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MUSICAL CHAIRS

Holy crap, is it August already? Where does the time go? As Gen Con approaches, all sorts of games are afoot around the office, as usual. Most of RPG R&D will be at the show, including Bart, Chris, Stacy, and myself for *D&D Insider*. Feel free to swing by one of our seminars or the booth and say hi if you'll be in Indy.

But that's not the real topic this month. I recently had a chance to experience something unique—something I know many of you do frequently in games of your own. I swapped places with one of my players in the game I run.

See, I run a weekly game for a rowdy bunch of co-workers, and a couple weeks back, I rolled up a character of my own and swapped places with one of my players. The results? Much, much better than I expected.

I don't have an adversarial relationship with my players. Far from it. We have a great time. They know it's their job to solve the puzzles and defeat the monsters I throw at them. And for the most part, they know it's my job to try and kill their characters. So we get along. But coming into this game—where I'm trading seats with one of my players—I was still a little nervous. I mean, one of my players can be a little, well, aggressive during a normal session. Maybe aggressive is the wrong word—let's say she sometimes seems to take the attacks of monsters personally.

"What will happen when I'm sitting elbow to elbow with these people?" I thought. "Will they accept me? Will they shun me? Will they tap some secret reserve of rage I'm unaware of and wrap a garrote around

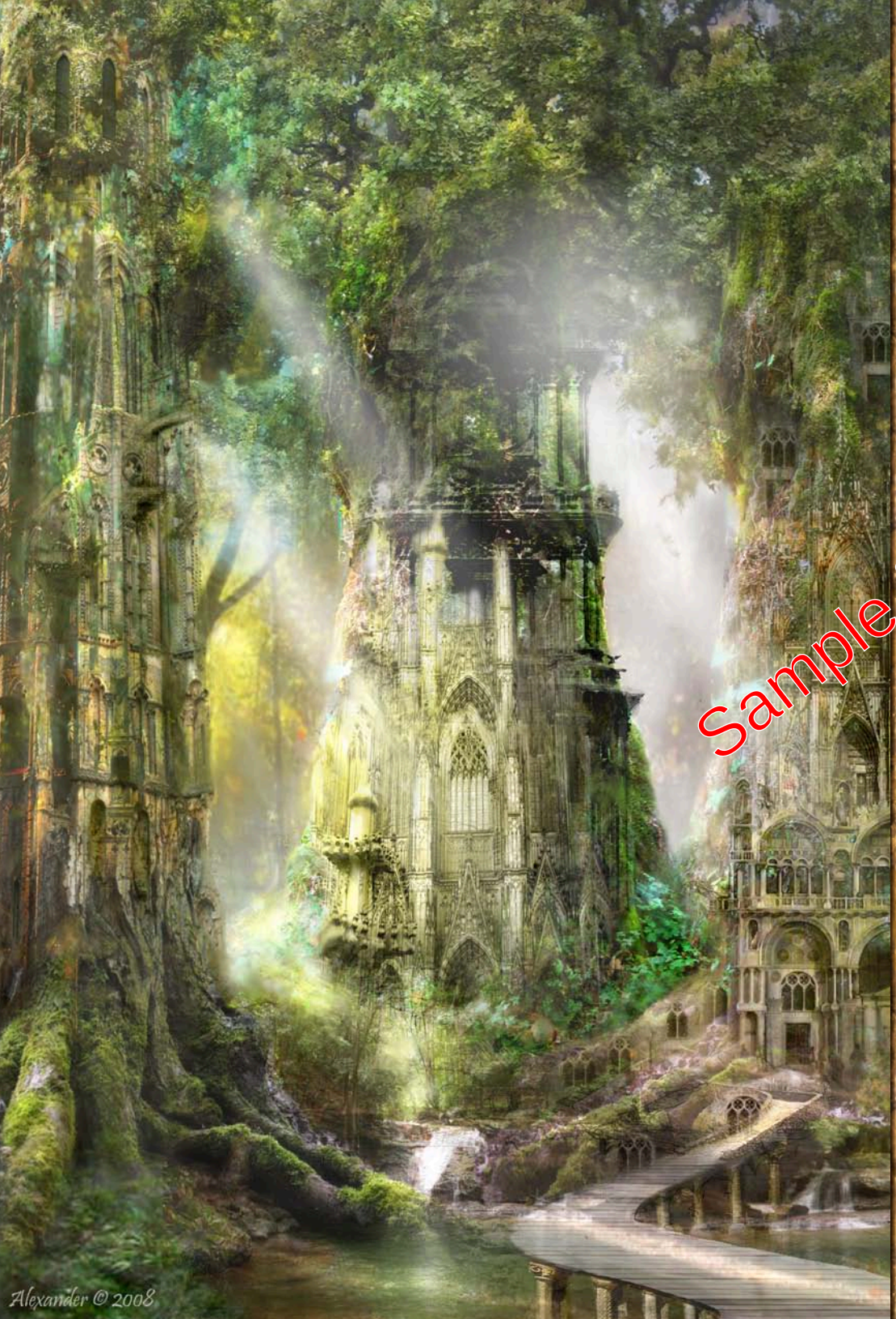
my character's neck at the first opportunity?" It turns out, my fears were completely unfounded. To my surprise, not only did they accept my addition to the group quickly and easily, they asked for another opportunity to swap seats so I could play with them another time.

