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ABOUT WT&D

The Way, The Truth, & The Dice

The Way, The Truth, & The Dice is an official publication of the
Christian Gamers Guild, an online group that tries to express Christian
faith in gaming. All are welcome to join the email list there, and take
part in our discussions. Visit

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“We may
throw the dice,
but the Lord
determines how
they fall.”
(Proverbs
16:33) NLT
Ever been to one of those X'er Anonymous meetings?
You know, the ones that start, “Hello, I’m Bob, and I’m an X’er?”
“Hi, Bob.”
“Well, I’m Mark, and I’m a Christian... and a Gamer.”

You would be surprised at how many people think that’s impossible. To many, it’s an oxymoron, right up there with military intelligence, legal ethics, and my personal favorite, the three-foot tall elephant-like creature that once roamed the plains of North America, the dwarf mammoth. You can’t be a gamer if you’re a Christian; you can’t be a Christian if you’re a gamer. The two pursuits are, I am told, incompatible.

Yet, as Galileo said about his theory that the earth might revolve around the sun instead of the other way around, it may be impossible, but it’s true. I am a devoted Christian; a model of the creed in ways that can be measured (which are not, to Christians, ways that matter), with degrees in Biblical Studies and extensive experience in ministry and teaching. And I am also a dedicated gamer, measuring time in this hobby in decades rather than years and involved in it as a game writer and designer. I find the two aspects of my life don’t conflict; in fact, I write a column elsewhere largely about how the two mesh, how I integrate them in my life, and how each benefits from the other.

Yet, as you might expect, there are people out there who are unconvinced. They believe fervently that these two parts of my life are incompatible. They write to me, responding to my article, telling me, often in the rudest possible terms, that it’s not possible to do what I claim is quite natural, that you cannot possibly be a Christian and a gamer. I write back to these people; I try to explain to them why they are mistaken, that it’s possible, it’s natural, that I’m a model of the creed, that you can be a Christian and a gamer. The two pursuits are, I am told, incompatible.

And I suppose I understand the feelings of some of those gamers, too. They see a title like Confessions of a Dungeons & Dragons Addict and they assume that they know what it’s all about. They’ve heard or read all the tirades by some who bear the name Christian, and they’re tired of them. So rather than read the article and find out what I’m really saying, they just send me a note reaming me out for what they think I must have said.

I see from this that gamers and Christians are not really so different. In some ways, they’re very much the same. Every time I get a letter from a gamer condemnning me for being a Christian writing about games, I see someone who made an assumption and acted on it. He didn’t take the time to find out what my article was about; he didn’t read it for himself or do any checking; he didn’t stop to find out who I am or what else I’ve written or whether I might actually know what I’m talking about. He made an assumption: I was a Christian writing about games, and therefore I must be an idiot needing to be condemned for my arrogance. It is the same mistake made by Christians about gamers. They make an assumption. They assume that the things they heard about gaming are correct, and they don’t check, they don’t investigate for themselves, before announcing their judgment (which is not theirs at all, but only the repetition of what they’ve been told) that gamers are participating in some sort of evil cult activity. It’s the same mistake. Sometimes it’s made by Christians, sometimes by gamers.

Wrong, and that many of them are afraid that if they think for themselves or listen to my arguments they’ll be fooled. Not everyone is able to think everything through themselves, certainly. There are many things I believe because I was told by people I trust. I’ve never performed nor even observed an experiment in time dilation, yet I explain that aspect of relativity to others quite often. I believe that those who explained it to me were smart enough not to have been mistaken and honest enough not to wish to deceive me. I never drank gasoline, turpentine, ammonia, or bleach, but have no reason to doubt that these are caustic poisons which would at the very least make me uncomfortably ill. It’s the same thing for most of the Christian critics: someone whom they believe is smart enough to know told them it was wrong, and although they don’t understand if fully they trust what they were told. In most cases (save for a few for whom the possibility that their mentors might be mistaken is too threatening, and those who seem to have a vested interest in maintaining the controversy), I just have to explain why what they were told is wrong, and the matter is fairly quickly clarified.
They say that the letters you get are just the tip of the iceberg, that there are hundreds of readers who think the same thing but don’t take the time to write. I am consoled by the fact that I do get positive letters. Every week I hear from Christian gamers for whom one of my articles is an encouragement and even an aid to use in explaining things to Christian friends. I hear from Christians who are not gamers, thanking me for helping them put the nonsense they’ve heard into perspective and come to solid biblical conclusions about the issue, conclusions which recognize that a game is a game, and can as easily be played to the glory of God as anything else we do in life. I hear from gamers who are not Christians who appreciate my efforts to explain their hobby in terms which perhaps Christians might understand. I remember that GAMA (the Game Manufacturers Association) asked if they could include a link to the article, and Wizards of the Coast sent me a thank you note and a gift because through my article I helped answer the concerns for hundreds of Internet surfers every week. I get the encouraging letters. But I still hear from gamers who hate Christians, who won’t forgive me for my faith or let me talk about their hobby even if I’m saying good things about it.

Yes, many gamers hold a dim view of Christianity from good cause. There are some Christians who already know what they think and won’t take even a moment to find out what gamers are actually saying and doing. Each time there is an encounter between one of those Christians and a gamer, the gamer comes away thinking that he’s just met another of those narrow-minded pinheaded religious nuts, and that Christianity of the sort preached and practiced today promotes that sort of – well, I was going to call it thinking, but that just doesn’t seem to be the word for it. But I know that there are at least thousands of Christians who enjoy hobby games, Dungeons & Dragons in particular. Some of them design games and work for game companies. Scores have written to thank me for that article. Beyond that there are millions upon millions who have no opinion on the subject one way or another, who would be or are surprised that there’s so much upset over a silly game. All I can tell you is that those negative voices are not most Christians, even if many Christians have been confused by them. But I can tell you that much with certainty. Christianity is not the enemy of gaming.

Perhaps I can put it in terms you’ll understand. I’m a Christian and a gamer. I’ve noticed, as you have, that among gamers we have our munchkins and our power gamers. They embarrass us. They sometimes make us miserable. At times we’d like to disown them. But in the end, we know that they, too, are gamers, and the world will see them as part of our hobby, and sometimes as the most evident part, no matter how much we try to present a better front. Well, we Christians have our munchkins and power gamers, too.

We remind ourselves that God isn’t finished with them yet, and might still be able to turn them into decent people. But meanwhile they’re out there making the rest of us look bad, and there’s not much we can do about it except tell you that as much as they think they’re the true examples of our faith, they really don’t represent most of us.

That, and invite you over to our place to play a few games and get to know each other a bit better. I hope you’ll accept the invitation.

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Christians Playing Dungeons & Dragons
by Steve Weese

Recently I have seen a resurgence of discussion on this topic, and since it is central to Fans for Christ, I thought I should address it. Since Dungeons & Dragons has long been described by certain Christians as a “doorway to occultism” and a “manual for magic” I will first address what D&D is. This will include describing a typical game session, including examples of games I have been in. Then I will address specific claims and charges about the game, which I believe are patently false.

What is Dungeons & Dragons?

Dungeons & Dragons (or D&D) originated from an already existing game of medieval warfare. This game, Chainmail, was further developed into the first true roleplaying game.1 A role playing game is where the player takes on the role of someone else, and acts out that role. This may seem a bit strange at first, but people actually do this for a living; they are called actors. So, this game gave people a chance to become actors, playing a part.

The director of this movie, if you will, was known as the Dungeon Master. This person was sort of the referee who created the world and the other characters that the players would interact with in their own movie. (Nowadays, this person is usually called the Game Master, since roleplaying games have expanded into many settings beyond fantasy).

The genre, or setting of this game is fantasy. It is very similar to the world of Middle-Earth in J.R.R. Tolkien’s Lord of the Rings novels. The general fantasy world is the world of wizards, knights, fair maidens, dragons, elves, dwarves, goblins, trolls, kings, and peasants. Of course, this world in some ways is similar to our medieval and renaissance times, in terms of government, clothing, weapons, and armor.

So, a player of D&D creates this persona, the role they would play, which is known as their character. A character in D&D has ability scores that describe how strong, smart, fast, and charming they are, for instance. They also have a sex, height, race (such as elf, dwarf, or human) and a class, which is their job. The current version of D&D, 3.5, allows many choices for this class. A character is some type of adventurer (obviously, you’d get bored playing as a peasant farming all day or scrubbing in the kitchens). The classes a player can choose for their character are based loosely on different fantasy stereotypes you have probably seen in movies. Here are a few examples: warrior, barbarian, wizard, rogue, priest, ranger (a woodsman or hunter), paladin (like a knight), monk (think Kung Fu).

Playing the Game

Once the characters have been created, it is time to play. The Game Master will usually start the adventurers on a long-term quest usually referred to as a campaign. The characters meet in the fantasy world, join together and begin on their quest.

There are many rules that determine what a character can and cannot do. They are based on the abilities mentioned before, such as strength, and also skills that the character learns. As a character gains experience in the game, experience points are awarded. This is a way for characters to advance their skills. As they gain experience, skills and abilities improve.

The game in some ways tries to simulate what it would be like if your character was actually there in the fantasy world. Let’s compare this to a task you would perform. You have a bow and arrow, and you are fairly skilled with it. So, you go practice at the archery range shooting at the targets. Now, even though you are good, do you hit the bull’s-eye every time? No. Sometimes you do, and sometimes you don’t. Sometimes you don’t even know why you missed. However, if you had no skill with the bow, you would probably never hit the bull’s-eye, or, if you did, it would be total luck. To represent this situation in D&D, your skill is added to a random dice roll. Here is an example of how this would work. This time, it is your character Visk that is skilled with the bow. To represent this skill, he gets a skill score of 8. (Zero would be no skill at all and 20 would be the best possible.) To represent random chance each time you fire, a dice roll is added to your score. Hitting the bull’s-eye is represented by a difficulty of 15. So, each time you roll your dice, you add your score of 8. If the total is 15 or above, your character hit the bull’s-eye. So, this sequence describes the action rolling a 20-sided die (results of 1-20):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roll + Score = Total (Result)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11 + 8 = 19 (Visk hit the bullseye)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 + 8 = 14 (Visk just missed the bullseye)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 + 8 = 28 (Visk made a perfect shot!)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 + 8 = 10 (Visk missed badly)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Wikipedia
The player would roll the die (die being singular for dice), and the Game Master would tell you the result of the action. This is how many actions occur in D&D. Other actions, such as getting on a horse or picking up a rock on the ground, are simple and do not require a dice roll. It is assumed that you are able to do it. To do something like this, a player just says, “I get on my horse.” So now the rest of the gamers all know that that player is on his horse.

An Example Gaming Session

As luck would have it, I played in a D&D game just a week ago. There were seven of us who went out to a gaming café. We sat around a table and got comfy on the couches. A TV was playing in the background and Rocky II was on, though I don’t know why.

Many people assume that when gamers roleplay they totally take on the character. Usually, this is not what happens at all. In fact I have never seen this happen, and if I did, I would think that the person doing it was a total nutcase. Instead, we all have a picture of our character in our minds, doing the things we are trying to do with him or her. Besides that, it’s not much different than friends gathering around to play monopoly or cards. We talk, laugh, joke, and play the game. During this session, for example, we took a break and walked next door to get pizza and subs. Let me give you an example dialogue from this game. The players are Scribe, Adryn, Steve (myself), Brad, John, and Lex. The Game Master is Dan.

Dan: Okay, so last time you guys played you had just killed all the wolves that the warrior guy had sent after you.

Steve: Yeah, I had just climbed up to the platform and then collapsed there bleeding. So I’m up there. Bleeding.

John: Okay I go look back to the room the wolves came from, behind the gate.

Dan: What gate?

John: The one to the room with the wolves.

Dan: Oh, that gate rose up into the ceiling, there’s just an empty room where the wolves were.

John: Oh, okay.

Scribe: Oh, this is such a bad movie.

Steve: What? Rocky II is a great movie! Its like… nostalgia.

Scribe: No it’s not, it’s just bad.

Brad: See I think watching movies is like a meal, sometimes you want something really healthy, but sometimes you want some junk food. So movies like this are just junk food.

Adryn: Yeah, I can see that.

Steve: THIS IS A GOOD MOVIE!

John: So anyway, I guess we all climb up to the platform.

Steve: Yeah, is anyone going to heal me?

John: Okay, let me see. I have one Cure Light Wounds spell left.

Steve: Well? Heal me!

John: Okay, I cast the spell. (John rolls some dice.) You heal seven hit points.

Steve: Okay, thanks. Now I’m up to 10.

Dan: Alright, what are you guys going to do now that you all climbed up to the platform?

Steve: Well I guess I will scout ahead. I signal to the rest of the party to be quiet and wait where they are.

Scribe: WHAT? YOU WANT US TO WAIT?

Steve: So much for stealth.

Dan: Okay, you see a door on the right and a room over to the left.

Steve: Okay, I go into the room.

Dan: This room right here, you just walk in?

Steve: Okay, no wait, I check for traps first.

Dan: Alright give me a roll.

Steve: (Rolls dice) Total is 31.

