

An after event report by host Kevin Siembieda

The 2012 Open House was a smashing success on every level. For me personally, it was awesome. The most fun I have had at one yet. There were some oversights, glitches and problems, but we took care of them as quickly and efficiently as we could. What was important to me and the Palladium crew, was that

everyone

who attended seemed to have a wonderful time. From all the laughter I heard, smiling faces I saw and feedback I received, everyone had a blast. People certainly want us to host another one in 2014, but the verdict is still out on that.

Of course, everyone who attended will have enjoyed different experiences. The events and information I'm about to relate are entirely my own, sprinkled with my recollections of things told to me.

Pre-Open House Preparations

There is a ton of pre-event work to be done. Everything from dusting and cleaning of the offices and warehouse, to scrubbing toilets, sinks and floors, to rearranging the warehouse, to buying supplies, getting ready for the auction, and preparation of food, among other things. All of it is a lot more time consuming than you might think. Furthermore, there are only FIVE of us at Palladium and we can only do so much, so fast. While we have helpers and volunteers, there is a lot to be done days and even weeks before the Open House begins.

I think the place looked the best that it has ever looked, and was even more fun and inviting.

The castle. I came up with the bright idea of using some Halloween decorations Kathy and I had purchased a year ago, to make an area of the warehouse to look like castle walls. While the idea was mine, *Kathy Simmons* did ALL the work to make it happen. We used the material to create a wall to section off the Open Gaming Area from the Panel Talk area as well as to create a nice looking admissions area. We used more of the castle wall material to cover up racks of boxes and files. It worked perfectly and looked good.

Zombies. Kathy brought over a dozen of her “zombies” from her own Halloween display and attached them to the pillars of heavy pallet racks for additional ambiance. Since the **Endless Dead** E

™ zombie sourcebook was “the” new release of the Open House (arriving the day of VIP Thursday), we figured zombies made perfect sense. Kathy also had a pair of zombies in the front of the building and one in the loading dock.

Space, the final frontier. Meanwhile, I had Wayne move and combine pallets of books to create more open space for our gaming areas and to accommodate general ease of movement.

The panel area. Earlier this year I moved out of my apartment and in with my sweetheart, Kathy Simmons. I used my extra furnishings – couch, love seat, easy chair, and end tables – to create a more relaxed and comfy seating area from which to give panel talks. For the backdrop, I reconfigured Palladium’s convention displays covered with large posters and book covers.

The store area. We used the rolling shelves we take to Gen Con and other large conventions (as well as some other shelving) to create a sort of store area displaying all of our titles and other products. The setup looked impressive and was easy to navigate.

Auction Items. One of the things that always seems to take me a lot of time is preparing auction items. This involves not only digging up rare and unusual items people might enjoy, but bagging them, signing them (if applicable), framing art and prints, and then figuring out a price. Once that’s all done, I need to write a description and display them in an attractive manner.

New Product. This year we had a lot of new products. Three recent book releases, four new T-shirts, a new coffee mug and a few other things. T-shirts had to be folded and put into bags. *Kathy Simmons* did ALL of that; approximately 500 shirts. Mugs had to be displayed. A couple hundred sets of bookmarks had to be collated, packaged and displayed, as did everything else.

Another big job was sorting, tagging, pricing and hanging a slew of pewter **Rifts® miniatures**.
Carmen Bellaire

had spent his weekends for the last two months making Rifts® miniatures for us. He bagged them too. But we now had to sort them out by type, add a plastic hanger, price them and hang them on the display.

Nick Bradshaw

tackled that job, with some help from me and

Lisa Hall

. Lisa is a long-time friend who came in a couple days early to help.

Shawn Hall

had arrived a day before his wife and worked on warehouse repairs, cleaning, bookmarks and a number of other projects to help get us ready. He and Lisa were a tremendous help during the event too.

Nick, Lisa, Shawn, Carmen, Doug Lamberson

and

Joe Bergmans

are all from out of state, so their early arrival and help was really something special and greatly appreciated. Thank you, everyone.

Endless Dead™. We always try to give our customers the best service possible. Consequently, we were thrilled to learn our newest zombie sourcebook for **Dead Reign™** would arrive and ship the Wednesday before the Open House. Only it didn't happen.

There was a slight delay, and the book arrived around noon on *VIP Thursday*. It was cool that we'd have the book in time for the

Open House

, but I hated the idea of not shipping it till the following week. In a moment of inspiration or sheer madness, I decided we had enough people to help us sort, pack and ship pre-orders and distributor orders that afternoon! Yes, it was probably a little ambitious and a tad foolish, as it did put us behind by 2-3 hours and made us a bit unprepared for people showing up at 4:00 PM for VIP night. However, we were able to get the books out to our customers and make those not at the Open House happy. Win-win in my book. Besides, we were all so tired

after

the event, it was good not to have to deal with shipping a new book on Monday or Tuesday.

Securing Parking. This was done three weeks earlier. It required me talking to my neighbors and getting them to agree to let us use their parking. The company on the corner and the one behind us were happy to help, but the other one we used to use was unavailable. Thankfully, the owner of a building across the street and kiddie corner from Palladium allowed us to use his parking. We barely had enough room for everyone. Whew. We sent each of these good neighbors a box of pastries and cookies to say thank you.

In between all this we were helping customers, making badges, printing the collectible Certificate of Admission, printing out directions and other forms, and doing the game schedule and sign up sheets – much of which fell to *Wayne Smith*.



Thank goodness for our helpers. *Kathy, Wayne, Joe and I* – with help from our friends and volunteers – handled putting out fires, dealing with problems and troubleshooting.

Joe Bergmans, Chris Guertin, Lisa

and

Shawn Hall

, and

Doug Lamberson

were huge in helping take care of customers and purchases. Artist and pal,

Nick Bradshaw

was another guy who was quick to help on every front, from clean up, to tear down and a range of other things. We'd have been lost without them.

