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Issue #12
Spring 2026



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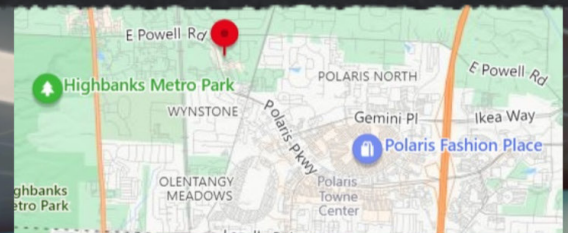
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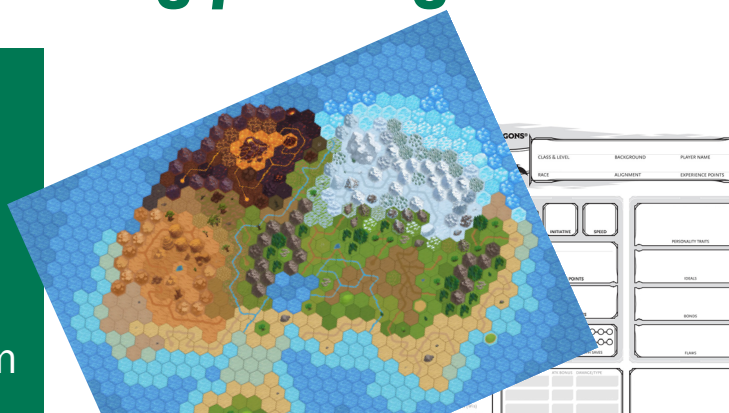


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Beer and Bread

A Feast of Cards

- KC Gonzales



Beer & Bread is a multi-use card game with resource management and card drafting for 2 players! You and your opponent are from adjacent villages and share crops, but each of you are still trying to brew and bake the best beer and bread.

Overview

The game takes place over 6 rounds (or years) which will alternate between fruitful and dry. In fruitful years, there will be more crops available to gather whereas in dry years, there will be fewer crops available. At the end of the game, players will tally up the total points earned from beer and bread separately, and

the twist is that a player's final score is the lowest of the two sums. This forces players to diversify their production to ensure an even score!

To start the game, pick the first player, give them the windmill token, and deal them 5 cards from the deck. The second player will then also take 5 cards. Then, seed each field according to the numbers in the field space corresponding to the current year type.

On a player's turn, they will play a card either for its upgrade listed at the bottom of the card, to harvest the resources at the top of the card, or to brew/bake it by paying the needed resources in the middle section of the card.

In fruitful years, after both players have played a card on their turn, they will give their hand of cards to the other player and each of them will take turns playing another card. They will continue switching hands and playing cards until all the cards in hand have been played.

In dry years, players don't exchange their hands of cards after playing, but they may instead exchange a card in hand with a card in the exchange row to play it instead. The exchange row contains 3 cards, and it is only present during the dry years.

At the end of the round, move the round marker forward one space and give the first player marker to the player with the fewest resources. Then the next round begins, with some special rules to follow depending on whether



the next year is dry or fruitful. At the start of a fruitful year, players will discard any cards they played for resources and all cards from the exchange row. At the start of a dry year, players will pick up the cards they played for resources in the prior year before drawing up to their hand of 5, and 3 cards are dealt out to the exchange row.

Thoughts

Kim:

When I first saw Beer & Bread I couldn't help but think of Heaven and Ale, which is one of my favorite games, so I was very eager to see how this game played.

In Beer & Bread there are so many options available with each card, and with the addition of the fruitful and dry year mechanics there is so much to think about. Do I play this card to harvest resources in a fruitful year so I can have

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

EVERY GREAT ADVENTURE
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Character



1

it in my hand for the upcoming dry year to play again, or do I use it for its useful upgrade? The addition of drafting cards with your opponent in the fruitful years always keeps you looking at what your opponent might need.

Since your end game score is the lowest of the two sums for the beer and bread that you make you really need to make sure that you are balancing the number of each type of card you are making throughout the game.

Beer & Bread has quickly become my favorite 2-player game as it offers so much strategy in a small box with a relatively quick playtime of 40 minutes

Devin:

Like Kim, I was excited for Beer & Bread based on its theme and some mechanical similarities to Heaven & Ale (earn points in multiple categories, but only score your lowest category). That's about as far as the similarities go, but I really enjoyed everything this brought to the table.

The game moves quickly, and there is always a feeling that you need to work harder to maximize the efficiency of your actions. Your resource storage is limited, and most of the high-scoring beer & bread cards require a large amount of very specific resources. In fruitful years, you'll find yourself looking at your opponent's resources and checking them against your hand to see if there is a card they could immediately make when you trade hands. Similarly, in dry years, you'll often look to the exchange row to see what your opponent could make from it, or you'll check your own hand before exchanging a card to try and limit your opponent's opportunities.

It can be a difficult balance sometimes; you don't want to help your opponent earn points,



but sometimes you really need to take a particular action that ends up helping them. As an example, if you ever generate more resources than you can store, you can exchange what you have in storage, and then you must offer the overflow to your opponent before discarding it. This could mean that you have to consider the benefits of playing a card for resources you really need against the bonuses you might give your opponent if your storage is currently full.

The upgrades on each card are another aspect you'll be watching. A card you may want to brew/bake/use for resources may have an



upgrade that would give you a huge boost. Upgrades could do a variety of things, such as help generate more resources or provide an additional end-game scoring pathway for whoever plays it. These end-game scoring opportunities usually provide bonuses for collecting certain sets (e.g., one of each type of beer, multiple cards worth 4 or 5 points, etc.), or other unique conditions such as having more upgrades than your opponent. Playing a card as an upgrade is also the only way to clear the brewed beer and baked bread from your play area to make way for more products!

The components are nice, the art is pleasant, and setup is a breeze. Getting this to the table is easy, and the quick play time makes it possible for us to play on weeknights when we don't usually have a lot of free time.

Overall, the game feels like a very neat, extremely tight puzzle to figure out. While long-term strategy is possible, and at least somewhat required as you generate resources with plans for future turns, you're often forced to adapt when your opponent plays a card that you were really counting on or takes the last available resource of a type for the year. Beer & Bread may have taken over as my favorite 2-player only board game (sorry, 7 Wonders Duel)! I really like the indirect interactivity between players. You aren't messing with each other's completed products or stored resources, but all of the card movement makes for a game where you are always interested in what's happening and the current state of the game. ■

For more content, check us out on other platforms, where we'll be posting pictures, videos, and more:

LinkTree:

<https://linktr.ee/thetabletoptimes>



The Forge Tavern Presents Spring Cocktail Recipe:

LEVIATHAN'S BREW

A dark, stormy tropical draught pulled straight from the depths.

INGREDIENTS

2 oz Kraken Dark Rum
2.5 oz pineapple juice
Ginger ale or ginger beer (to top)
Optional: 1 oz house-made ginger syrup (for added spice and sweetness)

GINGER SYRUP

(Ship's Stock)
1/2 cup sugar
1/2 cup water
6-10 slices fresh ginger

INSTRUCTIONS

Combine all ingredients in a small saucepan. Bring to a full boil, stirring until sugar dissolves. Remove from heat and allow to cool completely. Strain out ginger and store chilled.

How to Mix

Fill a glass with ice.
Pour in rum and pineapple juice.
Stir to combine.
Add ginger syrup (optional).
Top with ginger ale or ginger beer.
Give a gentle stir and serve.

TASTING NOTES

Bright tropical sweetness upfront
Warming ginger spice through the middle
Deep, molasses-rich finish from the rum.





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Putting the AI in Ancient Games- Craig A. Israel



Sometime in the early late 1800s, a small piece of carved limestone roughly the size of a Nerf football was discovered in the city of Heerlen, in The Netherlands. The stone was inscribed with intersecting lines that weren't readily identifiable, but were presumed to be an architectural sketch, a rudimentary calculator, or a game. It was labeled object #04433, and sat on a dusty museum shelf for the next 100 years.

Other than measurements and weight—(8"(l) x 6"(w) x 3"(d), 7.5lbs.—there are no recorded dates, information on exactly where it was found, or by whom.

The city of Heerlen experienced a building boom in the mid-19th century, after the discovery of large deposits of coal. The resulting construction led to the discovery of a buried Roman outpost named Coriovallum. There was little organized conservation of the site at the time, and objects were poorly catalogued. It's unknown if this stone was found as part of organized excavations, or if a laborer unearthed it while digging and dropped it off at city hall.

In 2020, Walter Crist, then a post-doc researcher, saw the stone while visiting Heerlen. Crist's research focuses on games throughout the world, so he immediately thought it could be an ancient game—albeit one he had never seen before.

He got to work.

First, he developed possible board configurations. The stone itself is damaged and of the markings of the left side are obscured. But there was no reason to think the board wasn't symmetrical. But even so, it wasn't perfectly



symmetrical, as the lines are crudely carved. Crist developed six possible layouts for the board.

