

# Fables & Tables Magazine

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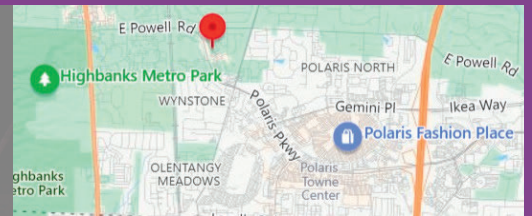
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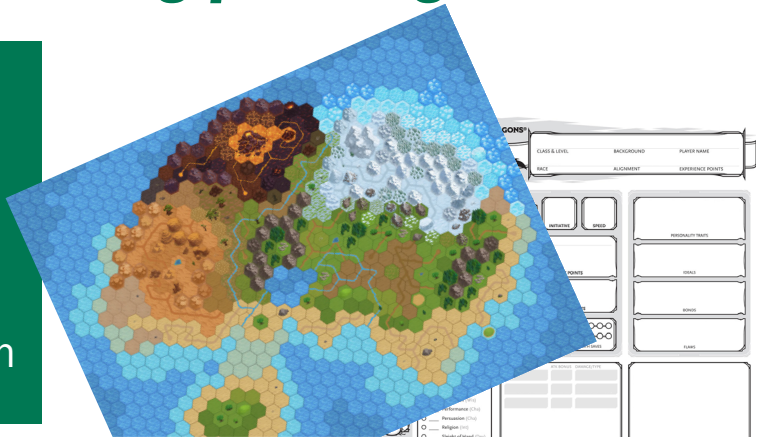


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# Dungeons & Differences

A Look at D&D 2024!

-Noah Martin

Dungeons and Dragons has been through many iterations since it's inception in the 1980s. Some editions have been wildly popular, such as the 2003 "3.5e" which went on to inspire a rival TTRPG, Pathfinder. After the failure of the short-lived 4th edition of Dungeons and Dragons, Wizards struck gold by creating an easy-to-play 5th edition in 2014. This edition caught on like wildfire and spread to tons of new players, especially during the lockdowns in 2020. In 2024, Wizards released the "2024 edition", nicknamed "5.5e" (among other monikers). It was heralded as an improvement on the 2014 edition, bringing new and welcome changes while not being too different from the 2014 edition that no one would want to switch over (which is what happened between 3.5 and 4). But the question is: what are these changes, and are they good?

Well, naturally there are far too many changes to go over in a singular article, so I'll be highlighting some of the important changes starting with terminology. A popular term from previous editions has made it's way back into

the lingo. That term is bloodied, which indicates a creature is at or below half of it's hit points. This term was so popular upon it's introduction that most people didn't stop using it when they switched over to 5e (2014). It's actually a term I learned when I was being taught how to Dungeon Master for groups, and a term that I didn't know hadn't "existed" for the past 10



years. Among other terminology changes are: transport now represents forced movement; expertise now used both as a feature and a

term; an action that is magical is now specified as "As a magic action..."

Some things have changed in the core gameplay of 5.5e, too. Something about 5.5e is that it adapted many house rules into it's core rules, such as the ability to intentionally fail a saving throw or being able to pick locks with sleight of hand. Among some of the other gameplay changes are: heroic inspiration can reroll ANY die, not just a d20. Players now also have common actions they can do, such as: search (to look around) and study (to examine an object or ponder). Most of these changes are minor, but a hated change that has occurred is that the Hide action now has a base DC of 15 to successfully hide instead of the DM determining the number. This means that at early levels it can be difficult for any class to hide, while later levels have it easier. Not only that, but having a DC 15 means that enemies (or players) are no longer using perception to notice you. Meaning that if you fail your stealth check then enemies notice you, and if you pass then they don't. There is no middle ground where one enemy might notice while the others might not.

Combat has had some major changes, most of which I think are nice quality of life changes. For instance, drawing or stowing a weapon is now part of the attack action. Previously, it was a free action (meaning you could use the action as much as you'd like per turn). This allows players to say, "I'd like to attack with

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

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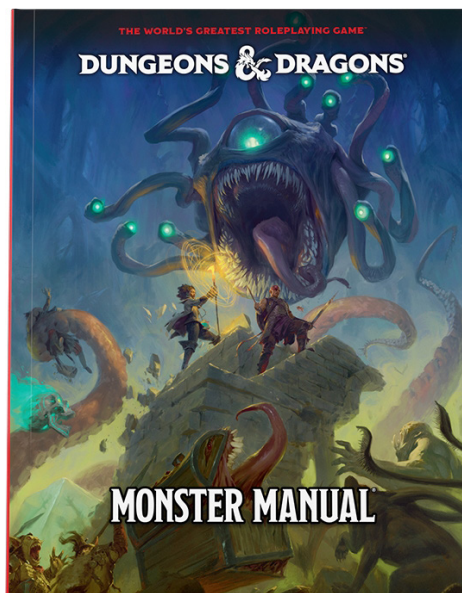
my bow," instead of, "I'd like to stow my dagger, draw my bow, and attack." The changing from free to attack now implies a change of weapon. A similar change in wording has impacted the opportunity attack. No longer does it impact a "hostile creature", but a "creature you can see". This means you can no longer opportunity attack if you're blinded, but you can now opportunity attack a teammate (if you wanted to be that kind of player). Next is a change I haven't made an opinion about yet. Fixed damage no longer adds ability modifiers. This means that unarmed strikes performed by classes that aren't monks deal 1 damage (which was how it originally was), but all fixed damage (like the blow dart) no longer adds modifier damage. I'd assume that it's not too bad of change, but I've also never played with anyone that has used a blowgun or other fixed damage weapons. Yet another major combat change is making official a homebrew rule I've been using since I first started playing. In 5e, in order to pass through an ally's space an ally would suffer the rules of difficult terrain. Now, one can simply pass through an ally's space



freely. This is a welcome change, and one that was already rather widely used.

