



INTRODUCTION

Thank you very much for your purchase of the “Kevin and Kell” role-playing game, and for entering the world inhabited by the Dewclaws and their friends. It is a community familiar yet strange, in which everyday concerns become issues of life and death. With the stakes raised to the highest levels, the supreme mega-weaponry in one’s arsenal turns out to be love, trust and tolerance.

These issues were on my mind in the early months of 1995 when I finally decided to call the phone company to install a second line into the den, allowing me to hook up the 9600 baud modem I’d bought the previous summer. Within a week I was on CompuServe, and “Kevin and Kell” began to form in my mind.

In my other strips “On the FastTrack” and “Safe Havens” I’d frequently had my characters take the form of animals in fantasy sequences, and I wanted to bring this one step further by doing a strip populated entirely by non-humans. As I got into the online culture, I began to see a wealth of material in the contrast between the high-tech world and a bucolic woodland setting.

Contrasts became the theme of the project, and I started by having two natural enemies meet online, fall in love before discovering their backgrounds, get married and raise a family. I chose a rabbit and a fox and named them Kevin and Kell. Get it? Heaven and Hell. Contrasts. Yuk. Yuk. Never mind.

Of course, Walt Kelly’s legendary “Pogo” was a major influence. He was a genius at using animals to illuminate the foibles of human society, complete with anthropomorphic versions of political figures. I took a slightly different tack, focusing more on general cultural attitudes rather than specific issues of the day.

After getting a week ahead on my King Features strips, I took the first week of April off to develop

this idea. I drew about thirty gags and showed them to my wife Teri, and she immediately had a negative reaction to the relationship which seemed too one-sided in the female’s favor. Also, the cultural stereotype of the fox contains negative associations of sly underhandedness; plus, the “foxy lady” cliché was pretty lame. Back to the drawing board.

I changed Kell into a wolf because of that specie’s more noble reputation. I had some initial hesitation since rabbits and wolves aren’t natural enemies (wolves prefer larger prey), but it seems to have worked out. One thing I had to change was the setting since I had them living in a hole they’d dug together. That made initial sense because foxes and rabbits reside underground. However, wolves don’t. Thus, the treehouse was born.

As for the rest of the family, I had a carnivorous baby rabbit and Kell’s preteen wolf cub son from a previous marriage. The more gags I drew, however, the more something seemed missing. The baby and the son didn’t interact much, and in this family some sibling rivalry was required. I created Lindesfarne so that the herbivore/carnivore relationship between the parents would be mirrored with the children. I didn’t want a third rabbit in the family, so for variety’s sake I made her an adopted porcupine. This was important since with her natural defenses the readers wouldn’t worry about her living with predators. (Later on, of course, she was revealed to be a hedgehog, an insectivore.)

I took another week in May to write about thirty more gags incorporating these changes, which pulled everything together. “Kevin and Kell” came online on September 4, 1995. Doug Pratt was the systems operator of the Comics Forum on CompuServe, and he and I decided to try to market the strip to other CompuServe forums at \$5 per week. Thanks to his salesmanship after a year fifty clients were paying for the strip, making





it cyberspace's first profitable comic strip.

Other factors intervened, and CompuServe was soon operating under a different business model. Fortunately banner ad revenue was picking up steam, and by 2000 "Kevin and Kell's" audience of two million page views a month was bringing in almost as much income as my two newspaper strips combined.

The dot.com collapse put an end to that. Since then the audience (which has grown to three million monthly page views and climbing) has directly supported the strip through the Kell's Angels patron program. In a way, the net has always been about the individual so it seems natural that "Kevin and Kell" should survive in this fashion.

I'm pleased to say that this role-playing game is the latest in a line of merchandise based on the strip. Of course, there have been eight book collections from Plan Nine Publishing, a comic book about Kevin and Kell's wedding called "Origin of the Species," T-shirts, mugs, mouse pads and (especially important for gamers) dice pouches. Equally important is the community that has grown up around the strip through the mailing list that has lively discussions over the characters and the challenges they encounter in the natural environment of Domain.