Dan: Yeah, you find a trip wire going across the floor here.

Scribe: I walk up behind the rogue.

Steve: What are you doing? I told you guys to stay back! There’s a trap here.

Scribe: Well, get rid of it, rogue!

Steve: What do you think I’m doing? Okay Dan, I get out my grappling hook and move back away from the trap and have everyone else back up. (Meaningful look at Scribe.)

Dan: Okay. (He moves our miniatures on the map to show where we moved to.)

Steve: Alright I throw the grappling hook across the wire and use it to pull the tripwire.

Dan: Okay, roll. (Steve rolls dice) You hear a loud thunk.

Steve: Okay, I go carefully check what happened.

Adryn: Wow, Billy Dee Williams sure looks different in this movie.

John: Yeah but you can still tell that’s his voice when he talks.


John: Remember in Star Wars he was the only guy who called Han “Han”, everyone else said it like “Hahn.”

Scribe: Yeah, that’s right.

Steve: That is so not Billy Dee Williams… it’s… it’s some other guy.

Lex: I think he is right.

John: No way that is totally him.

Steve: No it’s this other guy who went on to make this other movie… it’s Carl Weathers, that’s it. Carl Weathers.

Scribe: I’ll settle this. (Gets out her cell phone and calls someone.)
Dan: Okay, well you see a bunch of metal spears that are stuck in the wall now.
Steve: Wow, glad I found that trap.
Brad: I walk by and look at the spears. Hmm.
Scribe: (on phone) Okay, you know that Rocky movie?
Yeah. Who plays that guy... (pause) Apollo Creed. 
Steve: No, that’s the character’s name not the actor!
Scribe: Oh. (pause) It’s Carl Weathers.
Steve: Ha! I told you.
John: Okay, but he still really looks like Billy Dee Williams.

As you can see, this is hardly an occult experience we were having. Instead, it is like a bunch of friends getting together playing a game. I have played D&D for almost 20 years, and this experience is very typical. I have played with probably a dozen different groups of people, and it all has been very much like this.

Defending the Game

The chief complaint I see about D&D by certain Christians is the magic. Specifically, that somehow D&D either teaches real magic use, or is a front for people to lure the unsuspecting into the occult. An article on the Chick web site (maker of extreme Christian tracts) references many of these arguments, and somehow claims to have researched these things. However, in many cases, no example is given from D&D as to how these things are the case. I will use this article as a source later in this section. If you read the D&D sourcebooks, it is clear it is a game. The rulebooks are just that; a collection of rules to describe how to play the game. It seems that if some of the critics actually read the books, they would see there is no way to actually perform any “real magic” from them. Otherwise, wouldn’t we have hordes of teenagers out there purchasing these books and hurling fireballs and magic missiles at each other? To defend D&D and show it does not conflict with Christianity, I will examine the criticisms of this article. I will also show examples from the D&D books themselves. To prepare for this section, I just have read the entire section on Magic in the 3rd Edition rulebooks. I will also examine some other criticisms of the game and explain why they are flawed.

Morality

One of the claims that is made often is that the players (often portrayed as young, impressionable teens, though this is hardly the norm) are offered confusing choices on morality. For instance, in the game, your character has an alignment. This alignment determines your character’s general moral stance. The purpose of alignment in the game, as quoted by the Player’s Handbook is “a tool for developing your character’s identity... Each alignment represents a broad range of personality types or personal philosophies.” In real life, there are good and bad people. In movies there are good and bad people. So, why not in a game? Critics often say that because there is evil in the game, it encourages people to be evil in real life. This is like saying that watching Star Wars might make you decide to become like Darth Vader.

In every epic story or movie, there is always evil to overcome. Someone has to play the bad guy. Your character’s morality helps you know more about him or her. So, you can decide what they would do in certain situations. Using Star Wars again, Han Solo was a “good” character, but not that good. Remember Luke had to talk him into rescuing the princess by offering him a lot of money.

Luke: “But they’re going to kill her.”
Han: “Better her than me.”
Luke: “She is rich.”
Han: “Rich?”
Luke: “Yes. Rich. Powerful. Listen, if you were to rescue her, the reward would be...”
Han: “What?”
Luke: “Well, more wealth than you can imagine.”
Han: “I can imagine quite a bit.”
Luke: “You’ll get it.”
Han: “I better.”

Han might well be described as having the alignment of Chaotic Good, which is described as:
“A chaotic good character acts as his conscience directs him with little regard for what others expect of him. He makes his own way, but he is kind and benevolent. He... has little use for laws and regulations... He follows his own moral compass, which, although good, may not agree with society...” 2

So, alignment is simply background for your character. A criticism leveled at D&D comes from a description of the Lawful Evil alignment. This is from Schnoebeelen’s article from the Chick site:
“For example, you can have a ‘lawful evil’ character. A handbook states that: ‘A lawful evil villain methodically takes what he wants within the limits of his code of conduct without regard to whom it hurts. He cares about tradition, loyalty, and order, but not about freedom, dignity, or life.’ Talk about a mish-mash of moral ambiguity. Our young people are having enough trouble getting their values straight without being immersed in this sort of material!” 3

Yet, there are plenty of characters in the Bible who fit this description. I would say Pharaoh in Exodus is a good example. He took what he wanted with little regard for others, by enslaving the Jews. He had his

2 Player’s Handbook, page 89
3 Schnoebeelen
order and tradition, but did not value freedom or dignity of life. Admitting that there are people like this is hardly a corruption of one’s values.

**Fantasy Magic is Not Real World Magic**

The magic that we are forbidden to practice in the Bible comes from one source – Satan. God and Satan are here in the real world with us. Fantasy stories take place in other worlds, in other realities that never have happened and never will. It is important to note that in many fantasy worlds, like D&D, magic is different than what we might call ‘magic’ in the real world we live in. Magic in these fantasy worlds is considered a natural force. I would compare it to something like electricity or even gravity. Using magic in these worlds is like turning on a lamp or making furniture. It is simply there, part of the lives of the characters that live in the imaginary fantasy world. It is not the occult magic that is referred to in the world of reality. When a character in the fantasy world accesses magic, they are simply tapping into a power source that is built into their world, not calling on evil spirits, demons, or the devil.

If a game is supposed to be set in a fantasy world, it is hardly surprising that it might include magic in that world. It wouldn’t be very exciting to play a game called “Checkbooks and Yard Work” that was totally based in reality, would it? Magic adds an element for our imagination to enjoy when we are stuck mowing the lawn. It’s simply imagination. To say D&D is bad and not ritual, this is a description of casting a spell from the *Player’s Handbook*:

“Preparing a spell requires careful reading from a spellbook (for wizards) or devout prayers or meditation (for divine spellcasters)… after preparing a spell, the character carries it, nearly cast, in his or her mind, ready for use… Spellcasting might require a few special words, specific gestures, a specific item, or any combination of the three.”

Note that is the character, not the player, that is actually performing these actions. The player does not have a spellbook, nor does he meditate. It is just assumed the character does something to this effect, but it is not explicitly described. The player looks up the exact spell they want in the rulebook so they can understand the effects in the game. I’ll show you an example of one of the most common spells, Fireball.

---

**Fireball**

- **Level:** Sor/Wiz 3
- **Components:** V,S,M
- **Casting Time:** 1 action
- **Range:** Long (400 ft. + 40 ft./level)
- **Area:** 20-ft radius spread
- **Duration:** Instantaneous
- **Saving throw:** Reflex half
- **Spell Resistance:** Yes

A fireball is a burst of flame that detonates with a low roar and deals 1d6 points of fire damage per caster level (maximum 10d6) to all creatures within the area. Unattended objects also take this damage...

You point your finger and determine the range (distance and height) at which the fireball is to burst. A glowing pea-sized bead streaks from the pointing digit and, unless it impacts upon a material body or solid barrier prior to attaining the prescribed range, blossoms into the fireball at that point…

*Player’s Handbook, 204*

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4 Player’s Handbook, 6
5 Schnoebelen
6 D&D History
7 Player’s Handbook, 148, emphasis added
There is a bit more describing the effects such as things catching on fire, etc. However, there is nothing in the description of this spell or any other spell in the D&D manuals that will instruct you how to cast it for “real.” I suppose you could try pointing your finger and hoping a “glowing pea-sized bead” streaks out; good luck with that. The components section lists “V,S,M” meaning to cast the spell your character has to say a Verbal part (some magic words), a Somatic part (waving the hands and gesturing), and also a Material part, which in this case is a ball of bat guano (eww) and sulfur. There is no description for any of these spells saying exactly what the verbal and somatic parts are. Therefore it does not tell you how to cast the spell. Not that anyone can really cast a fireball spell anyway (if you have seen someone do this, feel free to correct me).

The absurdity of the claim that D&D manuals can help you cast spells is illustrated in a wonderful article entitled “Spellcasting 101” by William J Watson. He tries to cast the spell Hold Portal from the 3rd Edition books: “...the spell description says that “the magic holds the portal fast, just as if it were securely closed and normally locked.” That should easily keep my two daughters from running out of the playroom every two minutes to bother me as I write this.

Test Method: The book tells me that the only thing we need to cast this spell is a verbal component... but it doesn’t tell me what that magic word is. Still, a 20th level mage like myself should know all of this by now. I’ll just shout a few lock-related magical power words at the playroom door.

Results: Failure.

(Watson, emphasis added.)

I highly recommend this article to illustrate the point. The fact is that players do not even say any magic words or move their hands or do any kind of ritual whatsoever. The words and gestures are left to the imagination, and the player simply says, “I cast Fireball.” That is it. No rituals, no magic words, no eye of newt. Just, “I cast Fireball” with maybe an “at those guys over there” after it.

D&D and Negative Psychological Effects

Another frequent criticism of this game is that it causes violence, suicide, or some type of disorder where the player loses a sense of reality. Several studies have been done testing this hypothesis, and none of them found a link between these and Dungeons & Dragons. An article I found from religioustolerance.org lists five separate studies, and none of them found links to D&D. In fact, one study found that the suicide rate among roleplayers is over 50 times less than the average population. Another found that gamers are less likely to commit crimes.8

What about the cases where this has happened? There are often stories you hear about D&D players losing it and thinking the game is reality, or that D&D was involved in a crime. However, many of these stories are simply urban legends, or police ended up determining that D&D had nothing to do with the crime1. Of course there are a few cases where this did happen. Since we have already established that D&D does not cause these problems, it is logical to assume

8 Robinson, 3
the people in these cases had prior mental disorders. The tiny number of actual cases where gamers are involved in crimes, again, shows that they are less likely to exhibit violent behavior than the average person.

What about the Demons in D&D?

One thing that is helpul to understand about D&D is that it takes concepts that it considers to be from various mythologies to build a fantasy world. The Game Master can use these concepts to create various fantasy flavors. For instance, it could be Norse, Egyptian, Oriental, Celtic, or even Native American in style. The creatures that a player can encounter come from almost every one of these possible mythologies. Christianity is not the only religion to talk about “demons.” For instance, Japanese mythology has a type of demon called an Oni.

Oni are devil-like demons with long nails, wild hair, a fierce look, and two horns on their forehead like the devil images known in Western Christian cultures. They wear tiger skins and can fly. Oni hunt for the souls of those who did evil things in their lives. (Japanese Mythology)

In fact, since demons are not really given a physical description in the Bible, it may be Christianity was influenced by demon concepts from other cultures. The point is that the “demons” in D&D are not directly correlated with the Christian concept of demons.

The truth is, in the 20 years I have played D&D, I have had my characters encounter demons maybe twice. There are such a wide variety of monsters and creatures in the game that demons rarely show up.

Back in 2nd Edition D&D, TSR (the company that formerly owned D&D) actually removed all references to demons, in what was believed to be a gesture toward the religious pressure on it. However, they were placed back into 3rd Edition by the new company, Wizards of the Coast!

Personally, as a Christian, I will say I don’t like the idea that there are “demons” in D&D. I would rather there not be, and in any games that I run myself I exclude them. I know that demons are real, and would rather not play around with the concept. Since D&D is so versatile, it should be no problem to fully enjoy D&D without including any demons.

I found out in my research that 3rd edition released a book just on demons and demon worshippers. It is called the Book of Vile Darkness and is for “Mature” readers only. This is not part of the core rules, and is definitely not required to play the game. In defense of the D&D publishers, I would say that they probably don’t believe in demons and think of this as another “mythology” to add to the campaign. For example, in the movies Young Sherlock Holmes and Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom the heroes were up against strange cults that worshipped evil gods and performed human sacrifice.

Regardless, as a Christian, I would recommend for a good D&D experience just to cut out the demons altogether.

Sex and D&D

D&D is a fantasy world where characters can experience new adventures, conquer enemies, win rewards, gain experience, and even find love. Since you are only limited by your imagination, your character could do just about anything, including have sex. However, this game is definitely not designed for this purpose. There are no sections or chapters on characters having sex.

Christians have certain guidelines to follow on sex, and they would apply to playing this game as well. Just as they apply to watching movies, or other types of entertainment. Therefore, a player should keep these guidelines when playing D&D.