What I learned is that when it comes to DM/player relationships, it doesn't matter where you sat last week. It matters only where you're sitting at the session happening right now. My aggro player? She had my back from start to finish. And she was playing a rogue, so a called shot to the groin would have been well within her character's reach. But she saved her sneak attacks for the monsters, and I saved my healing spells for her and the rest of the group—they kept my leader good and shielded, as any good group does.

The experience also gave me the opportunity to really learn a lot about the relationship dynamics in my group of players. And I feel like knowing how my players play, and why they make the choices they do, will only make me a better DM when I'm back behind the screen.

So if you haven't given this a try yet, consider swapping seats with your DM (or one of your players, if you're normally the DM) for a session or two. Run something short—one or two sessions max—and give the switch a try. You might find that the change of pace, the change of DMing styles, and the change from your normal routine make your experience in your normal role that much more rewarding.





MITHRENDAIN, CITADEL OF THE FEYWILD

by Rodney Thompson

illustrations by Anne Stokes
and Rob Alexander

DEEP IN THE FEYWILD, beyond the swirling residuum storms of the Plains of Valdrennai, stands one of the most magnificent cities ever constructed by the eladrin: Mithrendain. The city's name is derived from the elf phrase "wall of the fortress," but the word has become synonymous with the beauty and longevity of the eladrin. Home to nearly 40,000 people, almost all of them eladrin, Mithrendain is a beautiful city resplendent with soaring towers and graceful architecture. In addition to its proper name, Mithrendain is often referred to as the Autumn City, since most of its towers are colored like autumn leaves, with yellow, gold, and bronze being common.

Mithrendain was founded several hundred years ago in the waning days of the eladrin empire. During a particularly brutal campaign against the forces of the fomorian kings, a contingent of eladrin soldiers discovered a place in the Feywild where the fomorians had carved a path from their deep kingdoms to the surface, creating a large hole that allowed thousands of vile beings to flow upward from the Underdark each day. After a bloody battle between the eladrin soldiers and the fomorians, the surface forces pushed their enemies back through the opening and into the Underdark once more. With the help of powerful wizards, the eladrin sealed the hole to the Underdark, shutting off one of the

fomorians' main avenues to the surface. Unwilling to trust that the massive opening would stay closed on its own, the soldiers founded a fortress on the spot, building the main citadel up around the barrier to guarantee that it could not be used to escape the Underdark without the eladrin being aware of it.

At first, the fortress stood vigilant over the barrier, with soldiers guarding the passage to make sure nothing would disturb it. Over time, secrecy surrounding the barrier (for the builders of Mithrendain did not want its existence to become common knowledge) caused knowledge of the true purpose of the fortress to fade from the minds of subsequent generations. Soldiers brought their families to live in the fortress with them, and children were born in Mithrendain with no knowledge of the barrier at the center of the citadel. Within a few decades, the small fortress was bursting with families, and these families built homes for themselves outside the walls of the fortress. With no attacks on the fortress, and no attempts by the denizens of the Underdark to shatter the barrier under Mithrendain, the fortress became a village, then a town, and within a few more decades the sprawl had become a city.