Through this game you now have the opportunity to actually inhabit this world, either through an existing character or one of your own invention. Whether you're predator or prey, you will face choices and decisions guaranteed to require resourcefulness, quick-thinking and the occasional trait to groom for parasites.

Welcome!

-- Bill Holbrook

LINE DEVELOPER'S INTRODUCTION

I got the idea of doing this project in late 2003. I'd been reading *Kevin and Kell* off-and-on ever since I first discovered Bill's ad in the back of

Shanda the Panda #25. I wish I still had that. It turned out I'd been a fan of Bill Holbrook's from years of reading his newspaper strip *Safe Havens* in the *Oregonian*. I followed the comic on the website but never thought to contact Bill. But near the end of my tenure at Seraphim Guard I got up the nerve to contact Bill and ask how much he wanted for the license.

I expected Bill to reject the idea outright or quote some outrageous figure that I could never hope to reach. But Bill surprised me. He took to the idea, quoted me a very reasonable price, and offered me the use of his entire archive.

What followed was the sort of false starts, reconsiderations, and other things that are prone to happen in game design. My original plans for the system design went completely out the window, and when the Action! System became available I leapt at the chance to use it. When Jamie Borg volunteered to adapt the core rules to Domain's unique needs, I was elated. And when I finally got the rules, I knew the hard work had only begun.

As I write this, I am setting out on the hard part – translating Bill Holbrook's unique creation to something you can take to your gaming table and have entertaining adventures with. Why write the Introduction before the game is finished? Because I felt there was something I had to say, which is this – I may not be the ultimate authority on everything K&K – that honor goes to Bill – but I am ever so grateful for this unique opportunity. By the time you are reading this, my work will be done, and I hope I have done it well. I owe the Dewclaws and Bill that much. What is more, I owe YOU, the gamer, that much.

I promise I won't disappoint you.

-- Michael Hopcroft





WELCOME TO DOMAIN

On behalf of the family of Kevin and Kell Dewclaw, I would like to welcome you to the township of Domain. It may seem like a strange place to you, because everybody walking around is an animal. Over there a fennec fox, six feet tall and walking on his hind legs wearing a suit, is carrying a bag of takeout burgers into a tree that has literally been converted into a house. A rabbit dressed in women's clothing greets him at the door, gives him a kiss on the cheek, and furtively they sneak into the house – it would get weird looks if a rabbit were to eat hamburgers in public. A few blocks away, a gigantic bipedal rabbit is spreading ranch dressing over his lawn in front of his own tree-house. In the basement, a bat is maintaining aging servers for the ISP run by the big rabbit and owned by the fennec fox.

That's the thing about Domain. All the animals who live here, and in the rest of the world, are sentient and capable of thought, speech and self-awareness. That doesn't mean they're not still animals. Under normal circumstances, the fennec fox would not be feeding the rabbit – he'd be eating her. But some unusual things happen in Domain. The fox and the rabbit woman are newlyweds. She in turn is the sister of the big rabbit, who works for the fox. And the bat works for the fox under the rabbit's direction (and watchful eye – the bat is also dating his daughter).

A ways away is the office of HerdThinners inc., leading supplier of groceries to carnivores who for whatever reason cannot hunt. Their professional predators frequently go out into the Wild outside Domain to track prey. Sometimes they'll try to pick off herbivores who live in town, but that's not as common as it used to be. If you think the predators at HerdThinners are vicious, you should sample the office politics. Under the firm hand of R.L., HerdThinners remains strong, profitable, and performs the traditional predator function is strengthening the bloodlines of the prey it pursues.

