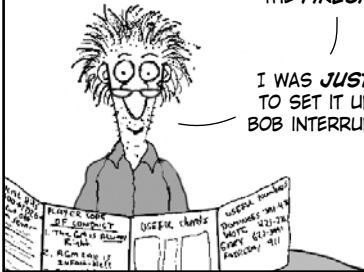


LOOK GUYS, I WAS THINKING WE COULD COVER YOUR BACKGROUNDS IN CHARACTER.

USING A LITTLE TRICK I SAW GARY JACKSON USE IN A TOURNEY YEARS AGO.

THE FIRESIDE CHAT.

I WAS JUST ABOUT TO SET IT UP WHEN BOB INTERRUPTED ME.



FIRESIDE CHAT...? WHAT?

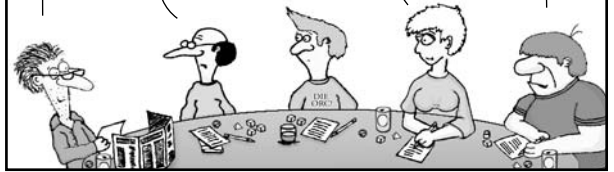
YOU MEAN WE HAVE TO TALK AND STUFF?

THAT'S RIGHT -- IN CHARACTER.

FOR CRYIN' OUT LOUD -- DID WE SIGN UP FOR A REMEDIAL HACKMASTER COURSE?

BUT I'M ALWAYS IN CHARACTER.

WHAT A WONDERFUL IDEA, B.A.



IT'S A GREAT EXERCISE FOR HELPING PLAYERS IMMERSE THEMSELVES INTO THEIR ROLES.

I'VE USED A SIMILAR DEVICE WITH MY LADIES OF HACK CAMPAIGN.

YEAH, WELL IT'S GREAT IF YOU'RE A NOOB AND DON'T KNOW HOW TO ROLE-PLAY.

NOBODY HERE FITS THAT BILL THOUGH.

SEEMS LIKE A WASTE OF TIME TO ME.



WELL YOU'RE JUST GOING TO HAVE TO HUMOR ME GUYS.

THIS EXERCISE IS NOT ONLY USEFUL FOR PLAYERS BUT FOR THE GM AS WELL.

IT HELPS MAKE THAT MENTAL TRANSITION WHERE A CHARACTER IS JUST A SERIES OF NUMBERS AND STATS TO AN INDIVIDUAL WHO IS FLESH AND BLOOD.

ALRIGHT, ALRIGHT, I'M GAME.

YEAH, LET'S DO IT.



BESIDES IT'S MORE THAN AN EXERCISE -- I'VE WORKED IT INTO THE ADVENTURE.

IF YOU PAY ATTENTION YOU MIGHT PICK UP A FEW CLUES THAT'LL BE USEFUL LATER IN THE ADVENTURE.

THAT'S ALL I'M GOING TO SAY ON THAT SUBJECT.

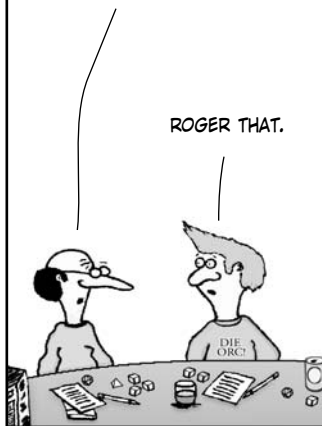


YA HEAR THAT...?

CLUES.

WE BETTER TAKE NOTES.

ROGER THAT.



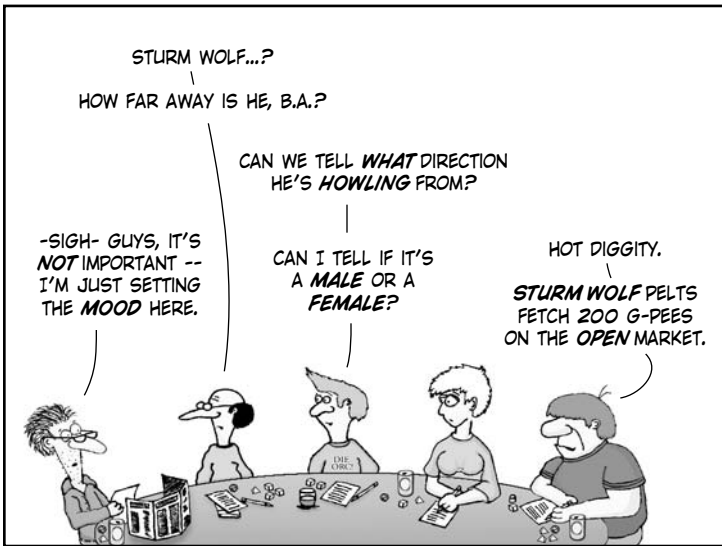
NOW AS I WAS SAYING...