A few other quality of life changes have happened. Often, tables (especially newer DMs) would get confused by the rules of surprise. Now, instead of the previous rules, if someone is surprised they receive disadvantage on their initiative roll. No longer is there a "wait, do they get a full round of attacks on us?" or arguments between players and DMs over how this elusive rule works. Contested athletics checks (which often had people thinking it was a strength saving throw) have been almost entirely removed, replaced with... a strength or Dex saving throw! In order to not get grappled one must make a strength or Dex saving throw, same thing with shove! Also, all the confusing traits, ideals, bonds, and flaws (which hardly any of my players ever used) have been entirely replaced and compacted; so, too, has how to make a character (you start by choosing a class now, then your origin!)

With all of the racial protests and tensions that have happened over the course of the 2010s and 2020s, a lot of TTRPGs have started chang-



ing the name so as to not make anything sound racist (IE a player yelling "I hate that race!" when talking about Dragonborn). Pathfinder now calls it Ancestries. Tales of the Valiant went with Lineages. And DnD went with... Species. Honestly, when seeing what everyone else called their heritages, I'm kinda disappointed in how lame DnD's is. I mean, who wouldn't want to make an ancestry, a lineage, or a heritage? Species doesn't have nearly the same context that the others do. Along with races, Aasimar have been added to the core rules, Dragonborn can fly once per day and have Darkvision, and a lot of racial differences (such as Hill Dwarves and Mountain Dwarves) have been erased leaving only "dwarf" or "halfling".

Many "species", classes, feats, spells, and stats have changed. Unfortunately, I can't get to all of them. But I can leave off with perhaps the biggest (and best) change Wizards have made: Cats (the animal) now have Darkvision (about time)!

After reading a few articles, the PHB, and the DMG I've learned a lot about the changes between 2014 to 2024. I've been asked to reflect and determine if they are good changes or not. Naturally, the first thought that comes to mind is that Wizards are doing this simply because Mattel told them they weren't making enough money. Especially because a portion of the rules changed are old homebrew rules that lots of tables were already using. Additionally, they changed some rules (such as contested athletics) into saves, simplifying them. Something that 5e has always strived to do was to simplify the TTRPG experience to make it as fun as possible. After all, if you want a mathematics-based fantasy you should go to Pathfinder, or if you want horror then head over to Call of Cthulu. But if you want a simple, fun time with your friends where numbers are simple and rules can be bent, then the best place to go is 5.5e. I've started migrating my groups to the new version, and it has been met with mostly positive reception. I've yet to have a negative comment, with the closest thing being "Oh? That's a new change? That's weird." ■

## The Forge Tavern Presents Spring Cocktail Recipe:

# THE CLASSIC LEMONDROP MARTINI

### THE LEMON DROP MARTINI!

The classic lemon drop martini is a fun, refreshing drink-great for those warm summer days. Our version with the added lavender takes it to the next level!

## INGREDIENTS

- 2 oz Gin (one that's not too Juniper forward)  
Feel free to Substitute Vodka, lemon vodka works well.
- .5 oz Triple Sec
- ¾ oz Lavender Syrup
- .5 oz Lemon Juice (fresh squeezed works best)

## INSTRUCTIONS

Add all ingredients to a shaker with 1 cup of ice.  
Shake vigorously to blend.  
Strain into a sugar rimmed martini glass.

To rim a martini glass,  
Use the juice of a lemon wedge around the rim.  
Dip it into sugar  
(best to place sugar on a plate or bowl)  
Garnish with a lemon wheel, or sprig of lavender.

### House made lavender syrup:

- 1 cup water
- 1 cup sugar
- 1/4 cup dried lavender

Combine ingredients in a sauce pan.  
Boil on medium heat until mixture thickens to a syrup consistency.

**Note:** Syrup will thicken more as it cools, so be careful not to overcook.



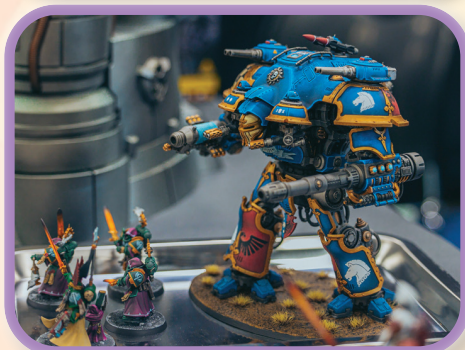


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## Episode V: My Heroes Have Always Punched Nazis

Let's get something clear:  
Comics have always been woke.  
Always.

