

# Knights of the Dinner Table®

## Tales from the Vault Volume One

By Jolly R. Blackburn

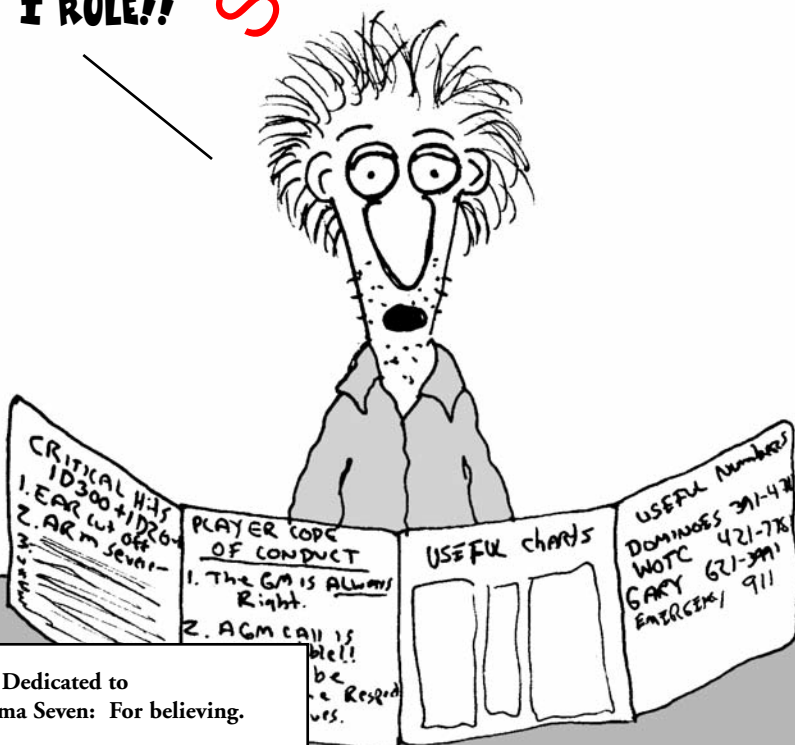
Cover by George Zhanic

### PROUDEST DAY OF MY LIFE!

I WAS ABLE TO TRANSFORM A SIMPLE WOODEN DOOR, A FEW RABID RATS, SOME GLUE AND ONE-LEGGED DWARF INTO ONE OF THE DEADLIEST TRAPS EVER!! FOUR PLAYER-CHARACTER DEATHS, TWO FAILED ATTEMPTS AT RESURRECTION AND A DECAPITATION!!!

**I RULE!!**

Sample file



Dedicated to  
the Alta Loma Seven: For believing.

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## KENZER AND COMPANY

**Knights of the Dinner Table  
Tales From The Vault  
Volume One**

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**Submissions:** We accept submissions for strip ideas, jokes, cartoons, etc. We are interested in running anything that other gamers and fans would enjoy. See our website for writer's guidelines. Electronic submissions preferred.

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# FOREWORD

Amazingly Knights of the Dinner Table has been running on and off since March, 1990. I've helped publish Knights of the Dinner Table comic books and related products for only nine months. That makes me a bit of a newbie, so naturally I was quite surprised when Jolly asked me to write this foreword. Using his extraordinary editorial skills, honed, of course, during his tenure as editor and sole founder of Shadis magazine, Jolly gave me less than 36 hours to write this foreword. I'm sure I'll find out from Jolly at a much later date, maybe over a few drinks at GenCon 2001, that I was actually his fourth choice to write this piece. Since the other three (probably, Gary Gyax, Steve Jackson and John Cleese) bailed and GenCon 97 is but 10 days away (our production manager is standing behind me tapping his feet waiting for this piece so we can hit the presses), I guess I'll stop procrastinating and get to it.

I know what you're thinking - who is this Kenzer guy, anyway? I'm KoDT's number two fan, who the HELL are you? (Jolly's mom is the number one fan.) Ahhh, I see you there shaking your head, thinking, no way, numb-dice, I'm the number two fan (not even you would dare to place yourself ahead of Mrs. Blackburn - she's a pirate queen, ya know - and yes, Jolly's middle name is "Roger"). I know, you've got every back issue of Shadis, Dragon, Familiar, etc. plus you own all the comics and this book (if you haven't bought this book and you're reading this, please buy it or send us a check for 13 cents as a royalty for reading this far). Well I love the Knights so much I BOUGHT THE COMPANY! And yes, I do get all my lines from Bart Simpson and old TV commercials, doesn't everyone? Well, actually, that's not quite accurate (KenzerCo actually purchased the rights to certain of Jolly's properties), but the story goes like this...

