

"I wish I had a book like this twenty years ago." Bruno Faidutti, designer of Citadels

KOBOLD GUIDE TO BOARD GAME DESIGN



By Mike Selinker

with James Ernest, Richard Garfield, Steve Jackson,
and a dozen more of the world's best designers

This is an exclusive Humble Bundle preview edition of the upcoming revision of *The Kobold Guide to Board Game Design*, planned for some time in 2019.

We'll be sharing articles with you as we get them in, so this booklet will expand over time. For now, here are four articles that we hope you'll enjoy.

For the meantime, if you like the Kobold Guides, we'd love it if you would please go to Koboldpress.com and purchase the print editions!

OK, here are some new pieces.

Mike

An Open Letter to a New Game Designer on the Subject of Things

by Mike Selinker

Hello Mike,

My name is Robert. I just finished reading your essay in the Kobold Guide to Board Game Design and had to check out your site. I am attempting to break into game design. My passion has a lot to do with the years I spent playing 3rd Edition D&D many years ago and my desire to help make new games by introducing them to the wonderful world of nerdiness. Besides flattering your ego and thanking you for an awesome game, I had a question about publishing. While I would love to work for a publisher or sell them my ideas, I know this is a saturated market with hundreds of awesome ideas that will never see the light of day. That being said, with Kickstarter and other crowdfunding options, self-publishing is more and more an option. However, I don't understand the steps that go into taking a game from a tested and retested prototype to a product that can be bought. If you had any tips for resources to learn more about this process that would be appreciated, or if you just want to hire me, I would take that too.

I will take any words of wisdom you have for a new game designer.

Thank you for your time,

Robert E Seamount IV

Sadly, I don't want to hire you, Robert. But I will give you the same words of wisdom I give everyone who asks me that question: "Be the person known for that thing."

What exactly is that thing? Well, I don't know. You have to figure that out. But when you do, make or do that thing and put it out there and get people to love it. That way, when you come to people like me, we'll say "Oh, you did that thing!" And we'll be much more inclined to look at you.

You're right about the prototyping step. The first step after you make a prototype is to make a second prototype. Most people miss that step. And then when you're done playing that prototype, make a third prototype. And keep doing that until the game works as well as all the games on your shelf. Now, you're saying that's a really high bar. Well, the thing is, the rest of us are still making games for your shelf. And your game has to compete with our games. So keep trying to get as good as us.

It also would help if you found collaborators in your community. People who can do things for you like test and draw and write. It's better to be among people who will give you honest feedback and not worry about hurting your feelings. Because the fans won't worry about that at all.

So keep doing that—prototype, test, collaborate, prototype, test, collaborate—until you reach that point where you can release your thing. Then you need to know how to release it. You can release it as a pay-for-play game or you can release it for free. That can be a tough choice.

Here's a tip: Everybody likes free.

Why should *you* like free? Well, if you want to be the person known for that thing, and if everybody likes

free, then everybody might just like your free thing. And if they like it, now they might pay you for your *next* thing. They might pay a lot, actually.

Of course, you don't have to like free. You can instead like being paid for your thing. But here's the sad news: People don't know about your thing so they can't decide to pay you for it. So you have to do something for people to know about it. You need a community that wants to pay you before you ask them to pay you, or they won't pay you.

But if they want to pay you, then they *will* pay you. And that's the amazing thing about Kickstarter and the other crowdfunding sites. People are very generous with their money. The community has a lot of it, and they want to give it away. Tabletop games is the largest category on Kickstarter for a reason. There are a lot of people who want them, and there are a lot of people who want to make them. If you are one of the latter, you might find a lot of the former. In fact, there are now games that are profitable a year before they're released. This is an amazing time to be a game designer.

There is, however, a catch.

If they give you the money, then you have to give them what they gave you the money for. If you don't do that within a reasonable amount of time, then you're in a bad way. Because the way you used to do things was to ask one person for money: a company, a bank, an angel. And when you disappointed that one person, then you had someone mad at us. Which is a bad thing.

