

# Credits

## Big Iron Vault

### Keith Foo

*Editing and Layouts*

*Writer, "Fantasy Grounds II interview"*

*Writer "Art of Interior Art"*

*Writer, "Interview with Adam Schmidt"*

*Writer, "Interview with Ethan Gilsdorf"*

### Jessica Beltran

*Writer, "Living with a gamer"*

### Cheryl Foo

*Writer, "A girl gamer's blog"*

### Ray Dillon

*Artist, Cover art "Warrior Woman"*

**A special thank to the following guests and people who have contributed to this issue.**

*Ed Greenwood*

*Tero Parvinen & Doug Davison*

*Shelly Mazzanoble*

*Ethan Gilsdorf*

*Adamn Schmidt*

*Keith Hackwood "The Edge of the Edge"*

*Jess Hartley "One Geek to Another"*

*Johnny on the spot "World Creation Pitfalls"*

*Ed Million "The Social Side of LARP"*

*Aaron Vanek "What is LARP"*

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1st Printing December, 2009

Sample file



# Words from the boss!



Hello everyone, welcome to our third issue! In this issue we have a ton more material from people just like you. Sitting there reading and wondering if someday you could publish a piece of art or a story that you had written. Well I'm here today to say that you can. I feel like that word is getting out on

to the street that everyone's voice is worthy of being heard. It doesn't matter if you're an industry veteran or someone new to the gaming industry. It just simply doesn't matter.

I am quite pleased that the community at large feels that this magazine is headed in the right direction. Being part of the community was always the number one goal of Big Iron Vault and if I have anything to do with it (and I do!), it will continue to be a large part of what we do and what we print.

Speaking of printing you may have noticed that we were not able to get enough print copies of issue #2 out to the street. The reason behind this is that we're having a lot of difficulty figuring out the best way to get our magazine 'in print' out to you. Simply using traditional postage doesn't make a whole lot of sense. See even though we don't take any revenue from shipping (that would be cheating!) it costs way too much for the regular reader. We want people to read the magazine and not have to give up their lunches to do it. However, there are plans to publish BIV via Print-On-Demand. This will allow those that want this magazine "in print" to get it and those that prefer PDF to get it electronically. The best of both worlds!

That being said, we have plans to attend local conventions in the near future and with us, we'll bring print copies of this magazine. When we say local, that's pretty much the FanExpo here in the Greater Toronto Area. Someday when we have enough support from the community we'd like to be able to offer print copies like we did for issue #1. Which by the way for those of you that got the 1<sup>st</sup> printing, you should really hang on to it. I think the first few had misprints that maybe worth something someday!

Till then please continue to support your friendly local magazine as we bring you more about the gaming community, the games and the people that play them!

Keith Foo  
Big Iron Vault  
[www.bigironvault.com](http://www.bigironvault.com)

## Stuff in this issue!

### Special Features

Fantasy Freaks and Gaming Geeks with Ethan Gilsdorf

The Edge of the Edge by Keith Hackwood

Living with a gamer talks to Ed Greenwood

### The Game Master's Corner

One Geek to Another by Jess Hartley

### Living with a gamer

Meeting Jess Hartley

Catching up with Shelly Mazzanoble

### From the vault

Fantasy Grounds II with Tero Parvinen and Doug Davison

The Art of Interior Art  
By Keith Foo & El Garing

Coming out of the gaming closet: A girl gamer's blog

World Creation Pitfalls by Johnny on the spot

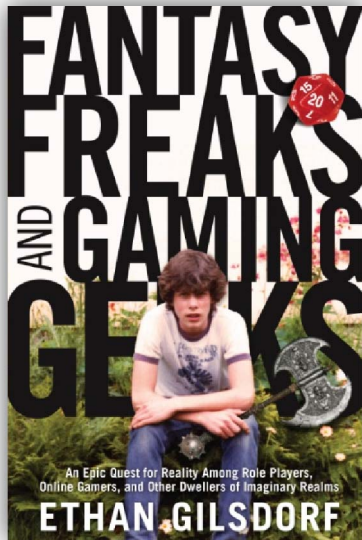
### LARP

The Social Side of LARP

Notes from Live Game Lab:  
What is LARP?

