all the local children for a pence a piece and making enough money to sell the tavern and retire in seclusion. As for the cousin, well, the spell had been a very simple one–*Show True Self!*

The crowd was laughing uproariously at the tale and the King was clutching his sides from the pain of too much merriment. The high man wiped tears from his eyes with a scrap of fabric and even the elf had a hard time catching his breath. The half-elf had given in a long time since and was seated on the floor applauding

(Continued on page 13)

A Kelfour's Kitten Ventures Forth

by A Kelfour's Kitten

Life is good, or so it is at the moment. I have my freedom, and that's what matters most. So, I am but a mere slip of a kitten; I can manage all right, I reckon. At least, I am far more content looking after my own self in the Landing, than when I was cooped up in that stuffy old mage's workshop. I like to choose my own prey, thank you very much!

I dine on the best that Kelfour's Landing's shops have to offer. Every day I make my rounds and visit all the purveyors of the town's finest comestibles, whether they realize it or not. Usually, for breakfast, I rummage around the empty cases and sacks behind the grocer's for scraps of salted fish, slabs of ancient torkaan sausage, and the occasional cracked hudvaark egg. Towards mid-morning, I start feeling a might peckish again, so I toddle round to the clothiers. She always leaves a saucer of milk for me under the cool shade of her porch. The perfect start of a nap. As evening falls, I generally swing by the baker's for a dinner of stale crullers and the rare but welcome treat of a proffered bowl of clotted cream.

As the moons rise over the Landing, I caper along the rooftops, through the streets, and beneath the pavement along forgotten sewers and underground byways, doing a bit of exploring. In the fullest of the fullness of the full moons, I have been known to clamber atop the town ramparts and, outlined black against the sky, burst into plaintive choruses in praise of heroic conqueror cats, shaggy sorcerers and feline felons of ages past. Of course, that is usually after a saucer or two of ale that I lap up solely for the amusement of the tavern crowd from

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As soon as he lunged, he knew it was wrong. His sword scored a glancing

Suddenly, the swordsman and lunged forward, hoping his thrust would score first blood.

blow, barely a scratch. He took the return stroke through the kidneys; the pain was extremely agonizing. Losing consciousness, he saw his opponent use his cloak to wipe his blood off her sword. She flashed him a smile as the attendants came out to drag him off.

When he awoke in the Infirmary, she was waiting for him. "Sorry about that, dear," she giggled. "Nothing personal, you know."

"No problem," he smiled back.

"Still want to marry me next week?" she asked coyly.

He coughed. "Of course, dear. I'd hardly last long without you to protect me, now would I?" They both laughed and embraced.

Just then, several attendants came in bearing arms, legs, and a torso. In separate pieces. It was what was left of the mage. The swordswoman frowned.

"Someone needs to teach that sorc some manners," she huffed. "He keeps littering."

The swordsman nodded. "Be careful, dear," he said. They smiled, and embraced. She went off northeast to the Arena while the healers pieced the mage back together.

"I can't wait until tomorrow," said one of the healers. "I hear they're running some specialty events at the end." The swordsman shuddered as the healers chuckled and shared graphic descriptions of the mass slaughter they so blithely referred to as "specialty events."

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After the team fights on Day 2, certain special events are run if time permits. The first of these are the Naked Brawling melees. No armor, shields or weapons of any kind are allowed. There is one melee for commoners, and one for those of noble rank. Adding mud to the Arena for these fights is a regular suggestion, but impractical at this time.

After the melees, the Gods reinforce the magical wards protecting the spectators for the Grand and Royal Melees. All bets are off for these fights, as are virtually all the restrictions on use of magical items. The Grand Melee is for characters of levels 1-19, and the Royal Melee is for Lords and Ladies. It has been said that the amount of magical energy expended in the first 30 seconds of a Royal Melee would obliterate an area 10 miles in diameter. So far, the God-given shields have held.

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The sorcerer's body hit the table with a thump. He still looked a bit dazed as the healers commented on how clean his ears were. The swordsman collected his winnings, at 8:1 odds. He could afford that diamond ring, now. His fiancee limped in. Her left arm was shattered and she was bleeding from the nose, but she grinned broadly despite the pain. In her good hand, she held the silver that would finish paying for her wedding dress.

"Still not afraid to marry me?" she asked sweetly.

"Of course not, my love," he grinned. "It's a lot less expensive than just hiring a bodyguard."

Fortunately for him, combat is not allowed in the Infirmary. ❖

Relative Strangers

By Ronin Zencat

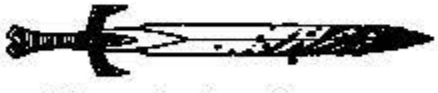
The bolt of electricity arced across the room, struck the wall and exploded, sending burning splinters and drunken patrons flying. Helga was not pleased.

Now, in all honesty, I probably shouldn't have been waving my newly acquired wand around like that, but my excitement overcame my usually cautious nature. I got the feeling that Helga and the dozen or so patrons of her establishment were not going to sit quietly while I tried to explain my, understandable, error in judgment.

Garios, my longtime partner, was already crawling towards the door, dodging smoking cinders and smoldering customers. We halflings have always prided ourselves on our quick wits and fleet, though somewhat furry, feet. I reached the door a few seconds before Garios and dove into the street, dodging a quickly formed bucket brigade which was attempting to douse the results of my experiment. Garios followed me down the closest alley, dripping and sputtering from an ill-aimed bucket.

"Wonderful," he muttered. "I suppose the idea of playing with your new toy outside never occurred to you for even one moment?"

"Briefly, but look at all the excitement we would have missed."



We stood in silence for some time. Then I tucked the still warm wand into my backpack and began walking away from the shouts that continued drifting our way from Helga's, even as we contemplated heading west.

"Stop complaining, at least we know how to fire this thing, and the bath certainly isn't going to hurt your social life."

Garios looked down at me with his patented "Why me?" and squished along down the street, trying to shake the water out of his boots as he walked. I glanced up at the sun, just clearing the top of the Temple.

"We should head over to the gate. Dart said he'd be there bout noon." I smiled up at him. "We don't want to keep him waiting." Garios' eyebrows lifted slightly, his expression one of nervousness.

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(Most Impressive, continued from page 11)

enthusiastically. Even the dwarf grinned before he realized what he was doing and quickly resumed his normal stoic expression.

The halfling stood and tucked the lute into his backpack. With another of his merry little grins he bounced happily back to his place.

The King then motioned for the dwarf to take his turn. The dwarf scowled and then shifted his axe loudly across the floor of the grand hall. The King winced as he saw the damage the bright blade was doing to his pristine woodwork.