From the earliest of days, back when two Jewish Kids from Cleveland invented the super-hero by putting a sci-fi spin on Moses and had him, in his first ever appearance, go up against a wife-beater and corrupt political lobbyists, comics, like all art, by its very nature, were "woke". Progressive. Left-leaning. Socially conscious. There, on the front line, fighting for the little guy. Superman was fighting slumlords and war profiteers long before he was dealing with mad scientists and super-intelligent gorillas, Batman went up against a corrupt executive of the Apex Chemical Company before he was ever taunted by the Joker, and Captain America, on the cover of his very first appearance, was knocking Hitler out with a good, ol' fashioned American haymaker.

Because, and I can't believe I have to remind people about this in the year of our lord two thousand and twenty-five, the Nazis are the BAD GUYS. Oligarchs are the bad guys.

And yet, here we are, reliving Jeph Loeb's PRESIDENT LUTHOR storyline from the early two-thousands only in real life and, in this version, Lex Luthor is a complete moron.

Art changes to reflect the time in which it is created. Sometimes, it changes faster than the people viewing it, but, more often, it takes some time to catch up. So, while the costumed heroes of comics were always "Social Justice Warriors" (to coin yet another phrase often hurled at people as if it's a bad thing), they haven't been perfect. They never will be. Comics, like all of the media we love, are still growing and evolving. Change is still happening and it always will. It needs to.

Those reading the pre-Batman issues of DETECTIVE COMICS back in 1937 and '38 were met with stories like "Claws of the Red Dragon" with long-since-forgotten sleuth character Bruce Nelson or, later, the tales of Sax Rohmer's Fu Manchu were perfectly comfortable with the narrow-minded concept of "the yellow menace" and saw nothing at all wrong with the absurd and offensive Asian stereotypes on the page. The character of Ebony White in Will Eisner's THE SPIRIT strips of the 1940's presented readers with the Minstrel Show stereotype of a black character complete with the exaggerated facial features and speech patters. Looking back on those strips with modern eyes can be difficult and uncomfortable but, at

the time, people generally accepted it. The term "a product of its time" comes up rather often when discussing old media as both an explanation and an excuse. An unfortunate element that has to be dealt with if we want to look back and what came before. Racial stereotypes in early comics were the byproduct of white creators. That's not a secret, it's not a surprise, and it's not something that can be denied. It's the truth. We know it and, more importantly, they knew it. Eisner, when speaking about the Ebony White character in his later years, expressed regret for how the character was handled but also noted "Those were different times".

And they were. They were different times. People either didn't realize or simply didn't care how those depictions were harmful. Things have, since, changed. Because, see, change is good. Change is healthy. As a society, we should be willing to change. To grow. To educate ourselves. To show more empathy and acceptance and respect for those who are different from us.

But some people don't like that.

As I'm writing this, promos for the new season of DOCTOR WHO have been airing...Images posted online, etc. In some of the stills, the Fifteenth Doctor (played by the wonderful Rwandan-Scottish actor Ncuti Gatwa) is wearing a rather sharp ensemble that is part suit, part kilt, part dress. It's very gender fluid. Very non-conforming. Very cool.

People, of course, hate it, saying things akin to "THIS IS THE WORST DOCTOR OUTFIT EVER!" forgetting, apparently, that this is a character who once spent an entire season with a stalk of celery pinned to his lapel. These people have never seen the Sixth Doctor's getup because...Yikes.

Really, it's not about the outfit. It wasn't about the outfit, last season, and it wasn't about the outfit when he was cast. It's about the man himself. See, Ncuti Gatwa is not only a man of color, but a man of color who identifies as queer and that, kids, hoo, boy, that is just a bit too far, for some people.

This isn't a surprise. A few years ago, when Jodie Whittaker was brought on as the Thirteenth Doctor, the reaction was such that you'd think the BBC personally went to people's houses and punched their dogs. How DARE they? A WOMAN? So to follow that up with a queer black man was clearly an affront to all things right and good and DOCTOR WHO, as a character and product, was obviously dead.

"Go woke, go broke", right?

Well, no. Not at all. It's more like "Go woke and open the door for new fans who may not have felt represented or recognized to finally feel a part of something". These things we love...Comics, Sci-Fi, fantasy...they've had communities built around them. Like any community, we want to be welcoming and to grow our numbers because the more the mightier! We should WANT to reach out and throw our arms around new fans with joy and kinship. Gatekeepers be damned, if we don't change, we go stagnant.

So, things are changing. We're seeing more characters of color, more representation of the LGBTQ community, more female protagonists. More emotional storytelling dealing with subjects that may be uncomfortable. With change, of course and inevitably, there are going to be growing pains. There will be pushback. People are not all going to be happy. But, hopefully, as time progresses and these representations become more normalized and more commonplace (because that's how the real world actually IS, kids. A big, beautiful garden filled

with every flower imaginable) people will grow used to it. Learn to see the beauty in diversity. Those who do not will, eventually, be left behind.

In STAR TREK, the Vulcans have a symbol called the "Kol-Ut-Shan". That symbol represents the philosophy: Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations. That there is unity found in diversity. That beauty and progress come from the union of the unlike.

Change isn't easy, it doesn't always happen quickly, and it will be met with great opposition but it needs to happen and the arts are and have always been the perfect starting point. When Marvel debuted the Black Panther in FANTASTIC FOUR #52 in July of 1966 (NOT, as some would have us believe, the first black super-hero...That was Lion Man in 1947...but certainly the first mainstream black super-hero) it was a direct reaction to the civil rights movement. For every letter of hate he received, he received two of support from young, black readers who finally saw themselves represented in the pages of super-hero comics. Not a side-kick. Not comedy relief. Not a valet or a servant but a HERO. A KING.

