

DIOXAZINE

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The table
top RPG
issue.



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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the first issue of Dioxazine. Here you will find a small grouping of literary exercises that will (hopefully) be released every quarter. While each issue will have its own theme, they will all follow a similar format. All of the work within the book is by me unless explicitly stated. I'll do my best to keep all PDF versions of the magazine free, however print copies are available in exchange for fiat and digital currency.

Because of the nature of the content and how I produce it I can't really consider this a true magazine because I have no editorial staff, nor do I accept submissions. Since that makes this a self-made little magazine it would be closer in format to a modern handmade zine but without any real meaning or political stance. Think of it as cross between the two.

This summer's theme is based on a popular table top RPG system which most of you should already be somewhat familiar with.

SHORT STORY

GAME DAY

Reaching towards the top of the small closet Nick found the ragged old shoebox, a relic of his school days, that now lives tucked behind old books. The thin cardboard had lost its shape over the years and barely held together as he placed it on his desk. He wondered what happened to the old shoes that the box once contained as he lifted the lid to inspect what was still inside. At one point he used it to store cards, then videogames, and when he sold those off it became the consolidated “old junk from college” storage.

The top layer held several loose and yellowing sheets of old spiral notebook paper. Beneath that were a few of the actual spirals themselves stuffed with hand drawn maps on loose sheets all crammed in at the last minute as though they would be opened again soon. He removed the papers and notebooks to reveal a handful of old metal figures, the paint chipped away from play. Nick picked up the warrior and looked it over, not recognizing it as one that he had painted.

The only other thing in the box was an empty Crown Royal bag which he slowly poured the contents of out into his hand. It was an eclectic set of cheap dice he had acquired over the years. A few d20's, various d6's, and the odd d4 which was never easy to pick up once it landed. Some of them were from cheap sets he bought at the local game shop, losing one here and there as most people did. Two of them were from a card game, and only two of the D6's matched at all. There was a heavy stone d10, the only one not made of acrylic, which reminded him of the day he had stolen it from the shop.

It was made of pink polished granite and sat beside others in a display case. His job, while his friends instigated an argument with the employee about arbitrary game rules,

was to reach around the counter and take the whole set. While he was successful in removing it from the back of the case, he stumbled on a nearby step causing him to drop most of them on the ground. His friends ran from the shop and he made it out with the single piece.

Rolling the dice around in his fingers he remembered how he and his friends used to play the game while in college. They had no money for terrain or miniatures the way they did now. Kyle had a full set of modular villages and castles to play on, but he was going to be out of town for the weekend they planned to all get back together, meaning they would have to do things the old way. Once per year Nick, Kyle, Mike, and Aaron would get together and play the game. As years went by and the guys all moved away with busier lives, and the number dwindled. It seemed that each year at least one person wouldn't be able to make it no matter how much they planned. Last time it was himself, having to be in his brother's wedding. Aaron had several kids which made it hard for him to get away, and Mike had to schedule any events in writing with his wife months in advance for approval.

Nick himself had taken a job out of state which meant everyone had to travel to even attend the game. The typical emails had gone out to the group to schedule the date and time but each recipient was slow to respond. Back in school they would simply grab a notebook and all head to the lobby of their dorm or at a friend's apartment. Kyle always did the brunt of the work, setting up the story even if someone else ran it, this time Nick was given the task. With no time to sit and work out an entire campaign with his work schedule he went out and bought a module for the most current edition. The game had added extra rules and character options since the days they had played it, which made it all the more overwhelming.

Aaron was bringing another friend from school that was interested in playing to fill the empty spot. Playing with

a stranger was always an issue as they had tried to bring in new people before only to have them get frustrated at how long the game took or got bored during the other players turns. Nick asked a coworker to play once and the walked out after his archer was killed having stood in front of one of the minibosses. He remembered he also quit his job in the same manner a week later. Ever so often a girlfriend would be invited. A few did well but the relationship either didn't last or they weren't interested anymore after playing once. After that it became a guys only event.

