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BAR

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Fellowship/Cult News

August is here!

I hope you all had an amazing summer. We have a lot planned for August; we will have 5 different DMs taking on sessions in the month.

With October around the corner, please reach out if you were looking for something a bit spookier. We will be trying to put together some festive fun. If we have enough people, we could add something as an in-server event.

Also, check out our in-server sessions; these are so fun and are building a life of their own.

Classic Whiskey Sour



Ingredients

- 2 ounces bourbon or rye whiskey
- ¾ ounce fresh lemon juice
- ½ to ¾ ounce simple syrup
- ½ ounce egg white (optional)
- Garnish: maraschino cherry and/or orange slice

Directions

- Combine whiskey, lemon juice, simple syrup, and egg white (if using) in a cocktail shaker.
- Perform a dry shake (shake without ice) for 10-20 seconds to emulsify the egg white.
- Add ice and shake again for 10-15 seconds to chill and dilute.
- Strain into a rocks glass over fresh ice or a chilled coupe glass.
- Garnish with a cherry, orange slice, or lemon twist. Optionally, add a few drops of Angostura bitters on the foam

Our Charity Table

June: We had a guest, Nick from K9s for Warriors! It was so great having him with us, and together we raised \$612.00!

Charity Night this month is on August 19th at 8 pm CST.

We will also have another set of auctions for the event and another Giveaway!

One shots! If you would like to join in the fun, contact Mandy or Cloud! It is from one shots we pick most players for campaigns!



Want to see them? Check out @rpgsidebar on



Want to learn D&D?

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From The Channel

Hey, we had some new things in the channel; one is also server-side!

All our Discord members can get the new LIVE role! This role makes sure you get notified when someone goes live. All go-live members are voted on by our "go live" board. Feel free to reach out to a MOD if you need any help with roles.

We have also been adding new widgets and links for our charity auction. This is once a month, but thanks to all the donations, we have raised even more for K9s for Warriors.

Card Packs:

The Collectors Series has been such a hit. In any stream, once we reach 5 subs (of any kind), we unlock a limited-edition card with a higher level and power.

Emotes: For August, we are adding a couple of the cutest sea bunnies to our emotes!



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Xaretul: The Forgotten Flame

Chapter 13: The Awakening of Power

By EndYourStreamTV

The days passed slowly, each one filled with a quiet anticipation. Xaretul had returned, but he was not yet whole. His form flickered in and out of the shadows, resting by the fire but not truly present. Kira, Arian, and the others could feel it, his power was still there, but it was faint, fragile, as though it could slip away at any moment. He needed rest, time to gather himself, to regain what had been lost.

For the first time since their arrival in this new world, Kira allowed herself to step back, to give the others space to grow on their own. There was a peace in that. A sense of trust that she hadn't realized she was building in herself and in the children.

They had gathered around the fire, the air cool and crisp as the night stretched on. The children, Nicholas, Caele, Garuth, Auriel, and Sandra, sat quietly, eyes wide as they listened to Kira and Arian recount the stories of Xaretul. These weren't just stories of power and might. These were the stories of a god who had known loss, a god who had wandered for centuries without the belief of his people, a god who had found new life through the faith of children like them.

Kira spoke first, her voice steady but filled with awe as she began the tale.

Kira's Story

"When Xaretul was young, he was a god of strength," Kira said, her voice soft in the quiet night. "He ruled over shadows and secrets, but he was also a protector. He was a god who believed in justice and fairness, and in the protection of the weak. He gave everything for his people. But as time passed, his people left him. The world changed. Wars came. His power began to fade."

Arian sat beside her, his eyes serious as he added, "When the other gods ascended, Xaretul didn't. He stayed behind, bound to the earth, powerless. But even in his weakened state, he never gave up. He waited. He watched. And he waited for those who would believe in him again."

Kira continued, her gaze on the fire. "And that's when we found him. We believed in him when no one else did. And now... now, he's back. Stronger than ever. But he's not just our god. He's our protector. Our friend."

The Children's Reactions

The children listened intently, their faces filled with wonder and disbelief. Nicholas, his small hands clenched around his knees, spoke up first.

"Do you think... do you think we could be like him? I mean, what if we can protect others too? If he can do it, can we?"

Kira smiled at him, nodding. "Yes, Nicholas. That's exactly what we're here for. To protect others, to share his light with those who are lost."

Garuth, sitting quietly by the fire, raised his head. "What happens when he wakes up? Will he be stronger? Will he teach us more? Will he?" He faltered, the uncertainty creeping into his voice.

Arian answered him, his tone confident. "He'll teach us everything. But we have to be patient. He's not just waking up from sleep. He's waking up from a long, long rest. When he's ready, he'll show us what we need to do."

cont on pg 9



MINI
FUN!



DINO
LAND
SHARK



MYR
GETTING
100%



Stellar Blade

Game progress

100%



Trophies

SLEEPY
BUNNY



CLOUD
COZY
GAMES



SOLO
BUNNY



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THE NEXT ISSUE OF REALMS





One Shot Recap

By SexySlothh



This week, the Whisperknots started with a bit of recovery and a debrief from the solo missions Thea, Vi, and Sybil undertook the day before to gather information.

Thea spoke with Ilira Boramar about the explosion that rocked her mansion after the ball they had hosted the previous night, while also checking in on a new friend.

Sybil met with Mrs. Brackholt, who runs the Three Rings Pawn Shop, to ask about the handkerchief found on the Halfling smuggler, Pira, who was killed at the Boramar Ball. She uncovered some interesting information about both the halfling and the Emerald Claw.

Meanwhile, Vi spoke to Orad Skeen about a lucrative job opportunity involving Dragon Shards. If they chose to take it, they would be guarding the delivery of the shards back to the city.

During their morning debrief and breakfast, the Whisperknots received a message from Allisia Larnd, a spy inside a House Cannith compound who needed to be extracted.

Where we left off, the Whisperknots were making progress on finding a way into the Compound to do just that. Tune in next week to find out if they make it out unscathed, or if they'll have to fight their way out!

