

# Adventure Tourism 3 - Wild In The Streets feat. Aaron King

Tue, 3/22 3:48PM 59:28

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

adventure, d&d, run, people, dinosaur, game, read, wrote, dungeon, zine, players, charlatan, classic d&d, called, weird, idea, character, hard, monsters, magazine

## SPEAKERS

Chris, Aaron King

---

- C** Chris 00:00  
Welcome to Adventure Tourism, a podcast where I talk to tabletop role playing game creators about the adventures that have inspired and influenced them. I'm Chris from Loot The Room and today I am joined by Aaron King. Aaron, who are you?
- A** Aaron King 00:36  
My name is Aaron King. I'm a game designer and game store employee in Minneapolis, Minnesota in the Midwestern United States.
- C** Chris 00:47  
So succinct, that's amazing. I need to learn this skill.
- A** Aaron King 00:54  
I do they used to. I, like have worked at bookstores for years. And whenever we have author readings, they would always make me do the introductions. Not because I'm particularly good at it because everyone else was like a nervous introvert. And I am, I'm super introverted, but I feel like I can just like disconnect and do that. So
- C** Chris 01:17  
I used to be a bookseller as well. But I used to do the other side of events to like, get off the setup. logistical side of things,

A Aaron King 01:25  
though, the harder the harder part of event. The hot,

C Chris 01:29  
the harder, most stressful part, but also the bit where you get to just sit and hang out with the author for an hour before the event starts. So you have picked an adventure for us to talk about. Which adventure Have you picked?

A Aaron King 01:44  
I pick two wild in the streets by Jason Peck. It's from Dragon magazine number 62. I forgot to get the publication date.


C Chris 01:55  
I have it in front of me. Thank you. Is dungeon magazine number 62. November December 1996. Great.

A Aaron King 02:03  
So I was 13 or 14 depending on when in December. I got it.

C Chris 02:09  
Yeah, I was. I was 10. This was two years after I started playing d&d. Same for me. Yes. I was really excited when you picked this one because I'm not familiar with this adventure. But Jason Peck wrote one of my favourite dungeon magazine adventures from dungeon 77 culture walk beneath the waves. And I'm really stoked to talk about this, because I read through it.

A Aaron King 02:35  
I don't know that one. But now I'm excited to look it up on

C Chris 02:38  
his phone. He wrote some really fun ones. He wrote one called Valley of the snails that was, I mean, just that title.



A

Aaron King 02:46

Perfect adventure title.

C

Chris 02:48

Yeah. I'm excited to talk about some real old school adnd because everything that I've done with people so far has been much more modern. So

A

Aaron King 03:00

yeah, and I hesitated to pick something this old because I feel like there are so many modern indie adventures that I want to support more actively. But I've run this 110 times at least. And so I had to go with it.

C

Chris 03:13

Wow. So talk us through it. What's What's the adventure kind of about? Yeah, why is it? Why is it so good, and why so important to you?

A

Aaron King 03:24

It's four and a half pages, which for a dungeon adventure is very short. And even in those four and a half pages, another full page is probably intro, some excellent art by Rk Post who did a bunch of art in alternity, and a bunch of other games through the 90s and 2000s. So really a very small adventure for the time, that still managed to feel a little bloated if you're more used to like OSR stuff. The synopsis is that kind of charlatan rolls into town with a waggon, full of what the Sheriff of the town calls dangerous beasts that then escape, and the adventurers are asked to track down these very dangerous monsters. And then the charlatan says no, they're just little babies. Please go bring me my baby monsters back. I do like a sideshow with them. I will pay you to return them to me alive. And then there are just levels of like, what's he lying about? What are these baby animals, and they end up being a few young versions of some classic d&d monsters. I won't spoil it in case well, We'll spoil it eventually. But if you want to stop now and go read it before you come back,

C

Chris 04:43

pause the podcast now. Yeah, so get super short. I was really surprised when I read it because like, the setup gives you so much to go on. And then it's I mean, you've the other one has run it 10 times I get the impression that this is the kind of adventure it's the kind of thing I really love where it's like, here's a situation. Go home. Yeah,