### Artist Alley

Interview with Adam Schmidt



# Ethan Gilsdorf

Writer, Poet, Teacher, and  
Gaming Geek

## Interviewing Ethan Gilsdorf Article by Keith Foo

Ethan Gilsdorf was just a young lad of eleven years, when his loving mother suffered a brain aneurysm. Within a year, her personality changed for the worse and in place of the the mother he once knew, was a person he called the *Kitchen Dragon*. At a tender age, Ethan was faced with one of the most difficult challenges of his life or anyone elses for that matter. Although his childhood was difficult it was also one of his most memorable and happiest moments of his life. For it was around the same time that he discovered the world of Dungeons and Dragons – a discovery that would shape his life for years to come.

Throughout the book, Ethan writes candidly about his experiences, the games he played and the people that he met on his journey. We get to know the subjects of his exploration quite intimately. I wish I had a chance to meet a few of his subjects in person, especially Stephen Chenault the creator of Castles and Crusades, a game we featured in BIV #1.

I have to say that I quite enjoyed *Fantasy Freaks and Gaming Geeks*. When I saw it on the shelf I thought it was going to be another one of those “inside the world of gaming” books that never quite got it right. Let’s be honest, gaming is still very much an experience that cannot really be discussed or written about by someone that hasn’t quite “gotten” it yet. As much as we’d like to have gaming become mainstream and to see boffering tournaments on Spike TV, it’s probably not going to happen anytime soon. I was quite happy that Ethan “got it”, an aspect of the book that was clear from the outset of his adventures.

*Fantasy Freaks and Gaming Geeks* shouldn’t be looked at as some kind of exposé book, it’s a book about a man’s journey to find again what was lost to adulthood, to responsibilities and to all the other things that us as “matured” people are supposed to do on a day by day basis. I found the book completely engrossing. (I found myself reading half the book in one sitting. A monumental feat I assure you on the basis of my certain ADHD problem.)

I do highly recommend this book, not only for gamers but for anyone that is even remotely curious about why gamers do what they do. Why do we dress up and run around a forest? Why do we crave the battle among thousands of other gamers in an open field in fully decked out plate armour? Why do we on a regular basis seclude ourselves in our mother’s basements? All the answers to these questions, really did strike a cord with me. Sure, everyone does it for a different reason. It would be foolish to assume that there’s

## big iron vault

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one reason that ties all gamers together, but on the other hand perhaps it's a deficit in society today that pulls us together. (I won't spoil the book for you!) I can say that Ethan made a valiant and successful attempt at unravelling the gamer psyche and it is definitely worth a read.

Luckily enough, I was able to get in touch with Ethan through a friend of ours and we cornered him long enough to ask some other pertinent questions! Questions like "Why you wrote the book?" or "What were your challenges?" aren't the type of questions WE'RE interested in! We wanted to get to know the person behind the book. Who better to ask than Ethan himself! Here we go!

**Hi Ethan did your journey to the literal ends of the earth (and back), change your nostalgia for days past with your old gaming group and D&D?**



Absolutely. In *Fantasy Freaks and Gaming Geeks*, I begin my journey by describing the excitement but also hesitation I experienced when I rediscovered my old D&D gear in a box in my parents' basement. I hadn't played in 25 years, and I had

thought that my old gaming stuff had been lost forever. But there it was: a dragon's treasure.

When I rummaged through the piles of papers, notebooks, character sheets, graph paper, my old DM's guide (this was AD&D, mind you; I played back in the 1980s) and other rule books, plus -- yes! -- my gray felt bag of dice and enough hand-drawn maps of far-away lands and dungeons to fill an atlas, I was instantly transported to those worlds again. I was instantly nostalgic for those old gaming days and my old friends. Finding that box was the catalyst for the quest I write about in my book.

But I also had questions to answer about how much gaming and fantasy had changed --- a lot, I suspected --- and how much I had changed as well. I had just turned 40. But I had associated playing RPGs back in the 1970s and 1980s with being a geek and introvert. I had turned away from D&D when I got to college. I didn't know where gaming would fit into the life of an adult me --- Ethan, a so-called grown up. I need to find peace with my inner

gaming geek. That is the second thread of the quest I embarked on.

