



Friday September 26, 2003

Endless possibilities

Story and pictures by CHRISTINA KOH

Wielding his great sword Blight, the warrior Aurane Fairlord stood at the mouth of the alley and peered across the moonlit street.

He frowned as he studied the city guards swarming around the main gates. There were more men there than he cared to count, and each and every one blocked the only way out. Somehow, they needed a distraction.

"All right. Here's the plan. I throw my oil flask on that nearby door, and since you have the torch, you set the door on fire and bring the guards running so that we can sneak past."

Aurane's companion – a rather absent-minded elven priest – nodded.

Together, the elf and the warrior crept out, the latter keeping Blight close at hand. The blade was cursed and it glinted when light fell on it, but the sword had served Aurane well and so he kept it.

Halfway through however, a shout rang out. They had been spotted. "Halt! Stand where you are!"

Guards began marching towards them. Aurane, thinking fast, smashed his oil flask into the first guard. Blinded, the man flailed, splashing dark liquid all over the street.

The elf, thinking even faster, cried, "I throw the torch on the guard and set him on fire!"

"What? NO!"



Sean (left) trying his luck at the dice while Dungeon Master Fadly (right) and Azizul look on. They are engaged in the Third Edition Dungeon & Dragons role-playing game.

I FELL in love with role-playing games when I was 13 years old. Back then, RPG was not so popular and it was a chore to find people who shared the same interest and schedule as me.

But how I loved the game and still do. Just think, you could be a Jedi Knight in the Star Wars universe or an immortal in the Highlander universe, or even play a vampire or a superhero! One of the things I love about RPGs is watching my characters grow. With each decision you make, your character gains experience, skills and eventually greater power.

With your character, you can fight tyrants, bluff your way into an enemy castle or even avert a war through peace negotiations, for instance. The possibilities are endless.

Sad to say, tabletop role-playing games these days are not as popular in Malaysia compared to, for example, Magic the Gathering, Pokemon card games or miniature wargames.

Each of these games has its own appeal, and it would be unfair to compare them to RPGs which require a lot more effort and patience to set up.

When I came to Perak, I pretty much gave up on the idea of finding a gaming group. Compared to Kuala Lumpur, I thought the chances of finding anyone with similar interests in Ipoh would be slim.

Imagine my surprise when I came across a fellow gamer, Fadly, who just happened to be the

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Dungeon Master for a Third Edition Dungeons & Dragons campaign, also known to fans as 3E D&D.

Through Fadly, I was introduced to his college student friends, Sean Chang and Azizul Rahman. Armed with our rule books and bowls of nacho chips and salsa, we sat down for our first gaming session at Azizul's house.

Since Sean had the more experienced character, he became our leader. He played the elven priest Primas Sanguinus, a sixth-level Neutral Good character with a penchant for running back and forth across the battlefield as our medic.

Other than setting a man on fire once (which cost us experience points!), the elf was a normally sane leader.

Azizul played our shifty, half-elven Chaotic Neutral thief with a typical greed for loot and the disconcerting habit of hiding or cracking jokes in the face of certain death.

Right from the start, I had a feeling his character, Magnanimous Bonhomous, would clash with mine. Because I'm a sucker for mysterious figures, I played the cynical Aurane Fairlord, a Chaotic Good fighter with a shrouded past and low tolerance for elves of any mixture, ironically enough.

Joining the guys, I couldn't help but feel a little apprehensive at first. I mean, it's been ages since I played. What if I had lost the knack for it or something?

Lucky for us, our Dungeon Master allowed the new players – Azizul and I – to start at third level, and so we had bonus points to beef up our characters with.

Our adventure began at a trading caravan, which had stopped for the night in some woods in the middle of nowhere.

We had barely finished introducing ourselves when an old woman came up, screaming something about losing children in the forest.

Being natural do-gooders (or at least the two of us were), we set off in search of the missing kids.

We came across a clearing which had an old well at the heart of it, but the strangest thing about the place was that the grass was lined with some kind of powder.

After several minutes of investigating, the thief and the priest clambered into the well to check it out, while my character naturally stood guard.

That's when Aurane suddenly noticed a swarm of nasty-looking things with claws and wings appear out of literally nowhere on the far side of the clearing.

Gargoyles! We were surrounded!

I admit it. I was a little trigger happy. The moment Aurane saw the first gargoyle in front of him, out came his knife which he flung towards the monster.

It shrieked in fury, and that's when the rest of the happy gargoyle family came charging at us.

What followed was pure, unadulterated chaos. It was mayhem. It was great!

There were gargoyles in the well, outside the well, and heroes zipping up and down and in and out in a desperate attempt to defeat the things, which almost seemed invulnerable.

At one point, a heavily wounded Aurane had to actually jump into the well in an attempt to get healing from the priest, who was still down there fighting his own gargoyle. I gave him a helping hand later, of course.

Then finally, it was over.

Sweet victory! There the enemy lay, incapacitated at our feet. And I won't even go into how the thief, at one point bored and curious, set fire to the mysterious powder which turned out to be flammable, causing it to *explode* in our faces.

Still, battered, bruised and barbecued, we had won, didn't we? Unfortunately, our Dungeon Master wasn't finished with us yet.



A Mage Knight miniature is used to represent the Chaotic Good fighter Aurane Fairlord. Dice of various sizes and combat miniatures represent players and monsters in the game.

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"You watch as the unconscious forms of the gargoyles slowly melt away ... revealing themselves to be the missing children you had been struggling so hard to find."

Argh! Much to the elf's grief, one of the children didn't make it. That was when the same old woman arrived at the scene, cursed us for thwarting her plans and ran off in the midst of our confusion.

The End?

As we played, it came to me that in today's fast-paced world of multimedia entertainment, some may find it difficult to comprehend the sheer thrill of taking part in a living, breathing story of our own creation.

Others may even think role-playing games are only for those out of touch with reality, but I like to think of it as a great way to let off a little steam, the same way people relax by watching television or blowing off a few hours with Counterstrike.

The only difference is that with RPGs, we can let loose our imaginations, exercise our creativity and have immense fun at the same time. Certainly not just a kid's game, that's for sure. There are some problems that just can't be solved by striking the first blow.

Racked with guilt, Primas, Aurane and Magnanimous resolved to chase after the old woman and get the answers to what was going on. They spent a day getting healed at the camp, and when it was time to depart, they left behind them a caravan of folk who stared at them accusingly for the loss of one of their own.

A little wiser now, the party gathered their weapons and set off in grim pursuit, deep into the woods.

And the adventure goes on!

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