A

Aaron King 05:10

and I, before we did this, I looked to see if anyone had read it and criticised it. And there's just

one very rude single paragraph review at a website. I won't mention that's like, this isn't even a fucking adventure. There's barely anything here. Which I get as a criticism. It's, it's a very small adventure. And I think that's part of why it has stuck in my head, like, it's small enough that I can hold the whole thing in my head. I read this years before I ever read about the OSR. But it really does contain some principles of like, provide problems, not solutions. There's like a hint of faction play like you can side with the charlatan or the sheriff. And it kind of evokes a wider world without dropping a bunch of lore. And it's just monitor like hold in my head. And even if I don't have monster stats, or NPC stats in front of me, the situation of you have to track down these animals. Some people want you to kill them. Some people want you to bring them back. One person involved is definitely like that's just like adventuring. 101 in my brain is like factions, unreliable characters, and potential non lethal solutions that let the players use their brains as much as their character sheets.

C Chris 06:37

Yeah, and like you said, like it's obviously like the first episode Batson I talked about what child is this? And that's, again, a very, very small adventure, with a lot of possibility in it. But I don't feel like that. Like you said, you can hold this in your head. You've got one dodgy as fuck MPC and three or four is it for animals? Three or four monsters are going to create chaos.

A Aaron King 07:01

Right? You don't need a map. Yeah, here's the and here's I guess here's where it will spoil it. The three monsters are a baby rust monster, which is awesome. Like classic d&d. Attack the different parts of the character sheet right, like go after their equipment.

C Chris 07:15

real small. This is our I could do a whole podcast about Ross monsters and how much I love them.

A Aaron King 07:20

I can't wait. That's gonna be your 2023 project.

C Chris 07:22

Yes. Monster.

A Aaron King 07:27

Yeah, a baby Displacer Beast, which is like, just very hard to catch. And like, everyone loves cat chaos, especially now in the days of the internet. And then a baby Ankylosaurus like an armoured dinosaur, which is still as big as like a horse, and has like an armour class of negative

four or something, like, almost impossible to hit for a first level character. And so it becomes about like, how do we lower this away? How do we distract it from like, just walking through people's house walls and stuff? And that's it. And there's no, there's no DM and there's a little bit of DM advice about like, here's maybe how some players might approach it. And here are ways to deal with that. But there's no like list of consequences. Or, you know, I've been reading Pathfinder adventures, and I know you have to have and they do a really good job of laying out players might do this, this way, this way, or this way. Which is potentially helpful for a GM but also kind of limiting, because then it almost puts you in that mindset of these are the three ways Yeah,

**C** Chris 08:32

this here are the right answers.

**A** Aaron King 08:34

Right? This has none of that. That's just like, that's it's chaotic. Go for it, which I really love

**C** Chris 08:41

it. Sort of like looking at the conclusion, the adventure section. Just straight up says like the adventure should not take longer than the rainy afternoon. It definitely feels like because a lot of Dungeon magazine adventures in the 80s in the 90s were very much like, here's an adventure that I wrote that I ran for my group. And now I've written it open up some majors, the dungeon magazine, and I feel like this almost feels like one of those sessions where like, you decided you're gonna play d&d, and you haven't done any prep of any kind. And so you just drop a situation on the table and see what happens. And it turns out to be super fun. Yes. And

**A** Aaron King 09:20

while they're arguing, yeah, while the players are arguing with each other, you're like, writing down stats quick.

**C** Chris 09:27

You listen to what they don't want to happen and be like, that's what's gonna happen.

**A** Aaron King 09:32

Absolutely. Yeah. So yeah, I don't know. I've run this. Like I said, 10 times in different systems. I'm happy to talk about that. I would

C Chris 09:41  
love to hear about the ways you've run it because you did. You sent me a PDF with like,

A Aaron King 09:48  
I sent you much homework. I'm sorry.

C Chris 09:51  
You know, I loved it. It was great. Why don't you Why don't you tell people what you sent me.  
We could talk about it.