YOU'RE SITTING AROUND THE CAMPFIRE.

A LONE STURM WOLF LETS OUT A MOURNFUL HOWL IN THE DISTANCE.

THE WOODS SEEM STRANGELY PEACEFUL AS YOU SIT ABOUT THE CAMPFIRE SIPPING FROM YOUR BOWLS OF HOT VENISON STEW.





STURM WOLF...?

HOW FAR AWAY IS HE, B.A.?

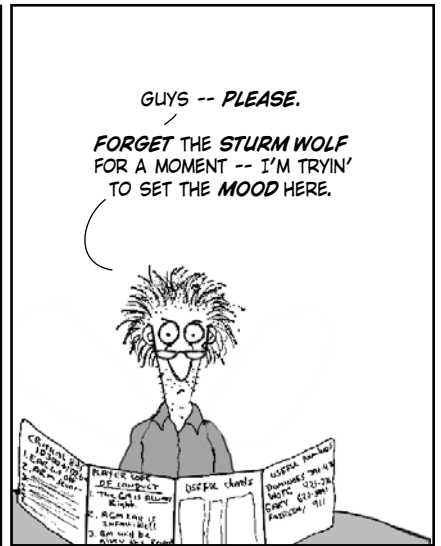
CAN WE TELL *WHAT* DIRECTION HE'S *HOWLING* FROM?

-SIGH- GUYS, IT'S *NOT* IMPORTANT -- I'M JUST SETTING THE *MOOD* HERE.

CAN I TELL IF IT'S A *MALE* OR A *FEMALE*?

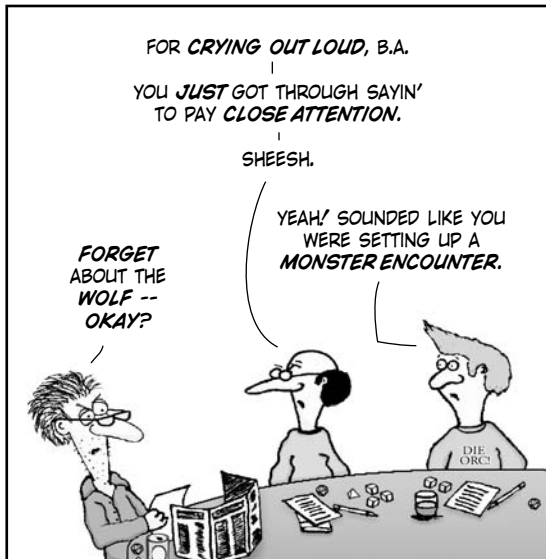
HOT DIGGITY.

*STURM WOLF* PELTS FETCH 200 G-PEES ON THE *OPEN* MARKET.



GUYS -- *PLEASE*.

*FORGET* THE *STURM WOLF* FOR A MOMENT -- I'M TRYIN' TO SET THE *MOOD* HERE.



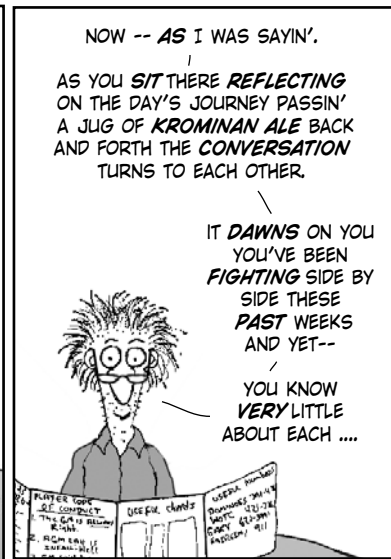
FOR *CRYING OUT LOUD*, B.A.