(If its not too late)



Xaretul: The Forgotten Flame (cont)

By EndYouStreamTV

Auriel, her eyes thoughtful, added, "I've been thinking about what he said... about faith. About believing. I mean, before we came here, I never really knew what faith was. I just... existed. But now, it's different. I feel something. Something stronger than I've ever known. And I want to help others feel it too."

Sandra, the quietest of the group, nodded solemnly. She didn't speak much, but the way she looked at Kira and Arian made it clear that she understood the weight of their words. She, too, felt that pull, the quiet hunger for something greater.

The Night of Stories

As the days passed, the camp grew in both size and strength. Kira and Arian began to tell the children more stories, stories of Xaretul's past, of his journey from power to forgottenness, and then his rebirth. They spoke of his kindness, his humility, and his unwavering belief in those who had lost hope.

One night, as the fire crackled and the children sat around it, Arian took the lead in telling a story that had stuck with him since Xaretul had first shared it with him.

"There was a time," Arian began, his voice low and steady, "when Xaretul walked among the gods, with light and fire at his command. But he wasn't like the others. The other gods wanted to control the world. They wanted to be worshipped, to be feared. But Xaretul... he didn't want that. He just wanted to protect people. He just wanted them to be free."

Kira joined in, her voice soft and thoughtful. "But as time

passed, the people turned away from him. They wanted stronger gods. Gods who could give them what they wanted. And so Xaretul was forgotten. And he stayed, alone, waiting for the day when someone would call on him."

The First Signs of Power

As the children listened to the stories, the air around them seemed to grow stiller, more charged. The firelight flickered, and the shadows seemed to deepen, as if something was stirring within them. The children grew quiet, sensing the change.

In the distance, at the edge of the camp, Xaretul's form began to shift. He had been resting for four days now, but the time had come. The power that had been returning to him, slowly but surely, had reached its peak. The faith of the children, their belief, had fueled him, given him strength he hadn't known in centuries.

Kira and Arian exchanged a glance, both feeling the same sudden surge of energy in the air.

And then, without warning, Xaretul's form appeared at the edge of the clearing.

The Awakening

His mask of shadows was no longer cracked. His body was whole again, no longer flickering and fragile. The flames that surrounded him burned brighter, stronger, and the shadows that had once seemed so dark and oppressive were now a warm, protective embrace. The power within him was not the same as it had been before, this was something different, something born of the faith of these children. (cont on page 11)



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Zeshra



Character Writing

By SexySlothh

Race: Black Dragonborn

Class: Rogue

Zeshra remembers little of the place she was born. What she does remember is the humid air, the smell of stagnant water, and the day everything changed.

As a curious young dragonborn, she wandered farther than she should have, chasing strange lights through forgotten ruins. Hidden among broken stone was a shimmering doorway unlike anything she had ever seen. Before she understood what it was, the world twisted around her. When the light faded, she found herself standing in Sigil, the City of Doors.

Alone, frightened, and with no way home, Zeshra learned quickly that Sigil had little patience for lost children. Hunger became her first teacher. She stole scraps when she could, slept wherever she could avoid notice, and discovered that survival belonged to those who stayed unseen. The city's endless alleys and hidden passages became her home, and its dangers shaped her into someone who could disappear into a crowd as easily as slipping into a shadow.

Over the years, small jobs turned into larger ones. A courier who couldn't be followed. A lookout no one noticed. A thief who could enter places without leaving a trace. Before long, people stopped asking where she came from and started asking if she was available for work.

Today, Zeshra works in the shadows of Sigil for anyone with enough coin. Some hire her to steal priceless artifacts, others to spy on rivals or uncover dangerous secrets. If information exists, she knows someone who has it, or knows how to get it herself. Her reputation has spread quietly through taverns, back rooms, and whispered conversations: reliable, discreet, and worth every copper.

She trusts few people. In Sigil, trust is often more valuable than gold and twice as easy to lose. Her loyalty lasts only as long as a contract, though she refuses jobs that target helpless innocents or children, remembering all too well what it was like to have no one looking out for her.

Though she has built a life among Sigil's endless doors, one question has never left her. Somewhere, there may still be a portal leading home. Whether that home still exists, or whether she would even recognize it as home anymore, the Sigil has become.

So, Zeshra remains what Sigil made her: a shadow among shadows, moving unseen through the City of Doors, selling secrets to those who can afford them while quietly searching for one answer no amount of gold has ever been able to buy.



Xaretul: The Forgotten Flame (cont)

By EndYouStreamTV

Xaretul looked around, taking in the group that had grown around him: Kira, Arian, Nicholas, Colean, Garuth, Auriel, Sandra, and the others. He could feel their belief, their hope, and it was like a fire within him, a fire he had not felt in ages.

"I have seen what you have done," Xaretul continued. "You have spread the faith, you have shared the love I gave you, and now, you will help me build something new. We will create a place where those who have lost their way can find hope again. A place where we can protect the weak, defend the helpless, and teach others that they are not forgotten."

The children's faces glowed with excitement, their faith and belief now confirmed in Xaretul's return. They were no longer children lost in a broken world; they were the beginning of something new. They were the future of Xaretul's faith, and they would spread it far and wide.

"I will guide you," Xaretul said softly. "But it is your faith, your love, that will shape the world we build."

And with that, the fire burned brighter, the shadows warmer. The children had found their purpose. They had found their place in the world, and together, they would walk the path of faith, guided by the god who had returned, not just for them, but for the world.



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Zorvex the Spark of Infinite Creation

New Gods of Ravnica

By GrimmGrixis

Chaotic Neutral - blue/red/green

Summary: Curiosity and chaos given form - the flash behind every reckless "just to see what happens." Zorvex doesn't care whether an invention helps or harms, only that something new was born. When experiments go spectacularly right (or usefully wrong), the Izzet say "Zorvex smiled today."

Myth: The First Mix

Long ago, an Izzet apprentice, some saying he was Zorvex before godhood, was supposed to mix two safe components for a routine reaction. Bored, he added a third, a fourth, and a fifth, against all set and established protocols.