**I can only imagine the joys of finding a treasure pile like that! But what did you miss most about the days past?**

I missed the ability to travel, at will, to these D&D universes. And of course I missed the actual adventures we went on. And what I also missed was the camaraderie. The way we engaged in this act of collective storytelling. The banter, the laughing, the role-playing, the shared imagination of this game that few understood. In a way, D&D was a secret world --- full of private lexicons and complex rules and specialized knowledge. The joy in the game was not simply the anything-can-happen fantasy setting and the killing stuff and the heroic deeds, but also the rules. As all D&Ders know, hundreds of rules exist for every situation. As we played, we consulted those rules --- charts, indices, tables, descriptions of attributes, lists of spells, causes and effects --- all of it like a school unto itself, filled with answers to questions. Almost like a religion. And we loved to fight over the minutiae. Arguing the rules was half the fun. Above all, I missed the person I used to be. Me and my gaming buddies, we were unselfconscious gamers, and we played without being aware what we were doing was "geeky". I missed the way I could become completely immersed in the game and let the real world fall away ---- and have fun with a capital F-yeah!

**You mention in your book, that the LARPing industry and table top games in general are on the cusp of resurgence, a notion that I completely agree with. These days I can pull out a game of Agricola at a party without getting a weird stare from anyone (I haven't worked out how to pull out D&D yet though). Where do you see this table top industry, board-games and RPGs going in the next few years?**

I see them embracing all kinds of narratives and fandom communities and subcultures. In board games, I think we'll see a continued expansion and blending of traditional family games (Monopoly, Parcheesi) with the slightly more geeky ones (Risk, Diplomacy) and the most geeky of all (Axis & Allies, Warhammer, Settlers, etc). In other words, at least in table top and board-gaming industries, as long as

## big iron vault

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people like to get together around a table, there will be games to support that. The genres and setting and scenarios of these games will always shift and change to support whatever are the predominant fads of the moment: vampires, swords-and-sorcery, deep space, soccer, you name it. This goes for RPGs too. The narrative arc of the adventure/quest/dungeon crawl will also adjust; RPGs will let gamers not only role-play wizards and ax-wielders, but guitar-wielders (like in Rock Band), baseball players, movie stars, you name it. I think it's the story that entrances us; if we had a role-playing game about venture capital, that would appeal to budding or fantasy venture capitalists. Maybe...



**In some lines of conversation, it is speculated that computer RPGs will eventually be and create a beneficial side effect for table top RPGs. Some even go as far as saying that people who start with CRPGs eventually "outgrow" them and start to look**

**for something more immersive and personal. What is your take on this hypothesis?**

It seems to me that the more people play computer-based games, there's bound to be an equal and opposite pendulum swing the other direction. Folks will increasingly crave the face-to-face camaraderie of board and table-top games. This explains the huge surge in cosplay and LARPing. People want to play in the real world, make props, sew costumes, run around in the woods. Online gaming is great, but it can also be isolating for some players. I also think that, like with TV and movies, arc of the plot for MMOs might become somewhat formulaic: explore the ruins, kill stuff, solve the puzzle, go to the next level, buy the sequel or expansion. For some, this won't grow old, but others will be turned off and desire something new. I met a few gamers while doing research for my book who told me they thought they'd do all they could with CRPGs and MMOs. They were bored. Plus, the physicality of a table-top RPG or

board game is hard to beat. Drinking beer (or Diet Coke) with friends will never go out of style. Face-to-face will always beat out the virtual --- at least I hope so! But then again I'm an old fashioned gamer.

**In my circles we often dress "in character" to play our annual Halloween game, but that comes from the player's end. What sorts of things do you think a RPG game company can do to make their table top RPGs more immersive?**

What you speak to here I think is important, and I get into this in my book. For some, an RPG can be unsatisfying because it isn't "immersive" enough. These players might need props, costumes, an environment to be in, Hollywood-quality sets and special effects (or something close to it) to help them suspend disbelief. After a while, they would likely grow bored with a table-top RPG. But for me, and I talk about this in *Fantasy Freaks and Gaming Geeks*, what was always appealing to me was the story. It was the collaborate creation of narrative. I never needed costumes for the game to feel immersive.