YOU *JUST* GOT THROUGH SAYIN' TO PAY *CLOSE* ATTENTION.

SHEESH.

YEAH! SOUNDED LIKE YOU WERE SETTING UP A *MONSTER ENCOUNTER*.

*FORGET* ABOUT THE *WOLF* -- *OKAY?*



NOW -- *AS* I WAS SAYIN'.

AS YOU *SIT* THERE *REFLECTING* ON THE DAY'S JOURNEY PASSIN' A JUG OF *KROMINAN ALE* BACK AND FORTH THE *CONVERSATION* TURNS TO EACH OTHER.

IT *DAWNS* ON YOU YOU'VE BEEN *FIGHTING* SIDE BY SIDE THESE *PAST* WEEKS AND YET--

YOU KNOW *VERY* LITTLE ABOUT EACH ....



B.A., I CAST *DETECT EVIL* ON THE *STURM WOLF*.

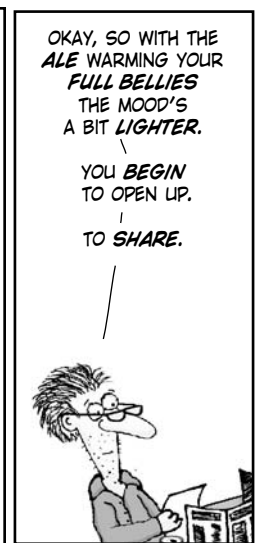


LIMMM, DAVE.

MAYBE YOU SHOULD *GIVE* THE *STURM WOLF* THING A REST FOR THE TIME BEING.

HE DIDN'T EVEN GIVE ME AN *ANSWER*.

HE'S GONNA *NEED* A FEW MORE *LESSONS*.



OKAY, SO WITH THE *ALE* WARMING YOUR *FULL BELLIES* THE *MOOD'S* A BIT *LIGHTER*.

YOU *BEGIN* TO OPEN UP. TO *SHARE*.

**GRISTER** IS THE **FIRST** ONE TO **BREAK** THE ICE AND BEGIN TALKING ABOUT HIS PAST.

THAT'S YOUR **CUE**, BOB. YOU CAN TAKE IT FROM THERE.

ME? WHY DO I HAVE TO GO FIRST?

JUST DO IT, BOB.

OKAY, OKAY, -- GUESS I'LL **KICK** THINGS OFF.

**GRISTER**'S REAL NAME IS **TARTH DUN'WALLOW**.

HE'S AN **X-GLADIATOR** WHO EARNED HIS **FREEDOM** THE **HARD** WAY -- ON THE **TRAVELING PIT FIGHT CIRCUIT**.

HE EARNED THE KNICKNAME, "**GRISTER**" 'COZ THAT WAS THE NAME OF HIS **SIGNATURE** COUP DE GRACE TECHNIQUE.

THAT BACK STORY **RAWS**, DUDE.

AAAAH, I SEE.

THE '**GRISTER**' IS A '**FINISHING MOVE**' OF MY OWN DESIGN -- A **REAL** CROWD PLEASER.

IT COMBINES THE **ROUND HOUSE GROIN KICK** WITH A **FITCH-KELLER** THROAT PUNCH TOPPED OFF WITH AN **EYE-GOUGE** AND IF **SUCCESSFUL** FINISHED OFF WITH A **CALLED** SHOT TO THE **NECK** BY **SWORD** AGAINST A **PRONE** TARGET.

BY THE WAY, I USED THE RULES IN THE '**BRAWLER'S GUIDE TO ARENA COMBAT**' FOR **TECHNIQUE ENGINEERING** AND CAME UP WITH A **SKILL RATING** FOR THE MOVE -- I MADE A **COPY** OF THE WORKSHEET IF YOU WANNA CHECK MY MATH.

OH, UM..., OKAY. THANKS.

TO EXPLAIN MY **LOW DEX** I CAME UP WITH A **BACK STORY** TIE-IN.

**GRISTER** WAS A **THIRD RATE** FIGHTER BUT HE SHOWED SOME **PROMISE**.

MORE OF AN **UNTAMED BRAWLER** THAN A **TRAINED FIGHTER** -- HE FOUGHT **HARD** AND HE **FOUGHT** TO WIN -- FOR THE **ONLY** APPROVAL IN LIFE HE HAD **EVER** KNOWN WAS THE **APPLAUSE** OF THE CROWD AT THE **END** OF A MATCH.