The resulting thing, there is no other word for it, exploded outward into a slow-rotating cloud of bright dust that hung in the lab for three days, refused to settle, and answered questions when spoken to. By the third day, it had answered seventy-one questions, each of them about something nobody had asked yet.

On the fourth day, it was gone. The notes survive, and to this day, sometimes the pages write more answers to questions never asked.





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Newsletter

Less Control = More Creative



By W. Adam Clarke

Good Afterwhenever, everyone. Your friendly neighborhood Game Dev, AP Runner, Streamer, and Author you've never read W. Adam Clarke again. This month, I'm going to hit on something that to some GMs out there is going to sound old hat, and for some is just going to sound crazy. But, that's the nature of speaking across generations and large differences in experience, right? So... this week, I want to suggest something to the GM's who haven't tried it: Give up control of your game.

Okay, sure, that likely should have come with a trigger warning, and some of you are clutching at pearls. (How can you afford pearls in this economy, anyway? What's your secret?) But, here's the thing: most of us play with the same group of folks, often for years. And frankly, most of us don't have that many creative original plot twists we can drop in, which means whether they say it or not, whether they know it or not, after years in the same group under the same GM, the players are just getting the "Best Of" album, and they know where it's headed.

But... not if you're not even in control of your game.

This flies in the face of most advice to plan, plan, plan, and then plan again, and show up

with 400 pages of world backstory. I know. But, do you know when a creative mind is *really* challenged? When they can't plan. Let's face it, the PCs can't know what you've planned, if in fact you haven't it all out.

This approach actually harkens back to Ye Olde Days of gaming. In the 80's and 90's, a lot more of a campaign was filled out with random charts. Names, races, cities, random encounters, even BBEGs. A lot of us pushed away from these, feeling we could tell a more cohesive story if we wrote it all out, and for the most part that's true. However, what I've come to realize over the years is leaning into the Chaos makes you a better and less predictable storyteller. Roll randomly for alliances, intentions, powers, whatever, and fill in the gaps using your storytelling abilities. "Let the Dice tell the Story." You'll be surprised by where this approach can take your games.

Anyway, that's all for now! Until next month, happy gaming!



Single Step Gaming

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Tues	8pm	Neonheart 80s Daggerheart
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Fri	7pm	Writing Stream
Sat		OFF
Sun	7pm	Spinespur Blades in the Dark

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Teyvora, the Weaver of Eternal Debts

New Gods of Ravnica

By GrimmGrixis

Lawful Neutral - white/black

Summary: Already weaving contracts when the first Orzhov made the first loan. Every action is a thread, and every thread must be repaid - debt-dodgers sometimes wake bearing her golden coin-shaped scar. Favored across Orzhov temples, where worship and bookkeeping blend for good reason

Myth: The First Loan

Before the break of one of the coldest winters in Ravnica, two neighbors lived in stone houses next to each other. One had a working hearth, fed well and burning brightly; the other did not. During the coldest night of this foul, frigid winter, the neighbor with the working hearth lent the other a bowl of coals so she could light her own. That bowl is the first debt.

The lender never asked for it back. The borrower returned it full of new coals during the next winter, of her own accord. The bowl has been passed back and forth between those two houses, with new coals, every winter, for nine thousand years.

Teyvora has since watched over all debts, contracts, and loans set forth in the city, beginning with that first bowl of coal.



Classes to Play in 5.5 and 5E



By Skyline

Welcome back, weary travelers!

In my last edition, I talked about my thoughts on what campaigns I'd run with the latest editions of Dungeons and Dragons. And while that can help aspiring or newer dungeon masters such as myself, I think there's something else that can help newer players, not just dungeon masters.

And with the latest edition 5.5 making some big changes to some of the oldest classes, I feel like newer players will be confused on not only what edition they should and are going to play, but the classes as well. So without further ado, let's take a look at my recommendations for classes in 5.5 and 5E!

5E:

Starting with 5E, which has been and still is the most played edition as of now, has a good balance for most of the classes, with some not being as powerful, hence the changes in 5.5. However, that doesn't mean you can't make those classes good; it could depend on the campaign or if you're incorporating homebrewing.

However, if none of those apply, here are the classes I would suggest playing for 5E campaigns!

Barbarian-

Me suggesting a combat-heavy class? Crazy, I know. However, I do recognize an awesome class when I see it. Barbarians got a kind of strange update in 5.5 that some people may not want to play (in which they are able to cast magic when they are basically the exact opposite).

Barbarians alike fighters, are overall pretty simple classes: get a weapon and hit, and also be intimidating! These basics can help build a foundation for a character that not only can lead to some awesome character development and RP in and out of combat, but depending on your subclass, you can get some abilities that frankly would make a mage jealous.

From raging, brutal critical and reckless attacks, it can also provide any player some strategic insights.

Wizard-

Ah yes, wizards, a true classic. When most people think of D&D, it's safe to assume most of the time they think of wizards, and it's a good thing! Wizards are a classic example of a character who truly relies on all aspects of the game: XP building, spell casting/learning, and acquiring what they need for the journey.

And while wizards are one of the weaker classes in early levels, it is worth it to keep at it and keep them.
(cont on page 18)





Send in yours by July 20th
in the SideBar pets channel!

Classes to Play in 5.5 and 5E (Cont)



By Skyline

alive (if your DM doesn't allow for revivals), as they are arguably one of the most powerful classes in the game.

From spells such as Fireball, Counterspell, and even cantrips like Prestidigitation, wizards are a great pick for 5E.

Paladin

Like wizards, paladins are also a well-known class in D&D and very popular. In this version, they are very consistent in what you get powers-wise and how you can approach combat and RP.

Additionally, in this version, there are a variety of oaths and deities to choose from; with most of them being straightforward in who's evil and who's less evil, it makes Paladins not only a great class to play but an easier one because you have a foundation to follow.

Moving on to 5.5, the latest version, there have been quite a few changes to the classes, which can be fun for a new player who wants to go outside of the norm!