Val Conder

and

Paul Deckert

were also welcomed helpers. A number of gamers also pitched in at pivotal moments to help when we needed them most. Thank you all so very much.

Designing Gaming Events. Figuring out the games you want to run, working out the adventure and rolling up pre-generated characters for players is an entire job in and of itself. Julius spent months prepping for his seven different games. So do a lot of our volunteer Game Masters (some of the finest in the land).

There was other stuff to get done, but the above are the most salient points. By the end of it all, we generally feel like we've run a marathon.

And then the actual event begins.



2012 Palladium Open House VIP Thursday, May 3

VIP Thursday officially opens its doors at 4:00 PM, but people start to dribble in around 3:00 PM. That's okay, as early arrivals are likely to find themselves asked to help out. Palladium fans being the amazing people they are, they cheerfully pitched in. Again, thank you.

Everyone who arrived got a free copy of **Mutants in Avalon™** (suitable for use with the **After the Bomb® RPG** and **Heroes Unlimited** ; adaptable to other Palladium game settings) and a pencil inscribed with the warning: *Do Not Remove. Property of the Chi-Town Library* . They also got their name badge and Certificate of Attendance.

I tried to greet people at the door as they entered, but inevitably, there were fires for me to put out and pull me away.

The VIP Dinner. For those of you who don't know, *Kathy Simmons* is an amazing cook. She has done professional catering and made wedding cakes for years, long before she came to work at Palladium. To help keep costs down, Kathy prepares *all* the food (except the chicken) herself. Without help. It is a herculean task to feed 140 people, but

somehow, she manages it. Wow. As you might expect, it takes a heavy toll on Kathy. To get it all done, she went 38 hours without sleep. Crazy. Kathy set up and supervised the entire warehouse, as well as dinner, and helped process orders and manage the event all weekend! People marveled at how she was everywhere and never seemed to stop moving. Honestly, we could NOT do the Open House without Kathy.

The VIP Dinner Menu:

- Kathy's famous potato salad.
- Noodle salad.
- Leafy salad.
- Mostaccioli and meatballs.
- Sauerkraut and kielbasa.
- Tuna salad sandwiches on croissants.
- Egg salad sandwiches on croissants.
- Turkey and cheese sandwiches on croissants.
- Breaded, baked chicken from **Lee's** (a great local place in Plymouth).
- Cupcakes for dessert, plus some store bought pastries.
- Soft drinks, coffee and hot chocolate. No alcohol.

5:30 PM (right on time) – dinner is served. During dinner, I greet and mingle with our guests, and help out as necessary.

7:00 PM – Opening Ceremonies. I gave a brief talk and opened the session up to questions and answers. This is always fun for me and those attending.

8:00 PM – Gaming began. I don't run Thursday evening as I find it better to walk around, talk with people and sign books. So that's what I do.

9:30 PM (or so) – I hosted a panel talk and opened it up to more questions and answers. More fun and laughter ensues. I welcomed the many questions, comments, stories and

suggestions. It was fun.

Around 11:00 PM, Kathy Simmons and I head home. We'll be up bright and early the next morning and we need to be relatively fresh. I think we were both out like a light seconds after our heads hit the pillow. However, a bunch of people went to the midnight showing of **Marvel's The Avengers**

. We are fortunate to have a couple of excellent movie theaters only five minutes away, so people had an easy time seeing the movie. Of course, everyone was raving about it the next day. Thankfully people were very good about not spoiling it for others. We saw The Avengers a week later and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves.

Gaming continued at the warehouse till around 1:30 AM when Julius cleared everyone out. Two conference rooms – one small and posh, the other a small hall that can accommodate 10 gaming tables – were made available at the hotel for those who desired to game into the wee hours of the morning.



Some Gaming Event Notes and Highlights

ALL Open House Game Masters are volunteers. Many are also *Palladium* creators like *Bran don Aten, Carmen Bellaire, Steven Dawes, Glen Evans, Scott Gibbons, Paul Herbert, Irvin Jackson, Madman Mike Leonard, Mark Oberle, Taylor White* and others. Some G.M.s are Megaversal Ambassadors like *James Brown*

and

Lonnie Langston

, or just outstanding G.M.s who go all out!

Hendrik

from Germany created character sheets patterned after real World War II documents and incorporated real photographs. They were gorgeous.

Isaac Xavier-Santos

presented each player with an actual Lazlo Agency dossier that looked amazing and he ran a 12 hour game session! If that sounds crazy (it did to me), the players in Isaac's game loved every minute of it, as I heard nothing but rants and raves about his epic game (as well as many other games). G.M.s who ran three or more games got a free T-shirt, a 30% discount on purchases and the fun of running at the Palladium Open House, which is a very meaningful experience for many people.

All of this results in some of the best Game Masters around running these events. That's only fair as we have found the players who come to the Open House also tend to be top-notch role-players. I can tell you that having such excellent players makes running these games an absolute joy for the G.M.s as well as the players.

Julius Rosenstein spent FIVE MONTHS planning and creating his games. This year, as usual, he ran 7 different adventures in various Palladium settings.

1. Dead Reign™ of the Red Dane – for Dead Reign™.
2. The Mighty Dwarven Power Rangers – for Palladium Fantasy®.
3. A Day at the Park – for Beyond the Supernatural™.
4. Human Weapons, Part Two – for Heroes Unlimited™.
5. The League of Egyptordinary Gentlemen – for Rifts®.
6. Moonwalk – a cross genre/Megaversal game.
7. Showdown at Apache Wells – a Western game using Palladium Fantasy RPG® rules.

Carmen Bellaire ran another epic extravaganza using miniatures and an entire city-scape. He made Open House history by being defeated in his own game by the players. Carmen is a gaming maniac and had lost most of his voice by Saturday. Still, he managed to make several video-interviews with me and Palladium staff writers and artists which he's posting on YouTube. See for yourself at: youtube.com/user/Maloquinn

James Brown also runs using miniatures and had his very cool dungeon set-up in place.