But it's nothing like having *thousands* of people mad at you. When thousands of people are mad at you, then it feels like your life is at an end. The good news is, it's not. But your independent game design life will be shaken, possibly beyond repair. So you have to know that you can design your thing, publish your thing, and deliver

your thing. If you can't do that, you might not want to tell people you can.

Here's the good news: If you do deliver what you promise, and it's really good, everyone will love you. Now you're the person who did that thing. I did that with my puzzle novel *The Maze of Games* in 2014, and people can't stop telling me how awesome it is. So when I went to the public with our Apocrypha Adventure Card Game—my follow-up to the Pathfinder Adventure Card Game—the public said, "Shut up and take my money." I did half of that, anyway.

Now, as I write this, the base set of the Apocrypha game is in our backers' hands. So are our Kickstarter follow-ups *The Ninth World* and *Thornwatch*. We're now the people who did that thing. And the next thing. And the thing after that.

You can do that too. If you want. But only if you want. Because if you don't want to—and I mean really want to—you shouldn't.

But I hope you do, because I want to see what happens when you do your thing.

Mike Selinker

Some Tips for Wannabe Game Designers

by Bruno Faidutti

I am regularly contacted by aspiring game designers looking for advice, either in developing their first designs, in finding a publisher, or more and more often in publishing their creations by themselves through crowdfunding platforms. This piece is the one I'm most often asked for, and writing it is also a way to stop writing the same thing over and over by email. It has been written and translated rapidly, on the fly, but I hope it will answer the most frequent questions by young game designers.

Like novels or music, games are varied. There are different styles of games, and different styles of designers. What works for the ones doesn't necessarily work for the others. Anyway, I'll try to make a short list of very general advice and usual traps.

I) Game design

Play other games and learn from them

Novelists read novels, musicians listen to music, and game designers should play games. Like a novel, a music piece, or even a cooking recipe, a game is never entirely new and original. It is always the result of a hybridization between the designer's style and ideas and the games he has liked or disliked. Designers who stay in their own little corner, for fear of being inspired by others' work, never create anything valuable for lack of inspiration sources.

Designing games requires a rich gaming culture. Acquiring one was difficult in the eighties, when I designed my first games, but it has become much easier now. Explore local game shops, explore websites like BoardGameGeek. Original designs don't come out of nowhere, they are just inspired by a dozen or more older designs, while

unoriginal ones are inspired by only one. Focus on new games, because new systems come up all the time, and because you need to keep up with trends, if not to overcome them.

Streamline and simplify

My first game designs were far too complex. I had to learn how to trim them down, removing one after the other all the unnecessary parts, all the rules or elements which didn't both add to the mechanism and strengthen the theme. I needed several years before I was able to go directly for simplicity, for basic systems, and then add layers. Many young designers face the same problem. They tend to think that more is better, and it's hard for them to streamline their game, to remove superfluous spaces, cards, tokens or rules.

Both the additive and the subtractive process can lead to great games. Whichever way you work, never forget that a board game cannot have, and therefore must not try to have, the same depth and subtlety as reality, or even just as novels, movies, or video games. Board games focus on simplicity, which can mean abstraction or caricature. Your game must not be too simple, but it must be as simple as possible.

Playtest your own games again and again

Sometimes, a game works at once. Most times, it doesn't. Some systems work more or less like you imagined them, but others don't. Some thematic winks or references feel obvious, other ones feel convoluted. Play your game again and again, if possible with friends who know a lot about other games, or with the usual crowd at a local game shop, and rework it between every session. Keep on playing new iterations of the game until someone asks you to play again – it usually means the game is becoming really good.

I'm always happy when the version 1.2 or 1.3 of one my designs gets published, but other ones are at version 8.9

and still not satisfying. Most seasoned designers do blind tests, giving the rules and prototype to players and looking at it from the outside, to see how players can manage the game without the designer. I see the point, but that's not what I do. I prefer to take part in every game, in order to feel personally what works and what doesn't. Let's say there are two schools here.