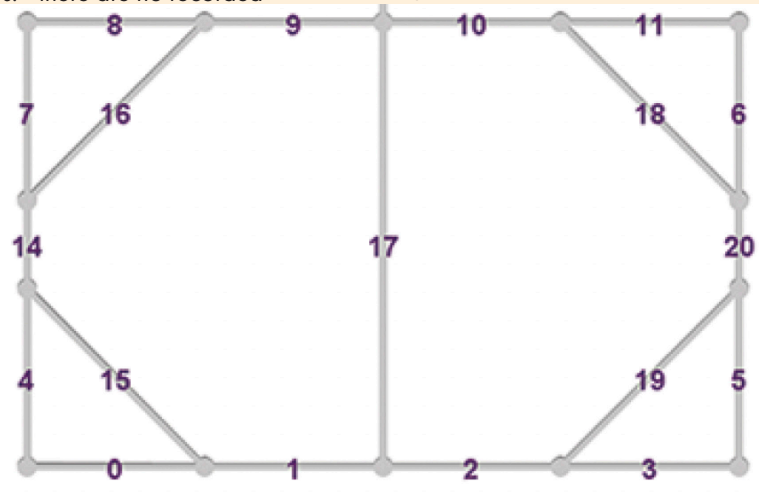
Then his team conducted microscopic topography analysis to observe wear on the surface of the stone that wasn't visible to the naked eye.

This showed areas where the limestone had been worn away by use. They discovered considerable microscopic abrasion along the engraved lines, as if playing pieces had been repeatedly moved across the surface.

These results gave the researchers confidence that object #04433 was a game. But even with this evidence, they had no idea of the rules or even what type of game it could be.

To figure out the last piece of the puzzle, they turned to a program called Ludii (<https://ludii.games/>). This is a game system developed at Cambridge University to play, analyze, and design games. Among its many capabilities, it allows for AI-driven gameplay simulations.

The researchers fed in the possible game layouts along with the rules for all known contem-



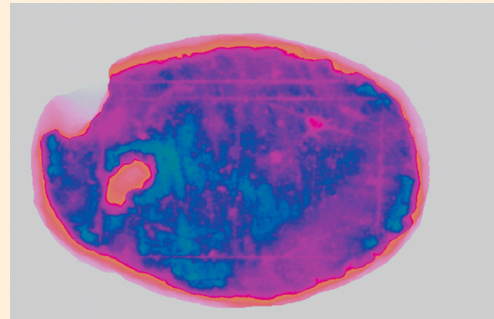
poraneous games. Then, they had two bots play head-to-head for each combination of board and ruleset, flagging any outcomes that would result in the wear pattern found on the stone.

After thousands of simulations, researchers narrowed it down to nine different configurations of board and moves. All nine of the games were asymmetrical blocking games.

The researchers named the game Ludus Coriovalli—"the game from Coriovallum."

Perhaps the most interesting part of this research is that there are no blocking games like this described in texts from the Roman era. This leaves two fascinating possibilities:

1. The years of research and thousands of plays by AI are completely wrong, and we still have no idea how this game is played, or if it even is a game.



2. We now have an example of a blocking game from the late Roman period, meaning that this sort of game existed in the world centuries earlier than originally thought

HOW TO PLAY

Ludus Coriovalli is a 2-player blocking game. One player is the attacker or "hounds" and the other is the defender or "hares."

- Hounds start with 4 pieces
- Hares start with 2 pieces

The hounds start on the four points on the right side of the board.

The hares start on the top and bottom points on the left side of the board.

1: Players take turns moving one piece along a line, forward or backward, to the next open point. Pieces cannot jump other pieces, either their own or their opponents.

2: Two pieces cannot share the same point.

3: The goal is for the hounds to trap the hares by maneuvering them into a point where they have no legal moves.

4: Hounds count the number of moves it takes to trap both hares. Then players switch roles and play again. The player who captures the hares in the fewest moves is the winner. ■

Academic paper: Ludus Coriovalli: using artificial intelligence-driven simulations to identify rules for an ancient board game: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/antiquity/article/ludus-coriovalli-using-artificial-intelligence-driven-simulations-to-identify-rules-for-an-ancient-board-game/E5644BD43F8A5DC86D-D1183A3E645ED9>

Ludus Coriovalli video by The Gaming Bench: <https://youtu.be/wplKuVo2ANc>



I explore the rules, history, and strategy for ancient games on my YouTube channel, "The Gaming Bench"
www.youtube.com/@TheGamingBench2024

Everybody Must Get STONED

Applying Stone Affects - Jasper Troncoso



Have you ever wanted to paint miniature rocks like a pro without being a pro? Tired of your rocky bases looking like candy or clay sculps without life or realism?

In this quick tutorial, I will show you one of my favorite homemade original recipes. How to paint "rocks" to look like granite stone.

For this project, you will need an old toothbrush, a medium or large size paint brush, and the model or models you will be painting.



For this demo, I will use a gargoyle I sculpted, then resin cast



STEP 1: Prime your model in black to ensure maximum results.



Select three or four grey colors, all different shades, dark, medium, light, and highlight. I recommend the highlight color to be white for better results in the end.

You will see in the later steps.

STEP 2: Using your old toothbrush, dip the tip of it into the darkest grey color. With your thumb, rub the bristles onto the model to splatter the paint. You should get a speckled look. Cover 95% of the model.



After this application, your model should look something like the next photo.



STEP 2: Follow the same process from step 1 using your lighter grey, only covering about 80% of the model.



Your model should start looking like a rocky structure at this point.



STEP 3: Using just pure white, sprinkle that color onto the model, primarily focusing on the front details, or the parts that show the most details

And the sun will hit the most.



STEP 4: Use your medium grey or any lighter grey of your choice, dilute that color to a coffee consistency, and then wash the entire model with it.



The wash will lock in all the colors cohesively and add realism at the same time.

Let this wash fully dry or use a hair dryer for speed.

As a final, optional but highly recommended step, cover your project with a matt varnish to protect

Your work long-term and eliminate any shiny parts that developed during your paint job.

The next photo shows the final results, all completed in less than 10 minutes

In conclusion, you don't have to be a pro like me, but you can still make your dioramas, displays, and bases look real with very little effort

Happy model making and happy gaming! ■



Local Daily Quests

Monday: Dragon's Lair
The GuardTower East
The GuardTower West

The Warp Gate

Tuesday: Dragon's Lair
The GuardTower West

The Warp Gate

Wednesday:

The GuardTower East
Dragon's Lair
The Warp Gate

Marche of Tirnewydd
The GuardTower West

Thursday: Dragon's Lair
The GuardTower West
The FORGE Tavern
The GuardTower East
Canton of Pfedersdat

The Warp Gate

Friday: The GuardTower East
The GuardTower West

May the Force be With You Mondays

Magic The Gathering

Altered 6PM-10PM
Paint Club 6PM-8:30PM
One Piece 7PM-10PM

Magic The Gathering Legacy 7:30PM

Player vs. Player Night

Cookie Run Braveverse 5PM-10PM
Pokemon TCG 6PM-10PM

Magic The Gathering Modern 7:00PM

MTG Free Cube Drafting 7:30pm

Grimm's Keep
Weekly Foam Fighting Practice

Pokemon

Warhammer Kill Team & BattleTech

Magic The Gathering Pioneer 7:00PM

Digimon 6:30PM
Weekly Gathering Meeting &
Armored and Rapier Practice
Warhammer League 6PM-10PM

Paint and Take

Lorcana 6PM-10PM
Star Wars Unlimited 6PM-10PM
Trivia Night

Youth DnD

Armored and Rapier practice

Commander Open Play

Magic The Gathering

Magic the Gathering: Draft 7PM-Midnight
Magic the Gathering:
Commander 5PM-Midnight





Friday: The Soldiery
Dragon's Lair

The Warp Gate

7:30PM

Saturday: The Soldiery
The Guard Tower West

Dragon's Lair

Sunday: Barony of the Middle Marches Armored and Rapier practice

The Guard Tower East

The Guard Tower West

The Warp Gate

MTG Casual Commander

Friday Night Magic
Casual Commander

Magic The Gathering Draft 7:00PM
Magic The Gathering Modern

MTG Casual Commander

Flesh & Blood 12PM-4PM

Alpha Clash 4PM-8PM

Gundam TCG 4PM-8PM

Youth Pokémon,
All ages Pokémon, Lorcan*

Magic The Gathering
Open Play DnD

Bolt Action 11AM-6PM

Battletech 11AM-6PM

Marvel Champions 12PM-4PM

Warhammer 40k Open Play

Pokemon League 6-8PM



Lucky 11

Don't Fear the GrimDark

Rumors

By: Cassie Rood

In the grim darkness of the far future, there may be only war. But in the brighter near future, there a bit of hope: Warhammer 40,000's 11th Edition is rapidly approaching. None of us are psychers, of course, so in addition to not getting a free one-way trip to visit the Emperor, we have to guess what might be in store for us with the new edition. I watched a bunch of YouTube content covering rumors, predictions, and wishes for the upcoming release so you don't have to! Let's take a look into this crystal ball I... liberated from some Thousand Sons and see what some of the well-informed expect.

We can start with what we know. During Adepticon at the end of March, Games Workshop gave a small preview of what we can expect from 11th Edition, and the anticipation of the timing seems to be correct. The general prediction was late June of 2026; June 2026 was shown over "There is only war" at the end of the presentation.

There will be a big box set to start the new edition off, Armageddon, filled with Space Marines and Orks. The Intercessors in the box will have a new look, with some older pieces of armor to round out the Tacticus power armor. And Ork fans will be pleased to know their Boyz will no longer have to choose between Sluggas, Shootas, and Choppas. Every Boy will be able to wield all three with their new models, for propa krumpin'.

The previewed rules changes are exciting as well, with several of the common threads from player wish lists being teased at or outright stated to be coming.