"I's the only dwarf that came here so I guess I'm it. And I only came to say that this is a stupid game and I don't want to play it!" With another heavy scowl the dwarf slung the axe back over his shoulder. Mumbling under his breath, he pulled his beard out from under it before staring again at the King. Turning, he stomped his way out of the hall, through the assembled crowd without so much as a backward glance, and back to his beloved mountains.

"I's the only dwarf that came here so I guess I'm it." Turning, he stomped his way out of the hall and back to his beloved mountains.

"Well," said the King as he looked over the contestants, "this is certainly not an easy choice. You all, well almost all, have been extremely impressive. Your skills are astounding and I commend you all. Well, almost all." The King stared at the half-elf intently as he corrected himself again. "But, upon careful consideration, I have made my choice. The most impressive of you all was the halfling. For all the glamour and magic and skill, not a one of you could make a dwarf react. Not a one except the halfling. It is truly impressive to see someone make a dwarf grin. My congratulations."

There really isn't much more to the story past here. The high man, elf, and halfling were all present at the banquet that followed. The half-elf disappeared in the confusion of congratulating the halfling and it wasn't until much later that someone remembered he had never given back all the jewelry he had pocketed during his performance. As for the halfling, well, he spent most of the money on cookies and tarts. Married himself a little halfling who could cook like a queen and had a whole bunch of children. Sometimes, I'm even proud to call him dad. ❖

(Interview with Fawn, continued from page 4)
we found a place to sit. Fawn indicated the plate of spiced almond cookies, and grinned at me, as I helped myself. Fawn said, "Please, make yourself at home. I always try to have refreshments out."

Smiling, I made a little bow, "A gracious hostess."

She returned the bow. "Evynn liked those cookies so much, we served some at her wedding reception."

Nibbling on my cookie, I took a look at my notes. I figured, first things first. "Well, to start with, how do you view your role as GameMaster in relation to the 'reality' that is Kelfour's Landing?"

Fawn leaned against a plain cotton hammock, and considered. "It's constantly changing, actually."

I settled myself against the balcony railing, writing implement and foolscap paper at the ready.

"You know that I was recently promoted to Product Manager for GemStone III?"

I nodded my head. My editor, Gira, had mentioned it to me, although I hadn't remembered until Fawn had brought it up.

"All the full GameMasters report directly to me and, along with Reline, I'm responsible for world administration. Basically, that means, we decide what will or will not be part of the world here."

I hadn't realized the extent of the promotion. I gave an "ah" of appreciation, and applauded enthusiastically. "Congratulations! Sounds very exciting."

Fawn grinned. "Thanks! So, I guess I have different answers for the different roles. Mainly, I see the other GameMasters and myself as caretakers for the world. We make sure it grows, and evolves; we add to it, enhance it, and do our best to make sure it lives and breathes. The world must be fair to everyone, too. Whether you spend $6 a month here, or $600 dollars a month, you have to live by the same rules as everyone else."

I nodded to her, in agreement. "I have to say, I am really enjoying the new shrines that have popped up, and their surrounding environs."

Fawn smiled, pleased. "The shrines are among my favorite projects. Iloura was the first, and even we were surprised by the reaction to it. I love seeing the Lords of Orhan have more of a visible imprint on the world. When we first started, the question was: Would players actually go to an area where there was no hunting, just to go there?"

"I see the other GameMasters, the Assistants, and myself as caretakers for the world. We make sure it grows, and evolves; we add to and enhance it, make it live and breathe."

I chuckled a little to myself, thinking of how much I loved going to a place where there wasn't any hunting, a place with an entirely different purpose, and different atmosphere.

"I think it's nice to have a touchstone for the 'religious' aspects of roleplaying in GemStone. I mean, the Lords of Orhan are more accessible. Who knows where that could lead?"

I smiled a little at the possibilities. "What is your specialty, Fawn, as far as GMing goes? What do you as an individual like to do best?"

"I'm very fond of events," she smiled impishly.

I felt my own smile broaden. "The Games? Quests?"

Fawn said, "Oh, I've always loved the Glad Games. I generally spend far too much time at those." She grinned. "And I like adding texture to the game. Little things, things you probably don't even think about much."

I raised an eyebrow. "Such as?"

"Such as, the goodies counter at the grocer's."

"I like the grocer's counter," I said, thinking of all the munchies I have purchased there, "and its new seating area."

She smiled, "I said to myself, 'Why aren't there more places that serve food here!?' The grocer is nice, because it's easy to change his inventory rather often."

"Ahhh," I said in enlightenment.

Fawn laughed, "You'll have to trust me on that, but it is very simple. Other town merchants are more complicated to change, but that was specially designed to be easy to modify more frequently."

"Well, the grocer is more like buying from the merchants who visit us now and again. Or so I assume."

Fawn nodded. "The others have an intensive system, at least that's how it seems to me. And yes, I like playing the wandering merchants as well. I love to roleplay!"

"Well, that's what it's all about, isn't it?" I asked, chuckling.

"As a player, I'd have been happy to spend my whole life in TS." She grinned at me. "So, the merchants provide a perfect opportunity to have fun roleplaying with the players. I've even played a few characters that might surprise you." She giggled.

I smirked, "I suppose you can't divulge their identities?"

She grinned. "I've played a 90-year-old male sorcerer, and a 60-year-old male ranger, among others. I doubt anyone suspected"

I had to laugh. "Sneaky woman!"

Fawn nodded at me, happily. "Those were loads of fun to play."

"Why did you decide to become a GameMaster?"

She considered. "Well, I started playing here around two years ago, more or less. I worked in another area on GEnie for a couple of years. It's not a secret; I was an assistant SysOp over in Chat Lines. One day, I was exploring GEnie and wandered in here. I'd had several friends who'd

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(Interview with Fawn, continued from page 14)

tried to convince me, but I always said, "Swords? Hunting? Yecch!" I chuckled at her. "Needless to say," she continued with a wry smile, "I've eaten those words about a thousand times over."

I laughed, nodding my head, "I bet you have!"

"I fell in love with GemStone within a few weeks. So, I played for close to a year, and then it seemed time to move on. Positions opened up for AGMs, and on June 1 last year, I became an AGM."

"And you made full GM in October?"

"October or November, yes."

I smiled to myself, remembering. "I had just started, been around for a whole glorious month, when you made full GM."

"I started out as Kygar's assistant. I wasn't an assistant for long, but we did complete one area together, and one pretty well-known quest. The Kral area is the one and only Kygar-Fawn hunting area in the game."

"I didn't realize that it was so new. Feels like it's been part of the terrain forever."