For me, for those who want a more immersive experience, they should move towards LARPing. It can be fun playing D&D and dressing in a costume, but a game like D&D and other old-school RPGs are really set up for cosplay. I think what an RPG game company can do to make the experience more immersive is give DMs and players the tools to tell great stories and how to be better role-players. The material and plots need to be original and create in the player a sense of wonder and adventure. I think the power of D&D is that the game and the player and the DM meet each other half way. Unlike an MMO, where the world is visually (and impressively) designed for the player, in D&D the world exists in the mind. It's a literary and oral experience. Ultimately, it all happens in the imagination.

**Speaking of dressing up, is a trip back to the Forest of Doors in the near future for you?**

I doubt it. Not because it wasn't fun or because the group wasn't great. But they're just too far away! If I get into LARPing, it's going to be with a group here in the Boston area.

## big iron vault

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### **Do you still stay in touch with the rest of the people you met on your trip?**

Many of them, yes. Some of them have become friends. And what's been wonderful being on my book tour (I did about 55 events in 3 months, and traveled from coast to coast) is that I reconnected with many of the folks who I interviewed for the book and got to include them in the celebration of my book. In a couple case, I finally got to meet people who I had only emailed with or spoke with on the phone. That was a real treat. Now my book is available in Canada, the UK, Australia and New Zealand, so I've been reconnecting with folks from those countries in my quest.

### **In the book you met Steve from Troll Lord Games, did you get a chance to play Castles and Crusades? If so, did you like it? I happen to be one of the "First 20 Castlekeepers" for that game when it came out. We should have a game!**

Unfortunately, I did not get a chance to play C&C. But I watched it being played, and I observed as Steve GMed a game at Lake Geneva Gaming Convention (which has now morphed into GaryCon). Part of that experience is in my book. Cool that you were one of the original players. Perhaps you can introduce me to the game someday.

### **What's Frank Mentzer like as a Dungeon Master?**

I had come to Lake Geneva hoping to play D&D with Gary Gyax (that was one of the stops in my "quest"

that I recount in the book). Alas, I missed Gary -- he'd died before I got there. But I got to play with old TSR legends like Frank. It was one of the first times I'd played in years, so I was intimidated to play with him. But Frank was fun -- and funny. He had a twinkle in his eye (and he looks a little like Santa Claus). He's also refreshingly no-nonsense, and ruthless.

### **If you and I were in the same D&D party, which one of us would be the fighter and which one would be the magic user?**

Well, it depends on what you like to play, and I don't know you that well. But I'd probably lobby to be the magic user. I never got into playing the He-Man tank type player, and the Boy Scout paladin character was always a bore to play. Too much doing good goody-two-shoes. Actually, I preferred playing rangers and thieves. Half-elf or hobbit (misfling) was always my thing. I suppose always wanted to be either Aragorn and Bilbo. (Frodo was a bit too much of a wuss for me.)

### **GenCon, the big daddy of gaming conventions. Do you intend to be there for 2010 and if so, I think you and I need to get a beer and reminisce about glory days long pass! What do you think?**

I'd love to come back to Gen Con next year. I hope it can happen. After my book tour, I'm a little short on gold pieces, but maybe I can find a way to be there. If so, yes, many a pint we shall raise! Thanks for this opportunity to talk about my book *Fantasy Freaks and Gaming Geeks*, Keith!

## **Fantasy Freaks and Gaming Geeks**

A review by GARRR the Orc Barbarian

*"GARRR thinks, me likes book. Pages taste good. Cover not so much. But Ethan no chump. Writes good. Talk about lots of people and they like him too. Me likes big battle Pennsic. GARRR win battle no question. Maybe next time GARRR be in Ethan's book. But first GARRR need to impress Ethan. Next year at big humie meeting in Indianapolis, GARRR out drink Ethan, prove GARRR strong, then GARRR have own chapter. Ethan friend."*