Do the rulebooks feature some scantily clad women? Yes. This is part of the fantasy genre. If you go to the library and look in the fantasy section, there will be many of these. (I dare say the same about the romance novel section.) D&D is not marketed to Christians, obviously. There is no actual nudity beyond the occasional breast in the books I have seen, and those are the older rulebooks. I just paged through all 286 pages of the Player’s Handbook. I found only 3 pictures with scantily clad women, none of which appear sexually suggestive. They are either just standing there or casting a spell. I think this may be part of marketing also to attract more women players by having less of those types of drawings and artwork in the newer books.

Benefits of D&D

Dungeons & Dragons, as we have seen from an earlier description, actually requires math skills. It does not require advanced math, but it does require regular addition, subtraction, and multiplication. Practicing these things in the context of a game actually encourages math development among the players.

The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs published a report on roleplaying, describing it as a stimulating hobby that promotes creativity. The National Association of Gifted-Creative Children has endorsed D&D for its educational content. D&D does actively encourage creative problem solving. There are puzzles to solve, social situations to resolve, and decisions to be made about actions and consequences.

The Imagination

I find that one of the most beautiful parts of D&D is the chance to stretch the imagination. A player can imagine other worlds, mystical creatures, endless seas, magnificent cities, and more. When we were children, we imagined things like this, at least I would say most of

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us did. Isn’t our imagination a gift from God? Where did the great painters get their ideas for paintings if they did not first see them in their mind’s eye? The great building and structures of our time were first imagined in the mind of an architect. As adults we should be free to imagine and enjoy the gift we have. We imagine differently from children, this is true, but we still imagine. We played “cops and robbers” as kids, can’t we play Dungeons & Dragons as adults? I say we can, and we can enjoy it.

Accepting Christians who play D&D

D&D is not for everyone. I’m not saying that Christians have to play D&D or even like D&D. However, Christians should, after learning the facts, be able to accept other Christians playing the game. In Romans 14 Paul writes:

The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls.

Christians playing D&D are not sinning and not becoming involved in the occult. As this article has demonstrated:

- Roleplaying involves imagination and fun, not a departure from reality
- The D&D sourcebooks are primarily a listing of rules to play a game, not instructions for the occult
- No credible link has been established between D&D and suicide, violence, or other mental disorders
- D&D does have some content that Christians should be wary of
- Playing D&D can have educational and creative benefits

Playing D&D as a Christian should be viewed as any other entertainment. Some movies and books we are ok to read, and some we should not. Just as we can eat too much cake or watch too much football, we can play too much D&D. As Christians, this is how we function in the secular world. We can do many things, within reason and limits. If we have a peach with a bad part, do we throw the whole peach away? We can, or we can cut the small bad part out with a knife and eat the rest of the peach which is perfectly good. D&D is not just one game, it is really an almost limitless structure within which a player can have adventures. Christians can play easily within this structure without going astray.

Biblical Perspective

I would be remiss if I did not put this article in perspective of the Bible. Interestingly, in the article on the Chick web site, the author quotes I Thessalonians 5:22 as saying: “Abstain from all appearance of evil.” This is from the King James Version. This appears to be a slightly inaccurate translation in the KJV, as three modern versions, the NIV, NASB, and NLT, translate it as such (respectively):

Avoid every kind of evil.
Abstain from every form of evil.
Keep away from every kind of evil.

Paul the Apostle, and author of this book, was not talking about appearances at all, but evil itself. The author of the Chick article is apparently ignoring other versions of the Bible to make his point, which is actually about appearance. However, we know God does not judge things by appearance.

The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart - 1 Samuel 16:7

Just because someone dresses differently from you, or looks like what your ‘culture’ might consider evil, does not mean they are evil. The next time you hear someone saying evil about D&D, tell them to look for themselves. Not at the appearance, but at the actual game and the people who play it.

Sources

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Love in the Dungeon by Rich Staats

Ah love! Andrew Lloyd Webber warns us that “Love changes everything, but not always for the better.” His adage is certainly true in the realm of roleplaying games. Love can: spice up an encounter, add motivation for a session, or bring the gaming table crashing down around the Game Master’s (GM’s) ears. In this article, we will examine some ways to spice up a campaign using love as a motivation and some guidelines for love’s introduction to avoid potentially embarrassing situations and maximize both the players’ and the GM’s enjoyment of the game. We will consider love from its broadest definition and include items ranging from pure lust (e.g. sexual orientation) to platonic (e.g. adoration). There are many factors which should be considered when determining if and when love should rear its head in the campaign; these include: the composition of the playing group, the genre of the campaign, and the personality of the GM. [Warning: this article contains mature themes which may be inappropriate for children.]

The most important factor for determining how and when to introduce love into a campaign is the make-up of the playing group. The maturity level of the group is a driving factor in determining the range of ways love can manifest itself while the mixture of players and their interpersonal relationships point to likely Player Characters (PCs) for a romantic interlude. For example, I am currently conducting roleplaying sessions with my three children (ages 8, 6, and 6); it would be grossly inappropriate to introduce notions of carnal lust into our sessions. On the other hand, while GMing at MIT, I had no compunctions about introducing a gamut of love-related complications and rewards into the campaign ranging from platonic relationships and love of the gods to same-sex carnal entanglements.

The interests and maturity level of the group determined what is germane and interesting. In session wrap-ups, I typically ask the players what they liked and what they would like to see done differently in future sessions. During one such wrap-up a player stated, “Let’s see something different to spice things up; things are too much like a fairy tale. We want to see some variation in your sexual stereotypes!” The comment was half in jest, but it lead to the group’s interaction with a gay prince and cross-dressing duchess. These became two of the group’s staunchest allies, and it sated the appetite of the more politically correct members of the gaming group. ☺

No matter what emotional or age level the players are at, it is possible to introduce love into the campaign to add diversity. But, the particular aspects of love should be tailored to the gaming group. Even the youngest players recognize some forms of love. Children can identify with the love they feel towards their parents, and the love children feel toward their pets. Adventures which involve kidnapping children or rescuing parents are very effective at the early ages. A potential reward involving love for younger players could be gaining an unusual or interesting pet.

Older players can understand the deeper and less obvious forms of love. Love toward their nation or their love of God. The players may be able to identify with their own love of their children. As the players become more mature, you can introduce complications which embrace a conflict between two valid loves. The PC loves his spouse, but to save the town, he must let her die. This can involve some great moments of roleplaying.

Even with the most well-grounded and mature groups, it is best to pre-screen your love related notions before springing them on the unsuspecting party. The good GM knows his or her party members. It works best for the group and the GM to avoid situations in the campaign that closely mirror incidents in the players’ lives. (Discard this advice at your own peril.) What would happen if an uncaring GM decided to have a whole scenario revolve around the death of a PC’s father only to find out that the player had lost a parent in a gristy car wreck? The GM is well served to ask questions about potentially embarrassing or incendiary issues before opening them up on the gaming table. I always asked the players before I introduced a love interest for them; almost always they agreed. In one example though, a player confided they had been raped by a person matching the general description of the NPC! (You can bet I immediately backed off from that option!)

Love does not have to involve just NPC-PC interactions. Love triangles solely involving NPCs can provide great fodder for party interactions. Another excellent campaign play is to have the party act as matchmakers for a pair of pining lovers. A truly enjoyable experience is to have the party STOP a romance involving unsuitable parties. 😎 “Love is blind!”

When introducing love, try to bring it up in a way that is realistic and sincere. It does not make sense for the princess to immediately fall madly and deeply in love with the random rogue (i.e. PC) wandering half-bathed through her court. (She might fake such a love for a variety of nefarious reasons.) Likewise, the prince might confess his love to a PC in order to bed such a person. Love takes time, and it is even more rewarding for the players to see their characters building up a nurturing, loving relationship over an extended period. I have literally seen players in their late twenties jump for joy at having an NPC return their PCs’ love; it was a cool moment at the gaming table.
DIFFICULT MORAL SITUATIONS IN RPGs by Rich Staats

This is a tough topic. I emphasize in my seminars at the Cons that the GM needs to be honest with himself and only work inside his moral comfort zone.

This is a piece I wrote for a discussion group dealing with how to bring a party back to the preferred path when they are distracted by other concerns:

➢ In XXX, YYY wrote: Now, here’s where it gets interesting... The evil wizard ... [snipped] ... The players agreed to join with him ... [snipped] ... I need help planning further adventures. ... [snipped] ... Help me out here, please!

Interesting issue. Here are some random thoughts that I hope are useful.

My assumptions:
* You want to portray being evil, working with evil as a Bad Thing
* You don’t want to kill off the entire party or end the campaign in an embittering (although potentially morally satisfying) way like having the entire party taken prisoner by the good king and his men and having the party sentenced to life-long servitude in an iron mine
* There is at least some hope that certain of the party members could “see the light” and “do the right thing” if given appropriate motivation

If those assumptions are reasonably accurate then...

First, nothing works like social learning! ☺ My first course of action would be to introduce some other good-natured, but clearly not-so-clever-as-the-smart-players NPCs to work for said wizard. These NPCs should do something in good conscience that turns out horribly, horribly wrong, and then these NPCs should be made to suffer hideously for their poor choices. “See those ghouls down there? Yeah, those used to be the Gobstock Gang. Hideous when you think about it, trapped in an undead body, but always aware what they were and could have been. Too bad they fell in with Magnus Eeeevil! Hey, does that remind you of anyone else?”

The rest really depends on the level of maturity and sophistication of your players and the social dynamics of the group.

If the party takes the message that they’ve done wrong then I would give them the chance to make amends and be done with it. The Allies were the good guys in WWII even if the Soviets weren’t really all that nice.

If the party needs a bit more of a reminder then I would give them the chance to make partial amends and then punish them in some kind of lasting way. For example:

* Every time they come into an area ruled by decent folk, the people give the party a bit of a cold shoulder, e.g., icy stares, pulling the kids in to protect them from the party, people making charms against evil when they see the party, people get up and move away when the party sits down in an inn; or,

➢ The party is captured toward the end of the adventure and branded with some type of significant mark showing them to have served the Bad Guy. You could even play this as a rash mistake – “Oh sooo sorry about my men! They are rash! Well, nothing to be done about those missing ears and brand on the forehead now. Please accept my royal apology. Serving evil, always risky, eh?”

If the party is unrepentant in the face of obvious reminders that they are Serving Evil then I would “let the chips fall where they may” and tighten the grip of Good Everywhere around the party members’ collective necks until they deservedly experience “a short drop and a sudden stop.”

It is not only the players who need to be comfortable with the topics raised. Ultimately it is the GM’s game, and the GM must be comfortable with the subject matter at hand. I call this being consistent with your own moral and political “comfort zones.” If the subject matter is offensive to you then reject it and plan something else. There is no shame in this. You are the GM, after all. It would be the height of arrogance for a gaming group to ask you to devote dozens of hours preparing a scenario you are not at ease with. Likewise, make sure that you are objective on the particular issue. If you’ve recently gone through a devastating divorce, it is probably just as well to avoid any major love involvements in the campaign for a bit.

Once you introduce a love interest, let the players take the lead on it. One of my parties had a hard time maintaining henchmen. The group got a very bad reputation, especially with hawlings who rarely returned after signing on with the party. One particular hawling named Myrtle did survive though due in large part to the repeated intervention of one of the PCs, Tremir.

Now, Tremir was elvish, and the PC wanted nothing to do with Myrtle which was all well in good until one of the other PCs (playing Tremir’s brother), Granth, dropped a love potion into Myrtle’s canteen while she and Tremir went out on a recon. Tremir continued to politely rebuff Myrtle, but Myrtle was nothing if not persistent. Eventually, Tremir received a wish and used it (with Myrtle’s permission) to transform her into an elf. Tremir and Myrtle ended up founding a line which lasted over a millennia in campaign years. It was actually quite a touching session.
Risus: The Anything RPG
by S. John Ross, from Cumberland Games, for free!

I was first introduced to roleplaying games several years ago when I was in high school, I fell in love with them then, and played all through my high school years. When I got to college, I was away from my gaming buddies and didn’t have as much time to game, so I sold nearly all my stuff. Then, when I was in seminary, I gained a little, off and on, and even bought GURPS (3rd Edition, I believe). Still nothing really caught on for me. Most games were expensive (especially if you bought it read it and never played it), had long, complicated rules and used strange-shaped dice that were not always easily available.

Then about five or six years ago I discovered Risus. Risus is billed as rules-light comedy-centric roleplaying game. The entire rules set is six pages long, the basic mechanic involves setting target numbers to accomplish tasks, and character creation is simple, taking less than five minutes to develop a basic character. In addition, it used everyday six-sided dice that anyone could get out of any boardgames that might be gathering dust in the closet.