A Aaron King 09:56  
Sure. So I have run this in fourth edition. Done. and dragons, fifth edition, Troika, and Patrick  
world, which is my like PVTa fantasy, weird game. And so I am

C Chris 10:14  
also great and approach to play it,

A Aaron King 10:16  
thank you if I, I figured we'll like wait till the end to really sell people on my own stuff. And I'm  
also like a very, I don't say meticulous, but I save almost all my notes that I make for games.  
And so like I ran it for 40 At the height of 40, in 2010 2009, whatever that would have been.  
Yeah, and I still have most of my notes from that I have my notes from the fifth edition version,  
and the Patrick world one. Well, it's not even Patrick world, it's just like a systemless. One page,  
personal synopsis conversion, a lot of which I did, by memory, because I gave away this issue  
of Dungeon magazine, when I was kind of getting out of role playing games and into punk  
music and like, ti 99 or

C Chris 11:07  
whatever. all been there.

A Aaron King 11:09  
Yeah. And so as then came back to the hobby, and just thought, well, this adventure seemed  
really fun, it seems really easy to run, I think I can just remember the essential information and  
fill in the blanks. So I have all these weird, different versions of it that I think hopefully show my

evolution as a designer and GM, but also kind of highlight where my interests were at the different times. The 4k version is very much about starting almost like a level zero game where you just have your stats, and maybe one ability. And it's just kind of learning the game, how to roll stuff like that. And then one

**C** Chris 11:49

of my favourite bits from your Forry notes is an index card that says horse you own a horse

**A** Aaron King 11:58

does for you have the all these different abilities that I think are great design, I love them. And part of the cool thing is you could like print nine out on a PDF and cut them out and treat them like little cards. So like when you use your daily ability, you can kind of like put it upside down on the table and not, you know, reduce that cognitive load. And so I wanted to do that without giving people making people read the full class descriptions. And so I had a little deck of index cards, and I shuffled them randomly and handed them out to the players. And some were like, You are the child of a witch. And you can use prestidigitation, which was like a wizard cantrip. Or you have a healing potion like this is a rare and powerful item. And if anyone gets hurt, you can bring them back from death. And then one is horse, you have a horse, which was great because someone a PC ended up getting trampled by that horse and almost dying. And then someone had to use their healing potion like it all interacted in a really fantastic

**C** Chris 12:55

way. I do really love the idea of like this as a full adventure, where it's just like, rally the mob to catch the animals that are stampeding through town would be really fun. Yes.

**A** Aaron King 13:08

It's, it was a good time. And it does this thing that I enjoy in gaming groups where it isn't introduced as a concept and people start talking. And then the longer people talk, the more willing they become to accept terrible ideas I find. And so you start with two people saying like, well, let's go after this one first, or let's go after this one first. Or they start discussing like, well, we get some gold if we bring them back dead or alive, but we get more if we bring them back alive for sure. So which should we try to do? And it starts that way. And then 20 minutes later, they haven't done anything but someone has introduced the idea of like, let's just fucking kill the guy that hired us take his money, and ride this giant dinosaur out of town. And they start entertaining these bigger and stranger ideas and then I think people just start to buy into those in order to do something. And then that's when like people start getting trampled by horses, and level zero mobs starts getting crushed by the dinosaur and you know, falling out of windows jumping after Displacer Beast kittens.

**C** Chris 14:15

I love that you've done it in so many different systems as well because I think it's not gonna

I love that you've done it in so many different systems as well because I think I'm not gonna say the system matters. I'm not going to start that argument. But especially with something like Troika. I think the backgrounds bring so much to the table already. That running an adventure in Troika is always like a production. Like I've run Rob black sludge the MacBook introductory adventure. Several times in MacBook, and then once in Troika, and the time I ran it in Troika was absolutely the standout session for just like you weird shit happening?

A

Aaron King 15:02

Yes, you have no idea what the backgrounds are going to be ahead of time.

C

Chris 15:06

Yeah, you don't know what the characters are going to be you don't know how people are going to use the weird share gives them Do you what was this like with Troika because I can see how it would totally work with that very like, trope has got a very permissive style of play, I feel. It just kind of encourages us to just say fuck it. Yeah.