The first thing is that if you have a codex, you won't need to buy another one, as rules will carry over from 10th Edition. While this is good, because if you already have a codex, you don't have to get another one, it's also a bit disappointing. There has been a lot of movement in the tabletop gaming space towards free, online rule sets. And given the regular joke that a Warhammer 40,000 codex is already out of date by the time it reaches store shelves, players would love

to be able to have real-time rules updates from Games Workshop themselves.

It does seem very unrealistic to expect them to give up a reliable revenue stream, however much the players might like it. One of the better suggestions to deal with this was to have the rules for play available free online (or even with a Warhammer+ account), and turning the codices into lore and art books for people to collect.

Games Workshop also announced over 70 new or updated detachments over all armies, with the ability to select multiple detachments for your army in certain circumstances. The existing detachments will still work, but there will be a lot more options to choose from. And that's very good, because missions which determine objectives in games will be impacted by the detachment you pick. This means armies that specializing in certain things will be rewarded for leaning into those strengths – if your Imperial Fists decide to stand their ground and hold the line, you'll be rewarded for it, while the Destroyer Cult Necrons will get more rewards for killing as many of the

hope.

Leaders will no longer lose buffs if their bodguard unit dies, which only makes sense – no longer will Morvonn Vahl forget how to reroll hits and wounds just because the Paragon Warsuits are gone.

And stratagems will be limited to one per unit per phase, including Command Reroll. It will make the choices a lot more strategic, since triggering a stratagem granting Lethal Hits means you won't be able to reroll a bad wound roll for the same unit without an ability.

And as of this writing, that's what we know for sure, aside from some model and character releases; Astra Militarum players can be relieved to see Commissar Yarrick back and ready to defend Armageddon once more, while Ork fans get a new Bikeboss who's been floating in the lore for years: Wazdakka Gutsmek.

Now we enter the murkier realm of predictions, hopes, and wishes. Nothing from this point on is, at this point, confirmed.

One of the common notes was that Games Workshop may consider bringing back war gear costs. Currently, there's no real downside for picking the best weapon load out for a model with options, particularly considering the broad spectrum of tank variants. Adding points costs to war gear could be a way to encourage players to be more strategic and thoughtful about their builds and increase the customization of armies. On the other hand, it doesn't seem very likely to expect the company to bring them back with the



opposition as they can.

No more circle objectives. Objectives will be interlaced with terrain footprints, which will determine control of relics and fortifications. This goes more in line with Games Workshop's stated goal to have a more narrative focus in games, even at the higher competitive levels.

Cover will also apply its bonus to rolls to Hit rather than modifying saves (which, frankly, makes more sense to me), and it will be easier to hide units. I am eagerly looking forward to seeing if I can hide Magnus behind a stand of trees that come up to his waist.

Combat is also being changed, with faster dice rolling, a shift in the order of consolidation and pile-in moves, and the ability to allow disembarkation from vehicles in combat. In 11th Edition, charge rolls will be completed before selecting the target of the charge, opening the door for melee-focused armies to have more flexibility if their charges don't go exactly as they might

success 10th Edition had with drawing in new players. Having to pick a load out which changes the points cost of a model makes things more complicated, and can lead to regret for starting players.

If you're new to Warhammer 40,000, you may have seen Combat Patrol boxes being released and stocked in stores and not realized Combat Patrol is actually a game format intended to be played with the contents of those boxes. And if you didn't realize that, you're not alone, or too far wrong. Combat Patrol is widely considered to be grossly imbalanced and nearly unplayable by the majority of the player base; most players simply use them as a way to get multiple units at a modest discount. The most common theory out there for Combat Patrol is a complete rework in the model of Age of Sigmar's 4th Edition Spearhead (which has gotten a great deal of praise), possibly with a new name.

Changes to the morale system may also be

coming, but given the preview we got during Adepticon, it may be small. Battle shock isn't perfect, and is sort of underwhelming if your army relies on fear tactics, but it's preferable to some of the prior versions of "your unit took a lot of damage" rule. It's possible Games Workshop will tweak the system, but it's very possible they still won't manage to satisfy everyone with whatever happens.

And now, the psychic phase. Unless you play Thousands Sons or play against them, it's likely you haven't seen much in the way of psychic attacks. In prior editions, there was an entire phase devoted to psychic attacks and abilities; in 10th edition, the phase went away, likely in an effort to trim down the complexity of combat. The only army doing a great deal with psychic attacks are the Thousand Sons, which brings up the question of what might be given to other armies for something to do during the psychic phase if it does come back.

Players also have a desire for changes to rules around flying units, aircraft, and fortifications. Current flight rules are somewhat underwhelming in their interaction with terrain and the pivot rules. The good part is that it makes terrain matter a bit more; the bad part is that it makes flying matter less. It feels disincentivizing to have a winged Daemon Prince or a squad of Seraphim if we still have to factor in vertical distance when they go over a small building with their wings. Maybe with terrain features becoming more important to missions, this will change.

Aircraft and fortifications both have been getting debuffed whenever they start appearing regularly in competitive or highly successful army lists. This wouldn't normally be an issue, except these units never have received a buff to make up for it when they drop off of general lists. It would be nice to see these units become more useful again, to allow for more diversity and flavor in army lists.

A lot of other changes which showed up as common things folks might want to see might be addressed by some of the already-announced changes.

While not part of the Adepticon preview, the release of the Crucible of Champions rules opens the door for character customization and choices. This will allow players to build a custom character for their army, leaning into the idea of more narrative gameplay.

The changes to detachments could adjust... well, almost everything, and we don't know what the extent of those changes will be yet. One of the regular concerns is how much more lethal the game is currently; changing what detachments are available and what they do could strongly impact lethality. Some factions don't have a lot of detachments considered really competitive (yes, World Eaters players, I'm talking about you), and the changes will hopefully give those factions more options.

It would also impact stratagems, which have already gotten adjustments, but there's no way to know what, if anything, will change with how many stratagems or which ones are available.

A lot of players are hoping the new edition will bring back some of the factions which no longer exist, like the Chaos Daemons, Imperial Agents, or Harlequins. The announcement that



Thulia Ghuld

10th Edition codices will be valid for 11th Edition indicates this is probably not the case. However, the extra detachments might allow the factions like Chaos Space Marines, Astra Militarum, or Aeldari to field a force which might imitate those missing factions.

And of course, there's the question of what models will be retiring, which will be refreshed, and what might be new coming soon. Given the regular releases of pre-order models, I won't get too deep into what minis may or may not be coming; however, there's a fair amount of reason to hope and believe Games Workshop will finally retire the last of the fincast resin models and move to plastic. Specifically, Drukhar, Grey Knights, Chaos Daemons, and World Eaters lines all either need an update or just more models available.

We know there will be plenty loyalist Space Marines models, but it would be good to have more factions than just the Astartes getting some attention.

And that's what we have at the moment! After 11th Edition drops in June, we can come back and see what was right, what was wrong, and what we completely missed as a possibility. And now, I have to go because it looks like the Inquisition has some questions about how I learned all these things! Ave Imperator! ■

Videos reviewed:

Auspex Tactics' "What's on My 11th Edition Bingo Card? Predictions and Hopes for Upcoming 40K!" 1/23/26

Poorhammer's "Predicting EVERYTHING about Warhammer40K 11th Edition" 6/17/25

Tabletop Tactics' "11th Edition 40k! The Return to Force Organisation List Building?!" 2/25/26

Happy Krumping Wargaming's "Warhammer 40k 11th Edition Explained in 16 Minutes (Everything You Need to Know)" 3/26/26

The VOD's of Warhammer's "Warhammer Preview Live! at Adepticon 2026 - Part One" and "Part Two" 3/25/26

Art of War's "What We Most Want To See in 11th Edition 40k!" 4/2/26

In Memoriam Gib Bickel

September 4, 1961 — April 19, 2026
Westerville



Gibson Omer Bickel of Greenville, Ohio passed away Sunday morning at the age of 64, following a 20 months-long battle with cancer. He spent his final days in the comfort of his home, surrounded by family and pets.

Among his many accomplishments, those that speak loudest about him are his beloved family, of which he was immensely proud; his stalwart support of the Red Cross, to which he was a member of the 10 gallon club; his role as a founder of The Laughing Ogre, cultivating a positive sense of community in the area; and serving as a comic community icon in the whole of Columbus.

He is survived by his sister Valerie, wife Cindie, children Corwyn (Dana), Eric, and Elizabeth (Chris), and grandchildren Elijah, Ginnifer, Calliope, Aveline, Amelia, and William, and uncountable other family and friends. He is preceded in death by his father, Ronald Bickel.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations to the American Cancer Society, Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, the Cat Welfare Association or any local animal charity, or a blood donation to the Red Cross.

SPOTLIGHT ON

The Guard Tower - Justin Rood



When we first started our spotlight series on game stores and groups in the central Ohio area, Fables & Tables started off with an interview about The Guardtower with owner Lynn Bartels. Two years on from that interview, Your Humble Correspondent met up with Lynn and a few of her staff to catch up. Given that our previous interview came right before The Guardtower's west location moved from where it had been for over thirty years, there was a lot to discuss.

The main reason the venerable gaming store moved locations was due to the building owners selling to a developer with the plan for the whole thing to be demolished to make more of the cookie cutter luxury apartments sprouting up all over central Ohio. The move was forced but it also came with an opportunity to expand. The new location would be dramatically larger than the original Guardtower, with most of the space set aside for tables. The larger site would also allow the creation of a studio for streaming and filming, something Lynn was eager to capitalize on. There would be room to show products and for stock. Being positioned by the busy Hilliard-Rome Road also had advantages. Even with all the possibilities the move offered, there were considerable risks. "I did my research," Lynn said, "and one of the things I found was that 70% of businesses that move over three miles from their original location close." Considering the logistical challenges along with that daunting statistic, the move was an unavoidable challenge but one that Lynn and the staff accepted as an opportunity.

