

Spring 2010 Issue 13

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On the Cover

The cover for Spring is the "Green Gods", in a rite of wild abandon.

This is Malcolm McClinton's third appearance on our cover, which is some kind of record.

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A Roleplaying Snob Reconsiders



As a younger man, I used to think that tinker gnomes, spelljammers, and wild mages were just dumb. If it wasn't about character and clever tactics and story, if it was ludicrously over-the-top powergaming or post-apocalyptic shoddy-science survivor fantasies, I couldn't take it seriously. I thought some gaming was just "not serious" or "not really hackworthy."

Oh, I was a huge roleplaying snob.

But somewhere along the way, I expanded my horizons. For this, I have two people to thank: Steve Kurtz, who was my GM for a spelljamming campaign, and Lester Smith, the GDW and TSR designer who introduced me to the joys of White Wolf and indie RPGs. That spelljamming I was sure I'd hate? I loved that, and learned how to run a long story arc from it. All those indie games and angsty White Wolf settings? Well, I was shocked to learn that TSR designers played non-TSR gamers, but I realized it made sense. Those WW games were ultimately not my thing, but they made me at least willing to look around and adopt the best elements of games not published in Lake Geneva or Renton.

In both cases, they were cracks in the wall; almost all of my gaming was still d20 and fantasy-focussed. In the end, it took me years to learn that just because something wasn't for me, that didn't mean it wasn't worthwhile. And just because something seems foolish at first glance, doesn't mean I should dismiss it out of hand. I learned to withhold judgment and try things out before getting too negative about them.

That attitude brought some good games my way: *Pendragon*, *Houses of the Blooded*, and others that I might not have bought in my TSR fanboy days. I learned to see the strengths of any given system. I started to think about games professionally, in other words.

Yes, I was a huge roleplaying snob and sometimes I still am, but I keep it down to the occasional snotty remark. Far better to take pleasure in the huge range of games and gamers within our hobby, to celebrate *Mouseguard*, the *Dragon Age* RPG (see our article on page 54), *My Life With Master*, and so on than to rely on a single setting or mechanic. It's what I call the "second system" in any given group. That is, the game that everyone likes well enough when you aren't playing the world's most popular RPG, your preferred change of pace. Heck, even WotC is re-releasing *Gamma World*, which fits that "second tier" category to a T.

It's worth branching out just as a change-up between campaigns of *Dungeons & Kobolds*. I'm learning to appreciate others, and who knows, maybe I'll even run some oddball games soon. There's no lack of options.

Sword-and-sorcery fantasy remains my first love. But games aren't like marriages; there's no need to be mono-gamist, and there's a lot we can learn from branching out to a new system or a new genre once in a while. What about you? Have you always been loyal to a certain, single d20-based system, or have you tinkered with Jedi, vampires, or mice among the dice?

Wolfgang Baur
Kobold in Chief