A

Aaron King 15:27

If I recall correctly, they like captured and returned one of the animals. And then someone had some sort of speak to animals or speak to bugs or who knows what. So they decided to befriend another animal. And then I had the dinosaur stopping this parade of kind of gods that were in jail. And they had this was there one day for public worship. And there's this important parade. And they really wanted this dinosaur moved. Which to me just felt like a trick, a thing that would be happening in the background. But then, of course, they ended up like talking to one of the gods. What is this God? And then they ended up being like, Wait, you're in God, jail? Why don't we, you use your god powers. And we ride this dinosaur out of here. And we escaped the city, and we become friends on the run. So someone, you know, could like walk through walls or something. And they set this whole thing up where they were luring the dinosaur out in this God was riding on the back of it. And it was very much like they ride off into the sunset for future adventures. And like, who cares about the people that hire them? Or ask them to do this?

C

Chris 16:39

We don't need 100 Gold is fine. Exactly. Like we have a dinosaur and a god. We don't need your money. So good.

A

Aaron King 16:49

Yeah. And it is like the seeds are just there enough that people can start asking like, Wait, where did this person get a dinosaur? And then he write that down for your session two or three notes of like, lay seeds for a dinosaur place, because these people want to find the dinosaurs



and stuff like that. Without kind of saying, If players are curious about the dinosaur, see this adventure of the dinosaur in the next issue or whatever?

**C** Chris 17:14  
Yeah, it's

**A** Aaron King 17:19  
freaking awesome.

**C** Chris 17:21  
Freaking awesome. catalysts for play. Yes. It's because like a lot of I think it's a really interesting one in how it's, it's almost not an adventure. It's almost just an adventure hook. But that's basically all you need.

**A** Aaron King 17:39  
Right? It's like a book and it sets you up. And it has some partial possible continuations. Yeah. And then just these Sandboxie kind of things that can be solved or left alone as you as you want.

**C** Chris 17:55  
So I've been doing this project where I read and run a lot of adventures that I've been kind of going through chronologically through the history of specifically d&d adventures. And I'm, I'm going to branch out to other systems, but at the minute, it's just the end. And I'm kind of looking at trying to create, just for my own benefit, some like formal forms for adventures, write some language around them, because the word adventure is so nebulous. And one of the things I'm noticing is like, you get two broad categories where you have like, a dungeon crawl that is very much like, here's a map. Here's what's in every room. This is a very granular experience for the players to experience. And then you have this, that's just like, like we said, more of just like a situation and some characters to interact with. Yeah, but this also had a point, I was headed towards a point and it's just a spread out in my head. Oh, fuck, when that happens.

**A** Aaron King 19:01  
Well, it makes me think about if you need a second to think. Like I came into games after reading a lot of comics, like I learned to read from comics, and I got into comics criticism for a while, and like formal reading of comics, like you were saying, kind of breaking comic pages and forms into these different names and groups. And it's really interesting to me, because in games right now, I see a lot more motions toward still like, this is a good kind of adventure. And

this is a bad kind of adventure. Mm hmm. Whereas comics, which are still like a pretty new medium, have gone on long enough that people say like, these are different kinds of comics. Some are good for certain situations. Some forms of storytelling are good for certain types of narrative. And so I'm like Scott McCloud did some groundbreaking work in Understanding Comics into about a few things, like one is level of abstraction, like in a human form, you have a highly detailed, like warrior with flowing hair, a pale skin a big sword, like that's a very specific character. And the readers probably not going to project themselves on that character that much, because this is a very specific person with a specific story. Whereas if you get something more abstract, like Astroboy, from the manga that's a very hazy character, like it's almost just a smiley face. And it lets you like protect yourself into it, and you're almost invited to be Astroboy. And maybe that's why it appeals to kids so much. And like, neither of those is better. But it makes me think about, like, there are different types of adventures and the really granular ones are maybe helpful for new DMS or DMS that have a very specific idea of fantasy in mind. And stuff like this is great for like you said, like, oh shit, I'm at a party and someone was like you run d&d. Let's play a game right now. I mean, it's yeah, this there's lots of room for new players and GMs to like, bring their own style to it.