Scott Gibbons ran game after game of his improved and evolving Rifts® board game. Wayne and I had intended to play, but somehow we just never had the time to do so. I heard a lot of positive feedback about the game and look forward to playing it. (Scott left a copy of it for us to peruse, not that we've had time to do so yet. As of May 16, as I write this, we have been working like crazy to catch up with work and get back to releasing new products.) Scott is a frequent contributor to The Rifter® and an all-around nice guy. If I met his wife Gwen before (I think I have), I couldn't remember with certainty. It was nice meeting their son, Jacob, who is a natural born gamer. All three of the Gibbons family members played in Game Three of my DeSilca Aftermath game.

There were are many wonderful games – laughter, shouts, and cheering filled the Palladium warehouse from Thursday to Sunday. My thanks to all the Game Masters, whether they ran one or many games. Each and every one of you are appreciated. As are the 230+ gamers who came to the 2012 Open House.

As for myself, for a long while I struggled with what I was going to run. Then, one morning I woke up with the perfect idea. Part of my problem is I need to spread my time out between many duties during the Open House. Not least of which is being available to chat with people, sign books, host panel talks, give tours, host the auction, MC the Costume Contest, and help run the darn event. To enable as many players to game with me as possible (I ran roughly 75 people in two days), I decided to limit each game session to two hours. (Though advertised as 90 minutes, I made sure I had at least 30 minutes to run over if desirable, which it usually was.)

What I came up with was a thrill for me, a blast for the players and epic in scope. **It was a Palladium Fantasy RPG**

® story arc spread over six games, with six different groups of players, totaling about 13 hours to create one epic story, gamed out in chapters. Each player group played the same set of characters and picked up where the last group of gamers left off. It was a truly wonderful experience for me and, I'm happy to report, for most of the participants. It ran smoothly and even better than I had imagined.

Note:

The entire summary of my six-part game is at the end of this POH Report. The reason I included it at all is that dozens and dozens of people asked me to do so, even some who heard about it but didn't get to play. I tried to write it in an interesting way and hope you enjoy it.

Friday – May 4, 2012

Friday is a day of gaming. Many games started at 9:00 and 9:30 AM and gamers were lining up by 8:30.

I decided to have fun with my games and experiment a bit. You can read the summary of the entire six part adventure at the end of this Open House Report. Suffice it to say, I had blast. One of the things I love about the Open House is the caliber of the gamers. Most are seasoned players and into characters, story and role-playing. Of course, I have fun playing with novices as well, and I had a few newbies in some of my games and they took to role-playing like ducks to water. Honestly, I would never have known they were new to gaming other than the fact that they told me. Genevieve was especially impressive. I'm always surprised how well most players work together, even though they don't know each other or their respective gaming styles.

I was also pleased with myself. All Game Masters know that sometimes you are at the top of your game and other times you are not. Well, Friday, I was on fire.

The rest of the day for me was spent in chatting with people, signing autographs, hosting panel talks, troubleshooting and having fun. Friday flew by for me; it felt like 8 hours, not 16.

Saturday – May 5, 2012

Kathy and I felt like we had been run over by a truck on Saturday morning, requiring some effort to crawl out of bed at 6:00 AM. However, after we got moving and showered, we were rockin'. I think I got to the warehouse around 7:45 AM and started to straighten up and do some prep work for the auction later that evening. *Bill Korsak* appeared minutes later both Friday and Saturday to lend a hand. He was a big help taking out trash, cleaning off tables, dumping ice into coolers and straightening up the place for the new day. Bill is a local gamer and G.M. who regularly lends Palladium a hand. Thanks, Bill.

Joe Bergmans, Chris Guertin, Lisa and Shawn Hall, Doug Lamberson and other helpers would also show up a while later to lend a hand and help us run the show throughout the day.

Games raged on and people had fun. I ran the last two chapters of the DeSilca Aftermath. One at 9:30 AM and the other at 1:30 PM. I didn't feel quite as "on" as I was Friday, but we

rocked. Both games started a little late, but ran long. There was fun for all.

At 6:00 PM, games were suspended for the **Costume Contest** and Auction. We had a batch of great contestants, including Sco

tt Gibbons

who set himself

on fire

to portray a

Rifts® Elemental Fusionist

. Okay, it was only his gloved hand, but it was cool. (FYI: Fire extinguishers were at the ready in case something went wrong.) Though there were fewer entries than past years, the costumes were clever, Erin Tarn was present (or at least someone claiming to be her), and the competition was great fun.

The Elemental Fusionist

(Scott Gibbons) won first place in the Rifts®/science fiction category,

the Nightbane

(Dan Deluca) won for Modern/Horror, and the

Ley Line Walker

costume won Best of Show. That's the second time the Line Walker took the Best of Show.

However, it was especially tough deciding who should win what, especially in the Modern/Horror category.





8:00 AM - The day follows with the usual great program, signed some talks, bidding, more books and
Sunday – May 6, 2012

By Sunday, we were all dragging me, Kathy, the Palladium staff, creators and the gamers in attendance. The doors opened at 9:00 AM, but the place didn't start filling up till ten.

Sunday is a short day, so the morning and early afternoon were spent playing in the last of the games, making final purchases, getting books signed, and saying goodbye.

I had toyed with running a 7th DeSilca Aftermath game for some players who had requested it, but I felt too spent to run a good game and bowed out. I apologize for disappointing you guys, but it was for the best. Not just because the game may have been lacking, but because it was good to be available to chat and to be available for the many hugs, handshakes and fond farewells. I did host a morning panel talk, signed a few hundred books and spent a little time with some of my creators. Funny, but I seldom get to spend much time with the Palladium freelance writers and artists at the Open House. Oh well.

