



What's It Worth?

(All right, ten seconds to go. Cue audience. Cue Wick. And in five. . . four. . . three. . . two. . . one. . .)

"Welcome back to *Players Assume the Craziest Things!* And here's your host, Jooooooooohn Wick!!!"

Thank you. Thank you. If I could think of something funny to say, you'd all be laughing now.

(cue laugh track)

Well, we've reached the end of another season. It's time to take one last look at those wacky players and the silly things they assume. So far, we've talked about starting on an level playing field, experience points, character death and even character perceptions. But this last one. . . whew. You may want to send the kiddies to bed early tonight, because tonight, we've got such a whopper, the censors are sweating thirty-sided dice.

Tonight, we've got three films, all based on a theme. The first at-home audience member to call in with that theme wins a special one-year supply of Eat-a-Sheet, the world's only edible character sheet.

Well, let's get on with the first film. It comes to us from a Jefferson Carter of St. Paul/Minneapolis. He calls it "Bait and Switch." Let's take a look.

(cut to Carter tape)

Here we have a group of freelance superheroes operating in Twin Cities area. These happy fellows (and one lady) hire out to the highest bidders, adopting the "If the money's right, we're there for the fight" attitude.

Well, that all works well and good until they're hired by a lawyer representing an individual who wishes to remain anonymous. "My client's son recently died from an overdose," the lawyer says. "He'd like to see the people responsible brought to justice. *You* can go where the police can't go. You can do what they can't. He needs you and he's willing to compensate for your services."

That's when he hands over a check - - from the attorney's law firm - - for \$50,000.

"The next check will be double," the lawyer says, "if the criminals are convicted."

The heroes agree. The operation goes smooth, and the bad guys captured before you can say "unstable molecules." The case gets picked up by the same legal firm that hired the players and the jury deliberations last about as long as a Tyson fight. The players receive a hundred thousand dollar check and they spend it on danger room renovations.

So, what's the catch?

The man who hired the players doesn't have a son. His name is Hunter Rose. He's one of the crime lords of the city.

The criminals were competitors. Now, thanks to the players, Mr. Rose controls *all* cocaine on the west side of Minneapolis.

Those wacky players. Well, I guess what they never knew never hurt them.

Player Assumption #1: They're always doing the right thing.

* * *

Girlfriend: "Are you watching this?"

Boyfriend: "Not really."

Girlfriend: "That means I can change the channel."

<click>

* * *

(insert obligatory, repetitive and redundant Danny Elfman "bouncy, yet creepy" theme)

"Hello, kiddies! Your old pal the Wick Keeper here with another *deadliciously* demonic tale. This one I call. . . *Bug Hunt*."

(credit placard reads:)

based on a short story originally appearing in

SHADIS MAGAZINE

written by John Wick

published by Alderac Entertainment Group

It's a sci-fi scenario that opens in the middle of things. The players wake up in cryo-chambers to the sound of claxon alarms, screams and ripping flesh; a splash of blood on their faces. They open their eyes and see spiders the size of cows moving like lightning through the room. A couple chambers are filled with a thick, web-like substance. If you listen carefully - - through the screaming claxons and the screaming bodies - - you can hear muffled voices begging for help.

The players fight their way out of the room. They fight their way to their weapons. They fight their way to the bridge and find out where they are. It's a small planet with a smaller research station. . . sending out an SOS. That's usually when the players figure out what's missing: their memories. Obviously, they're a rescue team here to answer that SOS. Right?

Wrong. When they get to the research station - - more spiders waiting for them outside - - they find out the truth. They're not a rescue team, they're mercenaries sent to steal secrets from the research center. . . at any cost.

Every corpse in the research station? That's their work.

Mercenaries. Merciless. Murder, murder, murder.

Turns out the researchers were finding ways to communicate with the spiders. The creatures are powerful psychics, and research shows ingesting spider milk is a powerful psychic stimulant in humans. That's what the players are here to steal.

Unfortunately, two things went wrong after the mission. The first was a group of spiders who snuck on board while they carried out their dirty deeds. The second problem? The players' employers don't want them coming back. Their ship was designed to detonate when it escaped the atmosphere - - only the spider serum would survive the explosion.

Of course, now that things have gone wrong, the research station sensors indicate another ship is on its way. A cleaning crew.

Can the players find a way to communicate with the spiders and save themselves from a band of bloodthirsty killers?

A group not a whole lot unlike themselves. . .