MANY A TIME AS HE STOOD THERE OVER A **FALLEN FOE**, HIS BLADE **DRIPPING** WITH BLOOD, HE **THANKED** THE GAWDS FOR PUTTING HIM IN THE **ARENA**.

BUT **GRISTER**'S PASSION FOR **KILLING** WASN'T LIMITED TO THE BLOOD-SOAKED SAND OF THE **ARENA FLOOR**.

HE **FOUGHT** IN THE **STABLES** AS WELL -- WITH HIS **FELLOW** GLADIATORS AND TEAM MATES.

HE SHOWED NO **MERCY**, KILLING FOR SUCH **MINOR** THINGS AS A **SPILLED** MUG OF ALE, THE **OCCASIONAL** **PERCEIVED** INSULT OR FOR A **CASUAL** GLANCE OF THE EYE HE JUST **HAPPENED** TO CATCH.

**GRISTER** WAS A **PROMISING** FIGHTER WHO STOOD TO MAKE A **LOT** OF MONEY FOR HIS **STABLE-MASTER**.

SOMEONE THE **COMPETITION** STOOD UP AND TOOK **NOTE** OF.

THEN ON THE **EYE** OF A **BIG** MATCH AT **GROD MONDRE**' SOME **RAT BASTARD** SLIPPED A LITTLE SOMETHING **EXTRA** IN MY EVENING **GRUEL**.

A **POISON** WITH LONG LASTING **DEBILITATING** EFFECTS.

THAT'S **TERRIBLE**.

B.A., WE'RE THINKING **WITHERING INDIGO** AS THE **POISON**.

IF THE VICTIM **SURVIVES**, HE TAKES A PERMANENT HIT TO HIS **CON, DEX** AND **STRENGTH** -- THAT FITS IN **NICELY** WITH BOB'S LOUSY STATS.

ON THE **PLUS** SIDE HE PICKS UP A **PLUS 5 BONUS** ON **ALL SAVES** VS. **POISON**.

UM, THAT IS -- **PENDING** YOUR APPROVAL OF COURSE.

OH...

WELL, ER, OFF THE **CUFF** I HAVE TO SAY I DON'T SEE A **PROBLEM** WITH IT.

SEEMS **REASONABLE** ENOUGH TO ME.

REALLY...?

YER LETTIN' ME **HAVE** THE **SAVE BONUS**?

WOW -- I THOUGHT YOU'D **TOTALLY** HAVE A **COW** OVER THAT.

LIKE I SAID, BOB -- IT SOUNDS **"REASONABLE"**. I'M ALLOWING IT.

KEWL BEANS.

THAT ACTUALLY MIGHT MAKE THIS **NEXT** PART A BIT EASIER TO SWALLOW.

"NEXT PART"...?

WELL, I **FIGURED** BEING AN **ARENA CHAMPION** WITH **EXTENSIVE TRAINING** AND ALL I SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO TAKE AN **ADDITIONAL 100 BUILDING POINTS** TO BE APPLIED TO VARIOUS **COMBAT SKILLS** AND **PROFICIENCIES**.

SORTA MAKES **SENSE**, DOESN'T IT?

OH IT DOES.

VERY **REASONABLE** IF YOU ASK ME.

SO WADDA YA **THINK**, B.A.?

WHAT DO I THINK...?