Again the day seemed to speed by. One minute it was 9:00 AM and what felt like two hours later, it was 4:30 in the afternoon and the Open House was winding down to a close. I asked Nick Bradshaw to see if he could get some folks to help tear down tables and stack them and chairs while we still had people to help. I had to take care of some business in the office and when I came back out, two thirds of the rented tables and chairs had been put away. Thanks, everyone.

Palladium video interviews. As I noted earlier, *Carmen Bellaire* and *William Johnson* made several short video interviews with the many Palladium personalities. These interviews are being posted on YouTube. I think Carmen said there are already 8-10 available for viewing and he plans to post another 6-8 over the weekend of May 19th, and more to follow the weekend after that. Though they used a corner of my office, Carmen and Will's efforts are entirely *voluntary*, squeezed in between games they were running, and done so that those of you who couldn't

attend could still get to meet us and get to enjoy the interviews. The video interviews can be seen at:

[youtube.com/user/Maloquinn](https://www.youtube.com/user/Maloquinn)

On Sunday, Will couldn't make it, so Carmen had to host the last handful of interviews solo. That included the interview with me. However, I was so busy and in demand that we couldn't do my interview until 6:30 PM Sunday evening, after the Open House. I ended up doing three 10 minute interviews about the Open House and my DeSilca Aftermath games. **WAR**

NING:

Though I think these interviews are fun, Carmen and I were pretty wiped out and our voices fading. We were running on pure adrenaline, so I don't know how good the interviews will look. Also, the way it was set up, I've been told that I (and some of the freelancers) look smaller than we really are. I'm actually a bit taller than Carmen, but that's not apparent in the video. That's okay, I'm sure the interviews are all still fun. Take a peek and please spread the word.

Sometime around 8:00 PM I took a bunch of friends to dinner at Bennigan's near the "official" Open House hotel. When we walked through the front door we were met with applause by the 20 or so gamers already at the restaurant. That wonderful greeting was a pleasant and unexpected surprise. We wanted to join that group, but there was available seating for only 4-5 of us and we had 8 in our group. The waitress led us to another table and I enjoyed dinner with *Kathy Simmons, Wayne Smith, Carmen Bellaire, Joe Bergmans, Nick Bradshaw,* my old pal

Isaac Xavier-Santos

and his friend

Joe

. The food was good and the company excellent. We were later joined by

Hendrick Harterich

(from Germany), and several other people dropped by to chat for a few minutes or to offer one last goodbye. Though I joke that we felt and looked like the Avengers in the clip at the end of the credits, we were a bit more animated than that, and I sure hope we looked less beat up. Kathy and I headed home around 11:00 PM and enjoyed a good night's sleep.

Monday and Tuesday were clean-up and recovery, though, in a way, the Open House continued for us, as we spent most of Monday with

Will Hunter

(aka "Killer Cyborg"),

Matt Trem

(from the UK),

Hendrick Harterich

(from Germany),

Matthew Clements, Joe Bergmans

and

Nick Bradshaw

. In addition, several gaming pals dropped by in the morning to say goodbye on their way out. And Joe and Nick didn't leave till Tuesday afternoon. It was a nice way to wind down, though we all continued to drag for the rest of the week.

That's the Open House in a nutshell. Or at least a glimpse of it from my point of view. Everyone had fun and it was a total success. What follows is the *story* of my **DeSilca Aftermath games**. Enjoy and keep those imaginations burning bright.

– *Kevin Siembieda, Role-Playing Madman*

Kevin's Six Part DeSilca Aftermath Game – played with six groups of different players

Off and on for three decades (including several Palladium Open Houses), I have run a game known as **Lord DeSilca**. It was originally conceived for the first **Octoberfest Gaming Event** at the

DGC

(Detroit Gaming Center) in 1981 or 1982. It's a great game. People always enjoy it, and I have enjoyed seeing dozens of different player groups play the same characters in the same adventure. I find it very interesting to see how different players portray the same characters and respond in different ways to the same villains and challenges.

Here's the set-up for the Classic DeSilca: The sinister Lord DeSilca has ruled the city-state of Shadow Hollow for generations. It is no secret he consorts with Demon Lords and commands Lesser and Greater Demons. Lord DeSilca is a tyrant and a monster who rules with an iron fist. Over time, he used his dark magic and allegiance to demons to turn himself into a pseudo-demon or supernatural being with the head of a Jack-o-Lantern.

When word leaked out that Lord DeSilca had made a pact with the ruler of Hades (a plane of

Hell) to become a Lord of Hell himself, heroes from across the land came to stop him. All the evil wizard had to do was to complete a magic ritual at the stroke of midnight on Halloween and sacrifice an innocent virgin. (A child! Not a hot young lady.) If DeSilca succeeded, the entire town and everyone in it (including the heroes) would be transferred to the Pits of Hell where they would serve him as his first minions and slaves.

Many heroes came to stop DeSilca and failed. Most lost their lives. Others were tricked into following false leads. Some ran away before the stroke of midnight. Inevitably, the player characters – a group of unlikely heroes – succeed in stopping the evil madman. (I think only two groups out of something like 50 or 60 gaming groups have ever failed to save the day.)

In storybooks this would be a happy ending. Ah, but this is not a faerie tale.

I got to wondering, what happens to the town afterward? With DeSilca gone, there will be demons running wild, and other evil villains and forces vying to fill the power vacuum left by his destruction. The child needs to be reunited with his mother, and much more. That was it! I would run SIX games in which we would play out what happens AFTER DeSilca's defeat. Thus the title: **Lord DeSilca Aftermath**. It was epic. 15 hours of gaming by a total of 75 gamers, to reveal the story of what transpires.

Game One (Friday) starts out with our triumphant heroes coming into town.