Character Creation
Characters in Risus are built on the basis of clichés. Each cliché is a shorthand description of abilities, skills, vocations, motivations, education, and so forth. They can be as broad or as narrow as the player and the GM determine. For example, it would be completely acceptable to have a standard 10-dice PC with the following clichés:

- Sven Haraldson
- Barbarian (4)
- Sailor (3)
- Horseman (2)
- Ladies’ Man (1)

Each numerical value following the cliché is the number of dice allocated to that particular cliché. This is the number of dice rolled to determine the outcome of any task attempted by the PC, up to and including combat. Often, it is helpful to define the scope of the cliché. In the rules, clichés are often followed by a descriptor, titled “What It’s Good For.” This descriptor is a short summary of the kinds of things the cliché will allow the PC to do. To use our example above it would look something like:

- Barbarian (4): Swinging a sword, wearing a horned helmet, drinking like a fish
- Sailor (3): Hoisting, trimming, and furling the sails, tying knots, singing sea chanties
- Horseman (2): Riding horses, training horses, whispering to horses
- Ladies’ Man (1): Being witty, charming, and a great conversationalist

Of course, this is a bare bones example, and one might want to further exploit the cliché, by either expanding its name or the descriptor, i.e., Berserking Barbarian from the Cold Northern Wastes (4).

The Basic System
One of the fun features of Risus is the core concept that “anyone can try anything.” This means that an Octogenarian Sunday Driver (2) could attempt to jump his Oldsmobile over the Snake River Canyon. What would then happen is the GM would set a target number for the attempt, likely around 30. Then the player would roll his two d6es and see what his results are. Most likely, at least in the universe most of us live in, he would not make it. The scale runs from automatic success for simple things like opening a door to 5 which is considered “a cinch” to 30 which is something approaching “are you kidding me?”

Combat is handled similarly. The underlying philosophy in Risus combat is that almost anything can be a “combat” from a high school debate match to a running urban firefight. The concept is that Risus combat is anything where one person is trying to wear down, jockey for position over, or otherwise defeat his or her opponent. The two roll dice representing their appropriate combat-oriented clichés. The loser of that round deducts one dice. Then they roll again. And so forth until one is reduced to zero and is declared the loser. At this point the other major tenet of Risus combat becomes apparent: the winner gets to decide what happens to the loser. In this sense, cliché dice are not the equivalent to hit points, which is sometimes difficult for many to grasp at first. It can be very entertaining to hear the descriptions of what the final outcome of a Risus combat situation, which could be anything from total humiliation to incapacitation to outright death.

This makes for very quick combat scenes, sometimes too quick for many. There are alternative rules available in the Risus Companion, a $10.00 64-page optional supplement available from S. John Ross (as well as some interesting discussion at the Risustalk Mail List on Yahoo Groups). These slow down combat somewhat, and make the outcome less of a foregone conclusion.

The simplicity and uncluttered ruleset attracted me to the system, and the light-hearted “Let’s not take ourselves too seriously” tone hooked me completely. It is very easy to adapt the system to most settings (as I’ve done with fantasy, pulp, and post-apocalyptic settings). However, most feel as if it is best suited for one-shot adventures and short campaigns, while not being ideal for longer ‘epic’ style campaigns.
Who Needs a Superhero?: Finding Virtue, Vice, and What's Holy in the Comics
by H. Michael Brewer, from Baker, at $12.99

A Hero is as a Hero Does
This past week, I finished reading Who Needs a Superhero?: Finding Virtue, Vice, and What's Holy in the Comics by H. Michael Brewer. As a way of a disclaimer, Brewer is both a pastor of a church and an avid comic book collector, who during college, maintained a small mail-order comics trading/selling business. So, based on those credentials, I believe that he is well-qualified to write on this subject.

I picked it up as I wanted to brush up on my superhero tropes as I seek to share the gospel with people that are generally marginalized in society as well as within the church at large. And yes, I'm talking about geeks. I have a burden for geeks because you see, I R 1.

It is really a simple premise. The underlying tropes of superhero stories share deep similarities with the Gospel story. Stories like a savior from beyond our world entering our world and living as one of us; man's inability to tame or even control the destructive beast within, guilt, vengeance, justice and grace, and truth. Brewer pulls relevant examples from contemporary stories as well as Golden Age comics, and weaves them throughout his book. He visits the tropes within Superman, as he sees in the Man of Steel profound similarities with Christ, the Man of Sorrows. However, the book doesn't come off as preachy or even too scholarly. In fact it is a breezily quick read, yet while accessible still contains lots of subjects for further meditation and discussion. It is a great book to get a discussion going.

For other pastors like me, he includes notes for using his book as a guide for small group studies in the Christian faith as told from a comics point of view. In addition, he includes a quiz, similar to many of the memes coursing through the blogosphere today. His “Superhero Self-Quiz: What Superpowers Lurk Inside You?” is designed, I think, as a way of also helping geeky people see their inherent worth as people created in God’s image and endowed with abilities that can benefit those around them.

I would recommend this book for anyone who wants to minister to the geek culture without coming across as condescending. Engage them in conversations about their hobbies, their favorite heroes and seek to share how the stories presented in glorious color and heavy action can actually inform a mature understanding of Christianity. Even Tolkien noted that all the really good stories of humanity ultimately point to the True Story presented in the Gospels. As Saint Columcille observed, “Since all the world is but a story, it were well for thee to buy the more enduring story rather than the story that is less enduring.”

I would also recommend it for geeks who might be interested in learning more about the Christian faith, in language that they understand.

All in all, it’s a great read.

Risus: The Anything RPG by S. John Ross can be downloaded from Cumberland Games and Diversions at www222.pair.com/sjohn/risus.htm. There are several good fansites available to support the system, including the Risus Talk Mail List at games.groups.yahoo.com/group/risustalk, as well as the Risusiverse Wiki at risusiverse.wetpaint.com.
Two questions come to mind immediately when most gamers hear about The Ark of the Covenant. The first is – Do we really need yet another variation/expansion of Carcassonne? There is currently the basic game, four official expansions, dozens of unofficial expansions, and a spin-off game, Hunters & Gatherers. The second question: Is it possible for a Christian-themed game to be any good? Most games made for the religious bookstores frankly are fairly sorry, with very few exceptions – Settlers of Canaan one of them. Ark of the Covenant follows the same formula as Settlers – copy an extremely successful “German” game with minor changes to fit the theme.

The answer to the second question is a resounding yes, as the game plays almost identical to the original Carcassonne with only a few changes. The changes are really nice, making the game easier to play, but giving it a distinct flavor that differs from its Carcassonne siblings. The graphics are crisp and clear, and game plays extremely smooth. If you only want one Carcassonne game, this is the one to get. The Biblical theme is barely there, but the game play makes up for it; and it’s nice to have a quality game that at least pretends to be Christian. Carcassonne addicts will want the game, but those who already have Carcassonne may not be interested; even though I believe it’s the superior incarnation of the genre. If you never played Carcassonne before, then this is a great way to introduce yourself to a superior, fun game.

Rules
(The following rules summary assumes a person hasn’t played Carcassonne before. For a summary of rule changes, see my comments at the end.)

A starting tile is placed in the middle of the table, with all seventy-one other tiles shuffled and placed face down in piles next to the board. Players receive seven followers (commonly referred to as “meeples”), one large meeple called the “prophet”, and place one leftover meeple on the first space on the scoring track board. An ark of the covenant token is placed near the board, and the game is ready to begin. The player who last read part of the Bible (starting an argument on spirituality) goes first, with play proceeding clockwise around the table.

On a turn, a player draws a tile from any stack, and places it on the board. The tile must be placed next to one side of one existing tile on the board, and all its sides that touch an adjacent tile must match. Tiles can have roads running through them, and/or parts of cities and fields. After placing a tile, the player may place a meeple on the board (either a follower or a Prophet); this meeple must be placed on the tile just played. The player can place a follower on a road, city, or field. The follower cannot be placed on anything that already has a meeple of any color on it; but tiles can be joined together later in the game, causing one or more meeples to be in the same city. Prophet meeples may only be placed in a city – once per game. After the optional placement of the meeple, and completed roads, cities, or temples are scored. A road, which is completed when the ends of the road meet a crossing, city, or temple, scores one point for each tile that makes up the road, with one additional point for each oasis located on the road. A city, which is completed when the city is completely surrounded by city walls, scores two points for each tile in that city, with tiles holding a small scroll symbol scoring an additional two points. Prophets double the amount of points scored by a city and are then removed from the game. The player who has the most meeples on the road or city moves their scoring marker accordingly (ties give the total points to all involved players) and removes their meeple(s) from the road/city. When a temple tile has tiles on all four orthogonal sides, forming a cross, it scores seven points for the player who has the most meeples on those five tiles. These meeples are not removed, and ties in majority give the seven points to all players.

After the first city is completed, the Ark of the Covenant is placed on the board by the player who completed the city onto any tile of said city. From this point on, a player may move the ark of the covenant 1-5 tile spaces on their turn, instead of placing an optional meeple. Each follower the ark crosses scores the owner of that meeple one point. Play continues in this way until the final tile is placed.

Final scoring then occurs for each meeple still on the board. Incomplete cities and roads score one point for each tile composing them, with oases and scrolls scoring one bonus point each. Incomplete temples score three points for the player with the majority of meeples surrounding them. Fields are scored for the first and only time in the game. Each field is worth two points for each sheep icon in that field; however, one sheep icon is canceled by one wolf icon in the field. The scoring track is then consulted, and the player who has scored the most points is the winner!

Components
Some comments on the game...

1.) Components: Hooray for a “Christian” game with top quality components! The tiles are thick with the fields being a yellow desert with little sheep on
them; and the cities look very sharp. I appreciated how each tile looked unique, even when it was basically identical to another tile on the board. The meeples are colored little wooden people, with the prophets being a little larger (this could cause some confusion at a quick glance, but because of the different role of the prophet in this game – it’s not that big of a deal). The scoring board looks similar to the tiles, with easy to read numbers on it. Everything fits quite well in a cardboard insert in the very sturdy box (which happens to be the same size as all other Carcassonne games.)

2.) Rules: The rules are printed on six full-color pages with many illustrations and examples. The formatting is excellent, and I had no problem understanding the rules. I did have to read them carefully, however, because I was already familiar with the Carcassonne system, so I had to search for differences. It would have been nice to have a section that outlined the differences between the versions. The game was extremely easy to teach, especially to people who never played Carcassonne, and I found that most people picked up the strategies quickly.

3.) Differences from Carcassonne: Besides the differences in artwork, here is a quick rundown of the major differences between Ark of the Covenant and Carcassonne.

- Prophets are new – doubling the point value of cities they are placed in – instead of just being a “Big” meeple.
- Fields are scored almost identical to those in Hunters & Gatherers, with sheep scoring two points each (with one wolf canceling one sheep), instead of the more confusing fields from Carcassonne.
- The Ark of the Covenant piece allows a player more options; and although I doubt a game has been made or broken by this token, it can give someone those few points to push them over the top.
- Temples only need five tiles, instead of the nine needed for the monasteries in Carcassonne. They also have no meeples placed in them, but rather score for the majority of meeples that surround them.
- Small cities (only two tiles) score four points rather than two like in Carcassonne.

4.) Which?: I believe that if you only want one Carcassonne and have more than two players (for two players, Carcassonne: the Castle is best), this is the best version to buy. It’s the third version of the game, and many of the small kinks that people complained about in previous versions are gone, such as incomplete cities, confusing scoring of fields, boring graphics, etc. It’s the nicest looking game, in my opinion, and has some unique options. I do not like it as much as Carcassonne + all expansions, but compared to vanilla Carcassonne, I’d much rather play this game. If you hate Carcassonne, this game isn’t going to change your mind, however.

5.) Theme: It’s actually kind of enthralling for me to play a “Christian” game that is actually good. But really, the game has almost no redeeming religious value at all – the theme could really be ignored by any player. The best feature of the theme is that I have been able to introduce the game to players who might never have played a German game such as this before. We didn’t have a church service immediately following after, but it’s nice for Christians to have a game themed to things they understand rather than the umpteenth fantasy-themed game. (Not that I dislike fantasy games, but it’s a nice change of pace.)

6.) Strategy and Fun Factor: One of the biggest complaints against Carcassonne, and therefore this game, is the lack of strategy – one just has to play the tile they draw. I’ve never found this a problem, but I could see how it could be disconcerting to many people. A variation allowing players to have a hand of three tiles helps reduce the luck in the game, but I found it increases analysis paralysis. I love to see how the sprawling map grows and expands, and it’s fun to put the tiles together to score a massive city. The game is a light game, with a lot of tactical decisions – one that fits well with most crowds.

Summary

I really enjoyed The Ark of the Covenant. I would encourage all Carcassonne fanatics to buy the game, but I’m sure they have before I’m done typing this review. For those who merely enjoy Carcassonne, this is an excellent variation, but not one necessary if you already own the basic game. For those who think Carcassonne is the most overrated game ever, this isn’t going to change your mind. But for those who crave a short, light game, and have vaguely or never heard the word “Carcassonne” before; this is the perfect opportunity to play Wrede’s masterpiece. Players can interact to a degree in this game, and all players can discuss where each tile should go. I found that it doesn’t work as well in groups that prefer heavy strategy games, but it’s one of the best introductory games I have. I’ve brought it to many events, especially church events, as a game to “hook” new gamers, and I have yet to have it fail me. How can I not have a game like this in my collection?
The Journeys of Paul
from Cactus Game Design, at $29.99

I recently had the opportunity to play a newer game based on the missionary journeys of Paul. Many "Christian" games have left me cold, as they tend to wrap the game around a Christian message. Journeys is truly a game with Christian context and flavor, but one that would remain enjoyable minus the religious teachings.