Fawn nodded. "It opened up at the conclusion of the 'Lady Puma' Quest."

I looked askance at her over the title. "I must have missed that one, 'Lady Puma'?"

"Or, should I say, 'Part I of the Lady Puma Quest: The Story of Marliese.' Which is ongoing."

"Ah, you bet it is!" I exclaimed, winking at her. She chuckled.

"Okay," I peeked at my notes, and smiled hesitantly. "Now for a more serious topic...armor." I ducked my head, hoping a cookie wasn't going to come flying.

Fawn grinned. "It's okay."

"There is great deal of heated discussion about armor right now. I know that AT3/4 (heavy hide) is going to be phased out. But for those who did not attend the forum, or don't read the BBs, can you give a rundown on the situation?"

You can get up to four times the normal experience for slaying a creature, just by being a good roleplayer.

She nodded. "It is most likely that AT3/4 will be phased out of the game. We're still waiting on word about the training away of MMMs, so I can't say for certain that it's going to happen. But it is very likely."

"MMMs?" I interrupted. Sheesh, you would think I would know the terminology by now.

"Minimum Maneuver Mods, the things that make some players not like to wear armor."

"And right now you can train away the mods? Or can't?"

"Right now, you can train them down but not away completely. What we'd like, is to be able to train them completely away."

The light dawns inside of Jerusha's brain. "Ahhh! And AT3/4 doesn't require any training, and that's why it's desirable."

"Right!" She nodded to me. "AT3/4 imbalances the game, in the opinion of many players as well as staff."

"Against pure arms users?" I asked.

Another nod. "Because it allows everyone, including spellslingers, access to

(Continued on page 17)

(Mages' Academy, continued from page 8)

None of the Above?

"As some of you may have heard from my former students, the final exam will consist of a single multiple choice question which embodies all that I have taught you. All right, turn over your paper and please remember to use a #2 quill.

"You have been contracted by a village to kill a dragon which has been terrorizing the local countryside. Unfortunately, upon confronting the dragon, you find that your spells are ineffective and you stand no chance of surviving a battle with it. Do you:

"(A) Bravely march into battle, sacrificing your life to give the villagers time to flee;

"(B) Ask the villagers to hire another mage to help you in your battle with the dragon, thereby admitting to all your colleagues your inability to perform what should have been a relatively simple task; or

"(C) Admit that your powers are inadequate to defeat the dragon and offer to give the village a full refund. Your offer of a refund will so stun the villagers that it will give you time to flee the area. True, this will probably result in the dragon eating the villagers but that will end the chance of any of those ugly rumors spreading about your failure to fulfill a contract, as well as insuring they don't take you up on your refund offer.

"Time is up. Please turn in your papers. Those of you who chose answer (C) may pick up your diplomas on the way out."

(Continued on page 16)

(Mages' Academy, continued from page 15)

It's Sometimes Academic

While my students were all quick studies, I did find it necessary to require them to purchase a text scroll for the course and assign daily readings to them. Fortunately, I happen to be the author or several authoritative volumes for beginning and advanced mages. All the royalties go to my own charitable foundation and, as we know, charity begins at home. Here is a selection from the course readings:

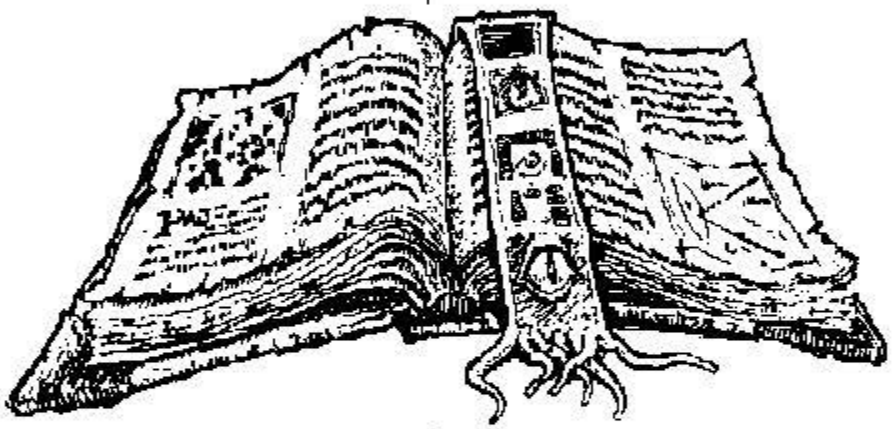
Mage Essentials 101

If you look in the Tomes and the Library *[GEnie page 931]*, you'll find a ton of information on rolling a mage. You'll also find plenty of information on using wands, casting spells and other things which a mage (or any magic user) should know. What seems to be missing are the everyday, mundane facts a mage needs to know, which most articles seem to assume you know or will find out within your first few years.

Well, they are right. You'll learn all the small facts you need to know within a few cycles of training but if you are like me, you don't want to wait–you want it all and you want it now. What I've put together is a list of facts which everyone should know when starting out in their life as a magic user.

The Power of Wands

Wands–you know you need them and you know you'll be using them a lot. So just what do they do? There are five common wands you'll be using–oaken, iron, silver, metal and gold. The oaken wand casts *Unstun* and is the only one of these five wands which doesn't cast an offensive spell. It's good to have if you are hunting in a group and one of the other group members gets stunned. Iron and silver wands both cast *Shockbolt* (901). Besides doing damage, *Shockbolt* has a chance to stun an opponent. It also has a decent chance to hit a low level creature with a critical and kill it with one hit. Golden wands cast *Fire Bolt* (906). *Fire Bolt* is "a powerful elemental attack which is not adversely affected by armor like *Shockbolt*", so it's good against things that wear light to medium armor. Metal wands cast *Gold Ball* (907). Gold balls are supposed to be much easier to hit with but do less damage than bolt spells. All wands have a three second round time. Prices for wands vary by who is selling them and how great the demand is for them at the time but generally you can buy (or sell) an oaken wand for 100-150 coins, silver and iron for around 400, and metal and gold for 500-600. These are only general guidelines; the selling price depends on supply and demand, the vendor and the buyer.



The Power of Power Points

In addition to wands, power points are a major consideration in your early years as a mage or other type of magic user. The formula for determining PP regeneration is: PP Gain = Current Max Power Points/10.

This means if you have a maximum of 10 PPs you will regain 1 PP every two minutes. (Oh, forgot to mention, PPs regenerate once every two minutes.) If you have a max of 20 PPs, you will get two PPs once every two minutes during your early years.