Bard

Now I'd say bards are good for pretty much any edition and most campaigns; however, I feel like they shine especially in 5.5. With the new subclass that involves dancing, it opens new horizons for players who prefer the magic classes!

I may be a bit biased because Bard is my favorite, but it is definitely one of the most fun classes to play in the game, especially if you have a darker theme to your campaign.

They are also very versatile and can adapt to your party depending on what subclasses, feats, and spells you take!

For example, Bardic Inspiration is always useful, Silvery Barbs (if the DM allows) can be a lifesaver, and Magical Secrets can make your bard just a little more chaotic and powerful...

(Cont on page 20)



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Member Showcase!

Shelbie

We asked a few questions to get to know Shelbie just a little better!

Favorite color?

lavender purple

Tell us about your hobbies?

I love to play video games, cook/bake, read, and go running. Each one helps keep me sane in its own way!

Do you have any Pets?

I have two cats named Yzma and Kronk. They drive me nuts but are the sweetest cats.

What is your favorite style of game, and what got you into it?

my two favorites are cozy games and rpg's.

If you would recommend a game to someone in that style, what would you recommend?

Obviously the best cozy game is Stardew Valley! And for RPG's, Skyrim is by far my favorite and I would recommend it to anyone who will listen.



What's something interesting that people wouldn't guess about you?

I have a ton of Wizard of Oz collectibles that I got as a kid that I still have to this day. And I LOVE them.

Anything Else?

Catch me playing Mara Stormpetal in the Caffeinated Chronicles here on discord the first 2 Wednesday's of every month! If you're looking to watch a relaxing and cozy dnd session, the Caffeinated Chronicles is the dnd group for you!



Classes to Play in 5.5 and 5E (Cont)



By Skyline

Monk

In 5.5, monks got a huge buff all around! Not only are their basic features better, but they can be so strong if you make them right. For example, in a current campaign I'm in, I'm playing alongside a monk who can walk on walls, deflect strikes, and can stun enemies! I mean, who wouldn't want that in your party? Alongside some great abilities like Step of the Wind, with the easy use of the Ki Points, it's a great class if you want to go more melee if you are more familiar with magic classes.

Also, in terms of RP, they can be basically whatever you build; it doesn't rely solely on a faith, but it can! It also can have the same faith-based RP like a cleric, or can have some druidic beliefs, which can make for cool multiclassing.

Ranger

Finally, ranger, I feel, is one of the most underrated classes in the game, which is why I'm so happy they got buffed in 5.5!

I have a ranger I currently play, and while it's one of the weaker classes, because I play her right and chose some awesome abilities, she is a powerhouse (without it being gloomstalker, mind you).

Some of the abilities that I love include grabbing the Tough feat, putting that alongside Nature's Veil, and that Tireless feat can make your ranger invincible and unstoppable. Rangers are not only versatile, but they can also have spells which can come in handy in and out of combat. I think it's especially useful to have a healing spell or two, and balancing out the concentration spells versus the ones that aren't!

Overall, D&D offers a world of possibilities that can provide many outcomes for any player and dungeon master. And I believe the more experience you get, the more you can experiment and play the harder classes and introduce multiclassing. But for now, I hope this article helped any type of player!

Until next time...



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Hello, so I recently started reading about the all-famous realms of DnD! And I have grown a love for it, and the one I've been playing is Humblewood! So far, it has been great, and I'm having so much fun playing it. So, if you are interested, I am working on classes, so I hope you enjoy.

Bird Folk

Strigs

Out of all bird folk, the Strigs are the most "imposing" (maybe) of them all. Strigs resemble owls; they have (over time) earned themselves a reputation as the most powerful of the bird folk races with their keen builds.

Strigs value strength and endurance because they believe it's critical to survive the wood. Although Strigs aren't SUPER judgey on races that are weaker, they are quick to call out someone if they think someone is not doing their best for the good. Their commitment to the well-being of the community is unwavering, and they often take on roles that allow them to protect and support others. With their sharp instincts and a natural affinity for leadership, Strigs can often be found guiding their fellow bird folk through the challenges of the wood. Their wisdom and insight make them sought-after advisors and strategists, ensuring that their communities thrive even in the face of adversity.

Strigs are also known for their deep connection to the mystical aspects of the wood. Many have honed their skills in the arcane arts, blending their physical prowess with magical abilities to become formidable defenders of their realm. Whether through powerful spells or sheer physical might, Strigs are always ready to rise to the occasion, embodying the spirit of resilience and unity that defines Humblewood.

♥ Thank you



A note from the editor

For those who are new, Mini-Cloud is the 11-year-old daughter of our DM Cloud and she has been wonderful to work with. Every month I get so excited to see what she will come up with next!



ad space
Available

email: rpgsidebart@gmail.com





So this month we are going to dabble in something a little weird... weards. Now I know what you are thinking: what the hell are weards?! Well, let's talk about it: weards are beings in Ravnica that are similar in kind to elementals, but the way I would think they differ is that they are created meticulously, often in Izzet Laboratories, are sometimes eerily humanoid, and very much alive. Now, where standard elementals come in common forms, such as fire and water, and earth and air, weards can be a manifestation of practically anything. Take that practicality and smash it together with chaos... true to Izzet nature, this is how weards are born.

An example of a potential weird in Ravnica is the mixing of both fire and ice into one form, the resulting being is wild, often untamed, and chaotic, leading to a chance for some interesting experimental failures and unique monsters for any party to face, so my advice to the party that finds themselves facing one of these creatures, take into account the volatile nature in which they were made, some may change with the combustion and reactions of their very form, shifting the way a battle is fought and how you can seize the day. Understand that many of these weards may have immunities to the damage types that they consist of, so adapt, overcome, and take them head-on! Best of luck if things get weird on your table, and well, don't die!

From one DM to the players,

GrimGrix





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Lindsay Lou's Crossword



Across

- 1 A temporary romance.
- 3 A cover for your cabeza.
- 4 For smores and warmth.
- 6 Paddle or row.
- 8 An outdoor meal.
- 9 An exciting journey.