The original game takes place on the outskirts of town in a secret underground lair beneath the cemetery, so the group must return to town. They have the 4 or 5 year old boy they rescued in tow. All he wants is to be reunited with Mommy. The group's plan is to reunite the child with his mother. They arrive to much fanfare where the townsfolk greet them as heroes. *Coltran of Wonders*, the group's arrogant Wizard, is happy to take credit for the defeat of DeSilca and weaves some magic to impress the crowd. The lady playing this character does a wonderful job playing him and wins the adulation of the crowd. The rest of the group is annoyed but says nothing to change the townspeople's perception that the Wizard is their leader. They parade the child around and ask if anyone knows the whereabouts of his mother, but nobody recognizes the child. He's not from these parts.

The celebrating continues, but the heroes don't have much time to enjoy themselves before an explosion a few blocks away sets a building on fire. The child wonders out loud if that might not be "Mommy," but before the group has time to ponder that statement, there are more screams

and panic in the street.

Demons run amok and people are in immediate danger. The Lady Elizabeth (a Knight) and the warriors rush off to save townspeople. They battle *Alu* and *Shedim demons* in the streets where everyone can witness their heroics. This impresses the townspeople and wins their sincere gratitude and adoration for the group. The child seems to be a target of a few specific attacks. One of the main culprits turns out to be the Scarecrow (or another one) the group fought and thought they slew to get to Lord DeSilca. The villain is mobilizing the assassin's guild and commands a couple of demons, including a Baal-Rog. He is making his move to fill the void left by DeSilca and become the new ruler of Shadow Hollow. He tries to buy off the group. When that fails, he sends the Baal-Rog and assassins at them.

Gryff the Wolfen and *Lady Elizabeth* are particularly valiant in protecting the child and townspeople, with Gryff drinking a Size of the Behemoth potion and taking on the Baal-Rog. However, they all fight as a team and every one of the heroes has a moment to shine, be they Dwarven Warrior, Ranger, Priestess, Wizard or Thief. Our heroes destroy the Scarecrow, the Baal-Rog and send the assassins fleeing. They win the day in dynamic fashion. Annoyed by the antics of Coltran of Wonders, the group lets the Wizard take the credit for leading them into battle. The crowd starts to chant, "Coltran, Coltran," while others cheer Lady Elizabeth. The heroes are offered food, drink and accolades for being truly noble heroes. Game one ends.

Game Two: Who is this kid, anyway?

Our heroes learn there is a bounty on the child's head. A substantial one. 300,000 gold is being offered by Beloc the Soul Stealer, reputed to be as powerful and wicked as Lord DeSilca. In fact, Beloc once served DeSilca before going his separate way. Presumably, Beloc is here to fill the void left by DeSilca. Why he wants the kid and is willing to pay so much, especially now that DeSilca is dead and gone, is perplexing. Moreover, there are at least two other individuals willing to match the price. One is on the other end of town at a local tavern known to be a hangout for thieves and assassins.

Someone in our band of heroes finally looks at the kid's aura. It registers immense P.P.E. and is definitely not human. After a few minutes of well put questions, it is revealed that the child is really a baby dragon in disguise. He is only a couple days old, quite innocent and learning how to use his abilities. "Mom" told him to metamorph into a human boy because people fear and distrust dragons. It all starts to make sense now. After all, it would take more than the blood sacrifice of an ordinary human child to teleport the entire city-state to the Pits of Hell.

The rest of the adventure involves more mysteries, revelations and several kidnapping attempts of the baby dragon by thieves and assassins.

Meanwhile, hundreds of townspeople, overconfident in their new heroes, follow them in mobs chanting “Coltran, Coltran” or “Lady Elizabeth” and cheering with every feat of heroics and daring-do. The person playing Coltran plays this to the max, winning hundreds of followers. The Priestess of Od tries to use her new-found fame to promote her god and establish followers. Meanwhile, Lady Elizabeth guards the kid with her life, and Gryff the Wolfen becomes one of the town’s favorite heroes as his courage and heroics make them realize not all Wolfen are evil or children-eaters.

All seems to be going well and the group plans to go investigate this Beloc and other mystery person, when there are several large lightning bolts that come crashing out of a clear night sky, setting a section of the town ablaze. This is followed by the bellow of an Elven Wizard in a voice that seems much too loud for a man. “Bring me my son or the town burns!”

This is no man nor Elf, but Daddy Dragon. And that’s not a good thing. Dragons tend to view other dragons as rivals and enemies. Males tend to hunt down and destroy their young before they can grow up to become rivals. The baby dragon has no idea this is “Dad.” In fact, he says to the group, “I’m sure glad he’s not my father. He’s mean.”

The group comes up with a clever if hasty deception to trick the father into leaving with one of their own disguised as the child (a Changeling and various types of magic are available to the group). Dad sees through the deception, but recognizing they are formidable heroes, offers them a million gold for his “son.” They refuse and deadly combat seems imminent as time runs out for this group of players. Then a new deception is hatched in desperation. “Our apologies, Great Horned Dragon. We were trying to deceive you to protect the town from your wrath. We don’t have your son. Beloc the Soul Stealer has him.” The dragon demands the location of this man. The group provides it, and just as they had hoped, the dragon flies off to Beloc.

They have bought some time. The plan is that Beloc and Daddy Dragon will severely hurt each other in mortal combat. Whichever one survives, the group will immediately attack and destroy. End of Game Two.

Game Three: Desperate Ruses

The third group of players inherits this desperate mess, but accepts it immediately. Part of the group runs off to observe the battle between Beloc and the adult Horned Dragon. One of them, Gilderon the Archer, goes to the tavern where the third mystery man is willing to pay a mountain of gold for the child.

Mother dragon suddenly arrives, appearing as an ordinary woman. The child instantly recognizes her. Mother and child reunited, the kid quickly explains how the heroes saved his life many times in the last 24 hours. She is grateful, pledges her eternal gratitude and gets ready to leave. The heroes petition her to fight the male dragon, but she wants no part of it. He is too powerful and she can't risk her child's life. They try to use the innocent townspeople who will suffer if she doesn't help, but she has little concern for mere humans. It is only when the group points out that "she owes them" and her child pleads for her to help "his friends," that she grudgingly agrees.