You should be aware of the existence in the lands of Essence nodes. Nodes are special places where the forces of Essence collect. If you are standing on a node, your PP regeneration will double. Therefore, if you have a max of 20 PPs and usually regain two PPs and you were situated on a node, you would gain four PPs (until you reach your maximum) in the time it normally takes you to recoup two. So far the only node I'm sure about is Town Square but there are others scattered around out there.

Although I have yet to confirm it, I have been told that when you reach your seventh year of training, your PP regeneration doubles and when you reach either your tenth or eleventh, it triples. (Someone kindly correct me if I'm wrong on this.)

The Power of Knowledge

Next, you should get a copy of the Mage, Open Essence and Closed Essence spell lists from the Tomes before you start your career as a mage, and decide which spells you want to learn. I like the idea of choosing one list and sticking with it but everyone has to make their own choice. No matter which you choose, you will want to pick your second spell from one of the other lists or you will wind up being level 1 and knowing both level 1 and 2 spells from the same list, thereby running around for a year with a spell you can't use. After you get the spell lists, talk to some of the older spell users and get their advice.

And after that, well, just go out and vaporize a kobold or something. Then proceed to the next chapter. ❖

(Interview with Fawn, continued from page 15)
an effective armor that requires no expenditure in development points. And by extension, if everyone has this wonderful armor, then those who can afford to train cheaply in heavier armors lose out. For example, I think that for a ranger to train in directed spells (which will aid them in avoiding magical attacks), it costs 15 development points. That's a big investment. Most semi-magic users just can't afford it."

"Right."

"The mage spends a much smaller amount to train in directed spells, but doesn't have to compensate by spending points on armor. So, the spell casters are not only great at avoiding magical attacks, they have great armor to protect them against physical attacks, and at no cost. The mage gets protection for free, while the fighter or thief or ranger has to pay dearly for magical protection. Rather, mages get physical protection for free. There are better explanations, but that's my take on it."

"So with the removal of AT3/4, how will that change?"

"With the removal of AT3/4, players will have to either choose to spend the DPs on armor, or select an armor type that will not be quite as beneficial to them as AT3/4 is."

I considered. "Or use the armor and not train in it. Which is silly."

Fawn nodded to me. "Some of the heavier armors are deathtraps without training. One other thing that I'd like to say on this. It's been stated that no one uses anything but AT4, but I heartily dispute that."

I thought about it for a moment. "I have seen many who use several different kinds of armor."

Fawn said, "If you look at the players hunting in the Broken Lands, or possibly even the Monastery, and beyond, you'll see a lot of the heavier armor types in use. They take the penalties, because some of the heavier armors offer better protection against the types of attacks higher level creatures tend to have."

"So, now comes the dreaded question. When do you all think this may be implemented?" I was wondering, as someone who as taken advantage of the AT3/4 armor all her life, if I had time to train some more before I had to trade mine in.

Fawn sighed a little. "I wish I knew. But we're still researching the changes to the MMM situation. Until we have an answer on that, we can't do very much."

"I take it though, it won't be next week?" I smiled a little.

"Even if the mods can't be trained away, there's a good possibility that we'll go for removing AT3/4 anyway. I just want to know what we're dealing with before we make a final decision. I'd like to have it in progress before summer ends; that is my hope. I have no idea when it will start, for certain."

Okay, I thought. Fair enough. "As a sort of a tangent," I grinned, "hunting has always been the quickest way of gaining experience. I know that a recent forum discussed alternate methods of gaining experience. Any thoughts on that subject?"

Fawn poured herself a glass of chilled lemonade, and smiled. "I hosted that forum. Actually, I have lots of thoughts on the subject. I do love the alternate methods of gaining experience, and I'd very much like to have more of those in the game."

"What ways are there now? Besides whacking on the beasties?"

"We already have some permanent quests for the low-level players," she said, "and I'd like to see some for everyone else as well. Then there are such means as lockpicking (of course), healing, resurrections, enchantment true, imbue, etc."

I smiled with just a hint of skepticism. "Well, picking, sort of..." My words trailed off as something brushed past my foot. I looked down in time to see a tiny mouse scampering down the wooden stairs. I looked up at Fawn, who was grinning at me. I pointed at the mouse.

"He lives here," she said simply, by way of explanation.

"We already have some permanent quests for the low-level players. I'd like to see some for everyone else as well."

"Elvanion has his big cats, and you have a mouse." I shook my head at her and grinned, noting the contrast.

Her smile widened. "I also have birds. And a few other critters that wander through from time to time."

My lips curled a little. "I hope he doesn't bring his cats to call. You may lose a pet," thinking that a mouse and a bird or two would be tasty little niblets to kitties of that size.

Fawn looked over at me and shook her head. "Not as long as I'm the boss." She giggled wickedly. "I'm a lot meaner than I look!"

I chuckled at her, and shook my head. "Ah, where were we?"

Fawn took a drink from her chilled lemonade. "Picking."

I grimaced, and looked askance at her. "Sure you want to get onto that subject?"

"We can go into it briefly. I don't really have my thoughts completely worked out on it yet, though."

I considered carefully. Picking is one of my pet peeves, and I didn't want to go off on a tirade. "Well, I guess I feel that if I spend 20k+ silvers on a lockpick, I should be able to get some experience using it."

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(Interview with Fawn, continued from page 17)

She nodded to me, saying, "One thing that the players seem to want, and I'm open to, is a wider range of difficulty on the chests. At the forum, we even spent some time figuring out what the upper limit should be."

"Which was?" I smiled a little.

"In the 500s, I think we decided, or at least discussed, at the forum."

"Sounds reasonable," I nodded.

Fawn continued. "It would make thieves more necessary, I think. I don't see single-trainers being able to manage those easily."

I gave a quiet snort, and chuckled. "I don't see *me* being able to handle those easily for a while." I thought about it, wondering what the logical conclusion to higher difficulty would mean. "So some day, experience for picking may be commensurate with the skill involved?"

"Maybe," she temporized, smiling. "I've only recently begun to really look at it, and most of my attention right now is on the AT3/4 phase-out."

Nodding my understanding, I said, "One thing at a time. Still, it's nice to know it's being looked at. I wanted to ask you about 'roleplaying', in and of itself, as a method for gaining experience." Fawn smiled at me. "I know we sometimes get bonuses for good roleplaying. How does that work?"

"Well, that's the best 'alternate' way of gaining experience there is. There are varying levels of bonuses that are given out, and each carries with it a modifier, depending on the level, and a flat bonus that's given out immediately."

"And the bonuses are given out accordingto what criteria?"

"Without getting too specific or technical, the criteria ranges from 'just barely' to 'truly outstanding', with a few stops in between. One well-known serious roleplayer here says it is the fastest way to get experience. Some players are very rarely without a modifier of some sort."