Jolly had some kind of divorce from his old partner. They apparently hated Bob Herzog - wanted a power-gamer in his place. Anyway, to make a long story short, Bob went on a hunger strike and refused to move from the table and Jolly supported him. Both parties filed suit in the Seventh Circuit (Federal Court). The matter was tied up for six years and several appeals before the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Jolly's favor. Apparently, Chief Justice Rehnquist is also from the old school of role-playing. In fact, the final line of his opinion reads "I waste them with my crossbow!! Judgement for Bob Herzog and Jolly Blackburn, Appellants." Not only that, but dicta in the case of Blackburn and Herzog v. Shadis Magazine reaffirms Bob's (and thus our) constitutional right to roleplay! Later, after Jolly joined the ranks of Kenzer & Company, we played a joke on Bob and told him he was fired (see page 59). I know it's mean, but he's Bob; if you can't pick on him, who can you pick on? But I digress...

Somehow I got to talking to Jolly on the phone. I just wanted to see how his new company was doing. We knew we had the same interests in games; I always loved Shadis and KoDT while Jolly secretly coveted Kalamar and who doesn't love Monty Python? As it turns out, we shared the same concepts on how to run a company. Jolly learned to keep costs down from the School of Hard Knocks ('course, I learned it at Kellogg business school and Motorola). A few months later we were planning a monthly KoDT comic and revamping Kalamar. All I had left to do was convince the

other shareholders that Jolly wasn't going to rip us off and run away with a goodly piece of KenzerCo. After the brutal initiation ritual (see Cries From the Attic, KoDT comic #5 for an accounting) the other stockholders were satisfied. Incidentally, Jolly is an owner of KenzerCo, not just an employee, i.e. he owns a piece of everything we do. O.K. so what the heck is KenzerCo all about? **\*\*WARNING\*\*** Blatant marketing material follows (I ran out of time so I was forced to steal part of our mission statement from our old web site. (The new site is [www.kenzerco.com](http://www.kenzerco.com)))


The sole purpose of Kenzer and Company is to create superior quality games and game-related products. With each release, we take great care to create, not just a product, but a world-class product. The quality extends to all areas of our games. Don't believe me? Pick up a Kingdoms of Kalamar map. Aside from its obvious beauty and the realistic geography, the map is printed on thicker and more durable stock than any other map product in the adventure game industry. When we produced the Kalamar setting, we did not want to make a product that was merely equal to the competition (a difficult task in itself, considering the disparity in size between Kenzer and Company and the established companies); we wanted to surpass anything they would ever produce.

This attitude is also reflected in the main text of our products. We feel that the strength of a product, no matter how many bells and whistles it may have, is in the core material. Our role-playing line is extremely well ritten and edited. The Kalamar, Brodeln and Adajy products were written for a demanding mature audience. They are realistic and remarkably detailed. All of our role-playing products are easy to reference during play, so the GameMaster can spend more time playing and less time flipping pages. Tools like the ImageQUEST adventure illustrator, extensive reference tables, flowcharts and all-encompassing indices provide this result.

Our collectible card game continued this tradition of world-class quality products. We set out to produce a humorous collectible card game. Therefore, we licensed the greatest comedy of all-time, Monty Python and the Holy Grail. This product really began a new era for KenzerCo. Our new motto became: Grab your coconuts and let's play! When Jolly came along, the fit was obvious, what could possibly top the funniest card game, ever? Why the greatest gaming comic of all time - Knights of the Dinner Table. Jolly was and is the perfect match. Actually, we tried to hire just Brian and B.A. first, but they wouldn't join without Jolly.

Now at cons when we get mobbed for KoDTs and MPHG, our neighboring booths ask, "What are you guys selling - gold bricks?" We just smile, wipe the mustard from our chins and honestly say, "no, we sell comedy!"

**HOODY HOO !!!!**



David S. Kenzer  
President, Kenzer & Company

# “How Did We Get Here From There?”

One day two elderly men at the Old Soldier’s Home decided to sneak away to the local city park for an afternoon stroll. It was a short walk and they figured they could go and come back without anyone noticing they had even gone.