C Chris 21:14

Yeah, cuz I remember being I had some friends around who wanted to play d&d And never played it. And this was when I was just getting back into fifth edition. Well, a couple of years after I just got back into fifth edition. And all I had to handle the curse of strahd. On trying to run curse of strahd at the drop of a hat having never read it is physically embrace.

A Aaron King 21:38

I've run Death House like the intro adventure a few times. And it's like, yeah, so, uh, based on like, where this secret room is and stuff. Yeah, I've had two beers. I cannot make this house map for

C Chris 21:51

this. Yeah, but if I'd had wild in the street. Yeah. I'd have been I'd have been laughing I'd have been salted. I've just remember what I was trying to come around to the point I was trying to come around to thank you. Which is that even though it is like so different to what people traditionally think of as an adventure, like there's no key locations, there's no storyline. It still has that very classic d&d, like hook of you have come to a village and this village has a problem. Right? Please solve this problem. Like it's that's such such a rich vein to tap play someone like, like zaf Kowalski is like the master of village for the problem, right? It's one of my favourite tropes and adventures. And I love that this manages to do it in like, a couple of 100 words.

A Aaron King 22:44

Yeah, and there's no, there's no sense of the village. There's only the problem, which I think is great. Because if someone's familiar with Game of Thrones, you can just put it in Game of Thrones land if someone loves like Disney kind of stuff. You can put it in, you know, a Disney

things that if someone loves like Disney kind of stuff. You can put it in, you know, a Disney village.

**C** Chris 23:02

Yeah, like we get. So I'm gonna I'm gonna read some box text. I'm really into reading box text at the moment. Good. I've been running abomination volts. And every time we hit a room with Box text, which is every room, I've been like, I'm going to read some box text now. This is what we know about the village though. Fenwick is a small sleepy town walled away from the dangers of the nearby border. The unrelenting rain has trapped your party in the town's soul in the black oak. That's it. Yeah, that's everything we know about this town and name and the fact that it hasn't been

**A** Aaron King 23:37

well in the rain is something that I have forgotten and not used, but is so good in this like, yeah, idea that everyone's soggy that it's hard to see if that's an armadillo or rust monster up ahead, is it just adds to it. And there's this idea of like, I don't want to go outside. I don't want to find these stupid baby animals like and I just I, I think that's such a good little detail. And it's one of those things that I try to remind myself when I'm writing an adventure, it's very easy to lay down that trope. And then if you can just add one little detail one extra twist or detail like it's unrelenting rain right now, that brings me in so much deeper.

**C** Chris 24:21

I think weather is really underutilised. Because we know we always like one of the big things about writing good Adventures is people say like, make sure you engage all the senses tell us what we see and hear and smell. And I think people forget about weather. Right, but like this site, I've played a lot of gauge where it's just kind of always, eternally one in the afternoon on a nice kind of clear, not too hot, not too cold.

**A** Aaron King 24:45

It might be a little windy or some clouds in the sky.

**C** Chris 24:49

Yeah, maybe you get a bit of pathetic fallacy like if something goes wrong. Suddenly it starts to rain. Right? Just having it be constantly miserable rain. Especially I come from the northwest of England. I come from Manchester which is known as rain city. It's like the Seattle of the UK. So I like rain rains a good trip.

**A** Aaron King 25:15

Yeah. And it's the the charlatan whose name is Jay quard or yeah quard or Jaqqard I don't know

of weird fantasy name is like this kind of bomb vault kind of charlatan, you know, big cap, bright colours, feather kind of stuff. Which if you introduce me to him, in a sunny day, I would immediately distrust him. But the idea of him like having travelled and just being soggy and being bullied by this cop makes me want to support him and help them even though he turns out to be the total shit of the adventure. So I just think that's a great detail of like, you know, what's this? What's this guy look like in the rain, he dressed for a festival and he is being dragged through the mud.