To say that the relocation was a forced leap of faith would be true, but happily there is no denying that the Guardtower absolutely stuck the landing. Customers who had been with the store for decades followed, though every few weeks Lynn said someone will come in and comment that they thought the store had closed.

"And I say, we've been here for two years," she laughed. The old sign has been brought over recently to hopefully catch the eye of any old regulars who have still missed the move. Most customers familiar with the store moved with it and new customers came. The new and much larger space allowed more room for tables to play at and the community responded by filling those tables. Filling them so well, in fact, that more tables have had to be added and more room has been made into play space several times since the new location opened. According to Lynn, they might have to open up more space for gaming soon. Fortunately, they have plenty of room as Lynn revealed that The Guardtower doesn't just own its footprint in the building but the entire building itself. "I was never going to be in that position again," Lynn said, in regard to the move. Having the whole



Lynn Bartels, Owner of The Guardtower

that has been in good use. While the studio was in process and even in use in the months before the move, it is not complete and fully operational. Guardtower Studios, owned by but operated separately from the store, wrapped up the long-term live play The Doomed City of Graniteguard recently and a sequel series (RP Gallery) is ready to launch soon. James Lowe, a producer and the manager of Guardtower Studios, talked to us about the videos they are producing and the possibilities available for others to make use of the studio. They produce a few regular series posted on TikTok, YouTube, and other social media sites. The Shiny New Toys series features unboxings of new products while Tabletop Scholar is about the back end of the game industry. Ash, who features in the Shiny New Toys series, said the studio is one feature of the Guardtower she wishes more people knew about. The studio can be rented for streaming or filming, and the equipment can be rented for use too. Equipment rental comes with a staff member to make the most of the time a group has with the studio. The studio has also allowed tournaments and other events to be live streamed, even with commentary provided in stream but not in the room with the players to allow them to focus on the games.

The additional space in the building also allowed for the creation of a build room for the staff to build miniatures for display and for play. One of the things this has let them do is offer the rental and use of "store armies" for Warhammer 40,000 to allow people to try out the game without having to make the financial and time investment, eliminating a substantial bar to entry for many players. Kids can come in and play a small force for free so they can get a feel for the rules and try out different armies to see which one, or ones for the mad lads and lasses out there, they want to play. Adults can do so too on Warham-



James Lowe in the editing room

building available has also allowed the store to expand in other ways.

The streaming studio is one of them and one

mer nights but they have to pay a \$10 rental fee. There are even "Family Friendly Warhammer" events where kids, and adults, can learn to play, complete with teachers and guides to the rules. These options also let people who just don't have the time or money enjoy a game they may love but just can't do on their own right now. One of the potential options for the store to expand is to create a build space for customers to use, complete with 'store tools' available to be used, all to give one more way for people to participate who might not have the space or tools at home to build an army on their own. The store already hosts a 'Paint Club' on Monday nights, but this will provide one more way to help the community by enabling people to be able to play.

"If they get into games, they'll never have money for drugs and if they're in here gaming, they're not out there getting into trouble."

Lowering bars to entry and serving the community remains a key focus of The Guardtower. The store hosts the largest Pokemon Junior event in Ohio and has weekly nights catering to young Pokemon TCG players. The events and tournaments are run by Professor Laura but hosted at Guardtower West. Always popular, the Pokemon events were packed, but Lynn noticed that some parents who brought their kids in to get cards didn't come to the game nights and brought it up. Lynn recounts,

"They told me, 'You know, we'd like to come but by the time we pick the kids up from school, and get them fed, there just isn't time.' So now we have pizza Pokemon nights. Bring the kids, they eat for free, and they can play in a safe place."

The pizza is free and there are no cover fees for events or game nights. It's not all the big games like Warhammer or Pokemon, either. People come to the store and run game nights for TCGs like the Gundam and One Piece games, which also lets The Guardtower focus on those to be sure they have product for those more niche games that can harder for people to find. Play to win events and tournaments also encourage



people not only to participate, but to try new games with the prospect of getting foods

Making game stores into a safe place for young gamers to go is important to Lynn and remains a priority for The Guardtower. That was one reason they started offering drinks and snacks, all at a lower price than the grocery store, so kids can come and hang out, play some games, and have something to eat. Unsurprisingly, Monster is their number one seller. Lynn noted that there were some high school aged kids who made the circuit to different game stores some days during the summer. "I tell parents," Lynn said, "that if they get into games, they'll never have money for drugs and if they're in here gaming, they're not out there getting into trouble."

Continuing to help grow and support the community isn't limited to the store either. Over the last few years, due to its reputation and history, The Guardtower has had a few conventions reach out to them to ask for advice and help with running their game rooms. The Guardtower has done so, asking only for a table to advertise the store and the charities they support, particularly Extra Life (<https://www.extra-life.org/home>). Creating a team or organization to better support conventions and gaming events is another project that Lynn and her staff are working on and that may be another service the store offers in the future.

Despite being one of the oldest game stores in the country, The Guardtower continues to keep up with the edge of gaming and the ever-changing community. From using social media to having an American Sign Language Dungeons & Dragons group for deaf players, the focus on serving the community means continuing to try to new things to meet the needs and wants of the ever-expanding population of gamers. As Lynn said in our first interview, "No matter who you are, what your faith is, what your skin color is, if you're LGBT+, when you come in that door, you're a gamer." In the end, that commitment to embracing and supporting gamers stays one of The Guardtower's greatest strengths and has remained unchanged across the decades and in all locations. ■

www.youtube.com/@guardtowergames



Guardtower staff members Ken and Ash



Episode X: Sam Kieth

Not that anyone asked...
Sam Kieth died.

For those unfamiliar, Sam was a comic book artist and creator who rose to prominence in the early 1990's with his creator-owned title THE MAXX, which was part of the second wave of titles offered by the at-the-time fledgling, upstart publisher Image Comics in 1993. Image was barely a year old, at that point, but was already a powerhouse bolstered by rockstar creators like Todd McFarlane and Rob Liefeld (fresh off of SPIDER-MAN and X-FORCE, respectively) and good ol'-fashioned payola-fueled hype from WIZARD MAGAZINE which, for some reason, held us all hostage and dictated what was "hot" based entirely on who provided their palms with the most grease. The initial batch of books... Liefeld's YOUNGBLOOD, McFarlane's SPAWN, Jim Lee's WILDC.A.T.S, etc...did nothing for me but THE MAXX? That piqued my interest and it did so based solely on Sam's name being attached.

You see, a couple of years earlier, on a cold November day in 1988, I had walked into my local comic shop (I say "local" but my family had re-located from Clifton, NJ - where I could ride my silver and red Hutch Barracuda to Passaic Book Center or Clifton News...Both long since gone...For my comic fix - to rural Pennsylvania in '87 so 'local' was a 40-minute drive away) and picked up the first issue of a comic that would change how I saw comics, influence the comics I would read to this day and, quite literally, point my entire life in a new direction. The comic?

THE SANDMAN: MASTER OF DREAMS issue number one: "Sleep of the Just".

Now, I know that there have been some recent unfortunate alleged revelations about the primary creator of that comic and his personal life that have gotten him in some, we'll say, hot water...And maybe some day I'll write an article about the fine art of separating art from artist when said artist is one of your favorites and turns out to quite-possibly-may-be-maybe-not-but-unfortunately-seems-likely be a bit of a monster, but this ain't that article.

No, see, this article is about family. Not the families we're born into, but the families we find.

I've said it before and I'll stand by it: 1986 is the single greatest year in comic book history, but 1988 was the year I went from being a casual reader to a rabid fan. Prior to that point, the only comics I was reading on the regular were G.I. JOE and TRANSFORMERS, which I had been reading since 1982 and '84, respectively, and BATMAN/DETECTIVE which I had started reading and collecting regularly

after a neighbor kid named Ricky traded me the first part of YEAR ONE for the first issue of MARVEL SECRET WARS back in '87.

I go off on little tangents, here and there. You should know that, by now.

Anyway, yeah, so, SANDMAN. I was a freshman in high school, at the time, and was in a Spanish class with a couple of upperclassmen, Mike and Bill, who were comic readers with incredible taste and who were weaning me off of the kids stuff (even though I would find out, years later, that Mike was an avid-but-closeted reader of the Real American Hero (TM)) by introducing me to WATCHMEN and SWAMP THING and AMERICAN FLAGG and JON SABLE: FREELANCE...But SANDMAN was book that I chose on my own and it was unlike anything I had ever read before.

It was a horror comic which, at that point in my reading, I had never really gotten into. It was darker and felt the way old comics smelled. It featured a character who was brand new but felt ancient. It was connected to portions of the DC Universe that I was unfamiliar with...The creepy portions. Over the next few issues, the book would take me to places unknown to me...The Houses of Mystery and Secret. The Dreaming. Hell itself. It was my introduction the John Constantine (whose own title, HELLBLAZER, was a mere year old when SANDMAN debuted so I sure as...Ahem...Hell tracked down those missed issues, as well).