Today is not a school day, but if it was you'd be seeing teenage animals of all species flocking (sometimes literally) to Caliban Academy, home of the defending city Hunting championship team. At Caliban, there are tracks that teach predators, herbivores, and nocturnal species how to survive and prosper in a violent world. This also includes modern skills like computer programming – the night class of which is actually taught by a Caliban student. A brilliant and lovely hedgehog, she is the adopted daughter of the big rabbit we met earlier spreading ranch dressing over his lawn. Right now she's sleeping.

Go ahead. Greet the big rabbit. He looks fearsome, and if you threaten his family in any way he'll pummel you seven ways to Sunday, but he's really quite a nice guy. His name is Kevin Dewclaw. And this is a rabbit who has broken many taboos over the course of his lifetime, and emerged the stronger and happier for it. Depending on your species, he might offer you some grass from his lawn or send you inside to greet his wife Kell, who'll offer you a nice steak. The Dewclaws are good people, in spite of all the talk about them. When a rabbit marries a wolf, people will talk.

But don't get too close to the baby. She might mistake you for food, and Coney can swallow an antelope whole and spit out all the bones.

SOME CONVENTIONS

Before we begin a detailed description of Domain, a few conventions. When the residents of Domain Township speak of their world, they call it "Earth", just as we call our world. However, for purposes of this book we will be referring to the entire world as "Domain" to make it clear that we're not in Arkansas – at least not the human Arkansas – anymore. Domain is also used to refer to the township where the Dewclaws live; in those cases we will call it "Domain Township".

There are hundreds of sentient species on





Domain – everything that lives, in fact, has a sapient mind. When we use the term “person” in this book, we could be referring to any of these species. Everyone in Domain, whether they’re a wolf, a fox, a rabbit or a snake, refers to themselves as a ‘person’ in addition to as a member of their species, so we shall show them the same privilege.

Finally, we’ll be using terms like “Carnivore”, “Predator”, “herbivore” and “Prey Species” a lot. These terms in no way imply superiority or inferiority for a species or an individual. Even someone you are trying to kill and eat is a person worthy of respect.

THE CIRCLE OF LIFE

The first thing you have to understand about life in Domain is that everyone, no matter where they stand on the food chain, respects the “circle of life”. Although civilization has blurred the natural roles of species and the lines between them, there are certain things that are taken as a given by everyone, and one of them is that some people can only survive by eating the flesh of other sentient beings.

This is not as gruesome as it sounds. Both predators and prey have bought into the concept. There are rules to the game which everyone follows. And most Herbivores who live in civilization can go their entire lives and have to fend off only four or five attacks over the course of it. And just because a predator can’t hunt doesn’t mean someone isn’t willing to feed him.

Domain functions like any other ecology. Plants create food by photosynthesis and grow. Herbivores eat the plants. Carnivores eat the herbivores. Eventually a carnivore will die and be buried, where their body decomposes and deposits nutrients in the soil, which feeds the plants, which in turn feeds the herbivores. It’s an endless cycle that cannot be interrupted \without resulting in ruin for everybody.

But now throw universal sapience into the mix and it takes on new dimensions. Carnivores

and herbivores alike are intelligent, capable and resourceful. The hunt is a duel of minds and will as much as of foot, tooth and claw. In addition, the hunter has a sort of duty to the prey. If the prey is strong enough, it will get away and go on with its life. If not, the predator will end its life quickly so it doesn’t suffer, only eat what will fill their bellies, and leave the rest for the meat packers and scavengers. And while some will actually hunt in town, it is increasingly becoming considered bad form to hunt in town. The Wild, where animals of all types live free of civilization’s strictures and by a code of their own, is a much better hunting ground anyway.

While herbivores do not enjoy being stalked, some enjoy the challenge of a good chase – sometimes too much for their own good. They will put all their wits and resources into their own protection. Each prey species has its own secret methods of escape and defense, taught for generations and adapted as situations change.