I asked, "And they are in effect for the actual time you hunt, or some other experience gaining activity?"

She nodded. "When you're not earning experience, the modifier sits and waits."

I was more than a little impressed by that. "That's really rather spiffy."

"It's a very nice system."

"And how do you know if you have a bonus going? By the 'flash of insight' message we get?"

"AT3/4 causes imbalance because it allows everyone, even spellslingers, access to effective armor with no cost in development points."

"One of those messages, yes." She grinned. "You can get up to four times normal experience for killing a creature, just for good roleplaying. That's outstanding, in my opinion."

"That's terrific!" I hadn't realized how much you could get out of one of those bonuses. "Gives people an added incentive to seriously roleplay, which is where all the fun comes in, in my humble opinion."

"Anyone who doesn't take advantage of that is really missing the boat. Even the smaller modifiers are extremely valuable."

A strong gust of wind rushed in off the water, ruffling my hair, and filling my senses with the fragrance of saltwater. I inhaled deeply, enjoying the fresh air. Fawn smiled and brushed her hair back from her face. As Fawn sipped from her glass, I took a peek at my list, and realized that I had asked all the questions I had for her. "Hmm, do you have any topics you would like to address?"

She "hmm'ed" herself, then said, "Perhaps just a warm fuzzy or two. First, to all the GameMasters and Assistant GameMasters, who really make this place work. Much of what they do will never be known by the players, except in vague terms. You have to consider to yourself, that every butterfly, every leaf, every curtain fluttering at a window, was put there by someone, someone who loves the game as much as you do."

I nodded to her, smiling, knowing how true this was.

"And next, but not least, the players. That's why we're all here; that was the draw to do this kind of work. Without the players, this world is just so much code; they make our ideas take on a life of their own. I'm just grateful to be here with such fantastic people, on both sides of the world."

I smiled at Fawn. I, for one, was rather glad she was in charge of the universe in which I was a part. I took another bite of my cookie, and saw a small movement out of the corner of my eye. The little mouse had returned, perhaps aware that there were delectable treats waiting on the table.

Fawn laughed, exclaiming, "Another one!" while I crumbled the last of my cookie hoping to lure it back. Too late! It had already scampered back down the stairway.

I dusted my hands off on my leggings, and stood up, realizing that it was time for me to go. Of course, walking was out of the question, and when I was ready, Fawn set me down just west of the Town Square.

It had been a good, productive evening and, with a happy heart and full tummy, I resumed my stroll back down Faetherquel Lane, and to the gemcutter's shop. ❖

Trachten's Travels

The Upper Dark Grotto and the Dark Temple: The haunt of formidable foes, sinister shadows and powerful hunters

By Lord Trachten Bickapod

In my previous two columns, I've provided information about the dark grotto including a map, a guided tour, and descriptions of the lesser creatures there. Now I will tell you about the more dangerous and fearsome dyar rakul and minor gogor.

Dark, Cold Shadows

First, the dyar rakul, or "dark, cold shadows." These creatures are found primarily on the stairway up to the dark temple. They will occasionally wander down into the raax area (much to the frustration of hunters there) and occasionally accompany the minor gogor in the dark temple itself.

Currently, the dyar rakul are considered a nuisance creature and are rarely hunted. Their shadowy form causes all weapons (even blessed ones) to pass through their bodies inflicting no damage. In addition to this, they seem to be immune to all types of channeling attacks, including the split-realm sorcerer spells. Essence attacks from the Mage, CE, and OE lists will work on them.

The best way to deal with the rakul is to cast OC *Light* in the room. This causes them to be damaged and prevents them from attacking. They can also be hit with directed spell attacks, but then they turtle. Since they are also large, unstunnable, with no arm and legs, and great resistance to critical hits, they are difficult to kill.

The rakul have two very effective resistance-based attacks. The first is a power drain from everyone in the room. In addition to draining power, it will pull all hiders into the open. The second is a resistance attack against a single target. It inflicts a cold critical and concussion damage if the target fails to resist. It is very similar to *Essence Strike*, although the type of critical is different.

Both of the rakul's attacks happen simultaneously, with no preparation. This, combined with a fast attack time, makes the creature a very deadly opponent unless you have a lot of resistance.

King of the Hill

Next is the minor gogor, the current king of the hill. These gargoyle-like creatures are smart, fast, and tough. So far, only in groups have adventurers hunted them with much success. They are only found in the dark temple itself.

Gogor are immune to most Essence attacks. Directed spells in particular are useless against them (wands currently work, but I believe this to be an aberration of the gods). They are unlife and have a particularly tough hide, so tough in fact that only magical, blessed weapons can hurt them. Elixirs are available from the backroom of the cleric shop in town to bless weapons made of laen, shaalk, and so forth.

These creatures are very smart and will run from most area effects like *Maelstrom*, cloud spells, and *Tangleweed*. In addition, they tend to run when outnumbered, but will stand their ground when supported by others of their own kind.

Gogor know much of the OC and OC spells lists, so have the ability to cast both *Bind* and *Frenzy*. This means, of course, that you must have very good resistance defense before venturing into the dark temple. They also have an attack similar to the *Unbalance* spell, however this attack cannot be resisted.

Among the specific spells known to the gogor are: *Aura*, *Unbalance* (with no RR), *Word of Stun*, *Protect I*, *Alkar*, *Spirit Shield*, *Silence*, *Bravery*, *Interference*, *Word of Binding*, *Heroism*, *Frenzy*, and *Spell Shield*.

Survival and Hunting Tips

The most effective hunting technique requires a cleric with *Bind* and *Sanctuary*, a sorcerer with *Curse*, and a mage with *Call Wind*. Lots of channelers don't hurt either. First, the cleric must cast *Sanctuary* at the three intersections in the dark temple. This effectively boxes the gogor in and prevents them from ganging up. The gogor will not enter a sanctuary room.

A lone gogor is found and the sorcerer casts the resistance-lowering *Curse* spell. The gogor will cast their defensive spells even while alone, so when you find them they usually have excellent resistance. After the *Curse*, the cleric binds them and the mage casts *Call Wind*. *Call Wind* is usually required to lower the gogor's defenses, because as I've said they are intelligent and will parry up when confronting large groups (and perhaps also when encountering *Sanctuary*). Next, everyone attacks until the gogor is dead. As you can see this requires a well-balanced and organized group to be successful.

At the end of this article, I have appended a general chart containing an overview of some of the most salient characteristics of dyar rakul and minor gogor. I would like to thank Lady Catrissa and Lord Thalior for some last minute help with my research for this month's column. I am happy to survive to tell the tale.