But it wasn't just that SANDMAN was good. Lots of comics were good. It was that SANDMAN felt like it was speaking a language I somehow already knew without realizing it. It was moody and literary and scary and sad and weird in a way that made me feel like comics could be bigger than I had been told they were. Bigger than superheroes. Bigger than 22-page toy commercials. Bigger than

"kid stuff."

And once that particular door opened, it didn't close again. Suddenly, I wanted more of whatever that was. Not just capes and crossovers and who-could-beat-up-who, but books with feelings. Books with atmosphere. Books that felt like they had a pulse. So I followed that thread. From SANDMAN to HELLBLAZER, as I mentioned, and from there to SWAMP THING, BLACK ORCHID, BOOKS OF MAGIC, SHADE: THE CHANGING MAN, and a hundred other odd little side roads that all seemed to lead to the same place: comics made for the kids in the back of the room who felt a little off-frequency from everybody else.

And that's where the family comes in. Because, for a lot of us, fandom isn't escapism so much as immigration. We weren't just visiting these worlds. We were moving there.

Which is why Sam Kieth mattered.

He mattered because his work looked like it had crawled out of somebody's subconscious. It was rubbery and wounded and ugly and beautiful all at once. In an era when Image, at least from where I was sitting, often felt like an arms race of shoulder pads, pouches and chromium nonsense, THE MAXX felt personal. It felt handmade. It felt hurt. It felt like it belonged on the same shelf as the weirder, sadder, more human comics I had started gravitating toward after SANDMAN cracked my head open.

Because that was the thing those books understood, maybe before I even had the vocabulary for it: not everybody sees themselves as the shiny, well-adjusted, square-jawed guy standing in the middle of the room telling everybody else how to live. Some of us were always more comfortable with the damaged ones. The haunted

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ones. The ones who looked a little odd and talked a little odd. The ones who moved through the world like they had shown up two minutes late to the human race and were still trying to figure out the rules

And the beautiful thing was, those books weren't just ABOUT misfits. They were made FOR them and made BY them.

SANDMAN was about stories and dreams and nightmares and ancient things and the weight of change, sure, but it was also about this whole orbit of lost souls finding one another in the dark. THE MAXX was weird and ugly and funny and deeply sad, but underneath the fever-dream visuals and the purple brute and the little murder-muppet Isz and all the rest of Sam's gloriously unhinged imagination, there was something painfully human beating away in there. Hurt people. Lonely people. People trying to survive the damage done to them. People building their own little emotional tree forts out of fantasy because the real world had a nasty habit of not fitting properly.

And if you were a weird kid in the '80s and early '90s...And, friends, I assure you, I was a weird kid... That mattered.

It mattered because a lot of us didn't exactly feel like we belonged where we had been dropped. I had my family, sure, and I love them, but I'm talking about that other kind of belonging. The one where you say a thing out loud that feels very specific to you, very possibly too specific, and the person across from you lights up and says, "Wait...You too?" That's the good stuff. That's the magic trick. That's the secret handshake. That's the first brick in the road that eventually leads to friendship, to community, to sitting in a convention hall decades later looking around and realizing that, holy hell,

these are your people.

Comics did that for me.

Not just the books themselves, although obviously the books were the gateway drug. No, it was the ecosystem around them. It was Mike and Bill in Spanish class. It was the guy behind the counter at the comic shop who didn't laugh when you brought up something obscure or, better yet, said "If you like THAT, try THIS". It was the letters columns. The old COMICS INTERVIEW magazine pieces and the weird little ads in the back of comics that made the whole medium feel like a series of secret tunnels leading off in every direction. It was the gradual realization that there were creators making work for people who weren't interested in fitting into the larger culture's neat little boxes and there were readers out there who responded to that work with the desperate gratitude of castaways spotting a distant light.

That's found family.

Not in the warm Hallmark Channel sense (although, hey, no disrespect to a good Hallmark Channel cry if that's your thing) but in the truer, messier sense. The sense of finding your tribe among the other oddballs. The goth kids and the punk kids and the artsy kids and the horror kids and the fantasy kids and the kids who maybe looked perfectly normal from the outside but had entire haunted amusement parks running inside their skulls. The kids who read comics not because they wanted to see the good guy win, necessarily, but because they wanted to feel less alone.

That's what those books did. They let us know that "less alone" was an option.

And, for me, that eventually became inseparable from conventions.

Because for all my griping (and, as regular readers of this nonsense know, I can gripe with the best of them) conventions, at their best, are basically giant reunions for the self-selected. They are temporary cities built by and for people who, at one point or another, fell in love with some odd little thing and followed it until it led them to other people. Sure, there are dealer tables and sketch covers and overpriced hot dogs and the occasional guy who smells like he has been marinating in a beanbag chair since 1994, but beneath all that? It's community. It's a bunch of people who were told, in one way or another, that the things they loved didn't matter, finding one another and saying, "Yeah, actually, they do."

And when that happens often enough, over enough years, something strange occurs.

The hobby stops being a hobby.

It becomes geography.

You build your life there. You make friends there. Sometimes you fall in love there. Sometimes you meet collaborators there. Sometimes you become the person you were always inching toward there. Sometimes the book that cracked open your skull in 1988 leads, through a dozen side roads and a few thousand long boxes, to the life you're living now. That happened to me. Not all at once and not with the sort of tidy symmetry that would make for a satisfying final page caption, but it happened. Comics didn't just entertain me. They introduced me to myself. And to my people.

Which is why the death of somebody like Sam Kieth hits a little differently.

It isn't just, "Oh, that guy whose art I liked is gone." It's bigger and stranger than that. It's the loss of one of the people who helped draw the

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map. One of the people who, knowingly or not, made strange kids feel seen. One of the people whose work stood there like a battered, beautiful roadside sign pointing away from the ordinary world and toward someplace weirder, sadder, funnier, more honest and, yes, more welcoming.

A place where the misfits could find one another.

A place where the broken edges didn't have to be sanded off before you were allowed in.

A place that, for a lot of us, started as four-color fantasy and somehow ended up feeling an awful lot like home.

So no, this isn't really an obituary. Not exactly.

It's a thank-you note.

To Sam. To SANDMAN. To the weird books. To the weirder people. To Mike and Bill and the shop owners and the fellow travellers and every creator who ever looked at the rest of the world, shrugged and said, "Nah, I'm gonna make something for our kind of people instead."

Some families you inherit.

Some you assemble, one comic, one conversation, one convention, one beautifully damaged soul at a time.

And if you've ever walked into a shop, or a show, or opened a comic and felt that little click in your chest that says, "Oh. There you are. I've been looking for you"...then you know exactly what I mean

Thanks for listening. I love you guys. ■

RECOMMENDED READING: THE MAXX by Sam Keith (with occasional story assists by Bill Messner-Loebs) #'s 1-35 – Available in a number of collected formats.

Nuffle or Not

New Coaches Guide to Blood Bowl

By: Coach BorosBoy

There's nothing quite like your first Blood Bowl tournament. The buzz in the hall, the clatter of dice, the quiet hope that today might be your day. Tournament is all at once thrilling and overwhelming. This guide is here to steady your nerves, sharpen your instincts, and give you the practical know-how that turns uncertainty into confidence. Step inside; you're about to level up.

I've given you a pre-tournament checklist for each stage that you can tick off, along with a fuller explanation of every item. This guide is pretty comprehensive, so grab a brew and settle in. It's designed to be something you can return to, whether you're prepping for your first event or reflecting afterwards.

You experienced coaches... I see you reading too. There's probably something in here for you as well, no matter how long you've been playing.

Thanks for reading.

Even before we click "purchase" on the ticket, we need to think about a few things.

Pre-Tournament Prep

Checklist:

- ✓ Tournament Pack
- ✓ Expectations
- ✓ Team - rostered and painted
- ✓ Scout the venue
- ✓ Know what gear you're packing

Most important:

Download the tournament pack.

I can't stress this enough: download the Tournament Pack and read it. Front to back. Before you even enter the event. Get a solid handle on the where, when, who, what, how, and why. The "why" is the easiest, Blood Bowl great fun! We'll talk more

about that next. Refer back to the pack regularly. Almost every question you'll need to ask, including many covered in this article, is already answered there. If you hit something you're unsure about, check the pack first. If it's not there, do a quick search. If you still can't find the answer, contact the organiser.

Second most important: What are your expectations?

I'm not here to crush your dreams, but let's be real: if this is your first tournament, mid-table is a solid result. Winning the whole thing? Possible, but about as likely as your Troll passing an agility test. Blood Bowl rewards skill, but the dice always get a say. You'll notice the same coaches floating near the top, but even they don't win every event. Sometimes your Big Guy dies on turn one of game one and the universe just shrugs. Welcome to Blood Bowl.

It is important to keep yourself grounded; you can't have a fun day if you don't know why you're there. At my recent tournament, I finished Game 3 feeling disappointed, but I reminded myself of this exact step and instantly brightened up. I'd achieved my primary tournament aim and didn't need to fall back on "enjoy the pizza," which was my emergency backup plan if everything went wrong.

It is a dice game. No matter how good you are, sometimes it just doesn't go your way.

Think about how you'll cope if you don't achieve your primary aim. Try to create a scale of success that lets you walk away feeling positive and excited to improve next time, rather than negative about the day.

Pick a team

For your first tournament, pick a team you know inside out. Choose a in which you don't need to constantly reference in the rulebook, and one where you already have at least a basic grasp of its strengths, weaknesses, and how it plays into bash and agility matchups.

Ask yourself: does this team, on an average day, give me a realistic chance of achieving my goal?