I have watched as the audience for comics has grown. Sitting at a con table, now, is such a different experience from sitting at a con table twenty years ago. I see more women, more people of color, more queer teens, all finding a home in our community and it's a beautiful thing. It truly, truly is. These people...people who love comics or animation or sci fi or gaming...are my people. OUR people. They're our family.

I don't think I need to tell you that things are getting bad, out there. It seems like the bad guys are winning. We have leaders who are using pages from the Fascist playbook as guidelines for their policies. Like any fascist government, they are singling out particular people to lay blame for the issues we're having. It's Germany, 1938 all over again but, instead of the Jewish community, they're targeting the Trans community or immigrants whose skin doesn't match their accepted shade of brown. See, nothing makes miserable people more compliant than having someone else to blame for their misery but, brothers and sisters, please be clear: Trans people are not to blame for your misery, Latino migrant workers aren't taking your jobs, black Captain America didn't cause your divorce, and a queer man of color playing a Galifreyan Time Lord was not responsible for your being passed on for that promotion.

People are being treated like enemies of the state for being who they are. Many of these people are part of our nerdy community. They're family. When someone threatens members of our family, it's time for us to roll up the ol' sleeves and stand before the gate. Not to keep it closed, but to keep it open. To let people know that it's a safe, welcoming place for everyone. It's time for those of us who create art to start creating art with purpose. Art with teeth. Art that fights back.

What is it that ol' Albus Dumbledore tells Harry in GOBLET OF FIRE? Oh, right: "We must all face the choice between what is right and what is easy". It would be far simpler to simply keep our heads down and ignore what's happening around us, but it wouldn't be right.

Decide what side of history you're going to be on. I know I have. ■

### RECOMMENDED READING

MARCH (books 1-3) and RUN by The late Senator John Lewis and Andrew Aydin with art by Nate Powell



# Shove Ha'Penny For Your Thoughts

*A look at the historical game of Shove Ha'Penny*  
-Craig Israel

Shove Ha'penny is a simple game of skill for two players or two teams. Players take turns sliding a coin down the board, trying to place it completely between the two lines of a numbered zone, called a bed.

The game that would evolve into Shove Ha'penny is believed to have originated in the 1500s. One popular origin theory is that it began as an impromptu after-meal game among the aristocracy. The dining tables would be cleared of dishes and the Lords would take turns sliding coins down the length of the long, narrow tables. Whoever managed to get their coin closest to the edge without going over was declared the winner. Alternatively, the game may have begun in pubs, where drinkers would play the same game on the long public tables—loser buys the next round.

Whether it began, it was greatly enjoyed by all classes. In addition to being popular in pubs, it is recorded 1532 that King Henry VIII lost £54 in one evening playing "shovell-board." That's more than \$70,000 US today.

The long narrow tables of shove-board, some 40 feet or longer, were eventually replaced with smaller tabletop versions, averaging three to four feet in length. The game came to be known as Shove Groat in honor of the most popular coin used in play, the English four pence coin, known colloquially as the groat. Later, the board shrunk ever further, and the old English

half-penny (ha'penny) became the coin of choice, giving the game the name that endures to today: Shove Ha'penny. The game fell out of fashion in the 1800s, replaced by billiards as the go-to parlor game.

## HOW TO PLAY

1. Coins placed hanging over the near edge of the board, then are slid down the length of the board using a single hand only. Players can use their palm, back of the hand, ball of the thumb, or any other part of the hand to propel the coin. However, players cannot flick a coin
2. Coins must be completely between

to make your board. The simplest version can be built with a 12x24" piece of 1/2" or 3/4" plywood. The scoring lines can be drawn on or carved into the wood using a straightedge and the edge of a flathead screwdriver. Just remember to decide first on what coin you will use to play, and space out the beds accordingly.

A more robust board can be made with the same 12x24" plywood board and adding a frame of solid wood around the edges. This will make the board sturdier and hide the ugly plywood. Adding a piece of wood for a backboard will keep the coins from sliding off the far end.

Finally, if you cut shallow scoring lines with



the lines to score. Anything touching a line or hanging over the side of the board does not count.

3. If a coin fails to reach the first line on a turn, it can be retrieved and replayed without penalty.
4. Players can shove coins into other coins to attempt to bump them into a scoring position. Coins can also be ricocheted off the backstop and back into play.

Once a coin scores three times in a numbered bed, that bed is closed. Additional coins landing there do nothing. The first player to close out all nine beds wins!

## BUILD YOUR OWN

Shove Ha'penny is a simple project that can be completed in an hour or more, depending on how elaborate you want

a table saw or router you unlock another aspect of the game: when there's doubt if a coin is touching a line or not, slide another coin upright along the groove. If the coin in question moves at all, it doesn't count." ■

Learn more about the rules, history, and strategy of Shove Ha'penny as well as how to build your own board, check out these links.