C Chris 26:00

I feel like the rain almost like, grounds it in a way that makes it not quite so ridiculous as well. Right? Like, if you, hey, it's really bright, sunny day, and there are three baby monsters loose in town. That's a kind of a madcap caper jolly adventure. And if it's like, hey, there's three baby monsters loose in the town. And by the way, it's absolutely shutting it down outside.

A Aaron King 26:27

becomes like a Coen brothers like, yeah. Neo noir mud filled.

C Chris 26:34

Yeah, like it's still funny. But it's funny in a very different, more kind of grimy way. Yes. Cause saga such a good detail, so much you can do with just one sentence.

A Aaron King 26:47

Yeah. Looking through my notes to see if I have anything else

C Chris 26:54

when we can, because obviously, it's it's such a small adventure. It's quite alright to run out of things to talk about with it. You want to talk about garbage bags as well, if I remember Oh,

A Aaron King 27:06

yeah. So part of my criteria for figuring out what to talk about is like, what have I run the most? This I've run 10 times? Oh, the other thing I'll add is that, yeah, I ran it six times across two days walk for six groups of three? No, okay, I want to hear about this. Yeah, I ran for six groups of three to five, first year undergrad students. My friend is a professor at a branch of the University of Minnesota. And they have kind of these groups of freshmen courses that are a bit more fun, a bit more out there. They don't meet us regularly, and they let professors do stuff that maybe they don't get to normally do. When I was a freshman there, there were courses on the American comic strip, there was a course about roots, American roots music taught by a

computer science professor, like it just lets people branch out. And it lets freshmen kind of meet and learn about academic interest without having to be tied to a certain field. And my best friend who I went to college with is now a professor. They're a professor of education. And he taught a class on games, and sport and play, kind of geared toward education and learning, but also just about like, what is play what is game like, digital versus analogue sport versus, you know, board game kind of stuff. And he asked me to run a role playing game for his two sessions. So it's like, almost 40 kids, it's like 30 to 40 students, not kids. Whoa, okay. And so he broke them up into six groups. And across, I think, Thursday, Friday, I just ran this adventure. Three times each day, it took I had an hour 45 Each time I think we came in hour to an hour and a half. And it was just such a funny mix of some people were like, just Uber nerds, like, I'm going to use my Dungeons and Dragons character. Here's their name, here's what they look like. You might have heard of them from this adventure, kind of thing to like, a, a sports dude sitting at home who would only contribute via chat, like typed chat, but still contributed a lot to like, like someone on a softball scholarship, who's like, I'm going to start to run RPGs now afterward, and they, they had to reflect on it and turn on reflection to the professor. And some of them did it on the basis of just what they've learned in the class. And then some wrote like in character letters about what they had done. And so I got to see these which was amazing. I almost included them in the PDF, but I there's like, an ethics thing about like, ah, yeah, but Yeah, just like a, you know, a page long recap of what happened, but full of like feeling and swearing at this charlatan who tried to trick them. And I was exhausted and wiped after. But it was so funny to have six groups in close succession. And some were just very much like, we got hired to do this job, we're gonna follow the rules, what's the best way to follow the rules, and some who quickly halfway through we're like, let's take the charlatan to a rooftop and hold him over, threatened to drop him unless he tells us the truth about what's going on. Excellent. And then absolutely one murder hobo crew that was just like, we don't have to bring these animals in alive. Let's just kill them all. And then threaten everyone if they don't pay us kind of thing. And so that was just a very strange survey of player types and player experience and kind of the flexibility of this adventure format of here's a set Yeah. Go wild.

C Chris 30:59

Did you? Did you read it in d&d Every time when you did it like that?

A Aaron King 31:03

That was in Patrick world? Oh, cool. Well make sense. Yeah. Yeah. Like it's a part by the apocalypse game with no stats and no playbooks. So you just pick some moves from this big move pool, and kind of go at it. But it leaves that tricky thing to where someone is like, I'm a dragon with impervious armour, and I can fly. And then someone's like, I'm a teenager who keeps a journal, and has a friend who's a goblin investigator kind of. And so it was very interesting to see who leaned into those powers, and who was just kind of tromping around like they're at a theme park, all of which are perfectly valid ways to play these games. But a very weird mix. Yeah, that's great.