Down

- 2 Fruitful outdoor hobby.
- 3 An important outdoor accessory.
- 5 Best with a sprinkle of Tajin.
- 7 Going from point A to point B.
- 11 A summer sport.
- 12 a sport or delicious summer fruit
- 14 too much sun or overcooked.
- 18 a summer, regional tradition in parts of the US.
- 19 Catch a wave.
- 20 Itsy bitsy, teenie weenie.
- 25 Time to tackle this on your to-do list.
- 10 Nemesis to Gingers.
- 13 The longest day in the Northern hemisphere.
- 15 Smokin' meats
- 16 Adult beverage of the lime variety.
- 17 New acquaintances can become these.
- 21 a bar sport, or a cool place
- 22 Much-needed resting period.
- 23 Musical gathering.
- 24 My favorite past-time.



BREAKING THE CHAINS

By ChaseStreet



Narrative Purpose vs. Gratuitous Cruelty on Athas

There is no dodging the sun on Athas, and there is no dodging the theme of slavery—it is the primary engine driving the setting's villainy. However, the goal of a modern Dark Sun campaign isn't to wallow in misery; it's to defy it. Clear villainy creates clear heroes. When the Sorcerer-Kings are undeniably monstrous, the simple act of sharing a cup of water or freeing a single captive becomes a legendary act of defiance. Dark Sun isn't a setting about suffering as a slave; it's about the moral necessity of becoming a liberator.

"Dark Sun isn't a setting about suffering as a slave; it's about the moral necessity of becoming a liberator."

Secure Opt-In at Session Zero

Before the first die is rolled, address Athas's darker themes directly. Establish explicit lines and veils with your players, discuss individual comfort levels, and align on the overall tone of the campaign. By establishing these boundaries up front, you transform potentially sensitive subject matter from a sudden shock into an agreed-upon narrative foundation.

Focus on Structure, Not Spectacle

A common trap for Dungeon Masters is relying on graphic cruelty or shock value to establish atmosphere. Instead, let the oppression reveal itself through the quiet realities of the world: economic dependency, absolute Templar authority, heavily controlled populations, and whispered resistance. Oppression works best as the structural backdrop of the setting rather than an exercise in gratuitous violence.

(cont on page 28)



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ZHULKAR BONEWEAVER

Large undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 18 (bone plating)

Hit Points 218 (23d10 + 92)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Con +10, Int +11, Wis +9

Skills Arcana +11, History +11, Insight +9, Intimidation +10, Perception +9

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 19

Languages Common, Abyssal, Draconic, Undercommon

Challenge 17 (18,000 XP)

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Zhulkar fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Turn Resistance. Zhulkar has advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns undead.

Master of the Dead. Undead friendly to Zhulkar that start their turn within 30 feet of him have advantage on saving throws against being turned, and their weapon attacks deal an extra 4 (1d8) necrotic damage.

Bone Harvest. Once per turn, when an undead creature within 30 feet of Zhulkar is reduced to 0 hit points, he draws its bones into his frame and regains 11 (2d8 + 2) hit points.

Spellcasting. Zhulkar is a 17th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 19, +11 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *chill touch*, *mage hand*, *prestidigitation*, *toll the dead*

1st level (4 slots): *false life*, *magic missile*, *ray of sickness*

2nd level (3 slots): *blindness/deafness*, *misty step*, *ray of enfeeblement*

3rd level (3 slots): *animate dead*, *fear*, *vampiric touch*

4th level (3 slots): *blight*, *dimension door*

5th level (2 slots): *danse macabre*, *hold monster*

6th level (1 slot): *circle of death*

7th level (1 slot): *finger of death*



ACTIONS

Multiattack. Zhulkar makes three Withering Bolt attacks. He can replace one of these attacks with one use of Bone Scepter or a cantrip.

Withering Bolt. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +11 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 27 (5d10) necrotic damage, and the target can't regain hit points until the end of Zhulkar's next turn.

Bone Scepter. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage plus 13 (3d8) necrotic damage.

Grave Storm (Recharge 5–6). Grasping bone and green necrotic fire erupt from the ground in a 30-foot-radius sphere centered on a point Zhulkar can see within 120 feet. Each creature in the area must make a DC 19 Dexterity saving throw, taking 55 (10d10) necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much on a success. The area becomes difficult terrain (a churn of jutting bone) until initiative count 20 on the next round.

Command the Dead (Bonus Action). Zhulkar targets one undead creature he can see within 60 feet. That creature can immediately use its reaction to move up to its speed and make one weapon attack.

REACTIONS

Bone Bulwark. When Zhulkar takes damage, he can redirect up to 20 of that damage to one undead creature within 30 feet of him; that creature takes the redirected damage instead. He can't use this reaction if he has no undead within range.



LEGENDARY ACTIONS

You can take 3 legendary action(s), choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. You regain spent legendary actions at the start of your turn.

Withering Bolt (Costs 1 Action). Zhulkar makes one Withering Bolt attack.

Grave Grasp (Costs 2 Actions). Skeletal hands claw up from the ground in a 15-foot-radius circle centered on a point within 60 feet. Each creature there must succeed on a DC 19 Strength saving throw or take 9 (2d8) necrotic damage and be restrained until the end of Zhulkar's next turn.

Consume Vitality (Costs 2 Actions). Zhulkar targets one creature within 30 feet. The target makes a DC 19 Constitution saving throw, taking 22 (4d10) necrotic damage on a failure or half on a success. Zhulkar regains hit points equal to half the necrotic damage dealt.

LAIR ACTIONS

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), you may take a lair action to trigger one of the following effects. You can't use the same effect two rounds in a row.

Marrow Rise. One patch of ground within 60 feet births a skeleton in an unoccupied space. It acts on Zhulkar's initiative.

Grasping Field. The bone-strewn earth in a 20-foot cube Zhulkar can see grabs at the living. Each creature there must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or have its speed halved until initiative count 20 on the next round.

Necrotic Miasma. Green mist floods a 20-foot-radius area within 90 feet until initiative count 20 next round. A creature that starts its turn there can't regain hit points until the start of its next turn.