Look at the skills package the tournament allows. Some teams get a lot from skill stacking; others barely need any help. Check what other people are taking. Ask your playgroup. Use social media. Try to under-

stand why certain teams and builds perform well in a tournament environment.

The more familiar you are with your team, the more mental bandwidth you'll have for the actual tournament experience the clock, the pressure, the noise, the fatigue, and the dice.

If you can squeeze in a few practice games before the tournament, do it. It doesn't need to be a full league season; even one or two matches will help you settle into your team, remember your key plays, and shake off the rust.

That said, sometimes you're going to a tournament because you want practice with a team. It can be a chicken-and-egg situation, that's one of the reasons you need realistic expectations. If the event is your first real outing with the roster, treat it as a learning experience rather than a performance test.

Practice helps, but mindset matters more.

Paint your team-mates

I strongly advise getting your team painted, in good time, whether the tournament requires it or not and definitely make sure they're numbered. You'll feel happier, more confident, and far less self-conscious.

Even a simple, tidy paint job makes you feel like you belong, and it genuinely boosts your enjoyment of the day.

It sounds silly, but it's true: when you're proud of your little guys, you play better. They don't need to be Golden Demon winners — just neat, consistent, and recognisable. You might not believe me now, but I promise you'll feel the difference the moment you put them on the table.

Scout the venue

Take a moment before the day to understand where you're going and what the venue is like. Make a note of your travel time. Do they have a car park? What time is the last bus or train? Can someone give you a lift if things run late? It's always better to be early than to be the person rushing in five minutes before Round 1.

Check whether the venue sells food and drink, and whether there's seating available between rounds. Think about the play space too — is there enough room for your stuff, do you need to bring anything extra, and do you have any accessibility or comfort needs you should let the organiser or venue know about in advance?

A little preparation here goes a long way toward a calmer, smoother day.

Equipment: Know your gear.

Tournament packs vary wildly. Some events expect you to bring everything that comes in the starter box — pitch, dugouts, templates, the lot.

Others provide most of that for you. Sometimes you get treated like a VIP and all you need are your team-mates and some dice.

Make sure you know exactly what's expected of you kit-wise, and that you actually own (or can access) everything on the list. If you're missing something, buy, beg, or borrow it ahead of time. You don't want to be staring at your opponent on Table 7 while both of you realise you assumed the other person would bring the astrogranite.

Submit your list

Most tournaments will require you to submit your roster ahead of time so the organiser can check it for legality; mistakes happen, and this step saves everyone headaches on the day.

The TO already has a lot to juggle, so be a pal and don't make them chase you for your list. In the worst cases, late submissions can mean losing your spot or

even disqualification.

Make sure your roster matches your painted team, Especially shoulder numbers and player identities. Nothing slows a game down like trying to work out which Blitzter is which because the list and the models don't line up.

If you're not using a digital system, bring a couple of extra printed rosters to hand to your opponent. It makes the game run more smoothly and shows you're committed to playing openly and fairly. Lots of players won't have one for you in return, and that's fine, you're not obliged to either. It's just a small courtesy if you're able.



How are you transporting your team?

Think about how you're getting your team-mates and all your accessories to the venue and back safely and comfortably. This includes your models, dice, templates, pitch (if required), snacks, water, and anything else you're bringing.

I actually failed this step at my recent tournament. I brought too much stuff, there wasn't enough space for it, and it caused awkwardness. Learn from my mistake: keep it simple, keep it organised, and make sure everything has a place.

Whether you're using a foam case, a magnetised tray, or a sturdy box, make sure your team is secure and easy to carry.

The calmer your setup, the calmer your day.

Have a miniature repair kit

Bring a tiny repair kit. Trust me on this one. Tournaments are busy, crowded, and full of people leaning over tables with elbows, dice, templates, and enthusiasm. Even the best-transported team-mates can take a knock. A mini detached from its base is all it takes to turn a calm morning into a mild panic.

You don't need a full hobby desk, just a few essentials:

A small tube of superglue (I take superglue for the "you're absolutely getting glued back on" jobs, and a standard thin plastic glue for anything that will tolerate a cleaner bond)

A blob of Blu-Tack for emergency "that'll do for now" fixes.

That's it. Nothing dramatic. But when something inevitably pops off mid-event, you'll be the calm, collected coach quietly doing battlefield surgery while everyone else is scrambling.

It's one of those things you hope you won't need... until you really, really do.

At this stage, we've handled everything within our control and trimmed the "unknown unknowns" down to size. Now we're set for the big day.

Before you leave the house

Checklist

- ✓ Bag packed

- ✓ Fed, watered and clean

- ✓ Travel plans still work

- ✓ Pack the night before

Do yourself a favour: pack your bag the night before. Even just gathering everything into one spot saves you from rummaging around for your scatter template before dawn.

Tournament mornings are stressful enough without discovering you've left your dice, your roster, or your lucky reroll token at home.

Get it sorted while you're still relaxed.

Include snacks and a water bottle. That is unless you've already scouted the venue and know they can meet your needs or have a strict no-outside-food-and-drink policy. Staying fed and hydrated keeps your brain working and your mood steady, especially in round three when the fatigue starts to creep in.

A little preparation here saves a lot of stress later. Think about what you're wearing

I'm not your mum, but take a moment to think about what you're wearing on the day. Nothing offensive, nothing political; you're trying to have the calmest day possible so you can play your best, and you really don't need a random stranger deciding to debate your T-shirt on the way to the venue.

Go for natural fibres if you can, and wear comfortable shoes. You might be on your feet for several hours, and it will probably be warm inside. The more comfortable you are physically, the more mental energy you'll have for the actual games. A little thought here makes a big difference to how you feel by Round 3.

Cleanliness is next to godliness.

Again, I'm not trying to parent you, but wargaming has a reputation for being full of people for whom hygiene happens once a year. Don't be that person. A clean body helps with clear thinking, keeps you comfortable all day, and makes the whole experience better for everyone around you.

A quick shower and fresh clothes, (yesterday's t-shirt does not count! I find it unbelievable that this still needs saying, but we've all played next to that guy) make a real difference. Maybe even add a dab of deodorant. It's basic stuff, but it genuinely boosts your confidence and focus. You're going to be in close quarters with people for hours; make it pleasant for everyone.

Check the travel situation

Get up a bit earlier than you think you need to and check the travel situation before heading out. If leaving half an hour early saves your morning, you'll thank yourself later.

Starting the day calm and ahead of schedule is one of the simplest ways to set up a good tournament. Running late does the exact opposite.

Eat A Good Breakfast

The last of Coach-Is-Your-Mum advice, I promise. But it matters. You're in for a long mentally demanding day. A day that might be physically tougher than you expect, and full of decisions that get harder when you're running on fumes.

Set yourself up properly. You've already got up early, so make use of the time and put something decent in your system.

Food, hydration, and a bit of preparation aren't optional extras. They're what keep your brain from turning into mashed potato halfway through a crucial drive. Looking back at my notebook the next day was a massive eye-opener! I went from coherent to, writing so bad it would make a doctor blush, in the space of 24 turns. I genuinely hadn't realised in the moment just how much I was struggling.

To recap:

When you arrive

Checklist

- ✓ Check in
- ✓ Orientate yourself

Congrats! You've made it. On time. You're feeling good, you know you've done the prep. At this point the nerves will start to kick in, it's an exciting feeling, so embrace it. Try to relax and channel that energy into enjoying yourself. If you're not already smiling (you probably are; this is the best part of the day,

when anything is possible and your Troll hasn't died on turn 1), give it a try.

It's okay to feel anxious. We all experience things differently, but even a forced smile can help shift you into a great mindset.

We're all set for a great day. Your team-mates have arrived safe and are ready to hit the pitch and your opponent's players.

The next step is to complete registration as per the Tournament Pack. Usually this just means finding the TO, but at bigger events there might be a more convoluted process involving passes, freebies, or a queue that looks like it's auditioning for a theme-park ride.

Orientation

Once you're checked in, take a few minutes to orientate yourself with the venue. There should be a player briefing, but don't rely on it to tell you everything you need. Find out where the food and drink vendors are, where the lavatories are hiding, and where you can sit down and decompress between rounds. Have a look at what there is to do when you're not playing; shops, demo tables, chill-out areas, whatever the venue offers.

The more you know your surroundings, the calmer you'll feel once the whistle blows for Round 1.

Playing your games

There's a lot more to this than you might expect, and not much of it is in the rulebook. I actually surprised myself when I started writing this section all the little habits, courtesies, and bits of tournament wisdom that people expect you to know but no-one tells you.

You'll notice the checklists stop here. That's deliberate. Once the tournament begins, you won't have time to consult lists. You'll be in the moment, and the rest of this guide is designed to live in your head, not on your phone.

Introduce yourself

I promised no more mothering. You know how to do this. But it's still worth saying: introduce yourself. A quick "Hi, I'm BorosBoy, good to meet you" goes a long way toward setting the tone for a friendly game. You're about to spend two hours together, might as well start like humans rather than two silent statues waiting for the dice to speak first.

Swap Rosters

If you're not using digital team sheets, make a copy available to your opponent. Talk them through your team. If they're a new player, or they have questions, briefly explain anything they might not be aware of. It's not about giving away your game plan. This is about making sure you're both on the same page before the first block is thrown. Ask them about their team too, especially if it's something you haven't faced before. Don't get blindsided by an unexpected skill that deletes your best player because you didn't realise their Lineman had Tackle or Mighty Blow and a grudge. A two-minute chat now is far better than discovering mid-drive that their "just a Lineman" is actually a guided missile with shoulder pads.