Somehow or other, as they walked along, they missed the turn for the park. Soon they found themselves in a very unfamiliar neighborhood on the outskirts of town.

Panicking, they attempted to backtrack but only managed to make matters worse. For hours they trudged along turning aimlessly hoping they would stumble upon a familiar landmark which might point the way home.

As night fell, the two old men found themselves on a forest trail which ran along a beautiful river. Tired, they decided to lay down and sleep on the river bank. As they lay there gazing at the stars and listening to the flowing river, one of the old men turned to the other and said, “I know we’re lost but I’m having a grand old time!” The other old man smiled and nodded. “Yeah, me too.”

The next morning, they awoke and saw that they were next to a tall hill. They decided to climb to the top to get a better view of the area. As they reached the crest of the hill, there on the far horizon they could just make out the red clay tile on the roof of the Old Soldier’s Home.

“Geeze Loueeze!!!”, said one of the old men. “How did we get here from there?”

I decided to start off this brief history of KODT with the above story because that’s pretty much how the strip came to be. It was an accident - an afterthought. I set out heading in one direction and turned around a few years later to discover I was on a path different than the one I had started out on. And like the old men in the story who discovered they were lost, I can’t really say I have any regrets.

In January, 1990 I published the first issue of Shadis™ Magazine. It was a labor of love from cover to cover. For the next six years, the ‘little zine that could’ (as one reviewer later described it.) would take me on a pretty amazing journey.

When it came time to put the finishing touches on Issue 2 of Shadis (March, 1990), I agonized over what to do with the last page. I had purposely reserved the page for cartoons which had been promised by various freelancers but never arrived. I’ve always been big on game-related cartoons and humor and I was determined that Shadis would have a page or two devoted to such material each issue.

Finally, as a last resort, I drew a very crude cartoon of GameMaster and a Player sitting at a gaming table. The cartoon was entitled, **Knights of the Dinner Table**. I showed it to a couple of friends who found it mildly funny. That was enough for me. I pasted the cartoon into place and sent Issue 2 off to the printers. I was confident that soon some ‘real’ cartoons would arrive in the mail and I could hang up my cartoonist’s cap.

The press-date for number 3 soon drew near and again no cartoons had arrived. Once again, reluctantly, I sat down to do another cartoon. It was a cycle that would repeat itself over and over in the coming months.

Finally I stumbled across the work of Jason Holmgren in a gameshop newsletter that someone had



**YOU FEELING LUCKY, PUNK?! HUH??  
YOU WANT A PIECE OF ME?? ROLL FOR INITIATIVE  
MONKEY-BOY!!**



sent to me. **The Adventures of Joe Genero** had me rolling on the floor and I immediately made arrangements to secure Joe Genero for future issues of Shadis. A short time later, I was introduced to a fellow named James Dixon from my home town. James was a godsend. He had tons of gamer related cartoons he had drawn for the enjoyment of his friends in his own gaming group.

He was kind enough to let me drag him down to a local 7-Eleven so I could xerox a handful of them. I was on cloud nine. At last I had cartoons. Knights of the Dinner Table was yanked from Shadis #6 before going to press (sadly, this particular strip was lost forever) and I felt a bit relieved that I was out of the cartoonist business.

I was a little dismayed when letters started to arrive asking, "What happened to the Knights?". Readers loved Joe Genero and the Dixon cartoons but they made it very clear they wanted the Knights to go back in Shadis. Many KODT fans are surprised when I tell them I stubbornly refused to bring the strip back. I just didn't have the time to do a cartoon. As editor and publisher of Shadis (as well as being on active duty in the U.S. Army), I had my hands full. Besides, I had never been an artist and had never tried to pass myself off as one. I scrawled out my comic strip in the early days because it was a one-man business back then and I couldn't talk anyone else into doing it.

It was at that point I learned a lesson, a lesson that would I would relearn over and over again in the coming years. The comic strip was in control and was pulling the strings of its creator.

The readers demanded KODT be brought back and it was. Looking back, it seems like the decision was made 'for' me and not by me. When the first letters started to trickle in asking if I had ever "thought of doing the strip in a comic book format?", I laughed. No way in hell would I be doing a comic book. Who had the time?

As I write this, Issue number 10 of the KODT monthly comic book is on the press. I can feel those strings being tugged even now.

I may have been slow to get the point, but I've finally realized what fans see in Knights of the Dinner Table. They see themselves and their friends.