Nick remembered one girl he dated being appalled by the fact that the game had demons in it. Remembering her made him want to include an entire dungeon filled with demons and succubi, perhaps he would roll a monster with player stats. Either way, he was preoccupied with fishing out the dice he would need for the game that was now soon fast approaching. Rolling the little plastic pieces through is fingers he counted out how many of each he would need to calculate the damage for the monsters in the module.

Next to his bedroom was his office where he kept his laptop and slumped down in to the leather chair at his desk. There weren't enough six sided dice in his old worn out dice bag. A quick search through Amazon led him to several dozen terrible dice listings. He could order a pound of seconds, that may or may not be in playable condition. There were several listings of sets of dice, designed for people who wanted one of each in every color that came with shoddy velvet draw-string pouches. Some were made of metal, or metal plated lead for all he knew. All he wanted was a set of d6's and the only ones online were either sold out or wouldn't ship until next month.

Nick backed out of Amazon and searched for other dice companies. Of course, none of them would ship a dozen d6's for less than the cost of the dice. He sighed and looked at the time, then picked up his phone to see if any comic shops were still open after 8pm. There wasn't time after work for

the next week as he had dinner meetings and team building events every day.

Grabbing his keys from the kitchen he left the house at 8:12pm arriving at the closest game and comic shop with fifteen minutes to spare. He had been to this store a few times before back in school. The interior had been completely renovated and rearranged since he was last there. A girl behind the counter with half pink half white dyed hair asked him if he was looking for anything in particular. Nick explained that he was looking for a set of dice and she pointed him to the back corner of the shop which housed all of the tabletop supplies. He thanked her and promised he wouldn't take too long.

As he walked through the shelves of graphic novels, none of the titles he recognized, he came across a large display of D&D modules, figures, maps, and toys. There was a wall of minis and paints, assorted modules with licensed cartoon characters on the cover, stuffed Cthulhu dolls, and bobble heads. Nick searched around the display of books to find a small tray of available dice in little clear acrylic boxes. Most were sets like he had found online, one d20, d4, d10, etc. Nothing. Then he noticed the fishbowl filled with random single dice with a sign above that read "Fill a bag for \$10. Must close."

He yanked a little velvet bag with the shop's logo off the wall and proceeded to fish out every d6 he could find. Checking his watch, it was now 8:55pm, he looked up at the girl behind the counter who was typing in something on the store computer. The tiny bag now seemed way larger than it looked as he continued to scrape the fish bowl for simple d6 dice. After a moment he gave up, grabbed half a handful and stuffed them in the bag.

He was out of breath by the time he placed the bag on the checkout counter. The girl asked him if he found everything ok. They always ask that. What if he said he didn't? He couldn't tell her that. Not when the shop was closing in five

minutes. A quick nod followed as he pulled his wallet from his jacket and handed her his card. She swiped it and he declined the receipt, trying his best to get out of there so they could both go home.

On the way back he stopped by a drive thru. He managed to miss dinner. The little sack of dice sat in his passenger seat, along with the food. Once inside the apartment he sat down at his couch to eat, dumping the little pouch out onto the coffee table to inspect his mixed-matched haul. There was a gold flecked one, a lime green one with impossible to read white numbers, a red speckled one, and three neon pink dice with purple stars for dots. Those definitely had to be used for damage rolls. How much fun would it be to kill off players using neon sparkle star dice?

Over the course of the next week Nick found himself taking breaks from work to make notes on his campaign. He would work on it at lunch, before bed, tweaking things here and there to make it just right. Then one day he got a text from Aaron. His in-laws were coming to town that weekend on short notice and he couldn't make it. Nick wasn't upset, he understood things happen, and the campaign would still work fine with just three people. In fact, it would make it go faster. Two days later Nick's backup guy fell through due to overtime at work. He wasn't sure if he could run a game with just two guys so he reluctantly called Mike.

