

Winter 2009 Issue 12

PLAY A BETTER GAME

KOBOLD

TM

Quarterly

A Magazine of Kobolds & Dragons

Winter Court of the
**SHADOW
ELVES**

Holy Remix:

D&D
DATHRINDER
**SPECIALTY
PRIESTS**

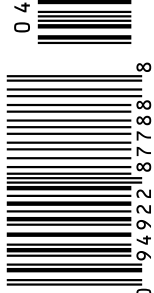
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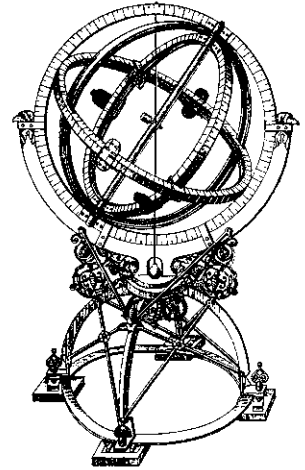


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Keep It Short



It's good to be reminded, every once in a while, that an encounter need not be a 3-hour slugfest to be memorable. Indeed, sometimes all that added wordcount just gets in the way. Look at any of the adventure modules from the 1980s: a typical encounter is shorter than this editorial. Look at some of the modules being written today: a typical encounter runs at least two pages and, sometimes, four or five.

Are we gaining anything as gamers from that? Yes, a big book gives us more words for our money. But are we getting more entertainment out of a longer book, or does the joy drop off at a certain point?

That's sort of the whole "small but fierce" philosophy in a nutshell: try harder in less space. Cater to gamers with serious, well-designed work, but don't go long just for the sake of seeing your words on the page, or (in the case of the windbag GM) for the sake of hearing yourself speak.

The hobby may be inexpensive in dollars, but it has always demanded a large time commitment; that's part of the appeal. The rules are complicated—even Byzantine—yet mastering them is part of the joy. Yes, it feels good to know the system. It feels good to abuse the rules (to a point). It feels good to make the game sing, to spin out a deadly encounter and know exactly when to deliver the villain's signature line. You've gotta be both master of improvisation and the mechanics to carve out a niche where the game really clicks.

I just read the opening section of current Open Design patron project *Red Eye of Azathoth*, for instance, by Tim

Connors. It starts with a bang, throwing together Viking raiders, English monks, and Cthulhu cultists to mix it up with full-on horror and super-creepy staging—all in about 500 words. It's a terrific opener that makes me realize how much potential there is in a small number of words. That sense of brevity and timing is refreshing, and it is yet another reason why the patron projects are so inspirational.

Likewise, the 4th Edition *Courts of the Shadow Fey* is squeezing some paragon encounters into less space, making it easier to scan and easier for GMs to put their own spin on the elements for players to react to. Even the two sets of original side mechanics take up minimal space. Fast and lean is proving to be extremely playable.

So, I think it's a time to fight RPG bloat, but I still see a hobby littered with supplements, add-ons, and fat books. In fact, Open Design just shipped a 188-page *Halls of the Mountain King*—I'm not being at all consistent because there's lots of juicy sections there.

And yet, I think it might be one of those pendulums that swings from time to time in a gamer's life. I know there are heavy-tome lovers out there, and I've been one myself. Big and ambitious is appealing because it's going for the limit... and maybe because it improves the odds of finding the elements you want. I just can't help feeling that sometimes, the little gems are just as valuable, and they never seem to draw the attention that the fat hardbacks do.

Maybe I just need to go run my game with three core books and a cloud of fury for a little while. Who's with me?

Wolfgang Baur
Kobold in Chief