C Chris 31:51

So has this, I realised that I haven't asked you kind of like, the other. I have, like three main questions to hit in this podcast. And the other one, which I completely forgot to get to, because

I've not organised today at all. Is, do you think this is how can kind of had any impact on your work? Or like, informed the way you work? Or the kind of things you make? Or is it just an eventually like to run? No, right or wrong answers here?

A Aaron King 32:23

Yeah, I think in form in most basic form, absolutely. It's like, what I aspire to. I don't have the the skill to like, make a good dungeon map. And so I've written a lot of adventures. I started kind of like you like doing FFIV stuff on DMS guild? Oh, really? Yeah. And so if you, I might have tried to hide them or take them down. But if you look carefully, there's about three, five hop. Right? There's about 300 pages of d&d Five e content that you can find by me. But a lot of them are in this similar format. Of here's a scenario, here's some possible GM guidance. Here's some weird twists. Go for it. And so in that sense, it absolutely has, I fully reject the like paragraphs of description, which this adventure does. And obviously, like would not have gotten published by dungeon if it didn't follow that format. That was universal at the time. And so I have a lot more kind of bullet lists or questions to the DM about like, do you want to run this

C Chris 33:40

this way? I really liked questions. So the DM that's really fun. Yes,

A Aaron King 33:44

yes. And so I mean, I would not be surprised if I went through all my adventures and just like, like you're saying maps, the pieces, the formal pieces of the adventure, and it just had like the same dramatic arc as this one of like, introduction, twist of expectations, introduction of lying NPC

C Chris 34:11

there's something I really love the lying treacherous NPC as a trope. It's one of those things you have to really use it in moderation, I think. Yes. Why? If every NPC the group is a liar, then it loses all his impact.

A Aaron King 34:28

And my not my a version of that, that my good friend, Peter Ray, who ran for free for me, and that was like when I was back in d&d hard he like brought me into it. Fourth Edition, ran this year long campaign for me and some other friends. He was heavily involved in like the improviser scene. Mm hmm. And he based all his adventures around what he called the ecology of assholes. Which is, you enter in a cave, or a new town, and there are two or more factions, they all are sort of shits, like, they're all just people who are trying to get by. So they're all a little selfish. They're all very subjective in their worldview, like no one is like, I serve the goddess of truth. And from this mystical objective height, I've seen that this is what

needs to happen. They're all just a little confused and a little scared. And you put the players in here, and you try to just like, enact these factions based on what they know and what they believe. And sometimes they're evil liars. But sometimes they're just people that don't know. They're making decisions based on incomplete information. And so that is more what I angled toward then everyone is a liar. It's like, everyone's just trying to get by. And they'd know, as much as any fallible human knows. And they're telling you things based on these mistakes they've made. It's up to you to kind of maybe find a truth or decide who is closer to your version

**C** Chris 36:01

of the truth. Yeah. And they're all ultimately they're all self interest. Right. And so yeah, I think much like the place.

**A** Aaron King 36:08

And so I think you can and I probably have run wild in the streets more as the cop that drags the charlatan in, is not like an upholder of justice. He's a shitty cop that wants to like take a nap, or beat the crap out of the sky for ruining his day. And then the charlatan is not necessarily like Disney villain, I'm gonna steal all your money, but it's like, just trying to make it through and wants doesn't want his animals to get killed, because they're his way out, but also makes money by kind of doing the circus hype of like, wait until you see these terrifying creatures and so is a liar and is very concerned with making some money. But as someone who writes little adventure lies, I have some sympathy for

**C** Chris 36:54

little potentialize is a really cool little.

**A** Aaron King 36:58

That's my next zine.

**C** Chris 36:59

Nice. I like that is actually a next scene. No. But it could be. It could be. It could be as February as the month. Mm hmm. Speaking of little things that you've written, we will talk about patchwork quilt. But someone I've really wanted to talk to you about for a long time. The first thing of yours I think that I remember reading I was reading the apocalypse. Yes. Which I loved that lodged itself in my brain. Thank you. And we're not let go. And I read that round about the time that I was first getting into PVTA games. Like if someone did this podcast and was like, came to me, it was like, I want to talk to you about a PVTA thing that inspired you, I would probably pick reading the apocalypse. Thank you so much. Where did that come from?