It wasn't the greatest phone call, Mike was driving and the poor connection made it difficult to hear him. Nick explained the situation only to have Mike explode. He started bad mouthing the other guys in the group, yelling about how the others were flaking out because Kyle wasn't going to run it and thought he wouldn't do a good job. Mike was actually angry about something at work but had no problem taking his frustrations out on the rest of the group. Nick told him not to worry about it, they could reschedule for later. Mike paused a moment before agreeing and promised to call when he got to the house.

After Mike hung up Nick went back to his office where the books and dice were sitting on his desk. It hadn't occurred to him that the reason they were flaking out on the game was the fact that Kyle wasn't hosting. Nick's apartment wasn't the biggest, but they would have no problem getting around the kitchen table. He was using a brand-new module, so quality of content wasn't going to be an issue either. Sheets of paper stuck out from the sides of the book, marking all the notes he had taken over the last few days. Rules had been checked and double checked. A new package of fine tip dry erase markers sat beside the books, waiting to be used on laminated dungeon maps.

Nick received a new message on his phone. It was Kyle wishing him good luck with his campaign. Nobody had told him they weren't going. He hadn't talked with anyone else. Nick responded with a quick thanks before ending the call and throwing his phone through the open doorway and into the hall. There was no doubt the screen had broken when it hit the hard tile floor of the kitchen. The monster manual was next, and it made it all the way to the fridge. He took pages of the other rulebooks, ripping them out in chunks, and threw them around the room only to have them float back towards him.

Standing on loose semi gloss pages of stats and lore he reached for the old metal figures and tried to mash them together in his hands. This only bent a few swords and arms but they held together. Luckily the newer plastic figures were still on the kitchen table where he had been painting them. The ball of mashed figures chipped a bit of drywall from the hallway as it made its way from the office as well.

Nick sat down on the floor of torn pages and notes. The hall was equally covered in paper, figures, and dice. He tossed the last of the sparkly star d6's through the doorway. He waited a few minutes to calm down and began picking up the mess. Most of the stuff went into a trash bag, it was just a bunch of torn up paper at that point. He could get new

copies later.

While cleaning the kitchen he went ahead and swept up the dice along with the bits of paper and ruined figures. Plastic cubes were just as replaceable as paper. He swept under the cabinets for a few more of them and collected them into the dust pan. The pink granite d10 sat there in the blue plastic pan. Nick rested the broom on the fridge door and picked the little die from the dust, wiped it off on his jeans and placed it in his pocket. Nothing else was saved.

A month went by, nearly two before any of his buddies got back in touch with him. One or two asked how the game went. Every time one asked Nick would say it went great and made up some fun encounter that never happened with one of the guys who was never there. The next year it was Kyles turn to run the game. Nick showed up with his new books and dice ready to play.

Pulling into Nick's driveway he noticed he was the first one to arrive, although semi late for having to grab beer. He knocked on the front door to see Kyle, red faced and angry. Everyone else had flaked again at the last minute. Kyle invited him in to eat the dinner they prepared for five people but the game wasn't going to happen. Kyles kids were there at the table helping eat all the pizza and snacks and were delighted to get to stay up late. His oldest kid was playing with the dice on the game table.

Nick asked the boy if he had played the game with his dad yet. The boy answered that he hadn't yet because he didn't have any of the stuff to play. The boy was nearly twelve and Nick found it astonishing that Kyle hadn't started any games with his kids yet. Dinner was soon over and he helped clean the kitchen table and the game room before leaving. On his way out the door Kyle apologized again for the game not working out. Before he went to walk out the door Nick handed his bag of dice and books to Kyles son. "Keep this safe for me."

OPINION

HISTORICAL ACCURACY IN FANTASY GAMES

The majority of fantasy books are set in a medieval setting where technology has advanced to the use of steel weapons and types of magic or alchemy. The thing is that not every part of your campaign is going to fit that level of tech. Outside the D&D IP realms and planes, etc., you are free to make up whatever old mess you want. So why is it that a culture clear across the continent or planet is on the same tech level as everyone else?