Play, listen, and piggyback

A test game of a prototype in progress is still a game. It must be played for the pleasure, for the fun, with the right amount of wine or beer, like a published game, or it is not a real test. You must try to win, not to test this or that game system, which will follow naturally if the game works smoothly. It's not work, it's play. Formal debriefing, or ridiculous printed forms asking for players for their opinions on this or that point of the game are pointless, but an informal discussion with players can sometimes help. In any case, listen to players, be curious of what they are feeling, and take note mentally of what you should change for the next session. If your players are not too straight-minded, you can even change some rules on the go during the game.

Theme and mechanics

Mechanics are the engine of your game, and theme is its bodywork. No matter whether the original idea was one or the other, they must fit together. Unless of course you're in two-player abstract games, which are a very special thing, don't work for months on a game system if no fitting idea for a theme comes up. Once you have a theme, it will give you ideas probably not for the main game engine, but for all the fun side mechanisms.

Rough drafts, not prototypes

I happened one day to see a few prototypes by Reiner Knizia, and they look much like my own, cards roughly printed and cut on cardboard, and two or three basic pieces of clip art. New games designers often waste time,

if not money, on a really nice looking prototype of their first game, sometimes with 3D printed pieces, or even with professionally made graphics. It's a good idea only at first sight.

It distracts playtesters from the game itself. If your game is good, it must be good with roughly cut cards and basic clip art from the web. If it needs to look nice, it's not good enough. Often, after a few games, you will want to make changes to the game, to add or remove a few spaces on the board, or a few cards, or to change the theme. All this is much easier to do on a rough and loosely illustrated draft than on a professionally looking prototype.

Also, and this brings me to the second part of this piece, the publishers who will have a look at your game must be able to imagine it with a different graphic style, with different components. This is much easier if the prototype is graphically light. I prefer to see my game projects as drafts or sketches than as prototype. They have to be clear, neat, and functional, but they don't have to look pretty.

Rules to help you know where you stand

Don't let your game slip out of your mind. You must know at any time where it stands, what is validated, and what is still in the works. This is why I often start with writing a complete set of rules, even when I know I will update them over and over, and sometimes rewrite them completely. I know that other game designers, like Bruno Cathala or Eric Lang, write rules in the end, when the game is entirely finalized in their mind, but this requires an extremely rigorous mind. Mine is not, and most probably yours isn't either.

In any case, the rules you will show to potential publishers must be complete, flawless, without the smallest ambiguity. It's not an issue for me, I know I'm good at writing rules, but if you are not, have it proofread by friends who played the game, and by others who didn't.

II) Game publishing

Self-publishing is risky and time consuming

Designing a game doesn't really feel like work. Publishing a game does. Running a Kickstarter campaign also does. Since you most likely already have a job, publishing your own game via Kickstarter means working for three jobs at once, which is a lot.

Crowdfunding has considerably reduced the financial risk in self-publishing, but it has not completely nullified them. A successful crowdfunding campaign has a cost, if only to show a graphically finished project. It is also extremely time consuming, and requires a thick skin. As for starting self-publishing without crowdfunding, it's probably easier, but you must have some money to lose, or at least to risk.

No one's gonna steal your game

Do not lose time with legal protection and all that stuff. No one is going to steal your game.

Most game publishers are, like you, game enthusiasts and that's why they respect your work. Furthermore, it is far more simple and far less risky for a publisher to pay you royalties on your game than to copy it. Last, if you start discussing copyrights, safeties, and all that stuff, the publisher you are discussing with will think that you are paranoid, or at least complicated, and will probably walk away and look for some other designers. And he'll be right.

I'm not saying there are never issues. There are very few ones, and they are always about very successful games that someone wants to copy. You are not there yet.

Show your game

Of course, it's much easier for a seasoned game designer like me than for a young wannabe to contact an established publisher. The board gaming world is,

however, very open. What makes a game sell is not the author's name on the box but the game inside. Publishers know this, and are always looking for new and interesting stuff, no matter where it comes from. On the other hand, major publishers receive game submissions by email every day and can't even look attentively at all of them.