(Continued on page 24)

(Classifieds, continued from page 5)

LOST AND FOUND

Lost: One small kitten, of nondescript nature. Speaks with a distinct accent, has fleas and seems to suffer from bouts of sudden drowsiness, but is worth its weight in gold. If found, please return to the Alchemist's Shop.

Found: Several moribund sparrows under my meat counter. Come and claim same at Grocer's, and please, don't leave any more lying around. My butcher has already sold several as quail, pocketed the silver for himself and left the complaints to me!

HELP WANTED

Rewarding opportunities in the field of journalism await! Authors, poets, reporters, columnists, artists, needed now! Earn credit towards free weekends in GemStone III, while earning the admiration and respect of your fellow adventurers. Send submissions to Gira, Managing Editor, KC at **TESOL**.

We are looking for a few good halflings! The Kelfour's Militia, in an effort to fulfill its long-standing commitment to affirmative action, is inviting applications from qualified halflings interested in a military career. Height requirements have been waived for these openings. Plenty of food, lots of funny stories, and adventure if you want it. Generous wage, so you will never come up short just before payday. Apply in person at the barracks. Don't go round the back, there's a double door there and you may be overlooked ❖

(Relative Strangers, continued from page 13)

"No, we don't want to keep him waiting."

My great-grandsire Toby Zencat, named after the famous Toby Hornblower of "Ol Toby's Pipeweed" fame, was related to Dartaghan's second uncle through his first cousin's great aunt Granelda Brassbottom. Familial relationships are very important to us halflings. And I was counting on it.

Several years earlier I had decided to break from the family business of burglary and learn the secrets of Essence, follow the ways of the mage. This had little to do with any sort of moral dilemma I had with burglary but, rather, the well-thought out realization that my talents might lie in some other profession. This realization came to me as I was fleeing the scene of my first attempt at the family business, being pursued by an overzealous mastiff. During my weeks of convalescence I examined my options and decided becoming a mage was my best chance of making a living without supporting whole families of healers in the process. Ah, the innocence of youth.

I managed to convince the local mage to take me on as an apprentice; the promise of protection from the late night visits of other members of my family went a long way towards convincing him, and after two years of hard study decided my best opportunities for wealth and knowledge, emphasis on wealth, were at the frontier.

I spent several days flipping the well-worn pages of *The Lineage and History of Family Zencat* and happened upon the name of a Lord Mage who was last seen in the vicinity of Kelfour's Landing, a well-known frontier town. Several months of correspondence later, Dartaghan agreed to meet me and do what he could to get me on my feet.

The trip to Kelfour's Landing was eventful. I met Garios. Spent several months evading several mobs of angry villagers (it turned out Garios had a touch of larceny in him too), and broke up a band of tork thieves (a band of elves stealing torks, not a band of torks with kleptomania). Eventually we arrived in Kelfour's and set up a meeting with Dartaghan.

We arrived at the town gates. Garios kept gazing back towards Helga's and the cloud of smoke that was beginning to drift across the city.

"I think it's starting to look a little out of control."

"I'm sure there's nothing to worry about. The bucket brigade seemed to be having fun, I bet they'll thank us tomorrow."

Garios seemed unconvinced.

Precisely at that moment a black cat strutted through the still-open town gates (I know it seems overly dramatic, but it was a black cat, really).

The cat looked sharply up at me with eyes that seemed a little too intelligent for your average wharf cat, sat, and began to clean its already immaculate fur. I reached down to give the cat a friendly pat.

"Please, not in public." Garios whispered hoarsely.

I sighed.

Somewhere Garios had gotten it into his overly thick skull that halflings enjoyed the occasional kitty consommé. I had tried, many times, to point out that as far as I knew the only cats my family ate were of the fish variety. But once a rumor became planted in Garios' brain it became unshakable truth.

We stood there arguing for several minutes, I pointing out the various culinary failings of felines as food and he shaking his head, looking at me with disappointment.

"Meow!"

We turned and saw the cat grinning (I swear, grinning) up at a rich-looking halfling, wearing the robes of a mage, who had just run through the gate.

(Continued on page 23)

(Kelfour's Kitten, continued from page 12)
time to time. Unfortunately, unlike human bards, all my ballads have ever earned me were several poorly aimed old shoes and broken bottles.

Well, it's not like I am a total moocher. I try to earn my keep and show my thanks to those that find it in their hearts to look after me. I do a mighty fine job of keeping the rats out of the grocer's, and I chase the field mice away from the clothier's soft, comfy bolts of fabric that make such tempting nesting places for them. And I'll not even mention all the flocks of pigeons I have vanquished from eaves of the buildings around the Town Square with my quick pounces and stealthy attacks. Orhan knows how crucial that duty is, in order that adventurers may gather, rest and gossip without constantly looking heavenwards or having to wear hats to ward off offending pigeon attacks. Grrrrr... pigeons, I hate them; rats with wings, I call them.

Where was I? I know there is a point to this tale. Ah yes! In the course of expressing my gratitude to my benefactors, I usually try to leave some token for them to show I have completed my labors of thanks. Many's the time I have dragged in a dead sparrow, snatched from mid-air, and laid it at the grocer's feet, meowing and yammering my appreciation. And I shall never forget how the clothier's apprentice was so overcome with joy at my gift of a dead skunk left upon her sewing table, that she fainted dead away! I beamed with pride to see that, until that broom out of nowhere came down upon me and swept me out the door, somewhat dazed.

Though I have been a free spirit of late, I still am drawn to the study of esoteric lore, something I retain from my early years as a mage's cat. One afternoon, fresh from my nap, I was casting about, looking for something interesting to do, when I spied the alchemist. I stalked him back to his workshop, and he didn't even notice me until I was inside the house. Grabbing me by the scruff of the neck, he asked, "Well, what have we got here?" Actually, he asked me "Meow mew rrrrr raah grrr?" since he has the power to converse with those beings more advanced than himself.

An afternoon in the library, perusing some tomes, snacking on a juicy bookworm or two.

While, thanks to my early training, I can converse with lower life forms in their own speech when the situation calls for it, I decided to let the conversation continue in the cat tongue, since he seemed quite pleased with his linguistic skills. Not wanting to discourage him, I did not even point out his horrible accent; he must have picked up his speech from listening to the late night, inebriated yowlings of a pack of Forversian stable cats.

"Oh shifter of substance, oh transmuter of that which is base into that which is precious, oh transmogrifier transmogrified, oh mighty..."

"Look, I haven't got all day. What are you doing here, little fleaflicker?"

"Er, sir, I was hoping you would allow me to spend this afternoon out of the heat and sun, in the cool, enlightening recesses of your most renown library, perusing a few minor tomes, and snacking on the occasional plump, juicy bookworm or two."