Wish your opponent luck

We're all fighting the dice, not each other. A simple "Good luck, have a great game" sets the tone, takes the edge off, and reminds both of you that you're here to enjoy yourselves; even if Nuffle has other plans.

Be a player your opponent would want to play again. Blood Bowl can be a frustrating game, and only more so after a long, tiring day. Try to keep smiling. You won't manage it all the time, but even the act of trying means that when frustration hits, you're far less likely to let it spill out in a way you'll regret.

If you need a moment, take it. Step back, breathe, reset. Anything that happens with the dice isn't your opponent's fault. Don't make it personal. They're riding the same emotional rollercoaster you are, and they're just as vulnerable to tilt.

Play in the right spirit and people will want to play you again. That's the real mark of a good coach, not your record, not your touchdowns, but the way people feel after sharing a table with you.

We're all in this together. Blood Bowl has one of the best communities out there and though not perfect, (nothing is) in this community by and large everyone understands that Nuffle is fickle, the game is absurd, camp, and comically violent, and that we're

all here to enjoy the chaos rather than suffer through it alone

The other coaches want you to have a great day. They're here to have fun first too. Yes, they'll play with ruthlessness and that's part of the joy, but they're not out to murder you or your feelings. Nuffle handles the player casualties; the community handles the support.

If you wobble, tilt, or need a moment, you'll find people ready to help you steady yourself. It's one of the things that makes this hobby special.

Rules Disputes

Look, they happen. Blood Bowl is a complicated game with a lot of moving parts, edge cases, and "Wait, does that actually work like that?" Moments. In a friendly game you'd crack open the rulebook, have a quick chat, and if you still couldn't agree you'd roll for it and move on. At an event, it's different. The Tournament Organiser is the final word on any rules dispute. If they make a ruling, that's it. No arguing, no sulking, no trying to re-litigate it three turns later. Take it on the chin and carry on. They're not judging you, they're just keeping the day running smoothly. And honestly, having someone else make the call is a blessing when your brain is already juggling block dice, turn counters, and whether your Blitzer can actually reach that square.

Your opponent's models

This one catches a lot of new players out. Don't touch your opponent's models unless they explicitly say it's okay. Even then, I'd still recommend thinking twice, especially if the model is bulky, beautifully painted, looks even slightly fragile, or is buried in the middle of a scrum. Most coaches are perfectly happy to move their own pieces for you when you pow them into dust.

Accidents happen, but try to let the other coach be the one who has the accident with their players. And because you've read this guide and brought a little repair kit, you're going to be the hero, not the villain, the person who calmly says "Don't worry, I can fix that." That's how you make a mate for life.

It's not about being precious; it's about respect. Those models represent hours of painting, converting, and care. Keeping your hands off avoids accidents, awkwardness, and the sinking feeling of knocking over someone's pride and joy.

Etiquette

A lot of this is second nature once you've played a few events, but new coaches often don't know it's important. A little etiquette keeps the game smooth and prevents accidental tension.

General Game Play

Good table etiquette goes a long way toward making the day smoother for both players.

Announce your actions clearly so your opponent always knows what's happening, and confirm dice results out loud, it prevents misunderstandings and keeps the game flowing. Talk through assists and strength, and if you think your opponent has missed something (I'm a menace for forgetting dodges; mine and theirs), just discuss it openly. If something feels off or you're unsure about a rule interaction, call a TO early rather than letting confusion build. And above all, be gracious. Assume your opponent has a good heart and has simply made a genuine mistake if they miss something. A good attitude is remembered far longer than any touchdown.

Dice

Dice etiquette matters more than most new players realise. Keep your rolls on your own side of the pitch. This is your space, and scattering dice across your opponent's models or carefully arranged setup is a fast track to awkwardness. Be mindful of their miniatures too; knocking over a painted figure feels awful for everyone involved. If your dice are hard to read, offer

to share clearer ones so both of you can follow the action without squinting.

And if a die lands cocked or on a model, just reroll it without fuss. No debates, no theatrics, pick it up and roll again.

These tiny habits prevent misunderstandings, keep the game friendly, and make you look like someone who knows exactly what they're doing, even if it's your first tournament.

You'll see the experienced players using dice cups honestly, they're a great investment. They keep your rolls contained, stop dice from skittering across the table like escaped hamsters, and make it far less likely you'll accidentally knock over someone's beautifully painted Blitzer. They also remove any suspicion about how the dice are being thrown, which keeps the game clean and the mood relaxed.

Time management

You'll probably be used to having near-unlimited time to finish a friendly with a mate or your Tuesday league match. Tournaments are built different. There's a schedule, there are dozens (or hundreds) of players, and the whole day runs on a strict clock. Time management catches out more new coaches than bad dice ever will.

A few simple habits make all the difference:

- Keep an eye on the round timer. Don't let it ambush you.
- If you're naturally slow, tell your opponent early. Most coaches are completely fine with it if you're upfront.
- Don't rush them, but don't drift either. A steady, consistent pace beats panic-rolling in the last ten minutes.
- If you're both behind, agree to speed up together. Shared awareness keeps things fair and friendly.

Finishing your game is part of tournament etiquette. It respects your opponent, the TO, and the flow of the whole event — and it saves you from the dreaded "unfinished game", which feels bad for everyone involved.

After the game

When the final whistle blows, how you finish the game matters just as much as how you played it.

Shake hands (or fist bump)

Always thank your opponent for the game. You might be tilting beyond belief and raging at the sun it's not their fault.

Respect them. If you've been on the edge, you can still be honest without being unkind. Something like:

"Man, that was a tough game. I'm struggling to smile right now, but I really appreciate the way you played it. Thank you."

That's sportsmanship. That's maturity. And it keeps the community healthy. If they're new, offer one positive thing they did well, something like

"I loved that gutsy cage-dive attempt" or "That throw was cool! I really thought it was curtains for me." It helps them walk away feeling encouraged rather than overwhelmed.

Don't launch into a full tactical breakdown unless they ask for it. Don't expect them to give you one either. They might, but they're just as you are. They're trying to make sense of what just happened, and they probably want to eat, drink, stretch their legs, or find the nearest toilet. End the game with grace.

It's the last impression you leave, and people remember it.



General Tips

Don't skip meals

Blood Bowl demands sustained concentration, and low blood sugar will sabotage you far more effectively than any bad roll. Make sure you eat a little before each round and carve out time for lunch, even if the schedule gets tight. A well-fuelled brain stays sharp, steady, and far more resilient when the dice turn cruel.

Drink water.

Plenty of it. Have some with you at the table if you can. I won't wag a finger about fizzy, sugary, caffeinated concoctions, just be honest with yourself about what they do to your focus. You want steady decisions, not jittery chaos.

Take photos! Future you will thank you!



New players often forget this, and it's brilliant for memory, learning, and content. Take a couple of photos each game. Pictures help you remember key moments and make writing reports a lot easier. I try to take one picture at the end of each of my turns.

I once had a situation where a player questioned how far I'd moved. I had the photo. End of argument. No drama, no awkwardness, just evidence. Photos don't lie, and they're a great way to track your progress over time too.

Take Notes

Bring a notebook. You can see from the above that I make notes of my games the notes support the photos, and the photos support the notes. I don't have time to take perfect, forensic records, but I try, especially early in the day, to capture the big moments and what I thought I was doing at the time. Even a scribble like "Turn 6: threw" can be enough. Later, you can pair it with the photo and reconstruct the whole situation. What was the board state? Was throwing the right call? Did you pick the right target? What were you trying to achieve? Note-taking isn't mandatory, but if you're attending a tournament I assume it's because you want to test yourself and improve. Notes and photos let you do that with something close to objective data not just vibes and memory.

If you want to get better, the best way is to critically review what you actually did, not what you think you did. A notebook turns your games into lessons, not just stories.

Final Thoughts

This was supposed to be a short guide... and then it wasn't. Turns out there's a lot to say when you want new players to feel prepared rather than overwhelmed. Hopefully you've found something useful here, whether it's your first tournament or your fiftieth. The whole point is to give you practical advice you can actually use and the confidence to walk through the door feeling ready. Tournament Blood Bowl is brilliant fun! Go in with a plan, look after yourself, and you'll crush your first event.

Lastly, remember, tournament Blood Bowl is still Blood Bowl and, as I always say, 'trust your instincts, distrust your dice'. ■



State of The Series

The Game Beneath The Game

By: David "Blue" Wendt PhD

Welcome back, friend. Pull up a chair

If you're reading this at Origins, you're probably holding this while standing in a hallway, dice bag on your shoulder, trying to figure out where you're headed next. Maybe you just finished a game. Maybe you're about to start one. Either way, you're surrounded by a thousand tables, a thousand different adventures, a thousand versions of the same essential act: people sitting down together to make something up.



I've been doing this for over forty years. And somewhere in the last decade, I started noticing something.

Every game has two games inside it.

There's the surface game; the system, the setting, the adventure. The stats on your character sheet, the map on the table, the monster waiting in room 12. That's the game you signed up for. That's the game on the box.

And then there's the deeper game. The one nobody announces out loud. The one your table is actually playing.

Sometimes the deeper game is let me forget this week existed. Sometimes it's I want to feel close to these people again. Sometimes it's I need to build something, even something imaginary. Sometimes it's I need to be tested, and I need to know I can pass.