Years came and went, and the original generation of soldiers who founded the fortress moved on to the next life. As the centuries passed, the secret beneath the Citadel Arcanum (as the original fortress came to be called) was forgotten by all but a handful of city leaders, who then passed the secret knowledge of the barrier down to their successors. With no more threats from the Underdark (at least, no more than any other eladrin city), Mithrendain flourished and prospered. Eventually, the influence of soldiers waned and scholars, artists, and artisans became the new lords of the city. As the golden towers of Mithrendain grew ever taller, the militant history of the city faded into history.

In modern times, Mithrendain retains little that would suggest it was once a military outpost guarding the surface from encroaching forces of the Underdark. Soaring towers of burnished bronze and shining gold reach for the clouds, and the streets of the city are filled with eladrin who have no idea that at the heart of their city is one of the largest passages into the Underdark in all the Feywild.

THE CITY

Visitors to the Autumn City from the World are likely to be struck by both how beautiful and how alien the city is. Mithrendain is built in the middle of a great forest, seeming to spring up from the ground just like the trees throughout the city. In fact, many tall, broad trees are larger than several of the city's eladrin-built towers, giving the impression that the towers are merely natural growths within the forest. Unlike the Citadel at its heart, the city of Mithrendain has no walls, meaning that entering the city is a matter of walking wherever a gap can be found between the buildings and great trees. Hundreds of streets flow outward from the city center, allowing visitors to enter wherever is convenient upon arrival; similarly, leaving the city is a matter of finding the shortest route to the edge of the buildings. A city filled with citizens that can teleport, even over short distances, has little need for large walls to protect it.

The streets, loosely paved with an extremely smooth sandy yellow stone, wind their way through the city in a rather haphazard fashion. The buildings in Mithrendain are not built into city blocks, but rather cluster together in groups of three to five towers; the roads flow around them, and no dead-end streets exist in the city. Every street connects with another, or another branch of itself, and the buildings allows those looking in any direction to see for great distances with little obstruction.

Though many buildings are in the city, each cluster of towers does not block line of sight over long stretches. While walking through the streets of the city, one might suspect that Mithrendain is an unplanned, haphazard city due to the organic nature of its layout, though this couldn't be further from the truth; the city's leaders carefully approve of every new building, making sure that it still leaves enough space for unobstructed views of distant places in the city. Additionally, the city has parks with small patches of grass and streams that feed into placid pool, which is where eladrin can gather outside their homes. The eladrin make sure that Mithrendain is constantly filled with gardens, streams, and small lakes, which gives the impression that the city and the forest surrounding it grew up at the same time.

Those who have not lived in the Autumn City for long notice a constant, low-pitched hum that permeates the entire city. Most eladrin living in the city no longer hear it; it is the thrum of arcane magic flowing through the city, interacting with its defenses and with magic on the inside (and outside) of every building in the city. The air pulses with unseen energy, but this is just a matter of course for the eladrin that live in Mithrendain. Another sign of the Feywild's magical influence is the *residuum* that collects on the buildings and streets of the city. The essence of magic, *residuum* coats much of the city like dust does in other settlements. The city's rulers pay to have the *residuum* collected and brought to the Citadel Arcanum, using it to reinforce the wards and magic sensors throughout the city. Unauthorized collecting and keeping *residuum* that has gathered on surfaces throughout the city is a crime, since this gathered *residuum* is absolutely vital not only to the maintenance of the wards around the city but also to reinforce the barrier over the tunnel into the Underdark found beneath the Citadel. Some greedy citizens have been known to keep *residuum* for themselves, but aside from being illegal, this

practice is also seen as a societal faux pas since it puts one's own personal gain over the safety of all Mithrendain.