NOTES

Regional Effects

The region within 6 miles of Zhulkar's seat of power is warped:

Carrion doesn't rot; the ground is littered with clean, dry bone that whispers when the wind moves.

Creatures that die within the region rise as skeletons under Zhulkar's control at the next dusk unless their remains are burned or consecrated.

A murky green pall hangs over the valley, dimming daylight to the level of an overcast dusk.

If Zhulkar is destroyed, these effects fade over 1d10 days.

Optional: Marrowbound

If you want Zhulkar to be a returning nemesis rather than a one-and-done boss, add this trait:

Marrowbound. Destroying Zhulkar's body does not end him. Within 1d10 days he re-weaves a new form from the bones of his valley, appearing at his seat of power. He is destroyed permanently only if he is reduced to 0 hit points while standing on ground that has been sanctified (e.g., by hallow), or if his Ossuary Heart — a fist-sized knot of fused vertebrae hidden somewhere in his necropolis — is found and destroyed (AC 17, 40 HP, immune to poison and psychic damage).





BREAKING THE CHAINS

(cont.)

By ChaseStreet

Embrace Unambiguous Villainy

While contemporary storytelling often leans into moral ambiguity, Dark Sun thrives on clarity. The Sorcerer-Kings are absolute tyrants, and their Templars exist to enforce systemic control. Removing moral gray areas around slavery provides your players with an unequivocal purpose—there is zero confusion about who needs to be brought down.

Make Hope Your Core Focus

The oppressive backdrop of Athas exists for one primary purpose: to amplify hope. Small victories—escaping a slave pit, bribing a guard, or overthrowing a corrupt official—carry immense narrative weight precisely because the world is so hostile. The setting functions at its highest level when cruelty remains in the background and the players' triumph remains front and center.

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For every 5 people who take a clip in the month, we will draw a name! Those names get Mandur mail!

Here are some of our past winners!

Best of Luck!



The Bell Beneath Briarwood

A mini-adventure for 3-5 characters of 3rd level.

By Tiffany Rose Nickel

Adventure Hook

Every midnight, a bell rings throughout the village of Briarwood. No bell tower exists, yet each toll causes thorny vines to spread farther through the streets. Three villagers have disappeared, and those remaining dream of a bell beneath the earth. Mayor Elira Thorn offers the party 150 gp to go find the source before the village is completely consumed by these thorns.

The Investigation

The vines originate from an abandoned shrine at the forest's edge. Questioning villagers or succeeding on a DC 12 Investigation check reveals that the shrine once honored Aveline, a guardian spirit betrayed by Briarwood's founder.

At the shrine, the party finds a stone hatch hidden beneath tangled roots. Cutting the vines causes them to animate. Four Twig Blights attack while one Vine Blight emerges during the second round of initiative.

The hatch opens onto a staircase descending into an ancient, root-filled sanctuary.

The Sunken Sanctuary

The first chamber contains three stone statues: a knight, a maiden, and a crowned king. An inscription reads:

"The sword betrayed her, the crown condemned her, and only the innocent mourned her."

The door opens when the maiden's statue is turned toward the knight and the king is turned away. An incorrect solution releases poisonous pollen, requiring a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, a creature takes 1d6 poison damage and is poisoned for ten minutes.

Beyond the door, the missing villagers stand entranced around a black iron bell wrapped in flowering vines. A ghostly woman—Aveline—commands them to pull its ropes. Guarding her is Sir Garran, the undead knight who murdered her centuries ago. Use the statistics of a Wight, but reduce his hit points to 35.

(cont on page 32)



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Smoked Boneless Pork Butt

By Brad Harris



Smoking a boneless pork butt is one of the easiest ways to make tender, juicy pulled pork at home, and cutting it into two smaller pieces makes it even better. Not only does it cook several hours faster than leaving it whole, but you also end up with more flavorful bark in every bite.

You only need a handful of ingredients to make incredible smoked pulled pork. We use our homemade BBQ Rub because it's a recipe we've been making for years, and it always delivers great flavor and beautiful bark. Feel free to use your favorite pork rub, but if you're looking for a tried-and-true blend, we highly recommend giving ours a try.

Ingredients Needed

- **Boneless pork butt** – We cut one large boneless pork butt into two smaller pieces for faster cooking and more bark.
- **Yellow mustard (optional)** – Acts as a binder to help the seasoning stick. You won't taste it in the finished pork.
- **BBQ rub** – Use your favorite pork rub or our homemade BBQ Rub (in the recipe card) for a savory, smoky crust that's perfect for pulled pork.
- **Butcher's twine (optional)** – Helpful if one of the pork halves unfolds after cutting, creating a more uniform shape for even cooking.
- **Pink butcher paper** – Used to wrap the pork once the bark has developed, helping retain moisture while protecting the bark during the remainder of the cook.



(cont on pg 33)

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The Bell Beneath Briarwood (cont)

By Tiffany Rose Nickel

The Choice

Aveline is not causing the curse willingly. Her spirit is bound to the bell by Garran's sword, which has been driven through its crown. Garran attacks anyone approaching it while claiming that destroying the bell will unleash something worse.

The party can defeat Garran and remove the sword, freeing Aveline. Alternatively, they can destroy the bell, which releases a Shambling Mound formed from centuries of accumulated hatred.

Characters who speak with Aveline and succeed on a DC 14 Persuasion check learn the truth before making their choice. Presenting evidence of Briarwood's continued remembrance grants advantage.

Conclusion

Once freed, Aveline recalls the vines and awakens the captives. She leaves behind the Briarheart Charm, a wooden pendant that allows its wearer to cast entangle once per long rest.

If the bell and Shambling Mound are destroyed, the vines wither, but Aveline's spirit vanishes without peace.