Let's say for the sake of argument your campaign is set somewhere between 1100-1400. Ye Olden Days with kings and dragons or dinosaurs, whatever you feel like. This is all pre renaissance era stuff, windows won't be glass outside of castles and churches. You only recently put an end to the Roman Empire, so some stuff isn't going to be feasible.

Books are going to be few and far between, your cleric or whatever that's carrying around a tome of something most likely had to create it themselves by hand after several years of study and is the only person in the group who can read. Having someone find a scroll or a note with words on it is going to require your most educated party member to decipher it.

If your party finds a vial of liquid, the glass might be cloudy or opaque. The crystal clear perfectly circular potion vials we think of now might be thick blue or yellow colored glass depending on the region and the nature of the sand found nearby.

Having everyone wearing head to toe black leather clothes is fine as long as your entire party are wealthy textile merchants. Other colors like brown, gray, and tan were more common and less expensive as they were the natural color of the wool used in the garments. I remember reading

an article where an artist drew some pirates for a campaign, and one had on a wool cap not unlike a modern beanie. People commented on how modern elements were ruining D&D etc, when in reality sailors at the time would have owned Monmouth caps or Tuques which look just like beanies.

Women and men wearing black leather pants as though there are closed stall toilets all over the place is out of the question. There was a reason for long tunics and skirts when you have to go to the bathroom outside or in the street. Well, men did wear hose or tights with a short doublet but they were typically wealthy and not likely to be in your adventuring party unless they're a well-paid bard. That or your noble paladin is in a situation outside their full plate armor. If you want your female tiefling-elf ninja assassin in functional pants give her nobleman's tights and slops without the codpiece.

Food is tricky because of trade. If your fantasy land is set up in a wondrous port city with access to chocolate, spices, and tobacco you might be able to get away with the party having tea or coffee during a rest or around the fire at camp. Yes, you can have a spell or magic create the items, but your characters would have to have seen or know what it was in the first place to make it.

The world as we know it is vast and not everyone progresses at the same rate of speed. A culture at one end of the planet may have access to natural resources that give them an edge. If your fantasy city is still stuck in the bronze age and you decide to invade a country filled with steel-plated flying horses and knights in medieval Gundam armor it might not work out for you.

Ultimately, it's up to you on how real or fantastic you want your campaign story to be. Things don't have to be historically accurate to be enjoyable, and this little bit is designed to assist in your backstory which can be set up any way you like. If you want the wizards to have cell phones because they are magic and can do whatever, go for it. Pizza in the taverns? Why not. It's just a game.

WHY TTRPG'S ARE GOOD FOR KIDS

When you look at articles about what kids do all day the number one thing I see is concern over screen time. It used to be just “TV and Videogames rot kids’ brains!” but now that has bled into phones and tablets as well. A good number of parents worry about how long a little kid spends with a screen device, just like they did when we were little worrying that we watched too many cartoons. The issue here is that tablets, phones, and computers are not solely used for entertainment. Kids use them to communicate with their parents, friends, etc. They have schoolwork that has to be done on the computer and research that has to be googled. It’s because of this that getting rid of screen time can be challenging when you use the device for nearly everything.

Yes, you can play TTRPG’s through ebooks and on your tablet. There are dice rolling apps for your phone. You can even play with friends online through shared videochat services. These are great options for adults who can’t get together or what have you, but this bit is about the kiddos.

Kids need to learn to play a game with other people physically in the room with them. They need to be able to gauge reactions and treat other players respectfully. With videogames the other online players are dehumanized NPC’s that can be yelled at, you can get angry at them for no reason, and call them names, etc. They may or may not know, but that’s not a healthy way to treat others in a game. When playing face to face in a room at the same table, that NPC concept goes out the window.

Treating someone at the same table as though you were in an online PVP match will result in a fist fight after a few minutes. Adults understand this. Well, most do. Young kids on the other hand have to be shown how to contain emotions

during a game or sport and tabletop games are a good way of doing this. The entire game can be played offline which means they have to read off paper character sheets, roll real dice, manually calculate scores, as well as get along with the other people at the table.