The first time playing this game, I played with a co-worker at our store. The second time I shared it with my wife and another friend of ours. The rules are simple. Build three churches (in the advanced game it is five) and then race to Rome to see Paul. Along the way, you have Event cards that change the outcome of the game and Opportunity cards that can change the Event cards. On a person’s turn, they can either move by land, move by sea (which requires a special event boat card) or build a church by earning and playing cell groups.

The first thing that stood out to me as we played was the nice mix of luck and strategy. You have no control on when you get an Opportunity card and you have no control over the Event cards. However, choosing the cities to build a church in and when to play Opportunity cards require a certain level of strategic planning.

The second thing, however, is not as good. The production quality of the game suffers a bit, especially for the price. The game comes in a long plastic tube and the board is actually a rolling laminated sheet of sturdy paper. The “map”, although it looks nice and is historically accurate, will not lie flat unless you re-roll it the opposite direction. This frustrates me. My friend commented that she would have liked it better if they had made the cell groups something you stacked up and then the church was a steeple similar to Bibleopoly. While the cards look nice and have solid graphics, some of the other pieces come off as cheap. I suppose they chose this packaging either due to cost or for unique packaging, but I disliked both the packaging and the “map.”

The game does have a message, although not necessarily what you would think. Sure, there is a strong Christian message in the game, but what I really gathered was the difficulties any traveler in the first century. It pays to have friends as several ‘sympathizer’ cards counter nasty Event cards. Overall, the game plays well for its historical accuracy and Biblical message and I think this makes it a more enjoyable game.

Overall
Overall, I recommend this game. I almost feel as though the production quals I have with the game are a matter of my personal taste (I am a game snob). Game play is solid, although it is like playing solitaire with your friends at times as most of the Event cards only impact your mission. I enjoyed the game, as did everyone else who played it, and welcome it to my growing collection.

Grades:
Game play: B+
Production: C
Enjoyment: B
Overall: B
**Testament** reviewed by Charlie Heckman

**Testament Roleplaying in the Biblical Era**  
by Scott Bennie, from Green Ronin Publishing, at $32.95

**Introduction**  
As a Christian gamer, I was particularly interested in *Testament* from the first moment I was aware of the pending release. I’ve been gaming for a long time, but a Christian for only the last ten years. I experienced firsthand some of the Christian backlash against gaming while an unsaved gamer. Since being saved, I’ve worked on the other side of the fence, so to speak, and I’ve been very interested in any and all criticisms of my hobby by fellow members of my faith. I’ve tried to find something of a middle ground in my own games, avoiding game elements that I find objectionable but not abandoning the hobby entirely.

This review is specifically intended for consumption by the Christian gamer who might be interested in *Testament*. I also hope it would also be of some value to the non-Christian gamer.

I’ve had the benefit of having some direct email contact with the author Scott Bennie through the Christian Gamers Guild (CGG) Mailing List. Mr. Bennie corresponded with the CGG at the time the product was released responding to questions and comments by various members. *Testament* is not written specifically from a Christian viewpoint, though it’s my understanding that it relies heavily on information drawn from the Old Testament.

**Cultural Depictions**  
Mr. Bennie clearly attempts to remain as neutral as possible when depicting the various cultures included in *Testament*. The product does not attempt to portray any culture as the “Good Guys” or the “Bad Guys.” I do not claim to be an Old Testament scholar, though I have read it in its entirety. I found the cultural representations to be reasonably presented based on my passing knowledge of the OT. The cultures have not been altered from their depiction in the Old Testament, though I’m confident that other source materials have been used to add detail to the non-Hebraic cultures. As a Christian, my biblical studies have pre-conditioned me to think of the non-Hebrew cultures in general and the Canaanites in particular as “evil.” But I would compare the neutral portrayal of Canaanite society to many fantasy products that portray Orc and Goblin societies in neutral terms. If you’re okay with Goblinoid characters, than I see no reason why you wouldn’t be okay with a Canaanite.

Despite attempts to be neutral, the availability of source material creates a distinct Hebrew slant. A simple page count shows that the Tribes and nation of Israel receive 53 pages of detail, Egyptians 27, Babylonians 15, and Canaanites 10. This translates into far more detail being available to flesh out the Hebrew or Egyptian nation. A GM or player who chooses to experiment with either Babylonian or Canaanite characters or settings is going to have more freedom and more work ahead of them.

As a Christian, I was a bit disappointed that the early Christian church time frame is not included, but to be fair, the book already bites off 1,000+ years of historical background to cover. Extending the source material to the birth of Christ and the early Christian church would have added another thousand years, give or take, and required a treatment of Rome and perhaps Greece resulting in a much larger product. Perhaps a follow up book will cover this ground?

**D20 Rule Sets**  
The book introduces some new wrinkles to the standard d20 rules. I don’t believe any of these rules are unique, but I was very happy with the *Testament* versions of these rules expansions. I’ll discuss Piety, Sins, Biblical Battlefield, and Community Management in more detail.

Piety is a rule set that I believe is critical to any game that attempts to model real world religions. Simply stated, Piety is a new characteristic that models a character’s faith, belief, knowledge, and compliance with their religious ideals. I particularly liked *Testament*’s treatment for developing Piety. Essentially a character tithes some of their skill points in order to develop their Piety; the higher the tithe, the faster the development. This represents time spent in study, prayer, worship, etc. As Piety is developed and increases, characters may use it to affect various boons once per game such as temporary hit points, special dice modifications, saving throw modifiers, etc. The use of a Piety boon does not lower one’s Piety, but it is capped at Wisdom +1 per level.

Each of the four cultures has its own lists of sins or religious transgressions and an associated Piety point penalty for each. This was one of the few criticisms I have for the *Testament* rules presentations. In my experience, even the deepest roleplaying game does not cover enough of the daily grind of life to capture all of a person’s opportunity to sin, and many games would barely scratch the surface of those opportunities. In my personal Christian walk, many of my most serious transgressions occur in my thoughts, not in my actions or even my words. I think this would clearly apply to the Hebrew sins and most of the other cultures, I would have much preferred some type of more general mechanic that involved a periodic saving throw influenced by in character decisions, otherwise I fear in most games, Piety will just climb to its limit and stay at each character’s cap. I would also consider modifying the Piety limit based on the level of skill point tithe mentioned above.

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Mass Combat rules are certainly available in many d20 versions. I found the Testament treatment to be a particularly nice compromise between character/army interaction, playability, and a reasonably historic flavor. Individual characters have some impact on the resolution of any particular battle without being portrayed as all-powerful. An entire battle can be accomplished on a few sheets of scratch paper with a series of dice rolls. No need to have a separate miniatures game session or to have the GM just arbitrarily decide the outcome. Opposing armies are represented by specific units with common arms, armor, and abilities. Characters appear as heroes and leaders that can have a significant impact, but within reason. Personally, I’ll employ this Battle rule set in all of my fantasy games.

Tying into the Mass Combat rules are the rules for Community Management. This is a reasonably detailed set of rules to model a developing community on a year-by-year basis without needing a computer. The Community Manager makes basic decisions about resource development and use that have some influence on community and regional events. As with the Biblical Battlefield rules, I think Testament has accomplished a nice balance between playability, usefulness, and interest.

History & Religion Treatment
As I mentioned earlier, while reading Testament from cover to cover, nothing jumped out at me as contrary to anything I was familiar with from studying the Bible. I am certainly more accustomed to a judgmental approach but Mr. Bennie has not tried to re-invent the cultures in a more favorable light. For example, the Canaanites temple prostitutes are discussed in general terms and mention is made of some of the Canaanite deities that encouraged human sacrifice. These cultural histories read much like any number of mythological histories I’ve read about the Norse or Oriental cultures.

Classes, Prestige Classes & Feats
Testament would not be a d20 product without its own contribution of Prestige Classes and Feats. There are 7 core classes and 7 prestige classes included in the book. The replacement core classes are adaptations of the standard d20 classes to this specific time frame or to specific cultures. The Levite Priest for example, replaces the Cleric, within the Hebrew culture. The book also includes over 50 new feats, 100 spells, and 30 new monsters thrown in for good measure. I’m not a big fan of multitudes of prestige classes and feats but in this case they are reasonable cultural adaptations, not “feats for feats’ sake.” Several of the new feats are “epic” feats intended to be developed by characters who intend to lead or influence armies or communities at some point in their career.

Product Quality
The book itself is of an above-average physical quality, it is what I would call typical of most high quality d20 products. I have come full circle in my opinions of the product quality as it pertains to layout and artwork. My initial reaction was that the fonts used in the headings and subheadings were a bit hard to read and that the artwork was sub par. However, the more time I spent reading the book and “getting into” the period presented, the more the fonts and artwork “grew” on me. I now believe they are appropriate for the product and the inherent flavor.

Possibly Objectionable Content
All Christian gamers have their own definition of what is acceptable and what is objectionable within their games. I obviously can’t address objectionable content to your standards. What I’ve attempted to do is identify items that are possibly objectionable for you to consider.

- Testament does include an application of fairly standard d20 fantasy magic, though some of it has been tailored to the cultures presented in the book.
- The Piety model, Piety boons, transgressions/sins might be objectionable to some who feel that the treatment of real world religions is inappropriate.
- Two Prestige Classes: The Qedeshot (Canaanite Temple prostitute) and the Idol Maker.
- 7 pages of Demons and Devils in the Biblical Bestiary; in one instance there is a demon illustration that could be considered obscene.
- 16 pages of Canaanite, Egyptian, and Babylonian gods, cosmology, and temples.
- As mentioned in the Demons bullet, one potentially objectionable illustration.

Overall Impression, Recommendations
I found Testament to be well written and clearly designed with the Gamer in mind. Rule sets are clearly designed for playability and are fairly clean modules that can be cut and pasted as a GM sees fit. The cultural presentations are informative but not overwhelming. The feats and classes are reasonable and with purpose. It is clearly not appropriate for every Christian gamer. If you are against the depiction of magic, demons, or non Judeo-Christian cosmologies, it would be better to pass on Testament. However I do not believe that anyone who plays canon Dungeons & Dragons would find anything offensive within this product. Personally, I am not running a Testament game but I have incorporated the Piety model, the Biblical Battlefield, and Community Management rule sets into my fantasy game. With the caveats mentioned above, I would recommend it highly.
The Book of the Righteous
by Aaron Loeb, from Green Ronin Publishing, at $39.95

Players and Dungeon Masters seeking guidance in designing their own pantheons, or at least their own unique paladin variants, will find a great deal of help in Green Ronin’s The Book of the Righteous (TBR). TBR is by far the most material-heavy book on deities and religions for D&D on the market; and to be honest, this is a good thing.

First and foremost, TBR offers a pantheon of 22 gods and goddesses and 23 churches, running from the benevolent and benign to the malicious. Why 23? The 23rd church is an overarching religion called “The Great Church” which reveres the good deities and reviles the evil ones (of which there are only four). The defenders of the churches are referred to as “holy warriors” and are defined by the new holy warrior core class. This new core class is essentially a stripped-down framework of the paladin class in the PHB, allowing DMs to create their own variant paladins. These warriors range from the Aesthetes of Aymara (the goddess of music and love) and the Arcstones of Korak (a dwarven god of the forge) to the Hearthkeepers of Anwyn (goddess of home, hearth, and servants) and the Purified of Canelle (one of a trinity of goddesses, Canelle being dedicated to victory and strength).

Clerics also follow variant paths, as TBR institutes requirements for certain levels and reintroduces a classic D&D practice of giving various experience levels their own titles. The requirements are primarily roleplaying in nature, but there are a few rule-related requirements as well. For example, a 1st level Soldier (cleric) of Terak takes on the title of “Helm” and must be trained in the ceremonies of his religion. In order to gain the title of “Banner,” he or she must survive enough battles, reach the 7th level of experience, and have a Wisdom score high enough to cast 4th level spells.

Each religion has its own prestige classes, mostly designated as religious orders. Some, such as Tinel’s order of scribes, are meant mainly as NPCs or as background for PCs seeking adventure. Others, such as the Swan Knights of Naryne, have additional requirements, such as being noble-born (though this is not necessarily binding for acceptance into the order).

The new domains, spells, abilities, and feats also provide a nice addition to the power of faith in D&D. Each church has its own list of abilities designated by its domains. Holy warriors of Rontra may receive the Divine Inspiration ability, which grants them inspiration from their deity in acts of creation and the preservation of creation. A holy warrior worshiping a deity with control over the Death domain may receive Counterspell: Necromancy, which gives allies within 10 feet times their experience level protection against necromantic spells. Even warriors of the same deity might not receive the same abilities at the same time, adding to the variations in characters.