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Old Wicked, Part I: The Witch and the Demon

By GetOffMacCloud

With this issue, we begin a fuller treatment of a subject readers have long demanded: the true history of the demigod luz, whose skull-crowned banners darken the lands north of Whyestil Lake. What follows is the first of five parts, compiled from the notes of Pluffet Smedger, the Elder, of the Royal University at Rel Mord, and treats of the Old One's parentage, a matter on which, we hasten to say, the sages of Oerth still come to blows. The present year is 576 CY.

luz, old luz of fearbabe talk, was long held to be human, or once human, though none could say for certain. Grandmothers from Highfolk to the Bandit Kingdoms still hush children with his name, and until lately the learned could tell those grandmothers little they did not already know. Some name him the by-blow of Orcus, Prince of the Undead, a rumor repeated in taverns and, more shamefully, in certain university lectures. The sages now know better, or believe they do. To understand Old Wicked, one must first understand his parents, and pray never to meet either.

The Mother: Iggwilv of the Yatils

She first appears in the chronicles of Perrenland in 460 CY, already a wizard of terrible accomplishment, working from a lair in the Yatil Mountains that the Perrenders would learn to name with dread: the Lost Caverns of Tsojcanth. Where she came by her art no record survives, and the reader should be suspicious of any sage who claims otherwise, for on the subject of Iggwilv the confident are always the least reliable.

What is beyond dispute is the scale of her ambition. In those caverns the Witch Queen assembled a library of dark arcana unmatched in the Flanaess, bound spirits and fiends to her service, and worked summonings that the demonographers of Rel Mord still decline to describe in print. Her masterwork was the binding of Graz'zt himself, a demon lord of the Abyss, ruler of several of its planes, whom she held as prisoner, servant, and consort. Of that union was born a cambion son. (cont on Page 36)



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Smoked Boneless Pork Butt Cont.

By Brad Harris

How to Cut and Prepare a Boneless Pork Butt

Preparing a boneless pork butt couldn't be much easier. Since there's no bone to work around, you can quickly cut it into two smaller pieces, giving you more surface area for seasoning and bark while helping the pork cook faster. Once it's cut, all that's left is adding a binder and your favorite BBQ rub before it



Step 1: Trim and Cut the Pork Butt

Remove the pork butt from the packaging and pat it dry with paper towels. Trim away any loose pieces or thick pockets of excess fat, but leave most of the fat cap intact. Using a sharp chef's knife, cut the boneless pork butt into two evenly sized pieces. If one piece unfolds a bit after cutting, that's perfectly normal.

Step 2: Apply the Binder and Seasoning

Coat each roast with a thin layer of yellow mustard, then generously season all sides with your favorite BBQ rub. We use our homemade BBQ Rub because it's a blend we've relied on for years, but any quality pork rub will work. If one roast has an uneven shape, tie it with butcher's twine to help it cook more evenly. Let the seasoned pork rest while your smoker comes up to temperature.

How To Smoke Boneless Pork Butt

Once the pork is seasoned, it's time to let the smoker do the work. We smoked these boneless pork butt halves at 250°F, letting the bark develop before wrapping them in pink butcher paper to finish cooking. The result was tender, juicy pulled pork with plenty of smoky flavor and a beautiful



Step 1: Smoke the Pork

Preheat your smoker to 250°F and place the pork directly on the grates. Insert a temperature probe into the thickest part of each roast, avoiding large pockets of fat. Close the lid and let the smoker do its job. After a couple of hours, you'll start to see the bark forming and the color deepen.

Step 2: Build the Bark

Continue smoking until the bark develops a rich, deep mahogany color. Resist the urge to wrap too early—the bark should look dry and well set before moving on to the next step. For ours, it took about **five hours**.



(Cont on Page 36)

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The Warrior-polis of Akros

The next section of Theros Lore

By: JimKBones



Perched defensively atop the cliffs of the Katachthon Mountains, Akros stands as the formidable warrior-polis of Theros. This mountainous fortress, built over the roaring Deyda River, is heavily inspired by classical Sparta. It serves as a vital shield protecting the mortal realm from the terrors of the wilderness. The citizens of Akros are renowned across the plane as the most feared, disciplined, and resilient warriors, viewing warfare not as a tragic consequence, but as a supreme spiritual and physical discipline.

The history of Akros is steeped in bloodshed and defined by its perpetual struggle for survival against the savage wilds. Centuries before its founding, the region was dominated by a tyrannical empire of archons, led by the cruel Agnomakhos. After human heroes overthrew the tyrant with the help of the goddess Ephara, mortals spilled into the highlands. Out of this brutal warfare, a legendary warrior named Elektes and his six companions, deeply inspired by the martial doctrines of Iroas, the god of victory, established the city of Akros. Elektes was subsequently crowned as its first king. The city was strategically engineered atop cliffs, forcing any would-be invaders to scale treacherous, narrow paths to reach its heart. No enemy attack has ever successfully breached the walls of the Kolophon, the city's massive, many-tiered central citadel. The polis remains in a state of constant military preparation, defending its borders against the raging minotaur clans of the Phoberos mountains to the north and the unpredictable anger of the gods.

The unique culture and resilience of Akros are directly embodied by its legendary leadership and mythical protectors. King Anax was a fiercely passionate and brutal monarch who ruled with unmatched physical prowess. Known for his intense devotion to Purphoros, the god of the forge, he ruled with extreme military zeal. During the terrifying siege of Akros instigated by the satyr planeswalker Xenagos, Anax fought ferociously to defend his people. His legacy became the stuff of myth when Purphoros reforged the king into a true demigod, granting him eternal power. His formidable counterpart, Queen Cymede, balanced Anax's aggressive martial instincts with her brilliant strategy. As a devoted oracle of Keranos, the god of storms, she looked to the skies for guidance. During the chaos of the divine wars, she mysteriously vanished, allegedly transforming into a pillar of fire.

Beyond royalty, everyday protectors forged the city's future. Hixus, the Warden of the Prison, was a revered military veteran known for his unbreakable discipline. He became an instrumental mentor to a young, impulsive street thief named Kytheon Iora. Hixus taught the young hero the foundational tenets of honor, combat, and the defensive importance of the phalanx. Kytheon, who later became the famous Planeswalker Gideon Jura, grew up in the steep streets of Akros leading a gang called "Kytheon's Irregulars." When his latent planeswalker spark ignited during a fateful, tragic encounter with a cyclops, he was launched into the wider Multiverse. Together, the unyielding history and legendary heroes of Akros reflect a society that prizes discipline, forging an eternal bulwark of civilization on a deadly, mythic plane.