The surface game and the deeper game don't always match. And when they don't; when you're running a brutal dungeon crawl for a table that actually needs a laugh, or running a cozy mystery for a group that showed up hungry for a fight, you can feel it. Something's slightly off. The energy never quite lands.

I've been studying this pattern for a while now. It shows up in fifty years of TTRPG publishing history, the industry swings between crunch and narrative, between darkness and hope, on a rhythm that tracks almost uncannily with what the world is asking of us. But it also shows up

at the table level, every single session, in the small choices we make before the dice even hit the felt.

The best GMs I know, the ones whose tables people talk about for years afterward; they're not just running the surface game. They're reading the room. They know what their table actually needs, and they shape the experience around that, whether consciously or not.

The good news: you can learn to do this deliberately.

I put together a quick tool; five questions, takes about two minutes. You answer them honestly, and they'll show you something about what your table is actually reaching for tonight. Not just what game to play, but why. The cycle you're in. The deeper game underneath the surface one.

Give it a try before your next session. Or right now, while you're standing in this hallway.

I'll close with something a little more personal. One of the projects I've been quietly building for years is a setting called Luxaria. It started as a sketch, a few notes, a map that kept growing sideways, a question I couldn't stop asking: what would a world look like if it was designed from the inside out, built around what a table actually needs rather than what a genre expects?

Luxaria grew the way all real settings grow. Slowly. Sideways. With detours. Sometimes I'd sit down to work on the political intrigue and end up writing a recipe for a fictional bread instead. The world insisted on being lived-in before it agreed to be adventured in.

What I found is that the deeper game was baked into the setting before I'd consciously designed it. Luxaria feels hopeful and a little strange. It has history with dirt still on it. It's full of places that feel like they exist even when no one is visiting them. That's not an accident — those are the answers I'd give if someone asked me what I need at the table. I just didn't know it until I looked back at what I'd built.

Every setting is like that, if you look closely enough. Every game you've run, every campaign you've played, underneath the adventure, you'll find the deeper game. The thing you were actually working out.

You already have a game. Now find out what it's really about. Then go play it.

That's all for now, I should get back to creating. Until next time, happy gaming. ■

Find me at: [Patreon: patreon.com/DocBlue](https://patreon.com/DocBlue)

DOCTOR BLUE'S TABLES CAN
BE FOUND ON PAGE 18

Read the room — a table-reading tool

Answer one question from each table.

Circle your choice.

Read your outputs across all five.

Two minutes.

Works before any session.

#	Your answer	The cycle you're in	What that means at the table
1	Dark and dangerous	Darkness cycle	Your table is reaching for catharsis through tension. Lean into consequence. Let things hurt a little.
2	Warm and safe	Hope cycle	Your table needs restoration. Protect the people. Let kindness be a meaningful act.
3	Weird and wonderful	Narrative cycle	Your table is reaching for possibility. Leave gaps in the world. Let players fill them.
4	Big and consequential	Crunch cycle	Your table wants stakes that feel real. Systems with teeth. Decisions that echo.

#	Your answer	Lean toward	Opening scene suggestion
1	Swords and sorcery	Fantasy	A tavern with a wanted poster. A road with two directions. One is safer than the other.
2	Horror and dread	Horror	Something is wrong, but no one will say it out loud. The players notice first.
3	Stars and futures	Science fiction	A ship, a station, or a city that shouldn't exist. Someone needs to explain why it does.
4	Real world, heightened	Contemporary/thriller	An ordinary place. An ordinary day. Something that should not be here is here.

#	Your answer	Look for systems like	Design note for GMs
1	Structure — clear rules, clear outcomes	D&D, Pathfinder, GURPS	Prep your encounters. Know the rules cold. Your players will push them hard.
2	Freedom — story first, rules second	PbtA, Fate, Ironsworn	Prep situations, not plots. Follow the characters. Let the dice open doors you didn't build.
3	Both — the safety net and the open sky	Blades in the Dark, Year Zero, Genesys	Use structure for conflict resolution, freedom for everything else. The seams between them are where good scenes live.

#	Your answer	Your table's superpower	Watch out for
1	Just me	Full creative control. Your pacing, your choices.	Decision paralysis. Use an oracle or random table to make the world push back.
2	2–3 people, close-knit	Deep character work. Room for every voice.	Scenes that go long because everyone's enjoying them. That's not a problem. Let it run.
3	4–6, full party energy	Faction play, ensemble casts, big setpieces.	Spotlight distribution. Give each player one moment per session that's just theirs.
4	New people — convention table	Fresh energy. No bad habits yet.	Slow starts. Hook in the first five minutes. Pregens, clear stakes, no lore dumps.

#	Your answer	The deeper game	How to honor it
1	To forget the week	Immersion	Set the scene before the first roll. Props, music, tone-setting. Give them somewhere else to be.
2	To feel close to each other	Connection	Build in scenes that let characters lean on each other. Let the fiction do the emotional work.
3	To make something together	Creation	Give players authorship. Let them name places, describe outcomes, add details to the world.
4	To be tested — and pass	Challenge	Make failure meaningful. Make success earned. Don't flinch from the hard moments.

Your five answers together are your table's fingerprint for tonight. They'll shift. Come back to these next session and see what changed.

If your Table 1 answer was 2 or 3, and your Table 2 answer was 1 or 4 — your instincts are pointing toward a world built on hopeful strangeness with history baked in. That's Luxaria. Ask Doc Blue about it at patreon.com/DocBlue.

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Play Like a Girl

Women in Magic

By: Cassie Rood

Some people will say that magic is everywhere, if you only look for it. They're probably right, and given the popularity of several of the recent Magic: The Gathering (MtG) releases, you don't even have to look very hard.

The Final Fantasy x MtG set (which came out in June 2025) was perhaps the most popular expansion set for the game to date, while the Avatar: The Last Airbender and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles sets drew in more players on top of that.

A growing player base doesn't just mean more money for the company, or more chances at finding an active game. It also means a more diverse player base, which can lead to challenges occupying shared spaces.

While most game stores are welcoming places, always happy to have a full play area, it can be difficult as a member of a traditionally marginalized community to feel like there's a space that's safe to relax and just have fun. It was with a desire to open a space for women, gender-diverse people, and members of the trans community to enjoy MtG that started the grassroots organization Women+ in Magic (WIM).

WIM is an international organization, supporting the Women+ MtG player base around the world with their Discord server as a place to gather, build community, and organize play events and meetups. The organization largely serves as a framework to allow local (and more distant) MtG players to connect in the way they feel the most comfortable with.

Near the end of March, a group of four friends decided to use the WIM Discord server as a platform to turn their regular meetup for casual commander MtG games into a bigger event at Beyond the Board, a locally owned game store in Dublin, OH. Beyond the Board opened in 2013, and has built a strong reputation for being friendly to the LGBTQIA+ community, which made it a great host for the WIM play event.

The four organizers of the event, Heather (redpandamon), Michelle (quince), Ash (freya), and Ashlyn (ash) had been meeting to play the casual commander format of MtG when they realized there was an opportunity to expand it, and as Heather stated, "there was a need, and my philosophy is when you see a need, you should try to fill the need." The meetup on in March was the first event the four had organized, and reached out to Beyond the Board to attempt to coordinate playing tables and times.

According to the organizers, the store was immediately interested and very willing to make space for the WIM group. There were two other events happening at the same time as the casual commander event – a Pokemon trading card game tournament and a Dice Throne tournament – and Beyond the Board told the WIM group they would make sure there was space for them



even if they had to put tables in between their shelves. Big credit was given to the community organizer at Beyond the Board, Sam, for being willing to help the WIM group coordinate with the Pokemon tournament to ensure enough tables were open for everyone to play.

There were three tables for the MtG players, and all three were full with active games; not a bad turnout for a first-time event populated entirely by people who frequently feel like they may not be welcome at a public gaming table. They also had several pre-made decks available for people who might want to try another deck or try MtG/commander for the first time before building a deck of their own. Heather also had a smaller table set up where people could play one-on-one (instead of the MtG's

ment of stickers, many themed for the LGBTQIA+ community, and several of which Heather designed herself.

This was my first MtG public event, I can honestly say that it was a very positive experience in no small part because of all the work Heather, Michelle, Ash, and Ashlyn put into it. It was clear they have a passion for the community and for the game, and that kind of passion is infectious.

I was one of the shy people who played a one-on-one game before I dove into the more common four-player format, but sitting down with my three competitors didn't feel like entering a competition. It was a very casual game (which is fortunate, because I learned at the end that my deck build was illegal – I have since corrected it), with all four of us chatting, sharing experiences and stories.

And that's what the whole point of the event was. Playing a game we all enjoyed in a place where we could make friends without worry. And not to be cheesy, but as we all know, friendship is magic (and Magic, I suppose).

It went well enough, and with enough of a turnout just based on the online flyers which were posted in several local game store Discord servers, that the organizers are working on setting up a regular event because "obviously there's a need, obviously there's an interest." The current intention is setting up something monthly.

Until they're able to get an Instagram account set up for the event, interested people can keep an eye out on Beyond the Board's social media and website as well as Heather's Instagram (redpandamonster) where updates will likely get posted. ■



usual four-player arrangement) if they wanted a tutorial game or were just a bit shy coming into a new situation.

The set-up and intended feeling for the event was inspired by the way that WIM sets up their booths at conventions (notably MagicCon, which will be held in 2026 in Las Vegas, Amsterdam, and Atlanta). All four organizers wanted "people to feel home-y" in the space, and brought their own decks and play mats, as well as an assort-