New domains and spells in the book include The Dead, which has the new spell Direct Return; the Forge, which includes the spell Greater Repair; Justice, which includes Shibboleth, a variant on the divine spells Holy Word and Blasphemy. Feats include such things as Devout, which indicates a character’s complete dedication to their deity or deities. Using this feat, the character gains a +4 bonus to Willpower saves against mind or emotion-altering effects from opposing religious powers. Another intriguing feat is Martial Instructor, which allows a character to teach others how to become fighters, including weapon proficiency.

The pantheon within TBR’s pages, while large, is a carefully woven one. Each church has its own attitudes toward the others. At the same time, the mythology of the pantheon is well-detailed, yet not so intricate as to prevent a creative DM from adding or deleting deities from it. While the material presented in TBR is well-detailed and the additional rules easily and nicely complement such supplements as Wizards of the Coast’s Deities & Demigods and Defenders of the Faith and Atlas Games’ Touched by the Gods, I do have some concerns.

My prime concern as a Christian is the focus on polytheism. Monotheism is briefly glossed over in a single paragraph, and even then, a pantheon of gods, rather than one deity over all, is implicated as being “behind the scenes.” While polytheistic societies are often a staple of fantasy, there is also something to be said about monotheism. C.S. Lewis’ Narnia, Stephen R. Lawhead’s Mensandor, and Calvin Miller’s Terra all featured monotheistic religions and cultures and did not swerve from presenting epic adventure for the reader. Even Dragon Magazine, in its 1980s heyday, featured an article discussing the potential merits and flaws of monotheism and polytheism in fantasy gaming. As a toolbox for DMs, I think TBR falls flat in this area.

My only other concern is that Green Ronin is falling prey to the tie-in syndrome, something which plagued the now-defunct Alternity and West End Games’ Star Wars RPG. In such a syndrome, links are made between various supplements, sometimes requiring a gamer to buy more than one supplement just to get that “extra bit” of information that is hinted at in the first supplement. Green Ronin includes tie-ins between TBR and its supplements on demons and devils, Armies of the Abyss and Legions of Hell. However, the company does redeem itself by posting some additional information about various deities to its website.

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Touched by the Gods: A Sourcebook of Cults and Cabals
by Justin Bacon, from Atlas Games, at $23.95

One of the first of many third-party d20 System supplements, Touched by the Gods (TBG) still shines as an example of what a quality supplement should be. The book presents 19 separate religions, cults, and cabals that can be dropped into any fantasy campaign, or perhaps even into d20 Modern, if a GM so desires.

The groups range from the benevolent True Stewards to the sinister Shepherds of the Root; from the unusual Openers of the Way to the mundane cabal Lurient’s Legacy. Each group has its own unique qualities, ranging from new spells, equipment, and abilities to new deities and group-specific prestige classes. A few of my favorites in the book include the Athæneum, a group of loremasters dedicated to preserving all the knowledge they can record, and the Way of the Wolf, a cult of werewolves unknowingly following a false deity.

An example of the more interesting items in the book comes in the “destiny mechanic.” The destiny system allows PCs to take those once-in-a-lifetime shots or redeem themselves after they fail. Each PC receives a destiny bonus based upon his abilities scores; the higher the ability modifiers, the lower the destiny bonus. The bonus is then added to the result of a failed roll or, if used before a roll, applied to the appropriate skill rank.

The destiny mechanic can also allow a PC to fulfill his destiny by committing an act of legendary proportions. In doing so, the character must make a Will save, modified by his destiny bonus versus a DC of 15. If he fails, he was unable to fulfill his destiny, and retains his destiny bonus for later use. If he succeeds, that’s that; he succeed and spends the destiny bonus. It should be noted that although these mechanics (and others appearing in Penumbra books such as En Route and Seven Strongholds) are tied to particular deities (or encounters and places, as the case may be), they can easily be used with little or no modification as add-ons to the core rules.

Unlike Alderac’s Gods or Green Ronin’s Book of the Righteous, TBG does not present a complete pantheon of deities. Instead, it presents each faith or cabal as a standalone group. Still, this does not prevent the authors from providing links between potential rival groups, such as Death’s Forsaken and the Order of Endings.

While this book may not appeal to all Christian gamers, it can still be a valuable tool for those who want to use RPGs to educate others about God’s word and His love for us. As a theology student, I can see a lot of potential of using this as a teaching tool for older youths who are curious about church history and doctrine. Groups such as the Justicars or the Order of Endings can be portrayed as extremist or even heretical sects of an allegorical church. At the same time, groups such as Lurient’s Legacy and the Way of the Wolf can provide challenging and interesting opponents for characters dedicated to the True God.

While it does not offer an in-depth look at creating a new pantheon, TBG does have its merits and can easily complement Green Ronin’s products.

→ under the “Tree of Life” section.

While the cover artwork on the book is amazing, inside it runs the gamut from beautiful to good to poor. I am not really a fan of sourcebooks which utilize more than one artist, but in a project as large as this, it is understandable. However, some of the artwork, such as that featured on page 129, does come off as being juvenile in style while the rest is remarkably detailed and professional.

Despite these problems, TBG does manage to shine and I do count it as a blessing to my D&D campaigns. I heartily recommend this supplement to anyone who is looking to breathe life into religion for their games.
Khymir, the Role-Playing Game

previewed by Mark E. Rogers Rich Staats

1. Introduction
Thank you for reading Khymir! It has been in the making for fifteen years. If you enjoy the role-playing game then we encourage you to read some of Mark E. Rogers’ novels set in the same world as Khymir. (You can buy these from www.buybooksontheweb.com.)

1.1. What Makes Khymir Special?
There are plenty of RPGs on the market, and there are even more settings for those RPGs. This section explores what makes Khymir unique. Both the setting and the game mechanics offer excellent chances for role playing.

1.1.1. Setting
Khymir takes place in the city of Khymir1 and its environs in the world of Thorgon Karrelssa. This is the world where Mark E. Rogers’ books, Zorachus, the Nightmare of God, and the Blood of the Lamb series are set.

Thorgon Karrelssa is founded on a blend of: gritty fantasy, logic, philosophy, and theology. Thorgon Karrelssa has its own Satan, Tschonbog, and its own messiah, Esaju. The people of Thorgon Karrelssa are stronger and more dexterous than their counterparts on Earth. They can also work magic, because “the Fall” occurred in the second generation. (More to come about this later.) God is real and omnipresent in Thorgon Karrelssa, and Khymir reflects this.

Warning: Khymir is an adult setting that deals with mature themes.

1.1.2. Encouraging Heroic Behavior
The core premise of Khymir is that the players are controlling the actions of heroes or heroines. The city of Khymir is no place for the feint of heart or the weak. The game system reflects this. Taking risks is an integral part of the game. The players determine how much risk their characters are willing to take. Heroic actions are suitably rewarded.

1.2. Overview of the City of the Gaming World

1.2.1. The World
Cosmology
In the beginning there was El-Sharaj, the One, and with Him, the Spell, as yet unuttered; and when He pronounced this word at last, the angels took their being, so that they might fashion all the realms that the He had imagined. Each world was the work of its own angelic host, differing from the rest not only in conception, but enactment, for the angels worked freely in accordance with their own natures, each a genus unto himself. But with all of this, certain themes recurred, some hateful. By its very nature, creation was contingent; contingency was imperfection; imperfection bred rebellion; some angels became devils. In one world, very like our own, the archangel Athtar came to despise what he had been charged to make; and he seduced many of the angels that served him, and led them in a great rebellion, to force the One to repudiate physical creation. When this revolt met with the only success it could, Athtar turned his mangled wrath upon his own garden, and struggled to twist the first man and woman, and turn them against God. But in this he failed, and with their sons and daughters as well; death did not come into that world until the fourth generation; and so, like as that world was to ours, its people went down a very different path. Human will and intellect were not darkened to the same degree; the effects of the fall spread unevenly through subsequent generations. Connections between mind and body remained stronger; was more resistant to wounds and disease. And powers that vanished in our world with Adam and Eve were passed on, studied and harnessed. Thus it was that when God and Athtar pursued their conflict among mortal men, the points were made with magic as well as the sword.

The World
Thorgon Karrelssa is roughly earth-like climate wise. The city of Khymir is located near the arctic circle of Thorgon Karrelssa. Khymir is protected from the elements through the protective magics of the Black Priests of Tschonbog. To the north, the savage Kraeghul live. There are powerfully built barbarians, able to stand the bitter cold and harsh life style of the far north. Much of the world was ocean, but there was a single vast continent, Thorgon Karrelssa (see map). The first civilization, that of the Amorites, developed along the banks of the Gura river; not long afterwards, on the other side of the continent, a wholly original culture developed among the Han, the forebears of the Chin and Sung. Between the Amorites and the Han lay an immense expanse of desert and steppe, home to savage nomads who would erupt from time to time to attack their civilized neighbors.

Throughout the gaming system we will be drawing a distinction between Khymir, the roleplaying game, and Khymir the city, the setting for the RPG. We will always bold Khymir when we are referring to the RPG.

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Purchase a copy of Khymir at www.drgames.org

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1.2.2. The Races

The Kadjafim

By the time of the events described in Zancharthus and Zorachus, Amorites had become Kadjafim, and their culture cross-fertilized with that of the Achaean, who lived on islands in the Western ocean; a strict monotheism, heavily informed by Achaean philosophy, had become the sole religion. Urguz nomads from the steppes had conquered the Kadjafi lands, only to absorb the culture of their vanquished foes; most of their officials (notably the celebrated Jagutai Jen Shian) were educated by the Kadjafim, Malochians, Kragehul. Along the Northern border of the Kadjafi lands ran the Andohar mountains, of which the Achaean islands were the westernmost spur; this range marked divide between the descendents of the Amorites and pale-skinned barbarians who spoke a very different language. One such group were the Tarchans, whose land was bounded on the west by the great sea, to the north by the Utgard range, and to the east by the Spine, the southern continuation of the range which was called the Mountains of Muspellheim in the north. East of the Spine lived the Malochians, who were infamous for their powerful, if primitive, sorcery. The rocky coastslands north of the Utgards were inhabited by the Kragehul, bold pirates who were the scourge of their neighbors to the south.

1.2.3. Mother Khymir

Near the tip of Muspellheim was the city of Khymir, mightiest in the world. Some say she was the conceived by Athtar himself, as an argument against matter, and particularly human flesh. But whatever the Great Tyrant’s role, it is known that she was founded by Malochian exiles, some of whom were priests of Athtar, or, as he was known in Malochan, Tchernobog (see Orders). Rounding the northern cape of the peninsula, the refugees had decided to winter on a mountain shelf overlooking the sea. Shortly after their arrival, the priest of Tchernobog, claiming inspiration from their deity, discovered a rich vein of gold in the mountains.

Basic Economy

Trade was swiftly established with the exiles’ homeland, and soon after, the Achaean citystates and the Kadjafim. Despite the risks, particularly along the pirate-infested eastern coast of Muspellheim, a brisk traffic developed, convoys sailing north with food, slaves, and raw materials, returning with gold. A gigantic settlement soon took shape on the mountain-shelf.

Ongoing Decay

The city itself, however, was impregnable atop its shelf; and the gold never ran out. Sometimes the Khymirians withheld it to prevent a glut, but whenever the lodes were played out, new ones were discovered, sometimes in mines that were thought with good reason to be exhausted. This peculiarity was remarked upon; the Priests of Tchernobog hinted that their lord was responsible. But even if this was the case, no one was troubled. For the ruling classes there was permanent luxury and unbridled decadence; for the poor, there were the doles, and drugs, and bloodletting in the circuses, and the excitement of rampaging unopposed through the streets in huge gangs, thug armies whose rite of passage was the burning out of one eye. The homes of the rich became fortresses, or were located in protected areas (see the Enclave) by day the streets were dangerous, by night, lethal. Garbage a half-mile deep filled chasms where the ground had collapsed over catacombs; pornographic statues and friezes were everywhere, mirroring the aberrations that were being performed in mansions, ramshackle tenements, and alleys, or all too often, out in the open for everyone to see.

Gods and Goddesses

At that time, most religious Khymirians, whose number was dwindling steadily, worshipped the Malochian pantheon, at the head of which was the Sky-god, Father Ziu (Kragehul Tiw, Tarchan Two.) There were also various gods that had been imported from other countries, most notably Tsa Terrathu the Double Goddess, the ancient Amorite patroness of Lust. Given the depravity of the Khymirians, (and the possibility that she was an aspect of Athtar herself) it was, perhaps, inevitable that she would be the last deity (beside Tchernobog) to retain a following in the city. Some time between the fall of Zancharthus and the return of Zorachus, the Sisterhood vanished under circumstances which are unclear.

The Great Ban Sorcery

When the Khymirian senate, made up of the nobles and the chief merchants, commissioned the city’s wizards to wall out Winter forever. A great assembly of sorcerers labored long and hard to achieve this end, sacrificing multitudes of slaves; in the end, a perpetual damp heat descended over the city and her environs. The spirits of the land rose in anger, but their wrath was walled out behind an invisible magical barrier; and they could only rage and rumble impotently, lifting up huge thunder-clouds, to threaten the unnatural city. In order to compensate for the lack of rain, great aqueducts were built, and mountain rivers diverted into them, down into the city.