Old Wicked, Part I: The Witch and the Demon

By GetOffMacCloud

She was not idle while the boy grew. The Concatenated Cantons remember the years of her open rule as the Decade of Tears: Perrenland enslaved, all Lake Quag taken, Kettite mercenaries and summoned fiends holding the land while the Witch Queen stripped it of every treasure that could fund her researches. The chroniclers quarrel over the exact span; the occupation is variously dated from the late 470s and from 481 to 491 CY, but not over its character. It is why Perrenders closed their borders, and why they keep them closed still.

The Father: Graz'tz of the Abyss

Of the Dark Prince himself, the less committed to paper the better. It suffices to say that he rules more than one layer of the Abyss, that his cunning is accounted the equal of any power in that place, and that his captivity in Tsojcanth, however it was accomplished, is the single greatest feat of binding magic in the recorded history of Oerik. That the binder was mortal beggars belief. That she kept him bound for years beggars it further.



How the binding ended is told two ways, and the sages have never reconciled them. One account holds that Iggwilv, deep in her researches, erred, that the Dark Prince slipped his chains, and that a battle followed in the deeps of the caverns which the Witch Queen won, barely, at the cost of powers she never fully recovered. The other holds that she offended Graz'tz in some matter no chronicle names, and that he, patient as only a demon is patient, drew her down into the Abyss and imprisoned her there in mockery of her own achievement. Both tales agree on the ending: by the early 490s the Witch Queen was gone from the Yatils, her armies scattered, her treasures looted by her own fleeing servants. Her vaults did not empty themselves, however, and what remains in the Lost Caverns, guarded, the Perrenders say, by a daughter she loved enough to preserve terribly, is a matter for a different article and a braver contributor.

(Cont on page 38)



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Smoked Boneless Pork Butt Cont.

By Brad Harris

Step 3: Wrap and Finish

Once the bark is where you want it, wrap each roast tightly in pink butcher paper and return them to the smoker. Reinsert the temperature probes and continue cooking until the pork is probe tender. Start checking around 200°F, but don't rely on temperature alone—the probe should slide into the meat with very little resistance.



Step 4: Rest and Pull

Remove the pork from the smoker and let it rest, still wrapped, for at least an hour. Unwrap the roasts and shred the pork while it's still warm, mixing the bark throughout for



Step 5: Serve and Enjoy

Pile the pulled pork onto buns for sandwiches or sliders, or enjoy it alongside your favorite barbecue sides. This smoked pork also freezes beautifully, making it perfect for quick weeknight meals.

Tips

- **Don't over-trim the fat.** Remove only thick pockets and loose pieces of fat. The remaining fat helps keep the pork moist as it cooks.
- **Truss loose pieces if needed.** If one half unfolds after cutting, tie it with butcher's twine to create a more uniform shape for more even cooking.
- **Cook by bark, not just temperature.** Wrap the pork once the bark has developed a deep mahogany color and feels set. The internal temperature is only a guide.
- **Probe for tenderness.** Start checking around 200°F, but don't rely on a specific number. The pork is done when a temperature probe slides in with little to no resistance.
- **Give it a proper rest.** Rest the wrapped pork for at least an hour before shredding. This helps the juices redistribute throughout the meat.
- **Save the juices.** Don't throw away the flavorful juices collected in the butcher paper. Mix them back into the shredded pork for even more moisture and flavor.
- **Freeze extra pulled pork.** Portion leftovers into freezer bags with a little of the cooking juices. They'll reheat beautifully for quick meals later.



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Old Wicked, Part I: The Witch and the Demon

By GetOffMacCloud

The Son

And the boy? He passed his youth in obscurity, and the obscurity was the point. Among the barren fiefs north of Whyestil Lake, where petty despots quarreled over worthless ground, one such despot acquired a "son", sharp-faced, quick, and by every account charming when he wished to be. None of the marauders who rode with that band guessed what had been fostered upon them, nor whose eyes watched over the boy from a mountain lair far to the southwest.

In 479 CY, the old despot died. What his son did next is the subject of our second part.



A note for Dungeon Masters: within the Flanaess, all of the above is scholars' reconstruction, not common knowledge. The Orcus rumor remains current among learned folk; luz's true parentage is known with certainty only to a handful of beings, most of whom are on no account to be asked. The two tales of Iggwilv's fall are both offered in various sources; a DM should feel free to decide which is true, or that neither is. Adjust these particulars to the needs of the individual campaign.



Random Rants w/Mandur

Lets Talk Change!



AMERICAN
ROLE PLAYERS GUILD

For over a year, I have been kicking around the idea of giving something back to the world of TTRPGs that has given me so much. I wanted to make something that was different. A group with the goal to not just play TTRPGs but to be a haven for players. A place for players who want more than just a game here and there, but to actually be part of a community that cares to better the TTRPG space. Our mission with the ARPG will be to help to educate and make resources available for people looking to join the world of TTRPGs.

The first official meeting of the ARPG will be in September on the 9th. Anyone is more than welcome to join and see if this is a format you are interested in being a part of. For members, we will have a drawing you can be a part of, and all funds raised go to the ARPG. If you would like to join the ARPG, we would love to have you join us! Just fill out the form on our website at:

americanrpg.org/join

We will also be working to visit local conventions in all of our regions in 2027; this will help us to be able to make meet-up points and have places to look forward to seeing our friends we make all over! My personal hope with the ARPG is to also be able to build a library of books for new players and for others looking to expand their knowledge in all kinds of TTRPGs.

The ARPG is a big dream! With great people who care, we can make this something we are so proud of. We already have members from sea to shining sea, and in all 4 regions, so we are off to a great start. I truly look forward to what we can build together, and thank you for making such a great place for me to play and work that I could dare dream of making something bigger

Thank you!
Mandy Sakora
ARPG President





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