The best way to submit your game is probably to tour as many game fairs as possible, big and small, and to have your game played and buzz enough for publishers passing by to have a look at it. If you are a stay-at-home person, you can try game design contests (in France, the most interesting ones are probably the Boulogne-Billancourt one and the Games of Tomorrow at Paris Est Ludique). You can also hire a specialized agent, who will help you finalize your design and will contact possible publishers. In France, the best known is Forgenext.

Contact several publishers

I've sometimes been told it was inelegant, but I usually show my designs to three or four publishers at once. Of course, I tell them. Publishers have different lines and different tastes, and a game can fit one and not another, or can please one and not another. On the other hand, if all publishers come back with the same remarks, it probably means you should rework it.

Don't be greedy

It's your game, your baby, and you've spent weeks or even months on it, but the publisher has also lots of development work to do, and will pay for the art – usually a heavy fixed sum – and the printing. If your game doesn't sell, the publisher will lose money – you won't.

Don't be too greedy about royalties, especially when dealing with a small, young, and probably poor publisher. Standard royalty rates in Europe are between 6 and 10% of the publisher's turnover in Europe, and they are slightly lower in the US. I often suggest to publishers, and especially small ones, progressive royalties – 6% on the

first 20.000 copies, then 8%, and 10% if they sell more than 50.000 copies, which rarely happens. It's fair because it means that the publisher will start to pay you really good money when he will start to make good money for himself. On the other hand, always ask for an advance, even just a few hundred dollars, as a token of the publisher's commitment to the game. I'm often asked how I can check the sales of my games, and therefore the royalties I'm paid. I can't, and must rely on trust. That's why I often said that what is really important is not what's written in the contract but with whom you are signing it. This is also true in many other businesses.

Anyway, don't think you'll get rich, or even simply you'll get a living from designing board games. It may happen, if you're both lucky and talented, but don't count on it.

Don't let your game loose

Your game is not perfect. Finding the issues and fixing them with you is part of the publisher's job – that's development. The problem is that publishers are either former game designers or frustrated game designers, and that they often try to change the game by themselves, without your input and control. You should be very wary of this. Your game can be developed, modified, corrected, but you must take part in every discussion, because no one knows the game as well as you do. Don't stick to it, be flexible, but don't let it get loose. Be wary when the publisher wants to change the theme, the setting of your game. Make sure that the new setting fits as well as the original one, and take the time to adapt the mechanical details to the new theme, the new references. As for the graphics, since you're not paying for them, it's not your decision, but be sure to see everything, and don't hesitate to give your opinion, especially about ergonomics. In short, no matter what happens with the publisher, stay in the loop.

These are very vague bits of advice, mostly based on my own good and bad experiences. They might not fit different types of games, or different people, but I hope they will give everyone a better understanding of how board game design, board game publishing, and the relations between them usually work. They usually work well.

Bruno Faidutti is the designer or co-designer of the board games Citadels, Mystery of the Abbey, Mission: Red Planet, Mascarade, and Queen's Necklace, among many others.

Theme As Mechanic: What Dreams Are Made Of

by Mike Selinker

I get asked a lot, “Which comes first, the theme or the mechanics?” It’s never that simple. For me, theme and mechanics are heavily intertwined, and one is never done before the other is started.

For an example. I’ll discuss what inspired one of the central mechanics in the Apocrypha Adventure Card Game. I admit I’m a little nervous about it. But it’s worth saying, and maybe it’ll help a bit.

Apocrypha is a project I co-created with my friend Rian Sand, and then the amazing team of Chad Brown, Mike Vaillancourt, Gaby Weidling, Paul Peterson, Tanis O’Connor, Liz Spain, Elisa Teague, Keith Richmond, and Matt Forbeck helped us pull it all together into a game.

A second team—the Remembrance Team—united to co-write the game’s core element, “memory fragments.” The team is a host of my favorite writers and friends: Matt, Kij Johnson, Jerry “Tycho” Holkins, Keith Baker, Erin M. Evans, Wolf Baur, Bruce Cordell, Teeuwynn Woodruff, Kris Straub, and Patrick Rothfuss.

The fragments are short-short stories that describe repressed memories that you unlock as a method of character growth. They’re incredibly cool reading. For example, in this video Jerry reads one of his, called The Bone Trick.