Bloodfruit

But as the population swelled, food became a problem; importation and fishing proved insufficient. Sorcery provided a solution when the Priests of Tchernobog, claiming that they wished to demonstrate the grotesquerie of bodily appetites, conjured the first Bloodfruit plants; single growths, nourished by the blood of firstborn children or slaves, could feed entire households. But the food was bland; and so it came to be that much gold was traded for spices from the south.

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Population
When word of gold reached the south, fortune-hunters flocked to Khymir to try their hand. But the trade was already firmly in the grip of a few men, who ultimately became the patriarchs of the Khymirian nobility; most of the immigrants wound up as mere laborers, but some became merchants, importing goods from the south, and made great fortunes. Others lived off doles granted by the nobles and the merchants. The city’s wealth also drew large numbers of sorcerers, who protected the rich and powerful from other wizards, and catered to jaded appetites by conjuring strange creatures; skilled workmen arrived by the thousands, and hundreds of thousands of slaves were imported.

Politics
Centuries passed. The Senate lost its authority; violence replaced debate. Periods of anarchy were followed by military rule. Aristocratic generals, most notably Lazark of the Golden Mail, established enough control over the city to mount several campaigns of conquest outside the walls, using mercenary armies; the Kraghul were driven far to the south. But the Khymirians had grown too soft by this time to colonize these territories, and in a relatively short period of time, the Kraghul reclaimed them.

Factions at the time of Zancharthus
Following the decline of the generals, two main factions held power. The nobles held sway over the northern side of the city, where most of the gold mines were located, while the Merchants, who had organized themselves into a Guild, controlled the south. Aligned with the Nobles were the Priests of Tchernobog, whom the Guild opposed with mercenary sorcerers, and acted in close concert with the Sockets. But presently the nobles were supplanted by their Priestly allies, even though they retained their titles and wealth; after playing the main role in putting down a particularly savage water-riot, the Priests made themselves the true masters of the north, and proceeded to try and eliminate the other cults in the city.

Factions at the time of Zorachus
When Mancdaman Zorachus came back to the city of his birth, the Merchant’s Guild still existed, but one of his first acts as High Priest of Tchernobog was to crush it utterly, appropriating its properties, surviving wizards, and troops. From that point on, the only organized opposition to the cult of the Black God was to be found in the Foreign Quarter, whose inhabitants were besieged and soon slaughtered. Utilizing internal passports, ubiquitous spies, and and terror of the most ruthless sort, Zorachus imposed an absolute dictatorship, unequalled in the history of Thorgon Karrelssa – the regimes of the Amorite Saathranim paled in comparison.

1.2.4. Places of Note in Khymir

Mountains, Islands, Caves, Glaciers
The mountains of northern Muspellheim were largely composed of granites, schists, and basalts; some of the gold deposits are the product of crystallization through water condensation in granites adjoining liquid rock, while others were magmatic, having crystallized directly in hardening lava—such was the origin of the gold veins in the Spire of the Shark, a towering volcanic chimney rising from the sea several miles of the coast of Khymir several miles off the coast of Khymir. Far beneath the city the stone was honeycombed with tunnels where ancient lava-streams flowed down to the sea; one such cave, opening on the chasm to the city’s south, became the lair of The Devil’s Rake (see bestiary), an enormous spider set by the renegade priest Dessicatorius to block shipping into Khymir. Deeper than the tunnels are lakes of still-liquid stone, one of which is said to contain a colossal living idol, half-sunk in the lava. North and east of the city, beyond the thunder-barrier, were great glaciers; one of these was the source of Lake Pharanthus, whose water descended to the city in a series of channels and aqueducts.

The Catacombs
Beneath the city but above the lava-tunnels were many levels of catacombs, chiselled from the stone, where literally millions of Khymirian dead were interred over a thousand years, in pits, niches, sarcophagi, and elaborate tombs. So riddled with these passages was the shelf beneath Khymir that immense swaths of ground collapsed, forming huge fissures that filled up with garbage over the years; one such crack was known as the Cleft (also the Offal Slash, and glutted Cunt) and formed the northern boundary of Socket Territory. The lowest levels of the catacombs were prowled by creatures from the lava tunnels beneath; known as the Shreeth (see Bestiary) they were pre-human inhabitants of Muspellheim, and offered sacrifices to the idol in the molten lake.

Monuments and Temples
Khymir was full of statuary, much of it on a grand scale, some of it purely decorative; but there were also monuments to popular figures, and statues of gods. There were many temples, almost all of them in a state of acute disrepair as Khymir neared its end; covered with scabrous growths, scores of elaborate facades three hundred feet high and more leaned out over the square known as Dead God place. Most of the temples still in use were used by foreigners in their Quarter; but there were exceptions, notably the garrison-temples maintained by the Priests of Tchernobog, and the great shrine of Tsa Terrathu, in Guild Territory. After the destruction of the Goddess’s temple, a new and lesser temple was set up in a huge abandoned brothel donated by a Guildsman.
Fortresses

Such is the violent nature of life in Khymir that all mansions and palaces in Khymir served as fortresses as well; but there were also purely military installations. In the unlikely event of an attack from the sea (and up the mile-high cliffs) walls lined the Western side of the mountain-shelf, set with battlements and towers; this waste of treasure, ingenuity and cut stone was commissioned by the nobles to give employment to the mob, although the parapets were an excellent place to watch the sun set over the thunderheads. Other fortifications, such as the bastion that warded the ends of the bridge south into Kragehul territory, were more practical. There were many garrisons throughout the city, and a large priestly stronghold brooded over the quays in the underground harbor; a priestly fort called Bone-in-The Throat guarded the upper terminus of the harbor lift. There were numerous Guild barracks in the southern part of the city, and a series of Guild and priestly fortresses faced off along Boundary Road.

Banipal Khezach and The Retreat Mightiest

Of Khymir’s strongholds, the largest man-made structure in the city, indeed, in Thorgon Karrelssa, was Banipal Khezach, the Black Tower, Tchernobog’s paramount shrine, begun under the High Priest Serrator and completed during the regime of Thagranichus Ordog. One last fortress deserves mention: north of the city, where Lucre Street spiralled high up into the mountains, stood a tower fashioned from five separate blades of stone; this was the Retreat, where Dessicatorius housed his huge spider-menagerie, and plotted the demolition of Khymir and her waterless resurrection.

Arenas

Even more important than the dole to the Khymirian mob was a constant succession of bloody games, where gladiators fought beasts and each other in battles of varying scale and complexity, and condemned men and slaves were dispatched in the most gruesome ways imaginable. There were a number of arenas, but the largest was the Aranthian Amphitheatre, or Palace of Blood, which was so huge that its pit, when flooded, could accommodate battles between four trireme galleys. After the accession of Mancdaman Zancharthus to the High Priesthood, the amphitheatre became the scene of spectacular combats involving gigantic demon-gladiators.

The Chasm and the Harbor

Access to and from the sea could only be gained through Khymir’s underground harbor, whose ceiling was lit with a star-chart of glowing gemstones; a tunnel, navigable at low tide, led to a steep-walled chasm that opens on the ocean. One section of this chasm, called the Double Elbow, became the hunting ground of the Devil’s Rake, when Dessicatorius employed the spider to choke off shipping into the city.

The Foreign Quarter

A great ramp led from the harbor up into the city; surrounding the ramphead was the Foreign Quarter, probably the safest area of Khymir. Eager to preserve good relations with the dignitaries and merchants who kept houses there, the Guild made sure that crime and strife are kept to a minimum; foreigners were decidedly less given to violence and cruelty than native Khymirians.

The Welt

On the outskirts of the Foreign Quarter was The Welt, Khymir’s chief slave-trading district, where human chattel of every kind could be purchased. Slaves intended for sexual use were sold in an area called The Feast, which was divided into smaller areas where different tastes were catered to; Gladiators were traded in Butcher’s Row, where houses specializing in fighting-men maintained training facilities and arenas of their own.

The Warren

Undoubtedly the most dangerous part of the city, the Warren was a huge slum on the southern side of the Cleft; a labyrinth of rotting tenements, it was divided between the Right and Left Sockets, two gangs who, taking turns with each other, regularly left their stronghold over natural bridges that span the Cleft, and looted neighborhoods outside the Warren, with the acquiescence of the Guild.

The Enclave

On a lofty outcropping that rose out of the southern part of the Warren, a collection of palatial Mansions belonging to the Chief Guildsmen; even though the mere sight of the slum beneath was screened off by tall trees, and the stench held at bay by the magic of Guild wizards, the Merchants rejoiced in their proximity to such horrible poverty, secure in the knowledge that their stronghold was surrounded by ten thousand Sockets, whose games and dole depended fully on the largesse of the Guild.

1.3. Quick Overview of the Mechanics

Khymir uses dice rolls to resolve the outcome of uncertain situations in concert with GM judgment. The GM is the ultimate authority in determining the outcome of any action in the game. Characters have five basic aspects and six derived aspects. The five basic aspects are: physical, discipline, mental, charm, and favor. Physical, discipline, and mental are used to generate the derived aspects. The derived aspects are: brawn, endurance, resistance, logic, intelligence, and quickness. The aspects are used to generate talents. Talents are peculiarities that a character has toward successfully performing a wide variety of related skills. For example, one talent is stealth. Included skills would be hide and sneak. Most actions are resolved using the skills. Raw skill totals are added with situational modifiers to produce potentials.
Potentials are pitted against challenges. Challenges are the trials and obstacles facing the characters. Challenges are described either as dice roll totals (like four six sided dice, 4D6), a raw score (like 14), or as a combination (like 7 + 2D6). Examples of the number and type of dice available are included in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential</th>
<th>Possible Dice Combinations</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2D6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>D6 + D8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>D6 + D10</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>2D8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>D8 + D10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>4D6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>3D6 + D8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We can use this table to construct dice roll totals or combinations of dice roll totals and raw scores for any challenge total from seven on up.

Example: If we use the challenge value of 25 then there are several ways of describing that value. One description is a pure dice roll, 25 = 10 + 15 = (D8 + D10) + (3D6 + D8) = 3D6 + 2D8 + D10. We could also describe the potential of 25 as 14 + 2D10. Another description is 25 = 18 + 2D6. We can also leave 25 as a raw number, 25. There are many more.

Note: Quick Start - just substitute 2D6 for every seven points of the potential, e.g., 7 potential = 2D6, 14 potential = 4D6, etc.

Most of the time, skills are improved through failure under conditions of risk. To improve a skill in this way, the character must fail the base potential of a skill divided by three.

Example: If Shufengee has a base potential of 26 in swimming then he would have to fail 26/3 = 8 times before he would be able to make a skill improvement roll.

2. Character Generation

This section addresses generating a character’s non-magical defining capabilities, special abilities and flaws. Magical skills and capabilities are addressed under “the Magical Arts” section below.

2.1. Orders

The first building block of character generation is the character’s Order. The Order refers to the ethnicity, religion, and customs that form the basis of the character’s view of the world. Order determines the types of skills, magic, and resources that the character has access to. Orders include: Sharajnaghim, Black Anarites, White Anarites, Khymirian Priests, Khymirian Merchants, Elementalists, Kragel, and Khanite. The GM will aid the player in choosing an appropriate Order for the character based on the campaign that the GM has planned.

2.2. Aspects

The character’s key spiritual and physical traits are called aspects. The five basic aspects are: physical, discipline, mental, charm, and favor. Physical, discipline, and mental are used to generate the derived aspects. The derived aspects are: brawn, endurance, resistance, logic, intelligence, and quickness.

Physical refers to the character’s body and such things as how strong is the character. A weight lifter or ice hockey player would have a high physical score. The physical score also determines how quickly the character regenerates magical energy points points.

Discipline refers to how well structured a character’s mental processes are and how well the character is able to resist temptations. A chess grand master would have a high discipline as well as a high-level monk.

Mental refers to how well developed a character’s nervous system is and relates to pure mental functions such as intelligence as well as physically related tasks such as reaction time. A college professor would have a high mental score.

Charm is the character’s innate ability to engender lust or positive regard in other characters. A highly charismatic or beautiful person would have high charm scores.

Favor is a measure of a character’s innate, untrained magical ability.

---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
The Algernon Files

previewed by Dave Mattingly and BlackWyrm Games

“A fully-realized and detailed set of characters with a history to rival any comic book universe, The Algernon Files is an excellent resource for any M&M game.”

Steve Kenson
Designer of Mutants & Masterminds

“The Algernon Files is a creative and intriguing comic book setting, full of characters, plots, and details that will grab your attention right off the bat – a superb example of how the HERO System adapts to any setting.”

Steve Long
HERO System Line Developer

The Algernon Files is a collection of characters, some friends, some most definitely enemies, that can be thrown into practically any supers’ campaign that’s even remotely four-color. It captures a degree of modern sensibility in its character design, while keeping the silver and bronze age spirit. Face off against the likes of the supergenius Prometheus, or an ancient god made flesh in the form of the Serpent Queen; decide whose side Hell’s Belles are really on, or trade blows with the mighty Magog – and if you feel a little overwhelmed by all the hostile attention, relax by visiting Fortress, expansive HQ for potential allies the Sentinels.