Coltran of Wonders and the rest of the group then go about putting out the fire that is quickly engulfing a quarter of the town. The gamer playing Coltran plays up the popularity of the wizard to the nth degree. With great fanfare, Coltran calls the townspeople to mass, follow him, and "lend him their strength." Nearly a thousand spectators chanting, "Coltran, Coltran" follow him. Since they are chanting his name and willingly "lending him their strength," he is able to draw upon their P.P.E. to cast one *Extinguish Fire spell* after another to quickly quell the fire. Likewise, the Warlock manages to summon a

Lesser Water Elemental

who helps battle the flames. The rest of the group rescue innocent people and help in other ways. When the fires are snuffed out, Coltran, again, takes ALL the credit, with a nod to his loyal servants (i.e. the rest of the player characters).

Meanwhile, back at Beloc's cottage, the battle between dragon and Wizard rages. Beloc commands Deevils, but the dragon makes quick work of them. Eventually, both combatants look battered and weak, but Beloc (pronounced "bell-lock") looks the worst for the wear. Realizing this, the male dragon pounces. When Beloc touches the great dragon, the creature shudders and a ghost-like essence is torn from its body. It is absorbed by Beloc the Soul Stealer, who now looks much restored as he drinks the dragon's soul and remaining P.P.E. The beast falls over, dead.

The three or four player characters watching in the woods are shocked by this sudden turn of events and decide they can't wait for the rest of the group. They attack immediately, firing Cyclops Lightning Arrows and hurling other ranged weapons and magic lightning. Unaware of their presence until they attack (and getting low rolls to respond), the Soul Stealer takes a

considerable amount of damage. It is decided that one of these heroes needs to get the rest of the group and hurries off to retrieve them.

The entire group and mother dragon, except for, Gilderon the Long Bowman at the tavern and Lady Elizabeth guarding the child, rush off to join the battle. Gilderon soon learns that the “mystery man” is a beautiful woman. She makes a deal with Gilderon. If he turns the child over to her, she’ll tell him the location of Lord DeSilca’s treasure trove worth many millions. As a sign of good faith, she hands over a jewel-studded, Old Kingdom coin worth at least 20,000 gold. Gilderon plays hard to get, and she hands over two more. They hatch a plan to capture the child.

The battle that had been going in the group’s favor, suddenly turns bad. When the Water Elemental grabs a near dead Beloc in an attempt to drown him, the mage steals its soul, the Elemental vanishes and Beloc smiles. He looks significantly restored and throws up a force field. He then begins to cast another spell. “Oh, crap,” is the sentiment of the worn down player group. It looks bad. Then mother dragon bellows, “Now! Hit him now.” And successfully casts Dispel Magic Barrier. The group hammers Beloc and he goes down for the count.

Upon returning to town, Gilderon and the Thieves conspire to turn the child over to the mystery woman. It is a clever ruse that fails to go according to plan. (I love the roll of the die and how it can determine the actions of non-player characters and players alike.) The woman playing Lady Elizabeth uses her astute role-playing skills and she matches wits with the greedy turncoats to manipulate the baby dragon. In the end, the child is rescued, and the conspirators play their evil deed so well that they convince the group it was all a ruse to capture the mystery woman. Which they do. The perfect play and double-cross. Mommy dragon thanks Lady Elizabeth for keeping her child safe, gives the treacherous trio a suspicious look and flies away with child in tow.

However, quick to convince the group of their innocence, the treacherous trio turn the woman over to the town authorities. The very authorities who served Lord DeSilca yesterday. Unknown to our heroes, as soon as the authorities are out of sight, they let the woman go, later claiming she escaped. Game Three Ends.

Game Four: Double Trouble

The new player group is brought up to speed and most of them decide to go back to the shattered ruins of Beloc’s cottage on the edge of town to search for clues and treasure. It is a

smart move.

Only one room, a library, remains standing. Unfortunately, there are clear indications that someone or several someones have beat them to it. There are several books missing from the shelves and drawers emptied. However, a secret passage is located and some treasure, a couple magic items (a medallion and scepter), and a diary of Beloc are recovered. The group also rescues a trio of prisoners Beloc tortured for his own sadistic pleasure.

Back in town, one of the Dwarven warriors is accused of horrific crimes by an angry townspeople. “How could you do it? We thought you were real heroes and hoped you would stay and run our town. But you’re as bad as DeSilca.” The gamer portraying the Dwarf does a wonderful job playing along to find out what this guy is talking about. At first, he insists it’s impossible as he’s been drinking at the tavern all afternoon, but the Dwarf adds with a wry grin, “Then again, maybe I blacked out. That happens sometimes. So tell me, what did I do that I don’t remember?” The townspeople think the Dwarf is playing a cruel trick, but relates the horrors of his wicked deeds.

Turns out there are Doppelgangers of the entire group. To make a long story short, Beloc had planned to take DeSilca’s seat of power. To make the transition less bloody and complete, he planned to replace the most important and powerful people in town with demonic Doppelgangers that would be secretly obedient to him alone. Without the slain Beloc to guide them, the Doppelgangers tried to follow his last order by impersonating the most important people in town. Which were now the heroic player characters.

I don’t want to shortchange this adventure, but this description is running long. Suffice it to say, the heroes had to fight *themselves!* The battle between them and their evil twins was very cool. The heroes prove themselves innocent to the townspeople and again capture their hearts. Not only is Coltran’s name chanted, but most members of the group. They are truly heroes, and even the monstrous members of the group (Wolfen, Ogre, Goblin) are cheered and embraced.

Again, all the players had their moment to shine, but the Warlock, Darryl the Ranger, and one of the Dwarves played central roles in this adventure. Game Four Ends.