**RULES/HISTORY/STRATEGY:** <https://youtu.be/0Z5qHshHAVs>

### BUILD VIDEO:

<https://youtu.be/kQhQqFtx68U>





# SPOTLIGHT ON



## THE GAME MANUFACTURERS ASSOCIATION

### A Peek Inside the GAMA EXPO

- Justin Rood

Conventions are nothing new to gamers of any genre, whether they're deep in the hobby or just a dabbler. "Cons" like the Origins Game Fair and GenCon are can't-miss social events for tabletop gamers. E3 used to be the most important time of the year for video gamers before it was hollowed out by publishers and abandoned. We're all used to big geek media news coming out of the San Diego and New York Comic Cons. In the last week of February, one of the most important conventions for non-video gaming of all kinds was held. The hobby as a whole was discussed, dissected, celebrated, and guided for the year ahead. And the event is one that most gamers have never heard of before.

Most gamers who know of The Game Manufacturers Association, usually just abbreviated to GAMA, know of it because of the Origins Game Fair. GAMA was originally created to support the interests of Origins, though the non-profit has grown beyond that original mission to become the premier trade organization of tabletop gaming. Whether board games, miniatures games, collectible trading card games (TCGs), role-playing games, or any other variety, it all falls under GAMA's umbrella. As a gamer, you may never have heard of GAMA but you have benefited from

the organization. Your local game store is probably a member and has gotten advice and support for their business. Many of the products on their shelves came into being through GAMA connecting creators to distributors and publishers. GAMA is in more places than most gamers will ever know.

In the last week of February, the 2025 GAMA Expo was held in Louisville, Kentucky. Your humble correspondent and our editor, Robert Gratton, were in attendance to shed light on an organization that is usually behind the scenes and bring awareness to a group that labors to ensure, in their own words, "a game on every table, a table for everyone."

With the links to the Origin Game Fair, it might be easy to think GAMA is a regional group. Just a few hours at GAMA Expo will reveal the sheer scope of GAMA's membership. At a table in The Galt House, a legendary hotel in Louisville overlooking the Ohio river, we chatted with a distributor of indie games from Washington and a game store owner from a small city just outside of Yellowstone in Wyoming. Members from as far afield as the United Kingdom were in attendance. GAMA might not span the entire world yet, but it's closer to it than might be expected.

The throngs of attendees were evidenced by just how many of the seminars and lessons were packed full. Many sessions were standing room only and in others, even the standing room was full. Attendees who had come together would rotate which of them were in the room so everyone in the group could get some time in sessions they really wanted to attend.

Not that there was any lack of classes and seminars to choose from. The scope of the gaming industry and GAMA were on display here as well. There were practical lessons on how to use specific apps and software like Shopify or Google Business for retailers wanting to add more tech savvy to their store's online footprint. Attorneys from Dentons Law Firm, GAMA's outside counsel, conducted sessions on complex legal issues, such as Intellectual Property. Indie game de-



velopers held sessions using their experience to give guidance on how to get games made and into the market. Experienced pros who had worked for the biggest companies in gaming shared insights and lessons learned so that the up and comers wouldn't have to learn the hard way.

Sessions such as the highly attended "State of the Industry" laid out the performance and trends in gaming from 2024. Types of games such as RPGs and CCGs were discussed in terms of general performance but also on what products had gone par-





ticularly well. Readers of previous issues will no doubt recall how so many of our interviewees mentioned the public health crisis of a few years ago as a cause to the boom of gaming, coming itself on the heels of a boom of board games specifically. The good news for gaming and gamers is that the industry has continued to build on that boom, though much more modestly, in each year since. 2024 was no exception, with overall gaming being 70% above where it was in 2019. The past year was the 16th straight year of growth for the gaming hobby industry, with the overall trend being one of generally upward stabilization.

There was plenty of information about uncertainty ahead for gaming, as it is for many industries. The then-unknown tariff situation created a great deal of tension about how costs could change for manufacturing and distribution. Board games were pointed out as being particularly at risk if tariffs come into play given that this sector of the hobby would be more impacted than others. The elephant in the room of the entire industry, however, was the bankruptcy of Diamond Distribution and how it would impact the ability to stock shelves and get product to market. While Alliance, the Diamond subsidiary that handles gaming, is the best situated of any of Diamond's branches and is thus practically guaranteed to be bought and

due to increasing costs of everything from material to shipping. There was a lot of commiseration about these worries but more than any of that, these discussions were about awareness of risks. Knowing where the potential pitfalls are is the first step in avoiding the worst of them and GAMA makes sure to keep members informed.

Information was far from all the Expo offered to members. There were also many opportunities to play games, not just talking about selling and distributing them. Rooms were available for live playtesting, allowing games not yet at market to be played and refined, feedback not just encouraged but actively sought. There were sessions where developers could practice the pitch for their game, whether in the pitch version of speed dating with one another or by doing your pitch before a Shark Tank-like group of pros. Games at levels of pre-production were present, some almost complete and undergoing final testing and some that were the only prototype roughed out using tools from the developer's home. Big companies like Wizards of the Coast and Games Workshop had a presence at the Expo, but they aren't the ones GAMA exists for. Those companies have game development and playtesting all their own; these opportunities were there for the indies and up-and-comers, pushing the organization's stated idea that there's a player out there for every game so they try to get as many games as possible into publication.