On a game level, fragments give you new powers, but they also give you new negative consequences when you use them. The more you learn, the more powerful you get—but the more unstable you get. Some fragments are

permanent; once you remember them, you get to use their powers for a while—until something overwrites that portion of your brain. And some others are fleeting; you use them once and they vanish out of your head forever.

Apocrypha is about scary things: demons and shadows and razor blades in apples. Those things scare me, but one thing scares me a whole lot more. And that fear inspired the fragment mechanic.

Because I'd been thinking a lot about Alzheimer's disease.

Now, before anyone tears the internet down, this game is not *about* Alzheimer's disease. Alzheimer's is the least fun thing in the world, and Apocrypha is supposed to be fun. So you won't see any mention of Alzheimer's in the game. Because it's not about that.

But the concept of losing control of my brain frightens me more than anything. I *need* my brain. Stuff that comes out of it not only makes sure I can survive, but helps give my teammates projects to work on, and my clients things to publish, and our fans fun things to play and read and solve. If I lose control of my brain, I don't get to do that anymore. Alzheimer's destroys that possibility. It rips apart your short term memory first, and then it takes everything else away piece by piece. It disassembles what you know, and then it disassembles you.

I read everything I could about Alzheimer's after watching my mother give a presentation about what it's like to deal with the early onset of the disease. She suffered unsettling cognitive symptoms which were diagnosed as probable Alzheimer's. She threw everything she could at her brain: medication, vitamins and supplements, exercise, socialization, and even puzzles and games. Some of **my** puzzles and games. After five years, she tested normal. Whether it was Alzheimer's or some other cognitive disease, she beat it back to its cave. Then she *wrote a book*

that told me even more about it. My mom is a goddamned hero, and when I grow up I want to be just like her.

And while I don't have the disease, my memory is eroding too. I am not as quick on the uptake as I was. I don't remember things I said to people that they remember as clear as day. I stall out sometimes. Hardly crippling, but it's there and I know it. I won't have this brain forever.

So, okay, I was thinking a lot about this. And part of that thinking—maybe the coping part of that thinking—led me to an interesting space in game design. We spend a lot of time playing games where you have a character. That's a representation of your fictional self. And in just about every case, you know everything about yourself. You may not be able to depend on much in our games, but you can depend on you.

But what if that wasn't the case? What if you knew some things about yourself, but not others? And what if when you learned the other things, you didn't know whether you got to *keep* knowing them? Is that a playable space? Do you want to do that?

I wondered if I could simulate the concept of memory disintegration in a way that people would be both engaged and disoriented by. We played a Mutants & Masterminds RPG session where Rian and his friend Miles handed us slips of paper that gave us new memories and power changes, and it was a blast. I decided to try to do that with cards both inside an RPG and outside of it.

In a retreat to my designer friend Keith Baker's Portland basement, I built Apocrypha's core concept, that your memory fragments would array themselves on a 3x3 grid around your character card like a halo. You would gain flashes of memory, and those would give you the ability to do certain things, but the new memories would also trouble you with their consequences. Ignorance is bliss in this game, but bliss isn't always what you want.

The concept of the “fleeting” memory—the type that is used once then forgotten—came soon after. This was particularly interesting in play. When you have a one-shot potion in a fantasy game, you chug it and forget about it. But when that one-shot is part of your mind, and when the thing you do to use it is called “sacrificing your memory,” it’s harder to pull the ripcord.

Other things came from this concept. Because the fragments were on cards, you could rearrange them. So their position in the array had to matter. So *your* position at the table had to matter. Because of the fragments, we could reward you for sitting to the left or right of other players, and use your memories and powers to help those players on your left or right. We could also break the circle, reverse the turn order, or even rearrange who sat where. The fragments made the game go from a static experience to a dynamic one.

We could also turn on and off parts of your brain. Fragments are sorted by color, which means bad guys could stop all red memories from working or make you replace one white memory with another from the box. If you’re playing with a gamemaster, she can give you a new memory that advances the plot and gives you a special power just for this session. We can give you a death card, which just clogs up a slot in your brain like an amyloid plaque.