"Hmm, most novel, a cat in search of education. Well, I need to do some research in there myself. Very well, follow me, my shaggy scholar."

He led the way into the mellow surroundings of his library. He pulled off the shelves several ancient and fragile scrolls, putting them gently upon the table in front of him. Then reaching up, he took a leather-bound book down and plopped it before me.

"Here, knock yourself out," he smiled cryptically.

I sniffed at the tome for a long time. Tooled torkaan leather, freshly tanned. My mouth started watering. Slyly, imperceptibly, I extended my front claws and dragged them across the spine. Ah!!!!!!! It felt sooo good! That over with, I opened the book and begin to read. It dealt with mages and familiars of all kinds, including cats, wolves, hawks and other beings who deserve to live out their lives free and wild, but are held under the Essence-enforced thrall of nefarious magic users. Who could be so cruel and heartless as to write such a book for all to read? I flipped quickly to the title page and froze. The author was my former master.

I slammed the book shut and looked around. The alchemist was deep in study, the most ancient of the scrolls unfurled before him. His lips moved noiselessly as they formed the words to spells that no being had heard or used in eons. Suddenly, I was possessed by an ancient, primal and irresistible impulse, something which was issuing from the very depths of my subconscious. I couldn't help myself; I arose on all fours and silently padded across the table. The alchemist, in his reverie, did not notice me. I continued my approach, daring not to breathe lest it betray me. Finally, in need of oxygen, I let out a huge yawn, circled once or twice around the ancient parchment, and with a satisfied sigh plopped myself right in the middle of the page the alchemist had been studying so intently. Abruptly, I fell into a deep, contented slumber.

(Continued on page 24)

Lord Strom Goes Skinny Dipping

by Lord Strom O'Berin

I was talking with that trader in town the other day about the itinerant merchants and things, when he said something strange to me. Out of the blue he warned me in a harsh whisper that I

should watch out for that Jarlik fellow who runs the furrier's. His exact words were, "Watch that Jarlik, he's a sly one. Almost ruined me, he did. But you can weasel a good deal outta 'im."

Now, I have done business with Jarlik for many seasons and I had not considered he would cheat us like that crook Murdos, over at the gem shop. I thought this over for a while and it kept gnawing at me. Was he a cheat? Had he been skimming from us? Could we continue doing business or should I repeat the charges to the constable and hope to see Jarlik arrested. Was he even guilty? I thought and thought about this, then hit upon a plan to test the man's honesty and integrity.

I resolved to go on a great hunt. A hunt to put that trader, who hangs around town, to shame. I stocked up on supplies, planned my defenses, and figured my itinerary. I ended up traveling all over the lands of Kulthea surrounding Kelfour's Landing, and even to another distant, war-torn land that I was transported to by magical means. I saw forests and grasslands, caverns and mines, mountains and valleys. I spent several days seeking out the beasts of our lands and collected samples of various remnants of the critters to show Jarlik and ask his pricing. Some beasts I could not find even with Lady Kali's help. Lord Gillaume managed to track down a brown bear for me though.

I brought Jarlik more, different business than he had seen in a while, in hopes I could maybe trip him up and discern what, if any, dubious practices he was employing.

I found 48 current beasts with salable body parts. When I took my loot to the furrier's and turned them in, sure enough! Jarlik tried to cheat me over and over. Sly one indeed!

While he offered me the same top price for each of my goods, he would lower his worst price and try to pay me that, since the lower prices varied so much (generally the lower price is within 10 silvers of the top price).

I won't mention them, except to say, "A few silvers here and there, all the time, adds up pretty quick."

Now I have come to believe that Jarlik was out and out cheating me every time I came to him. Why, he would stutter and even rename a price for a particular skin! I only asked him his price again, as if I did not hear or perhaps understand him the first time. I did not try to barter with him, using

(Continued on page 24)

Beast	Body Part	Price	Beast	Body Part	Price
Barrow Wight	Wight Claw	75	**Hill Troll**	Troll Beard	55
Black Bear	Bear Hide	100	**Hobgoblin**	Hob Scalp	35
Brown Bear	Bear Skin	100	**Ice Skeleton**	Skeleton Skull	25
Boar	Boar Snout	75	**Karnelin**	Karnelin Hide	25
Bounder	Bounder Hide	90	**Ki-lin**	Ki-lin Horn	875
Carrion Worm	Worm Skin	35	**Kobold**	Kobold Skin	25
Cave Troll	Troll Skin	55	**Lesser Mummy**	Shroud	75
Cobra	Cobra Skin	45	**Lesser Orc**	Orc Hide	35
Cockatrice	Cock. Feather	35	**Manticore**	Mant. Tail	35
Death Dirge	Dirge Skin	35	**Marmot**	Marmot Pelt	45
Dark Orc	Orc Ear	55	**Mountain Ogre**	Ogre Nose	75
Fire Cat	Cat Claw	600	**Puma**	Puma Hide	290
Fire Rat	Rat Tail	350	**Salamander**	Sal. Skin	75
Fog Beetle	Carapace	1000	**Skeletal Giant**	Giant Bone	45
Forest Troll	Troll Hide	55	**S. Lizardman**	Sohleugir Skin	45
Frost Giant	Giant Toe	100	**S. Chieftain**	S. Crest	75
Ghoul King	Ghoul Finger	100	**Storm Giant**	Giant Skin	100
Giant Rat	Rat Pelt	25	**Threk**	Threk Hide	45
Gnome	Gnome Scalp	35	**Titan**	Titan Scalp	75
Goblin	Goblin Skin	35	**Torkaan**	Torkaan Pelt	25
Grey Orc	Orc Beard	45	**Werebear**	Werebear Paw	45
Greater Orc	Orc Scalp	45	**Wolverine**	Pelt	35
Greater Ghoul	Ghoul Scraping	45	**Wraith**	Wraith Talon	55
Greater Spider	Spider Leg	55	**Bone Golem**	Golem Bone	35

(News Briefs, continued from page 2)
the gathered crowd. Odd effects and spell redirections were seen, attributed to the essence-bending characteristics of the disturbance. So massive was this redirection, that two brave souls fell due to misguided magic. Lord Bolin died when an Aura cast upon him went wrong, and Lord Krisenfest was killed in the course of trying to lifekeep another fallen comrade.