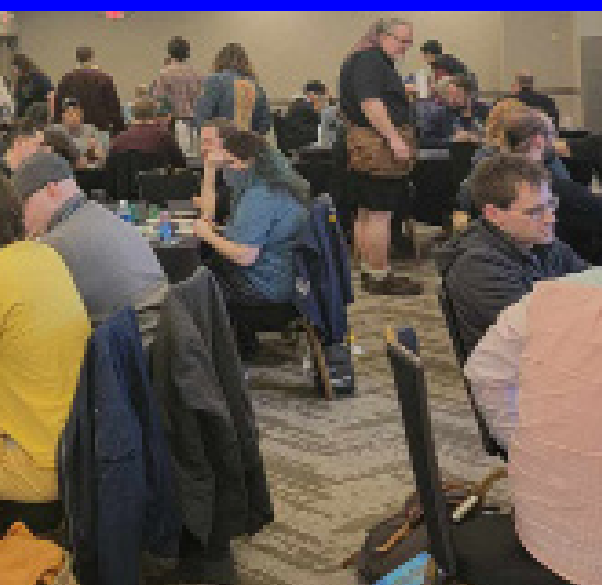
The massive Exhibit Hall, which opened on Wednesday of the Expo, is another way of doing this. Hundreds of stalls are set up for retailers, publishers, and developers, all for the purposes of making the connections and deals they need. This is where those practiced pitches come into play to try and convince publishers to pick up a developer's new game. Retailers can check out new and upcoming products to order ahead of time and plan for the year ahead. This is where a lot of the real wheeling and dealing is done at the Expo, a prime opportunity for anyone in the industry whether established

or looking to break in. The anticipation for the Exhibit Hall and the determination to succeed inside it grew each day as goals took clearer shape for the attendees.

Achieving those goals is the entire point of GAMA as an organization and the Expo as an event. Through networking, knowledge sharing, and education, the members of GAMA are positioned to work together for as many as possible to succeed. Trade shows can be strange events, given that they're made up of presenters and attendees who are all competitors in the same industry. There can be a sense of everyone keeping their cards close to their chest, attending out of practical need but not wanting to give away an advantage to rivals. GAMA Expo wasn't like that. The word "competition" wasn't even mentioned. Instead, the focus was on cooperation. The philosophy of GAMA can be expressed with the old chestnut of a rising tide lifts all boats but was perhaps more simply put forth by GAMA Member Services Director Bryan Borgman at a question session for new members on the first day of the Expo, "If I can make money, you can

make money."

Through every class and seminar, from the keynote speech to the last wrap up, this spirit of success through cooperation was at the core of every scrap of content at the GAMA Expo. There was an unspoken understanding that everyone in the industry is in it together, and at the end of the day, all are gamers. Everyone there had games they love. Games that made their lives better and even changed them for the better. They know there's a game out there which will be "that" game for everyone. The dedication of GAMA's leadership and staff to their mission of making sure those games are out there to be found came through. If you're someone who wants to get into the industry, if you have an idea for a game but don't know where to start, if you're looking to run a store, give GAMA a look. GAMA Expo proved without a doubt their commitment to helping everyone in tabletop business to succeed. They have a vision and the tools to live up to it. "A game on every table, a table for everyone." ■



operated by some company, just who and what changes that buyer will make remain a lurking fear.

Uncertainty, due to both the above and other factors, was a recurring theme in conversations at the Expo. 2025 had already been chaotic, even in February, and was expected, accurately, to only become more so. Broader economic uncertainty means when people are likely to spend less on hobbies and new games, relying on those they already have. Plenty of games already have a degree of sticker shock when people see the prices and many are likely to grow



# Toupee Terrain

## A Foilage Tutorial

- Jasper Troncoso

Have you ever wanted to make an immersive display of tall grass for your tabletop wargame experience, but lack the confidence, patience, and funds to make it happen?

In this short tutorial, I will show you how to take a bland cheap wig from your local dollar store and turn it into large grass fields or simple patches for bases and dioramas.

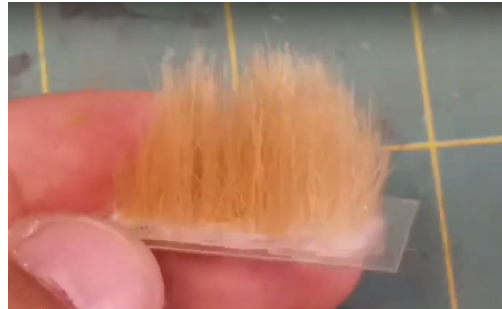


**STEP 1:** Cut bundles of the "hair" into small stacks. Depending on how tall or short you want them. I recommend cutting the bundles in various heights for a natural look when applied to your bases.



**STEP 2:** There are two ways to easily apply your grass depending on the size you want to cover. If you have modular boards that are medium to large sizes, use a spray adhesive such as Super 77 or any kind of your choice. Before spraying protect and cover all of the surrounding areas of the table or floor where you will be spraying. Spray adhesives are very sticky and can ruin your furniture and clothes. As a safety precaution wear gloves to prevent any of that glue from getting on your fingers. Once you have let the glue sit for about 5 seconds, begin to apply the hair bundles you have collected in the previous step. Grab your bundles and dab them onto the glued surface as upright as possible. This application of the tall grass works best if you have large areas you want to cover and will save you a lot of time. You will notice that much of the hair strands will flake out of formation and won't look pretty, but that is a part of this process. After about 2 to 3 minutes vacuum all

of the floating strands that will be laying sideways as much as you can. If you do not own a vacuum with a hose extension, gently comb off all of the loose fibers until you are satisfied. At this point, your adhesive should have been able to lock in the grass you want to keep in place, so don't worry about the vacuum messing up your progress. Before moving on to step 3 inspect the areas of grass and trim down all of the outstanding strands. This is always a great opportunity to refine the look of the grass to make it look more natural. Cut random heights for a more organic appeal. Make sure the scissors are very sharp and away from your fingers. If possible use a hair clipper the same way a barber would, in the end, it should look something similar to the picture below. Please note that results



will be different on an individual basis. For smaller projects such as bases, the second method of application can be more efficient. Make smaller bundles of grass and separate them by groups.