All of that is cool. It plays great. It’s *fun*. I took a thing that scared me and made a game out of it. That doesn’t make it less scary, but it does put it in its place. I can hold it in my hands and say, “I made something good out of you.”

In Apocrypha, you are what you think. And I’m thinking of good things.

How Hard Should it Be?

by Chad Brown

In each of our Pathfinder Adventure Card Game Adventure Paths, we had to approach the question: How hard should it be? I'd like to talk with you all about the thematic and mechanical motivations behind the different difficulty of each Adventure Path.

Let's talk about what it's like to work on a game that's always changing and yet always somewhat the same. We explicitly design each PACG Adventure Path to be compatible with all of the others. This means that once you know how to play the game, you can easily jump into any set... and if you really like a particular character from a particular set, you can bring it into a different AP. Our default example of this is Lirianne, the iconic Gunslinger character in *Skull & Shackles*. If you decide that you'd really like to play Lirianne in *Rise of the Runelords*, *Wrath of the Righteous*, or in our upcoming release, *Mummy's Mask*, you can do so, and she'll work just fine. For Lirianne, we recommend that you also bring along some of the firearms from *S&S*, but that's up to you—she works either way.

At the same time, we also spend a lot of time, effort, and brainpower to make each Adventure Path a new and interesting experience. We use a wide variety of techniques to do this, including new characters, new mechanics, and of course, a brand-new story with each one. One important technique we use that might not be obvious to everyone is the **power curve**. This is a technical term we use to roughly mean, "How hard is it to get through the adventure at different points along the path?" If you've ever studied writing and film—and especially if

you've ever GM'd a long campaign—you've gone through at least some of this process yourself. How strong are the characters at the start? When things get tough (as they usually do), when does it happen, and how often? Do the characters have the resources they need to protect themselves? Do they use them wisely, or do they have to scramble to get where they need to be? As the plot unfolds, are they ahead of the game, behind the eight ball, or both... and do they know it?

In our first AP, *Rise of the Runelords*, the adventurers start out in the small coastal city of Sandpoint. As the adventure begins, the town is attacked! A few minutes later, the typical adventuring party is moving from location to location, finding goblins with torches and kicking them in their oh-so-many teeth.

Mechanically speaking, the characters start off in a position of relative strength, but also ignorance. Unless they are risky or get unlucky, the typical character can go toe-to-toe with the typical goblin and expect to come out on top most of the time, especially if there's some help available. In the story, though, it's unclear why these torch-toting goblins would trouble the town. Figuring out that secret is the step that takes *Rise of the Runelords* from a one-shot "defend the town" session to an epic campaign against an ancient evil of the first order. As the story progresses, the characters grow in both knowledge and power, facing and overcoming increasingly dangerous threats on their way (both figuratively and literally) to the top.

In *Rise of the Runelords*, the character power progression is more or less linear over time, while the difficulty of challenges is a curve that dips and then rises. Character power starts very slightly behind the power curve in Adventure B. Then the difficulty curve dips beneath the power curve through the middle of the Adventure Path,

rising over time until, very near the end, the two lines approach.

In story terms, this represents the change in difficulty as you discover the stone giants behind the ogres, the rune giants behind the stone giants, and eventually the ancient Azlanti behind it all.

In *Skull & Shackles*, the doughty adventurers are press-ganged into service on a vessel most piratical. You start off by learning to handle life at sea, including learning to crew a vessel (and learning to hate geese) and learning how to get along with the rest of the crew, be they friendly or otherwise.

Here the characters start the campaign off-kilter—they're quickly tossed into a situation that's unlike what they're used to facing. Whether you played *Rise of the Runelords* or not, you probably recognized at some gut level that Valeros could fight his way free of his captors, but he would be alone on a boat in the middle of an unfamiliar sea. From both a narrative and a mechanical perspective, *Skull & Shackles* was a bit more difficult than *Rise of the Runelords* because we forced you to learn to do new things. You could still focus on being the strongest fighter, awesomest bard, or stabbiest rogue, but unless you could also handle yourself underwater, navigate a ship, and manage a crew, you were very likely to run into serious trouble. In game terms, we forced you to spread out your resources. Most characters can't afford to dedicate every card and feat to a single, focused goal.