The level of violence and severity of actions in the game can be controlled by the DM who would most likely be a parent or older teen. I've written about this before, but you don't have to have undead eldritch horrors in your game and any of the monsters can be made easier to kill or less scary on the fly. If your kids have a real problem with violence you can change the mode of the game from "killing the bad guys" to solving a puzzle, or using their characters abilities to help others.

Your DM or extra parent will also be managing the behavior of the kids. When one makes a bad roll and gets knocked out, it's very easy for the other kids to get angry or make fun of them. Teaching the kids that it's not ok to take things out on other players for things they have no control over is part of the game. Instead of yelling at each other or getting angry show them that they can easily help their teammates with potions and spells, and that a bad roll isn't a catastrophic situation.

Now, other card and board games do this as well, but with the RPG aspect added on the kids also get to be creative with their characters in ways they can't with videogames. You can scroll through 46 colors of hair for your character in a game but with an RPG there is no limit and they don't have to pay \$10 a month to unlock a skin to be something.

FLASH FICTION

CHARACTER BACKSTORY FOR ELF RANGER

You were born in a small forest village, running away from home as a child. Unwilling to return home the majority of your youth was spent surviving in the woods by means of scavenging and stealing from local outposts and travelers. Your time as a highwayman taught you how to use a bow and short sword, as well as how to hunt and stalk a target.

As an adult you now live in a squalid shack far away from civilization. You must hunt because the beasts of the forest can no longer stand the stench. The animals you hunt hang from trees to dry, preserving them for the winter. Hides, fat, and furs are collected in old beer barrels you've accumulated or stolen. Stray dogs and cats wander into your encampment but are quickly used as target practice. Assistance and companionship are only distractions for your lifestyle.

Occasionally you must venture into the village to trade animal furs for supplies and beer. It is during these trips that you might happen upon a group in need of your abilities. They have to contend with the stench and fleas that surround you at all times, a sour encrusting of dirt that covers your clothes lets them know they are your only set and rarely cleaned. Your ears have elf-lice which cause you to twitch them. If it weren't for your skills in archery and tracking they would immediately abandon you.

CHARACTER BACKSTORY FOR HUMAN PALADIN

A couple of halfling squires once assisted a great noble paladin. During a furious battle the warrior fell, unable to heal himself or reach help in time. His two squires tried to reach him with healing drafts but were too late and in the midst of the fight put the armor on themselves.

The two continued the fight, one standing on top of the other's shoulders inside the armor, riding the horse and using his weapons in order to maintain his oath. Even though you consist of two separate halflings, your stats treat you as though you were a single human.

Only members of the party with high enough perception can even tell that you are made up of two halflings, the rest will speak to you as though you are a normal human and never really question why you don't take off your armor.

You pride yourselves on taking on your lords' tasks and perform any duty he would have been called upon to do. This includes helping those in need or anyone who asks for assistance with a quest.

Selecting the persuasion skills would be most beneficial as you are constantly tricking people into thinking you're a full sized human regardless of your janky movements and tendency to speak in two high pitched voices.

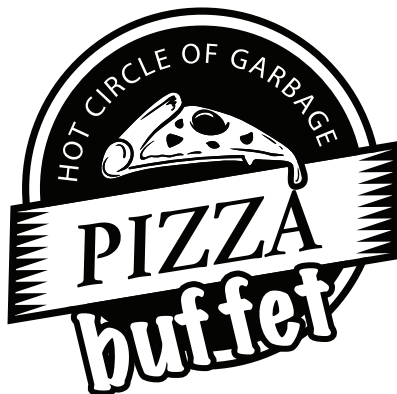
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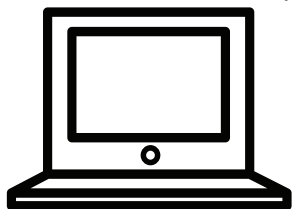
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