I recommend using a very small amount of super glue at the bottom of each bundle to bond all the strands together as shown in the image below



**STEP 3:** Now begins the fun part, adding colors to the grass. In this stage of the project there really are not any incorrect ways to paint. You can use an airbrush for smoother, quicker painting. If you don't have an airbrush, don't fret! This is still a simple process. From my experience I recommend less expensive acrylic paints, not expensive paints. I like to use various green colors from acrylic paint brands such as "Americana" and "Craftsmart", which are available in every single color for less than \$2 at any arts and craft stores.

The importance of letting your grass and glue fully cure cannot be overstated. Allow



the project to fully cure or dry over night in order to insure a strong bonding. Painting will consist of a lot of dabbing up and down. Dilute your paints with water and



apply random colors from your selection. Once you've dabbed in all those colors, wet your brush and blend everything together. Work the paints in the hair bristles the same way you would when using dye. This means you will remove a lot of paint, leaving behind the stained colors. As you do this, naturally the bristles will stick together the more wet they are. To separate them use your paint brush to comb them out and use a hair dryer to evaporate the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 9





water. I recommend using a medium or large size square synthetic dry brush. Painting in a dabbing motion will beat up your brushes very quickly, but those square dry brushes are perfect for this.

**STEP 4:** After you have applied the colors of your choice, let everything dry for a few hours, vacuum or comb away any additional loose particles that might have emerged and you are done. In the pictures below you will see examples of the end results including the bundles I showed in previous steps. The saturation of colors on your grass will vary depending on how much paint you add. The more, the stronger the colors will look it is all personal preference.

As a finishing touch you can press and bend the grass to simulate wild growth of grass and everyone will ask you " how did you



make the grass"

In conclusion you don't need static grass applicators or expensive tools and materials if you are on a tight budget, this technique will allow anyone from beginner to advance to recreate a high quality grass effect for all your creative miniature master pieces and gaming terrains ■



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# State of the Series

## Are You The Problem or AI?

By: David "Blue" Wendt

Come on in, I'm just sitting and enjoying the sounds of spring rain.

If I recall correctly, last time I promised (threatened) to talk about my perspective on Generative AI. (A quick reminder, as a PhD statistician and as an active manager of AI Governance and Innovation for my company. So, I've spent a lot of time thinking about Gen AI and the ethics around it.)

First, let's talk about a little history of our hobby

One of the first RPG books I got my hands on was the first edition AD&D Dungeon Masters Guide. For those of you who are unfamiliar, Gary Gygax and his collaborators filled the appendix with dozens of random tables to help the DM both at the table and while preparing their adventures.

Even today, I have easily a dozen books dedicated to random tables to help with preparation and insights. They are incredibly useful tools, particularly when I need inspiration.

So what, you ask, does that have to do with Generative AI?

Some background on Artificial Intelligence. AI is not new. The term itself was coined 70 years ago in a paper entitled "A PROPOSAL FOR THE DARTMOUTH SUMMER RESEARCH PROJECT ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE" submitted by J. McCarthy, M. L. Minsky, N. Rochester, and C.E. Shannon. (I know this is a paper magazine, but I include the link for you to peruse - there is some very interesting stuff. <https://www-formal.stanford.edu/jmc/history/dartmouth/dartmouth.html>)

In the paper the postulate many things that we take for granted today:

- Automatic Computers. "If a machine can do a job, then an automatic calculator can be programmed to simulate the machine. The speeds and memory capacities of present computers may be insufficient to simulate many of the higher functions of the human brain...."
- Programming Languages for computers.
- Neuron Nets - which are the forerunners of Neural Nets - the technology necessary to make modern Gen AI happen.
- And perhaps most relevant to this discussion: Randomness and Creativity. "A fairly attractive and yet clearly incomplete conjecture is that the difference between creative thinking and unimaginative competent thinking lies in the injection of a some randomness. The randomness must be guided by intuition to be efficient."

In other words, the educated guess or the hunch include controlled randomness in otherwise orderly thinking."

So that idea of randomness (particularly as linked to creativity) in an AI is not new. Not new

by a long shot.

Why then the uproar about Generative AI, particularly in our hobby?

I think it is driven in part by a lack of understanding about AI and Gen AI.

FIRST, AI cannot yet reason, despite what the technologists say. Traditional AI (or as I prefer Deterministic AI) does what it is told - full stop. There is no randomness. If you input the same information, you get the same output every time. Kind of like book marking the old DMG. If I flip to the Appendix for dungeon dressing, I will see the exact same content every time.

Generative AI (or Non-Deterministic AI) has randomness at its core, but it cannot create new concepts. Gen AI first has to absorb massive amounts of information. This initial "model training" is incredibly expensive - both in dollars and computational power. This training is done by computers that might feel like they come from Science Fiction. They are literally so hot and so heavy, that specific storage places must be made for them. And this level of hardware really hasn't been available until relatively recently.