In *Skull & Shackles*, the difficulty is much closer to linear—the difficulty increases mostly steadily over time—but the character power progression follows a parabolic curve. In the very beginning scenarios, character power is somewhat above the difficulty line, but it dips down below the line quickly in AD1, and then rises above the line for much of the AP. Near the end, the character power curve

levels out, and it comes very close to the difficulty line by the end.

In story terms, this represents the narrative progression of the characters as they start out as "fish out of water" and then come to master their new environment, as they escape from captivity, gain their own ship, then make their mark in the Shackles as part of the Pirate Council.

Eventually, they discover an invasion plot and move from freebooting around the islands to confronting the Chelish fleet and taking the fight directly to the Hurricane King.

In the third Adventure Path, Wrath of the Righteous, you're in the city of Kenabres to celebrate a famous past battle against the demonic invasion into the Worldwound. Just when the festivities are about to officially start, something very bad happens. This time, though, it's not goblins with torches or pirates with whips. It's demons... lots of demons. Again, I don't want to spoil too much, but the title of the first scenario in Adventure 1 is "The Fall of Kenabres." (I can assure you that it's not the follow-up to "The Summer of Kenabres.")

We once again changed things while keeping the game the same. In this case, the characters start out "behind the curve," both in knowledge and in raw power level. The demons you face right from the get-go are tougher, more numerous, and just meaner than you've seen before. On the other hand, you have a bunch of new tools to even the score. In particular, Wrath of the Righteous adds both cohorts and mythic power. Cohorts are a new card type in this Adventure Path, representing important, named characters that will help you in your struggles against the demonic hordes.

Cohorts are bonus cards given to the party at the start of scenarios. They make you a little bit tougher, and in the right hands, they have some potent powers. Additionally, we've brought in mythic path cards, representing the unlocked potential for mythic power possessed by each of

the characters in this set. The way they're added to the AP is important here: mythic paths are unlocked by a specific event that happens in the story. When you're playing *Wrath of the Righteous*, you get a chance to play a number of scenarios before you pick a mythic path card, which helps with your understanding of the card and the narrative arc of the story. On the one hand, you now have some experience with the character, and you can make a better choice of which path will be the most fun. On the other hand, it lets us level up the characters in a new way. This helps us create the feeling of being slightly overwhelmed and in trouble at the start of the AP, but it then gives you a dramatic moment where you start climbing out of the pit, bringing yourself up to the level of—and even potentially ahead of—the mass of terrible, evil banes we've assembled for you.

In *Wrath of the Righteous*, both the character power level and the difficulties they face are curved. Difficulty starts high, but dips quickly below the character power level before rising again. At the same time, character power level starts off relatively linear, rising as the characters recover their footing.

In story terms, the characters start off behind the curve as the initial troubles with the Worldwound are overbearing. You don't start with the feeling that you can solve the problems of the Worldwound so much as you hope that you can withstand them. As those that survive the initial onslaught unlock their mythic potential, the character power curve catches up and exceeds the difficulty curve. These things are tricky, though, and only time will reveal what the future holds for your valiant crusaders!

The use of the d20 in mythic paths is the final piece in the puzzle here. While it increases the top end of your checks, it doesn't help with everything. It also doesn't change the bottom end at all. d20s roll 1s just like every other die. In a set like *Skull & Shackles*, the d20 would be "too swingy"

to use often, but in Wrath of the Righteous, it's a great fit. You each have within you the potential to do truly amazing things, but so do your opponents. The results are far from certain... which is kinda what we were going for.

These are very different sorts of power curves, and they produce different responses in players. In the end, any way that you find to have fun is a great way to play.

Chad Brown is the lead developer at Lone Shark Games. The games he has developed include the Pathfinder Adventure Card Game, Betrayal at House on the Hill: Widow's Walk, the Apocrypha Adventure Card Game, Thornwatch, and The Ninth World: A Skillbuilding Game for Numenera.