Every fan who has ever introduced him or herself to me starts out with, "I know you've probably heard this a million times before but the guys in the strip remind me of my own group."

*"Who are these guys based on?"*

I usually shrug and say, "Oh, they're just a montage of players and GMs I've known over the years." Perhaps that answer is a bit too simplistic if not a touch dishonest.

The truth is, the guys of the KODT are based on my own pioneering group. They don't look like the guys I played with but to be sure all of their personalities and quirks are there.

Brian the argumentative rules-lawyer is none other than my long-time friend, Joel Bozell, who invariably could quote the page number and often times the paragraph where a particular rule in question could be found. The fact that he was always right caused many a GM to turn red faced behind those screens.

Bob, the temperamental and excitable hack-'n'-slasher, is based largely on Lew Herring (who is credited with introducing me to AD&D and the world of role-playing). If you ever run into Lew at a convention, have him show you how he used to read a four sided die - you'll see Bob written all over his face. Be forewarned, Lew will deny any connection with Bob or any of the other guys of the KODT. Pity.

Dave is perhaps my favorite character. He's based on an old Army buddy, Brett 'Rambo' Filzer. If Brett wasn't engaged in combat or kicking down a door he wasn't happy. I only played with Brett for about 8 months in 1985, but he provided enough material for the KODT to last for years. I've lost contact with him over the years but I'm sure he's helping some poor GM lose his hair and gnash his teeth out there somewhere.

Sara? Sara is the only character not based exclusively on a single person. After the KODT ran for several months in SHADIS, I was constantly asked "Where's the female gamer?" Some saw it as some deep indication that I, like most gamers, was afraid of women - even to the point of drawing one.

I resisted introducing a female member of the KODT for four years, not because I was against the idea of adding a female - I simply didn't want to deal with the headache of redesigning the panels of the cartoon to make room for a fifth character. Finally Sara debuted in issue 2 of the comic book and shortly thereafter in Shadis. Who is she? Sara is truly a collection of personalities I've played with over the years. A lot of her wisdom and insight comes from our female readers who suggest ideas or relate personal experiences.

Sara seems to be the typical frustrated female gamer type - forever putting up with bouts of hack-'n'-slash while trying to interject some honest, down-to-earth role-playing where she can. Along the way she attempts to educate her fellow gamers.

Weird Pete has drawn a lot of speculation from readers. For a minor character, he seems to have a loyal

following. Here is the struggling game store owner, chocked full of advice (some good, some bad) and a little bitter. He's based on a guy I knew in Muncie, Indiana during my college days whose name is long since forgotten. Apparently everyone knows a local incarnation of Weird Pete.

It would probably frighten a lot of people to learn that Nitro Ferguson is based on a real person. He's actually based on several individuals I've met over the years at the gaming table. Some of these guys were scarier than the monsters we were fighting in the game.

That leaves B.A. Felton. Ol' B.A. is based largely on myself. In fact, his name was taken from a pseudonym I wrote under for many years. B.A. is the eternally frustrated gamemaster constantly at odds with his players.

Despite the fact that most of the characters in **Knights of the Dinner Table** are based on real people, one of the things the reader will notice while reading this treasury is how the strip slowly evolved as the characters developed. The characters have taken on a life of their own over the years. Slowly, from strip to strip, each of them has developed their own unique personality.

This introduction started with a question, "How did we get here from there?" For whatever reason, KODT has found a loyal audience. This treasury is the direct result of numerous requests over the years for all the strips that have appeared in various publications to be gathered between two covers.

Enjoy!! I leave it up to you, the fans, to answer the final question. "Where do we go from here?"

*Jolly R. Blackburn*

Jolly R. Blackburn  
July 27, 1997



# Strips with No Names?

It wasn't immediately apparent way back when but one of the annoying things about the **KODT** strips appearing outside the magazine is that the strips themselves do not have individual titles — an oversight. How many times have you tried to find a strip in one of the **Vaults** to no avail? *Yeah, it's the one that had Lou wearing and there was this shoebox and...* Well, thanks to Erik Bouchard (*Who we made an 'honorary' Knight of the Dinner Table — even if he IS a Canadian*) that oversight has been remedied. Erik came up with the idea of retroactively giving each strip a name. Here then are the titles for all of the strips appearing in Tales from the Vault: Volume One (*most of which Erik proposed*).

## TALES FROM THE VAULT: VOLUME ONE

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