Player Assumption #2: The players are the protagonists.

* * *

Girlfriend: Yuch. Spiders.

Boyfriend: You've got the clicker.

Girlfriend: Yeah. Right.

<click>

* * *

The Starbucks Theatre Presents. . .
The Blair Witch Rip - Off
With your host, John Wick

Open on a group of players (three humans, one demi-human and one half-breed) in the woods. It's dark. They ran out of supplies a week ago. They have no flint, they have no steel. The NPC they hired (the guy with the Hunting and Survival Skills) took off two weeks ago. . . with all the gold, food and fresh water he could carry. He also

got away with the magical whutzzit the king's gonna pay 'em ten billion gold pieces for. Apparently, the NPC wanted the reward more than they did.

How did this happen? The players treated the NPC like. . . well, like most players treat NPCs: a pile of bantha poo-doo. So, he left 'em. Alone in the dark.

They don't even know how to find true north.

And while they're out in the woods, the Ranger saved the kingdom, married the king's daughter and stand in line to inherit the throne.

Hey, wait a second. . . was that *Dueling Banjos*. . .?

Player Assumption #3: The world revolves around us.

* * *

Girlfriend: Isn't there anything good on TV?

Boyfriend: There's always the Playboy Channel. . .

Girlfriend: You had to say that, didn't you?

<click>

* * *

It's a sin we're all guilty of, not just silly players. We all believe we're the hero in a story told for our own pleasure. Like Neal Peart wrote, "We're only immortal for a limited time."

Players assume their characters are the protagonists. They assume the story revolves around them. They assume that everything the Game master tells them is true. They assume everything they know is fact. They assume everyone in the whole wide world is there for their amusement.

Players assume they will win in the end. After all, the books they read (schlock fantasy), the TV they watch (*Star Trek*), the movies they watch (*ID4*) all have happy endings. The hero defeats the bad guy, gets the girl and lives happily ever after.

And most importantly, the hero never - - *ever* - - dies.

Like in *Braveheart*. Or *Gladiator*. Or *The 13th Warrior*.

Or *The Usual Suspects*. Or *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Being a hero doesn't mean you live to see the end of the story. Ask Moses about that.

Being a hero doesn't mean you're always there when the villain goes down. Ask William Wallace about that. (The movie version, that is.)

Being a hero means you're willing to make sacrifices when they need to be made. Being a hero means you're willing to give up everything - - family, friends, loved

ones, even life itself - - to make sure justice sees the light of day.

I read an interview with Wolfgang Peterson - - the director of *The Perfect Storm*. I was hoping he'd tell a certain kind of story. I think I'm gonna get my wish. He said [paraphrasing here], "It's a big story about a little struggle." The *13th Warrior* was like that for me. No saving the world. Just thirteen men standing against thirteen thousand, all to save a bunch of people too vain to save themselves.

Frank Miller's *300* has the same kind of energy. Three hundred Spartans standing against three hundred thousand Persians, their deaths buying time for the rest of Greece to get its act together.

So, what's all this amount to?

There's no such thing as a free lunch. (I'm showing my stripes.)

I've GM'd for groups who thought having big guns made them heroes. I introduced them to guys with *bigger* guns. They weren't heroes. They were Swiss cheese in seconds.

I've GM'd for groups who thought having big spellbooks made them heroes. I introduced them to guys who *didn't need* spellbooks. Frogs, every last one of them.

You want to be a hero? It takes more than 100 points, a cool name and witty banter. Just because you assume you're the hero doesn't make it necessarily so.

That's a title you've got to earn.

Small postscript

All right, enough fun for GMs. Next month, an entirely new direction for the column. Next month, *Playing Dirty: The Player's POV*.

See you then.

[Past Columns](#)

Article publication date: June 23, 2000

548 *Pyramid* subscribers rated this article **3.70** on a scale of 1 to 5. Visit the [ratings page](#) for more info.

Copyright © 2000 by [Steve Jackson Games](#). All rights reserved. Pyramid subscribers are permitted to read this article online, or download it and print out a single hardcopy for personal use. Copying this text to any other online system or BBS, or making more than one hardcopy, is *strictly prohibited*. So please don't. And if you encounter copies of this article elsewhere on the web, please report it to webmaster@sjgames.com.



[Home](#) - [Subscribe!](#) - [Current Issue](#) - [Playtesting](#) - [Chat](#) - - - [Feedback](#)