There is then a second set which is what we all interact with. This is the step where we ask the AI for something and it brings something back. But how is it doing that? Well, essentially that first training step has created a massive amount of mind-bogglingly big random tables. And when it is generating an answer, it looks at everything that has gone before, rolls a virtual die, and looks up the next "thing" it should produce.

Each of these "things" is small. A word, a pixel, a note. But by building up the response piece by piece, the Gen AI can emulate what looks like thinking - because it has trained on our output and how we capture our thoughts and creativity. This is an incredibly powerful tool - but also dangerous.

There are many risks around Gen AI, but I'm going to focus on two:

- Gen AI is a really fast and really eager intern. It knows nothing, but it knows how to look things up. Unfortunately, if it can't find what you are looking for, it will make things up. This leads to misinformation or hallucinations. This also means that we should always have a human around to keep an eye on output.
- Gen AI is only as good as and can only respond with the materials it is trained on. Early on, technologists were not thinking about creative rights. They just wanted to make a thing work. (Does this remind anyone else of Jurassic Park?) Today, most major public/paid models actively exclude IP, copyrighted material, et al. Instead they focus on publicly available information and public domain materials when training. It CANNOT create anything new, it can only combine things in a random way within the constraints it is given.

This second point is where the trouble kicks in. Creatives see computers "creating" new works and rightfully are concerned about the impact on their chosen career. Yes, non-creatives can create documents and images much more quickly than ever before. And on the surface, they might have

some merit, but I postulate that they will never be as good as something created from scratch. Those creations are most better suited for brainstorming and prototyping.

In the hands of a DM, Generative AI is the fastest and most complete set of random tables they could ever lay hands on. And better yet, if you have a computer open, you can rely on your chosen AI to generate ideas on the fly - need an NPC, all you need to do is ask. Images can be more problematic in the sense that they take more iterations to get what you want, but a clever DM can have some custom set pieces prepared before the session without resorting to their own drawing abilities or stealing something from the internet.

I don't believe these uses steal from creatives. However, when you move from personal use to publishing, this is where things get (a lot) iffier. Minimally, publishers or others selling creative works should:

- Be transparent about any and all use of Generative AI in their creation. (To that end - NO Gen AI was used in the creation of this article.)
- Verify that their Gen AI models of choice have sourced their training data ethically.
- Endeavor to incorporate traditional creative work to the fullest degree their skills, resources, and budgets allow.

Does this solve the problem of potentially tapping or recreating someone else's work? Not entirely, in part because we as humans are always mimicking what has gone before. Artists learn by copying other artists. Writers learn by copying other authors. Musicians take inspiration from those who have gone before. As a result, similarities will spring up.

In closing,

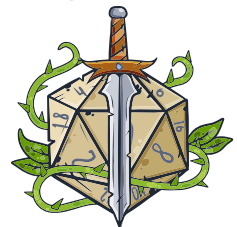
- Randomness will always be part of our hobby.
- AI and the idea of creative computers is a lot older than most people think.
- Gen AI cannot think and cannot create original works.
- DMs should feel free to embrace the randomness of Gen AI to enhance their games.
- Publishers who want to use Gen AI should do so in a thoughtful and ethical manner.

As I say regularly in my day job, I have two wolves inside me. One that wants to run free and explore all the possibilities the Gen AI represents. And the other that wants to protect the pack, and sees the need for ethical guidelines around Gen AI in our hobby.

I hope this has been informative and I am open to more discussion on the topic.

But until next time, happy gaming! ■

Until this magazine gets a letter page, you can find me on BlueSky (@wwwendt.bsky.social) or Patreon (<https://www.patreon.com/DocBlue>).





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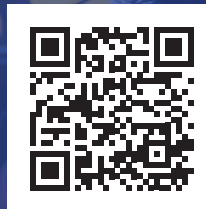
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# Local Daily Quests

Monday:	Dragon's Lair The GuardTower East The GuardTower West  The Warp Gate	May the Force be With You Mondays Magic The Gathering Warhammer Age of Sigmar  Magic The Gathering Legacy 7:30PM
Tuesday:	Dragon's Lair The GuardTower West  The Warp Gate	Player vs. Player Night Warhammer 40K  Magic The Gathering Modern 7:00PM MTG Free Cube Drafting 7:30pm
Wednesday:	Grimm's Keep The GuardTower East Dragon's Lair  The Warp Gate  Marche of Tirnewydd  The GuardTower West	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 Heroclix
Thursday:	Dragon's Lair The GuardTower West The FORGE Tavern The GuardTower East Canton of Pfedersdat  The Warp Gate	Paint and Take Crisis Protocol Thursday Trivia Night Youth DnD Armored and Rapier practice  Commander Open Play
Friday:	The GuardTower East The Soldierly Dragon's Lair The Warp Gate	Magic The Gathering MTG Casual Commander Friday Night Magic Casual Commander Magic The Gathering Draft 7:00PM Magic The Gathering Modern 7:30PM
Saturday:	The Soldierly The GuardTower West Dragon's Lair	MTG Casual Commander Warhammer 40K Youth Pokémon, All ages Pokémon, Lorcan*
Sunday:	Barony of the Middle Marches The GuardTower East  The GuardTower West  The Warp Gate	Armored and Rapier practice Magic The Gathering Open Play DnD  Bolt Action Sunday  Warhammer 40k Open Play Pokemon League 6-8PM