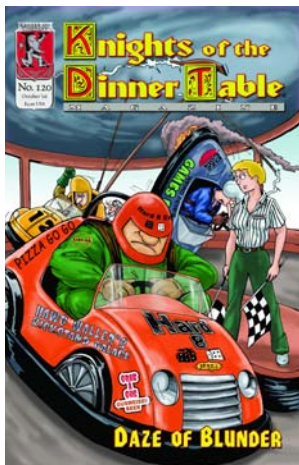
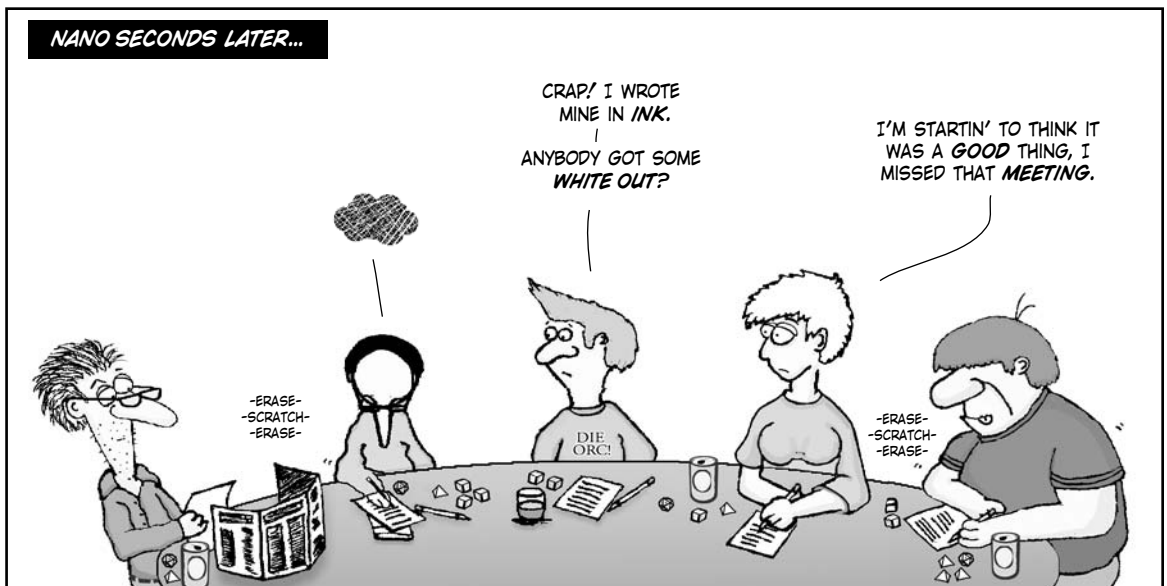
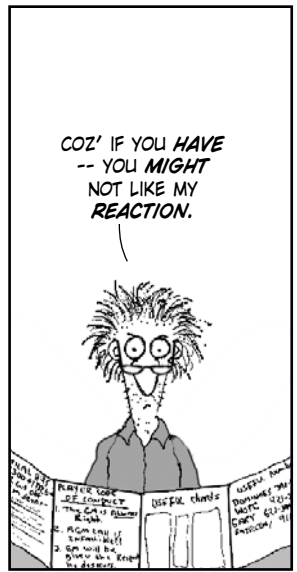
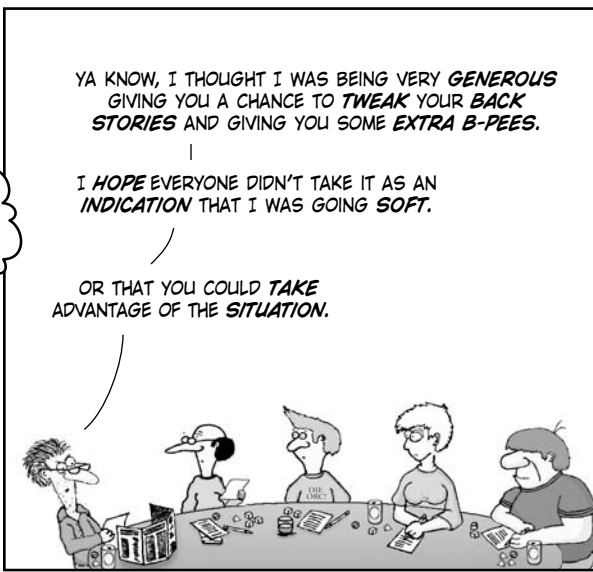
I THINK YOU WERE **OFF** TO A **VERY GOOD** START AND THEN YOU GOT **GREEDY** -- THAT'S WHAT I THINK.

YOU ARE **OBVIOUSLY** TRYING TO **TRICK-OUT** YOUR CHARACTER ON THE **TAIL END**.

NO WAY IN HELL.

OKAY. MAYBE **100 B-PEES** IS A BIT MUCH.

**FIFTY THEN??? TWENTY...?**



This preview is from KODT #120  
on sale 10/25/2006

Check out the issue for the whole story