Mithrendain is ruled by a council of seven respected members of the community. Each of the councilors is considered among the best in his or her field, and has earned the admiration of the rest of the city. The seven councilors also each hold a symbol of office; unknown to the inhabitants of the Autumn City, these symbols are also keys that can deactivate or destroy the seals on the barrier to the Underdark. When a member of the council dies, the other members of the council select a new councilor from the most deserving members of society, making sure to select a councilor that the people accept as a good choice. The councilors take great care in their choice, since each councilor must also hold a significant responsibility for the welfare of the barrier.

Walking through the streets of Mithrendain can be, for newcomers, like stepping into a timeless realm of alien design. There are no clocks, no sundials, and no other method of keeping time found anywhere throughout the Autumn City, and it can be easy to lose track of the time or even the date for those unaccustomed to this quirk. As a result of the organic layout of the city's streets and the lack of timekeeping, visitors to Mithrendain are often frustrated by both directions and descriptions of time given by the locals. "Meet me in the southeastern portion of the city, near the sculpture garden, sometime after midday," is a perfectly reasonable appointment for the inhabitants of Mithrendain, though the vagueness can sometimes confuse outsiders.

Like any other city, Mithrendain is broken down into a series of districts and zones. Most of these districts are identified solely by their directional relationship. Neighborhoods typically have names such as the "Southeastern" or "Below the North End," though a few exceptions exist. The Citadel

Arcanum is the sole remaining structure of the original fortress that had been called Mithrendain, and the Old Battery is a darker side of town that represents some of the oldest homes and settlements in the city. Likewise, the Outskirts covers all the homes and villages outside Mithrendain proper, beyond which the light of civilization does not shine as brightly. Unlike most major cities, Mithrendain does not have a "Merchant District" or bazaar; rather, specialty shops serve customers throughout the city, usually on the bottom floors of the homes of individual citizens. Thanks to their longevity, eladrin learn more than one trade (and the basics of many more), and the need for specialization is less common. Most eladrin learn to make their own clothing, repair their own homes, and perform the basics of several other trades.

DEFENSES

Though Mithrendain might appear to be a harmonious place, the members of the eladrin city must be constantly vigilant for many dangers. The city was built above a massive passageway into the Underdark, and many of the city's defenses were put in place to warn of intrusion from below. However, threats from the Underdark are not the only things that worry the city's defenders; the Feywild full of mischievous and malicious creatures, many of which could do great harm to the city, also trouble them.

The primary defenders of Mithrendain are the members of the city guard. The city guard consists of volunteers who patrol the streets day and night, vigilant for the presence of anyone attempting to disturb the peace. Lurking in the shadows of Mithrendain are also the Watchers of the Night, a secret police force that is tasked with rooting out anyone, or anything, that might pose a threat to the safety of the city from outside. See the section on Law Enforcement below for more about each of these organizations.

As mentioned before, Mithrendain has no outer walls, and the buildings most distant from the Citadel Arcanum are without protection against anything coming from the forest. The inhabitants of these buildings take their defense into their own hands, though, and outlying buildings are full of surprises to ward off invaders from the outside. In many cases, those that dwell on the outskirts of Mithrendain keep a bow or a spear close to the door, and those that can afford it have magical wards placed on their homes. Buildings on the outskirts also have arrow slits carved out of the walls on the upper floors (at least, those sections of the building facing the edge of the city), allowing their owners to fire upon intruders from the relative safety of their homes. As one approaches the center of the city, the buildings have fewer defenses raised by their owners, and the city's own defenses become more prominent.

Mithrendain's two primary defense mechanisms come in the form of revelation spheres and tremor wards.

Revelation Spheres: Invented well after the city grew beyond the bounds of the original fortress, revelation spheres are solid marble spheres roughly 8 feet in diameter set into the indentations in the ground. Each revelation sphere is covered in glowing runes that pulse with arcane energy; these runes cause the spheres to give off waves of magical energy that disrupt illusions, including invisibility. In the Feywild, invisible threats pose extreme danger, since they could otherwise walk directly to the center of the city; given the number of creatures in the Feywild capable of turning invisible, it is no wonder the city's leaders ensured that revelation spheres were placed at intervals throughout the city, ensuring that their zones of influence overlapped to cover almost the entire city.

Revelation spheres take up an entire square as blocking terrain. Each revelation sphere radiates a continual 20-square close burst. Powers with the