- over 100 characters
- heroes and villains
- vehicles and maps

The book is available for Mutants & Masterminds (144 pages) and for the HERO System (256 pages). Preview documents, as well as other extras like freely downloadable character artwork are available at www.blackwyrm.com.

The Arsenal of Democracy

This ready-to-play government-sponsored superhero team is presented as a preview chapter for The Way, The Truth, & The Dice. It includes a variety of superpower archetypes, origins, and personalities, and indicates the general quality of writing and artwork in the book.

We hope you enjoy the preview, and will consider purchasing The Algernon Files for use in your superhero games.

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Purchase a copy of The Algernon Files at www.blackwyrm.com
**DESCRIPTION**

Major William Oliver Wright was a “super soldier” even before the experimental procedures. Like his father and grandfather, Wright was a career military man with a stellar record.

He had all the qualifications necessary for the new supersoldier program, Project Twelve, along with almost 700 other candidates. The government absolutely did not want another Project Nine on their hands, and tested all their candidates to a ridiculous degree. After almost three years of psychological screening by every relevant governmental agency, Wright and eleven others proved stable enough for the project leaders to clear them for the procedures. Of the volunteer patients, only Majors Wright and Baron developed substantive abilities to any degree. Major Baron went on to serve in the field as strike force leader on many covert black ops, while Major Wright, who scored slightly higher on the “people skills” side, become the centerpiece for the new government-sponsored superhero team, the Arsenal Of Democracy (later shortened by the press to just the Arsenal).

Anthem (the second person to use that superhero identity) is stronger, faster, and tougher than before. He can lift over two tons, run faster than an olympic-level sprinter, heal from debilitating injuries in a matter of minutes, and can withstand inhospitable environmental conditions that normal soldiers would require special equipment to weather. The only downside is that his enhanced metabolism processes toxins faster than before, leaving him particularly at risk to biochemical weapons. His immune system resists diseases to a remarkable degree, but poisons, especially ingested and inhaled poisons, have become his Achilles’ heel.

Thus far, the public has had only limited exposure to Wright’s carefully-molded and presented persona – every instance being carefully orchestrated by the team’s handler. As a public relations gimmick, Wright has been trained to fight with a special steel staff. The committee’s idea was that by not using a sidearm, he shows that America is moral enough that she doesn’t have to resort to lethal violence when a government-trained operative can handle the problem with just a stick. This hasn’t quite worked as planned as the image of Anthem and “his big club” gets frequent play on comedy circuits and late-night TV. To his credit, Wright has yet to show the strain that stress and public friction inflict on him, but his temper with his people and their opponents has been getting noticeably shorter, especially after American Dream’s death, and his handlers have started limited the team’s direct media contact more and more to compensate.

**PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE**

- 5 Leader of the Arsenal
- 10 A true American hero
- 15 Faster, stronger; the ideal man
- 20 Arrogant and smug
- 25 Doesn’t get along well with most civilian superheroes
- 30 Deadweight against poisons

---

**QUOTES**

“Thanks for your help, citizen. The professionals are here now. You’re dismissed.”

---

**CR**

**RACE**

- Human

**SEX**

- M

**HT**

- 6’4”

**EYES**

- Blue

**GROUP**

Arsenal

**AGE**

- 34

**WT**

- 240#

**HAIR**

- White

---

**PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE</th>
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<tr>
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<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Judson Roberts has always felt the need for speed—that's why he became a NASCAR driver. When his brother Wade, the eccentric genius mechanical engineer, needed a test driver for his prototype engine accelerator, he naturally called on his younger sibling. The accelerator was intended to boost engine performance tenfold, and had worked well enough at low speeds, but it was discovered that engine efficiency had also been boosted, giving the engine the capability of traveling at speeds far in excess of other land vehicles.

The accelerator, however, did more than boost the engine—it actually warped time to do so. Where Wade acquired the parts or technology to push the envelope even farther than his past eccentricities had gone is a secret he's didn't share (and now, never can). Once the stripped-down racecar with the temporal engine hit and passed the speed of sound, the fields it generated infused Judson with indefinable temporal energies. The engine destroyed itself in the process, and its creator Wade paradoxically ceased to exist. No one, not even Judson, remembers him, or how Judson got his powers.

Now, Judson Roberts can manipulate time around himself. It appears to others that he has speed-based powers, and can run very fast, but actually Roberts alters the timestream so that he can move a great distance in a short time. What appears to be super-fast punches are actually Roberts accelerating the aging process and disintegrating the target with a touch. What seem to be supernaturally fast reflexes are actually Roberts speeding up time for himself subconsciously so that the world seems to be traveling in slow motion around him.

Since he is manipulating time, instead of speed, his enhanced reflexes also work to his favor when he’s driving or using other skills that rely on coordination. After all, to him, even though he might be driving at 150 MPH, it feels like 15 MPH, so maneuverability is not a problem. It’s a pity that it’s taken most of the fun out of sport racing.

As a result of this temporal manipulation, Roberts is harshly affected by attacks that are out of phase with the normal space-time continuum. His timestream excursions seem to be aging him prematurely, as well, since he appears to be in his late 40s, despite his actual age of 27. He joined the Arsenal under the name of Minuteman.

The team needed a “speedster,” and Minuteman appeared to fit the bill. He's a bit worried about the consequences if certain villains, Praetorian in particular, find out that he controls time, so he hides the fact that he's warping time by pretending to be a normal speedster.
DESCRIPTION
Blair Carter grew up the only daughter of a career Army officer. She learned of her mutant powers as a teenager and was – miraculously – able to keep them hidden. Determined to use her abilities to help people, and spurred on by the sense of duty she learned from her father, she took on the identity of Miss Liberty.

She was already working through the government at the start of her costumed career (secretly changing identities while working her job as an archivist under General Rector and his appropriations committee), when she heard of the new government-sponsored superhero team forming. She talked to the committee, and they agreed that she’d be a perfect choice – a dream combination of training, power, and demographics.

As Miss Liberty, Carter wears a modified Statue of Liberty costume. When she’s fully grown, she’s over 50 feet tall – with the strength and durability that go with it. Her gear, including tablet, torch, and clothing, all grow with her, somehow subconsciously being included in whatever morphogenic field alters Blair’s own size. Her crown spikes make her seem even taller than that. Her maximum height had been increasing by about a foot per year, but the constant and stressful usage of her powers since the Arsenal was formed have pushed her abilities again and again, with her top limits constantly being redefined.

In addition to her innate abilities, Liberty can throw the eight spikes from her “crown” for serious damage when propelled by her incredible strength. Her most common opening action is to use her armored tablet to protect bystanders, first, or teammates, second. She’ll often dive into the open to draw fire away from her teammates, and attempt to deflect it all. It doesn’t always work, but it gives her a chance, anyway.

Carter is Puerto Rican (her father anglicized the family name many years ago), with shoulder-length wavy black hair. She’s 5’7” tall (normally), with an athletic build. As a civilian or in costume as Miss Liberty, Carter is direct, often to the point of being brash or pushy. She has a military mindset, and is used to having her orders followed. She was quite close to American Dream. Blaming herself for not being able to protect her friend, Liberty has grown more brusque and closed off, much to the chagrin of the handlers who were used to using her as their centerpiece in PR opportunities.

QUOTE
“Bring your tired, your poor, your huddled masses... and then pity anyone that tries to hurt them.”

RACE | SEX | HT | EYES
--- | --- | --- | ---
Human | F | 6'11" | Brown

GROUP | AGE | WT | HAIR
--- | --- | --- | ---
Arsenal | 27 | 8 tons | Black

PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE
5 | Member of the Arsenal
10 | Extremely tall
15 | Very strong
20 | Hard to hit, what with that tablet and all
25 | Protective of bystanders
30 | Bossy, maybe a little bit man-hating

ATTACK | DEFENSE | DAMAGE | GRAPPLE
--- | --- | --- | ---
+12/+8 (+6/+4) | +6/+3 (+2/+1) | +13 Unarmed | +13/+33

SKILLS
Diplomacy 5 (+8), Intimidate 4 (+7/+13), Know (Civics) 5 (+5), Pilot 4 (+6), Pro (Soldier) 5 (+7), Sense Motive 5 (+7)

FEATS
Attack Focus (Melee) 4 (Limited: Only 1 rank per 3 levels of Growth -1), Attractive, Equipment 1, Fearsome Presence 4 (Limited: Only 1 rank per 3 levels of Growth -1), Improved Grapple (Limited: Needs at least 6 levels of Growth active -1), Interpose, Luck 2, Power Attack, Startle

POWERS
Device 14 (All Easy to Lose, Crown Spikes [Strike 2 (PF: Mighty, Thrown)], Tablet [Deflect 10: All Ranged (Action: Free +1), PF: Improved Block 4], Torch [Nullify 10 (All Darkness; Area Effect: Cone +1); AP: Dazzle (Visual)]), Growth 12 (12 STR and 14 CON at Normal Size), Protection 4 (Limited: Only 1 level per 3 levels of Growth -1), Super Strength 2 (Limited: 1 level per 6 ranks of Growth -1)

EQUIPMENT
Commlink

AT | CM | SV | SK | FT | PW | DB
--- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | ---
21 | 28 | 10 | 7 | 12 | 80 | —
George Dunn was meant to save lives. His mother was a cop, his father was a fireman, and his brother was a nurse. It’s practically a family legacy.

So, when he joined the Air Force right out of medical school, it came as something of a shock to his family, at first. But when he explained that he wanted to save the lives of people who were putting their lives on the line every day in order to protect their nation, it made sense.

With a stellar service record, and a background in most types of rescue operations, George was chosen to test out a new device. The battlesuit was a non-lethal source of rescue, emergency, and crowd control technology. In a joint venture between the National Firefighters’ Association, the Department of Defense, and Homeland Security, built by private contractors as a prototype for a possible nationwide rollout, the Fire, Rescue, and Emergency Device (FRED) was ready for testing. And the Arsenal is the perfect testmarket opportunity. Under the name Peacekeeper, George acts as the conscience of the group, as well as the triage corpsman.

FRED comes equipped with the latest technology, including heatproof armor, boot jets, a complete sensor array, a battle computer, and a full complement of non-lethal weaponry. Even the power suit itself is sheathed in a hard rubber that renders its hydraulic punches non-lethal.

Quick-dry glue, tear gas, smoke bombs, a firehose, oil slicks, immobilizing agents, and sleep gas are all on board FRED. FRED somewhat blurs the line between large battlesuit and small “mech,” making it somewhat difficult to operate in small or confined quarters. Despite the zero body-count thus far during the test period, there has been a substantial property damage tab.

When not wearing/operating FRED, George himself is a slight figure, 5’10” and 140 pounds. He has brown hair, brown eyes, and from a physical perspective is pretty forgettable – which contributes mightily to his handlers never letting him be seen outside of FRED when PR is involved.

QUOTE
“Come along peacefully. We don’t want to hurt you.”

PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE
5 Member of the Arsenal
10 Big metal suit
15 Used to be a fireman or whatever
20 He calls his armor FRED, heh
25 Never hurts anyone
30 Has a medical degree
**US STEEL**

**DESCRIPTION**

Todd Coleman was an ordinary guy that loved explosives. That could describe any guy, right? Well, Coleman made it his profession (or obsession, depending on who you talked to).

As a young recruit in the city’s bomb squad, Coleman was on a training exercise when a real emergency came up just a block away. The supervillain Surefire (page 129) was making off with an experimental weapon from an Omnitech facility. His own abilities augmented by whoever his employer was at the time (presumably either the Orchard or the Magi), he was using the high-tech facility’s own weapons against its staff by mentally remolding the gun turrets and sidearms to explode upon firing, and had left a number of explosive devices to cover his escape. As a member of the bomb squad, Coleman felt that he could “defuse” the situation, and ran to assist, beating his supervisor there by a good margin. He had the misfortune of running into Surefire, still in the process of escaping the facility, who took the opportunity to warp Coleman’s sidearm which was in the midst of being fired at the experimental weapon Surefire was carrying. This resulted in some unexplained backlash of Surefire’s abilities, or perhaps some exotic side effect of the weapon, or maybe even something entirely – the truth of the matter has never been verified to anyone’s satisfaction.

The resulting accident bonded Coleman’s body with a sort of malleable metal sheath as he absorbed his sidearm and Surefire’s stolen weapon into himself. When he awoke, he found that he could move, speak, and perceive as before, but that his mass had been immensely multiplied, as had his strength. He no longer has many of the normal human biological functions, such as eating and sleeping, and he can now sense magnets and radio waves. His metallic body reflects light-based attacks such as lasers and dazzles, but does not protect him from the effects of those attacks. His mass and metallic form are extremely unsuited to stealth, however, and Coleman has little appreciation of the concept of subtlety regardless.

Coleman went on to have a successful career as the solo superhero Gunmetal before he was recruited into the Arsenal. Changing his name to US Steel was recommended by the Congressional Subcommittee that approved the team’s formation (and funding); enjoying the jump in prestige, as well as the sizeable paycheck involved, Coleman didn’t balk at such a minor request.

**QUOTE**

_“Things are about to get heavy.”_