Game Five: More Treachery

Nobody but our heroes know the boy (i.e., the baby dragon) and mama dragon have left town. Their departure took place in the woods on the outskirts of town. As a result, there is still a bounty on the child. The group wants to know who and why the child is still so important. It turns out the same woman – *Lady Sarah*, a Succubus who once served Lord DeSilca, is at the roots of this campaign to acquire the child. She is also in cahoots with the local assassins' guild whose headquarters is the tavern where some of the heroes have been hanging out. Yes, she is the same woman who was captured but later released. This is when they find out the woman was released and that the authorities cannot be trusted.

The player group hatches a clever plan to lure this mystery person out in the open once and for all, and do away with the Succubus, assassins and the evildoers working with them. The group pretends they have the boy and Haloric the Bold, a Thief, promises to sneak the child away and turn him over.

Of course, things don't go so smoothly. Our heroes find themselves tailed by assassins and worse: Shadow Beasts and a number of lesser demons. The assassins and demons attack in an attempt to snatch the kid and get the handsome reward for themselves. After the heroes are able to hold them off, kill and capture several of the villains, the Thief in the group convinces the evil Lady Sarah to call off her dogs and give him till sunset to produce the child. She agrees, but warns, if he fails, she and her henchmen will come for the child and destroy everyone who stands in their way.

Now comes one of those, "What the . . . ?!" Game Master moments. The heroes, realizing no place in town is safe, decide to go to, and hole up at, Lord DeSilca's castle! Really? You think DeSilca's castle is a safe haven? They decided, yes, it was. As I thought more about it, I must admit there is a certain logic to it.

The group arrives to the castle, demand entry, and as conquering heroes, seize control. They gather all the servants, sense who is evil and send them packing. They momentarily decide to keep the servants with "good" alignments on site to keep them safe. These innocent people are terrified and I point out that "safe" seems unlikely. The heroes could be double-crossed and attacked at any moment, and God only knows what evil may lurk hidden in the castle. As a result, the heroes decide to send the "good people" home. They then sweep the castle sensing for evil and looking for secret passages. They find no evil, but do locate a secret passage and a long, dark tunnel.

Some members of the team stand watch, others eat and rest, the Goblin Cobbler Thief decides to see where the tunnel leads. By herself! (**An Aside:** I love Goblin Cobblers as player and non-player characters. I use them as NPCs all the time. Cobblers can turn into small animals like ravens, weasels and rats. Consequently, I'm surprised how many people have never played one, and I'm equally surprised how well people play them whenever I hand them one. Cobblers are versatile, awesome and fun characters to play. EVERY person who played the character, Zandrox, in this series of games played the Cobbler to a "T" and often played very important roles in the course of the adventure.) So, the woman playing Zandrox turns into a black cat and quietly prowls down the tunnel. She goes a mile and keeps on plugging away. She discovers the tunnel leads to Lord DeSilca's secret lair under the cemetery where they battled and killed him and his legion of monsters. (She had actually played in the original DeSilca game, so she knew the layout.) Zandrox keeps going down familiar passages, taking note of the fact that this dungeon where fierce combat had taken place only a day before has been cleaned up of blood and dead bodies.

Unseen, Zandrox keeps going until she reaches the chamber with the sacrificial altar. There she observes the evil Lady Sarah talking with two robed figures. The trio discuss the final preparations for the ceremony to resurrect Lord DeSilca. All they need is the right sacrifice to bring back their master. Zandrox sneaks away and runs down the long corridor to warn her teammates. Game Five ends.

Game Six: End Game. The Resurrection of Lord DeSilca

Now knowing Lady Sarah's plans, the group cooks up the ultimate double-cross. They have the means to enable the Cobbler to appear to be the child. They'll hand the child over to Lady Sarah and get the location of DeSilca's treasure to loot at a later time. Then, knowing when and where the ritual to raise DeSilca is located, they'll attack the villains from two sides. One, via the secret tunnel which the villains don't know about and, two, from the entrance at the mausoleum in the cemetery. Best of all, the Cobbler – disguised as the child – can turn into an animal and slip away or attack at the most opportune moment. Someone points out that even if the Cobbler should be sacrificed and slain by accident, he's not the baby dragon and the ritual will be ruined. It's a win-win situation! Everyone but the Cobbler sees the wisdom in this plan, but the valiant Zandrox, dreaming about DeSilca's treasure and of becoming one of the town's new rulers (the people have asked our heroes to rule them), agrees to go along with the plan. As Game Master, I think it's just crazy enough to work.

Then comes another, "What the . . .?!" moment. Haloric the Daring announces she'll go alone to the tavern with the faux child to turn him over to Lady Sarah and everyone agrees. They prepare for the final battle at the castle, securing weapons and horses, and figuring out which teammates will go down the tunnel and which will attack from the cemetery.

Haloric literally walks into the lions den – the tavern – where Lady Sarah waits. Remember, a) Lady Sarah is known to be a Succubus. b) This tavern is known to be the headquarters for the assassins' guild. c) The head bartender is the Master Assassin who runs the guild and many of the patrons and tavern workers are assassins and thieves. Haloric “the Daring,” indeed. Lady Sarah is happy to have the child delivered to her. The Succubus thanks Haloric, takes the child by the hand and starts to walk out the door.

“Wait,” shouts Haloric. “What about my reward? The treasure.”

“Oh,” says Lady Sarah with a cat's grin. “Boys, give the thief what she deserves.” And she walks out of the tavern with the child/Cobbler hand in hand. Zandrox doesn't want to tip his hand, and isn't sure that Haloric is in trouble, so he continues to play the role of innocent child and lets the Succubus lead him away.