Not everyone entirely lives by the cycle. With the coming of civilization, many live their lives away from deadly danger. Many members of c\carnivorous species simply buy their meat with money they earn at their jobs, and retirees are given food and money by the government. Likewise, many herbivores only graze in their own front yards, and buy the rest of what they need. The rules of dietary boundaries are not absolutely. A wolf who buys a hamburger and trimmings at the local fast-food joint won’t throw away the bun – they need fiber in their diet too. And a herbivore is physically capable of digesting meat – it’s just that most intensely dislike the taste, especially of their own species. And some who are born carnivores can, through the miracles of modern medicine, adopt the herbivore lifestyle, even replacing their digestive tracts to get the maximum nourishment from things like grass and hay.

Finally, the boundaries between species themselves are not set in stone. Any person can breed with any other person of the opposite sex. Most people confine their choice of mate to their own species, but not all do. Many come to see the





person behind the species and fall in love, even if their species are natural enemies. The story of Kevin and Kell centers on the marriage between Kevin; a rabbit, and Kell; a wolf. They had a child of their own, a rabbit with the dietary habits of a carnivore, and each brought a child from a previous marriage into the family. What was once considered scandalous is happening more and more often, to the point that it is sometimes difficult to tell at sight what species a person belongs to. And many of them like it that way.

THE DOMAIN EARTH

The Earth in which Domain township is located is the same planet as the one the humans inhabit – just in a different time line. The alternative time line was created fifteen thousand years ago when time travelers from the future arrived and decided to massively intervene. The travelers, who would be the ancestors of what would later become known as the Great Bird Conspiracy, had the best of intentions – the Earth they had left behind had been practically destroyed by human ecological neglect. They had decided that by making all animal species intelligent that the fate of the Earth could be prevented.

As it's the same planet, the geography is identical. Domain Township is located in the southern United States; it has not been specified exactly where, but somewhere in Georgia is suspected. It is near a large city and about five hour's drive away from the North Carolina coast.

The same nations that exist on our Earth exist in Domain. The United Kingdom, for example, is a monarchy ruled by hedgehogs descended directly from the original King Arthur (legendary for pulling "The Quills from the Tree"). The natural nobility of most countries, however, consists of carnivores. Most of the major historical events of our world had parallels in Domain, from the American Revolution to the Civil War through to the events of September 11, 2001. The American Revolution was the result of foxes who had fled England (to avoid being hunted for sport by hounds) being pushed

around by Britain. Once they were in power, they created a form of government that gave all species a voice – unique at the time, but becoming more accepted now worldwide.

Transportation around is by a mix of natural and technological means. Birds, bats, and many insects fly and regularly travel long distances in this manner. Many animals can run very quickly for short distances, but this is mainly used in hunting and avoiding being hunted. Civilized people drive cars, take buses, and fly in airplanes.

RELIGION IN DOMAIN

Domain's religious structure is somewhat different from our Earth's, but it does have some similarities. Christianity is practiced, there is a Bible, and there was apparently a historical Jesus of Nazareth. Although they are not mentioned, it is presumed that such faiths as Judaism, Islam and Buddhism exist in Domain as well. However, since the Dewclaws are Christians we are mainly exposed to the Domain view of Christianity, so that will be our major focus in this subsection.

THE CHRISTMAS STORY

According to the Gospels as they were written in Domain, Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem to be recorded for the roman tax. They were apparently a mixed-species couple, and thus faces such heavy disapproval from the inhabitants of Bethlehem that they were not allowed to stay in the inn and had to sleep in the stables with the beasts of burden (who, like all animals in Domain, were sentient). In Holbrook's version of the story as told in the strip, Kevin was cast as Joseph and Kell as Mary – though this may have been for the reader's benefit (by enabling Holbrook to use familiar characters to tell the story) it did illustrate the point.

Soon others started coming to the stable. Although no midwife could be summoned to attend to the delivery, shepherds from the fields came to the stable entirely on their own and assisted in the delivery of the baby. It was at the moment of birth that Jesus performed his first miracle – everyone