Summer Weddings

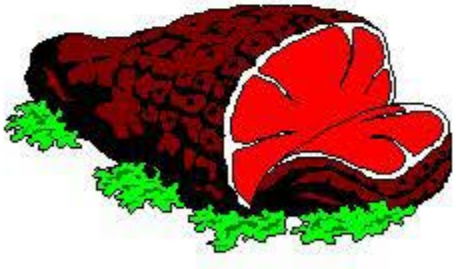
On a balmy afternoon in early July, Marc and Kaikeyi were married by Sydna just outside of the Shrine of Heroes, Cay's Shrine. The wedding got off to a slightly late start and lasted for about an hour, including the reception for the happy couple at the dance tent. Many of Kelfour's most popular citizens attended, for a total of 32 jubilant guests. The vows as spoken by the bride and the groom were of their own devising. Marc alluded to a previous marriage to Suzielle (tongues were wagging all the while about how they never did seem to have benefit of clergy for that union but oh well, love is blind). The guests were done up in their finest wedding attire, which made the food fight that broke out at the reception even more fun. Rumor has it that the food fight started when a ranger, looking for the ladies' room, lost her way and tipped over the dessert cart onto a ravenous halfling. When the party came to an end, there was more food left on the floor than on the refreshment trays.

Later that same month, the wedding of Maera and Krisenfest was conducted. Decked out in gorgeous finery, the bride and groom played gracious hosts to about 25 well-wishers. Lord Elvanion and Lady Miriani helped the bride and groom with the sartorial, catering, and decorating arrangements, doing their usual divine best to make it an affair to remember. ❖

A Cautionary Tale

by Fadrel Nazpar

A fair elf awakes in the midst of the night,
Poor ranger had'et aught that didn't set right.
As he painfully hunches above a tin pail,
He thinks "Was it the pie or the ham or the ale?"



There and then to himself
does he swear a stern oath,
To avoid Frith's and Helga's,
a pox on them both!
Though they've fine serving
wenches and lasses galore,
Now his poor gut a-wrenches,
his sides are all sore.

A word to the wise, if you'd stay out of danger,
Take heed of the plight of our poor, heaving ranger.
Beware in a tavern, e'en if it be rude
Drink yer ale to the dregs but don't dare eat the food! ❖

(Relative Strangers, continued from page 20)

"Dartaghan?"

"What? Who? By the great quivering belly of Kreack the incontinent! I have no time to waste now, there's a..."

"I'm Ronin, we were going to meet you at the gate."

Dartaghan slapped his forehead. "Of course! Pardon my haste but some misbegotten moron has set fire to Helga's! They need all the help I can offer. If I find the fool..."

I shook my head in disbelief, "Should hang the twit."

Garios raised an eyebrow at me.

Dartaghan was rummaging through his backpack. "Here, I brought this for you. Let's see, I'm sure...ah here!"

He dropped a silvery shield and two odd-looking amulets at my feet.

"Wear the amulets. If you need some help, just rub them. The shield is made of laen, you'll find it will protect you better than the reinforced shield you can pick up at Tyron's." His head lifted as if he was listening to somebody we could not see or hear.

"Oh, good heavens! The fire's starting to spread! Luck to you, Ronin. Let's meet tomorrow, you can leave a message for me with anyone in the Town Square." Dartaghan dashed through the gate followed by the cat.

Garios was already wearing one of the amulets, I put on the second and picked up the shield.

"Well what do ya think, Garios? Those nymphs better watch..."

Pop...clang...rattle, rattle. The shield had popped from my hand and dropped to the ground. Garios looked at me with a grin. "Great idea! Throw your shield at them to distract them and I'll sneak up from behind"

"Very funny," I mumbled as I picked up the shield. "Must have some sort of magical properties Dartaghan forgot to mention." Without further ado, we walked out the gate towards the sea cliffs and a pleasant afternoon of hunting...or so I hoped ❖

(Rakul and Gogor, continued from page 19)

	Dyar Rakul	Minor Gogor
Level	42	45
Approx CPs	400	600
AT	AT3	AT4
Attacks/OB	Essence RR -PP drain, no prep; Essence RR - cold crit (like E-strike), no prep	battleaxe/240(280); short sword/240(280); claw (broken weapon)/ 240(265)
DB	n/a	240(265)
Spell DB	230	n/a
Criticals	large/no stun /no limbs/ resist (-30)	norm/?stun/ limbs/ resist(-40)
Round Time	fast	varies, but fast
Skin	none	none
Treasure	none	level V chests
Special	CC*Light* prevents from attacking; weapons pass through	Unlife; thick skin is immune to non-magic; blessed weapons; spells*

*Spells cast by minor gogor include: *Aura, Unbalance* (with no RR), *Word of Stun, Protect I, Alkar, Spirit Shield, Silence, Bravery, Interference, Word of Binding, Heroism, Frenzy,* and *Spell Shield.*

(Kelfour's Kitten, continued from page 21)

I awoke in total darkness. I checked myself thoroughly with tongue and foreleg, making sure I had not been turned into a newt for my impertinent declaration of nap time and place. Overjoyed that I was still the crown of creation, a cat, I heaved a meow of relief. The table was bare and the door to the library was open.

I must thank the alchemist for his overwhelming patience, tolerance and hospitality, I thought. No ordinary gift will do. I scampered down the alleyways back to the Town Square, my mind a reel with thoughts of proper tribute. I was at a loss though. Somewhat fatigued by my journey back from the east side of town, I curled up on the stone bench and listened to the tale of a young adventurer.

"I am not exaggerating, rats, hordes of them, *this* big!" He made a wide arc with his arms, trying to encompass a vast space. My ears perked up as he embellished his story.

Sweet staff of Eissa, that was it! No ordinary thank-you rat would do, I must bring a *giant* rat to the alchemist's door as a token of thanks! To the catacombs straight away!

But excuse me for a moment now, methinks I just saw a flock of pigeons alight upon Moot Hall. ❖

(Skinny Dipping, continued from page 22)

Jarlik lowers his worst price and tries to pay that. Once armed with this information, if we citizens of Kelfour's Landing band together, then perhaps we can force Jarlik the furrier to treat us more fairly.

my skills as a trader that I have picked up over time. Jarlik seemed only too ready to repeat his prices to me, as if he thought that I truly could not hear well and that he could fool me repeatedly!

The man greatly offended me, but when I asked the constable about Jarlik's pricing policies, he replied, "High Lord Strom, while I understand you feel cheated, Jarlik is the only one willing to buy these things.

"In truth, milord," he continued, "I fail to see that he is practicing unlawful acts. I mean, the man does always give you the same top silver bid, even if he rarely pays it!"

Accompanying this article is a table *[p. 21]* showing the best prices Jarlik would offer me on the various skins I had collected. I hope that once armed with this information, if we citizens of Kelfour's Landing band together, we can force Jarlik to treat us all fairly. ❖