Before Haloric can respond or take action (a sad initiative roll), she finds herself alone, surrounded by a half dozen assassins plus the Leader of the assassins' guild. They are all chuckling and taunting Haloric about how many ways they can torture and kill her. Ordinary citizens in the tavern who were celebrating their freedom from the tyranny of DeSilca run out of the tavern to avoid becoming collateral damage. A hooded figure steps back and begins to quietly mutter as he blends into the shadows. A handful of cutthroats stay to watch the show.

Outnumbered, Haloric tries to talk her way out of the jam. It doesn't work. As some of the assassins move in to cut the thief's throat, the Head of the assassins guild tells them to back off. He hands Haloric a mug of poisoned ale and instructs her to take the drink and die fast and comparatively painlessly. Haloric continues to stall and palms a smoke bomb in one hand and holds the mug of poison in the other. Things look bleak.

Meanwhile, back at the castle, nobody knows Haloric is in trouble. The group is so confident in their plan, that they haven't even considered that something could go wrong. At least not until a Magic Pigeon arrives delivering the warning that Haloric is outnumbered and in immediate danger. They need to come quickly. It seems the hooded figure was an admirer of their heroics, perhaps even one of the many other heroes who had come to town to try to stop Lord DeSilca.

The group is shocked by the news and they immediately mount up and head for town. The problem is, even the fastest horse and Gryff the Wolfen can't get there in time. They are at least 6-8 minutes away. They ride like the wind.

Haloric is out of time. She plans to throw the smoke bomb at her feet and try to push her way out in the confusion. The Master Assassin Leader has had enough. "Drink now or die by our blades!" As if on cue, the front door of the tavern, and then the back, are kicked open and a mob of angry townspeople carrying shovels and pitchforks barge inside. Inspired by the heroes, they demand Haloric's release.

"Are you insane?!" barks the Master Assassin. "These people aren't going to stay here. As soon as they're gone, someone like me will be ruling you sheep. Go home now and I'll try to forget this ever happened."

The townspeople attack. The smoke bomb goes off. A half dozen innocent townspeople die fighting. Others get hurt. Haloric gets to the street just as her comrades arrive. ALL OF THEM (except the Cobbler). They slay the assassins and help the townspeople. A short time later, they realize the ritual must be taking place. They don't have time to attack from both ways in. They ride for the cemetery. A mob of townspeople follow after, chanting "Coltran, Coltran," mixed in with the names of the other heroes, and words like "freedom" and "an end to tyranny."

Wolves howl in the distance as the heroes and the mob reach the mausoleum. There can be little doubt that the howling, which keeps getting louder and closer, is Alu Demon Hounds. The heroes convince many of the townspeople to go home to protect their families, but two dozen, nervous but heroic people insist on staying around the mausoleum to guard their backs.

The heroes charge straight down into the catacombs where they engage more Shedim demons and henchmen. The battle is fierce but goes in favor of the heroes. (Their dice rolls were fantastic. Mine were awful. Ah, I love role-playing and the fate of the die roll.) While they battle, three members of the team charge toward the ritual chamber.

As usual, Coltran hangs back near the top of the stairs where the mausoleum opens to the secret lair. So does one of the Dwarven Warriors. As the battle rages, one of the townspeople runs in. "Coltran. Coltran, we need you out here. We're scared. The howling is getting closer."

The Wizard answers the “call of his people” and steps outside to calm their fears. The Dwarf stays behind to guard the group’s back. The townspeople who fetched the Wizard bows and scrapes before his greatness, and says, “You want to come with me.”

I, as G.M., say, “Roll to save vs magic Charm.” Coltran’s roll fails. The Succubus, disguised as the townspeople, smiles. “You are such an arrogant fool, aren’t you?” Though charmed, Coltran laughs and says, “You don’t have the baby dragon. It’s the Cobbler. Your ritual can’t work. Your plans are ruined.”

Lady Sarah smiles, strokes Coltran’s hair and says, “Do you take me for a fool? We know he’s not the child. It was you we were after. We don’t need a baby dragon to resurrect Lord DeSilca. We just need someone with sufficient magic energy, such as you, my dear.”

Meanwhile, the Cobbler, chained to the sacrificial altar, transforms into a weasel and slips away. The two hooded figures and Lady Sarah are (presumably) in the next chamber preparing for the ritual. He heads toward the sound of battle, where he is met by some of his comrades. The Warlock throws up a wall of ice, trapping the hooded figures and the Succubus inside the altar chamber. Being reunited with the Goblin Cobbler, they leave the villains with no human sacrifice and rejoin the rest of the group. The demons are dispatched and the heroes exit the mausoleum triumphant. It is only when they do a head count that they realize Coltran is missing.

Nobody saw where Coltran went. The Cobbler turns into a raven and flies around, but they are nowhere to be seen.

As the G.M., I’m thinking, “Oh, no. They screwed up big time. DeSilca is going to be resurrected and kick their behinds.”

Then the guy playing Gryff says, “I know Coltran’s scent, right? Can’t I track him?”

“Roll for it.” He rolls well under his ability. “Yes, you can follow his trail.”

A short time later, however, Gryff has to roll again and fails. He rolls again and fails again. The trail is lost.

The player of Darryl the Ranger says, "We're outdoors, I search for tracks." He finds the trail but it disappears at the same location where Gryff lost the scent.

Without hesitation, the Goblin Cobbler and the two Dwarves drop to their knees and start to dig at that spot where the trail was lost. Smart. I'm impressed. They find a secret door and another tunnel. Following the tunnel it leads to the sacrificial altar under the mausoleum. Coltran is gagged and chained to it. Lady Sarah and the two hooded figures are chanting. Lady Sarah has the ceremonial short sword poised above Coltran.

The battle is swift and terrible. Coltran and the day are saved. Lord DeSilca remains dead and gone.

Game Six ends. Triumph snatched from the jaws of treachery and near defeat. Epic teamwork. Epic story. I couldn't have done it without you.

I hope everyone enjoyed it as much as I did. Game on.