A

Aaron King 37:57

I made that. So like I said, we share a history of being booksellers and bookstore workers. And when I first moved to Minneapolis about 10 years ago, it was to go to library school. I dropped out after a semester because I just was like a wreck of a human. I was what in my late 20s, which is a tough time in general. I didn't really know anyone and I didn't know what I was doing with my life. And I started volunteering at this radical bookstore. All volunteer run, it's called Bone shaker books. It's still open and volunteered there for five years. And I ended up joining this collective that ran the bookstore and made the decisions and stuff. And I always liked reading and obviously I was going to bookseller school, and I've worked here and there bookstores and libraries before. But like really made friends with these people at this bookstore. And then got a real job a paying job at one of the bigger independent bookstores here in Minneapolis called Moon Palace books. And all those times, like just felt like I had found my people. And you know, we were talking about all sorts of things. But inevitably, people just be asking, like, what are you reading right now? And there was no judgement ever. You know, people would read romance novels, and old sci fi and like new literary bestsellers and obscure things. It was just a place of like sharing the joy in reading and taking reading, which is like a really solitary act, and kind of turning it into a communal act and sharing recommendations and talking about you know, we read this book the same time, let's talk about it. So when I wrote reading the apocalypse, I was in a very book centred way of thinking and like a lot of my social circles based on love of reading. So reading the apocalypse is 20 to 30 pounds. By the apocalypse moves, and each one is based on one of my favourite novels. So some are a very serious attempt at trying to take a character trait from one of these novels or a plot device and actually turn it into a playable pbta Move that changes the story or gives a character something new to do. And then some are just like weird for most jokes, like one is based on Moby Dick. And it's literally just the first paragraph of Moby Dick. Like, powered by the apocalypse move. And it's just my way of like, kind of taking these two things. I loved reading fiction, and playing role playing games, just trying to smash them together. I've been making scenes for a long time, and also was like a co organiser of the Twin Cities ZINE Fest for a few years. And so I would just try to like make some weird little thing to have every year to bring to zimfest and that was one of them. It eventually got paired with video game apocalypse, no Game Genie apocalypse. Yes, the same thing but my favourite video games and so those are currently available like together the physical one is like a flipbook that changes direction in the middle. Yeah, is that is a very long answer to what is the zine? I guess I love it

C

Chris 41:19

though. It's great. I am. There's I'm gonna I'm gonna forget the actual move now. But there's one the Garmin gust one the endless chambers of Garmin gust. Yes, that's like when you try to find a room we never visited, roll on a 10. Plus, you find the room or you recall a path back to where you started from or something like that. And one of them is no one notices you and your travels. I can't remember the exact move. I've just mangled it completely.

A

Aaron King 41:44

I can find it. Hold on. Should I find it?

C

Chris 41:47





Chris 41:47

Read it out loud? Yeah, do it.



Aaron King 41:48

Okay, hold on. Just second. I gotta go. My bookshelf is right behind me. I'll be right back. This is the joy of editing.



Chris 41:53

Ah, yes, it is.



Aaron King 41:57

The endless chambers of Gorman guests inspired by the growing gas trilogy by Mervyn Peake, when you try to find a room you've never visited in the ancient, sprawling, complex role on a 10 plus choose to on the 79 Choose one, you find the room recall a path back to where you started from. No one notices you and your travels. It's great. I mean, those books are so good.



Chris 42:21

That's so good. I have an entire game in my head based around that one move that at some point, I'm going to write and then I'm going to send it to you and be like, Hey, is it cool?



Aaron King 42:36

Yes, absolutely. Please do. It's all yours. I mean, like part of this is I cringe at like, the kind of modern media trope of like reference self referential, like, you're referencing everything. Hey, remember, we recreated this scene from the southern movie in our new movie?



Chris 42:55

Huh? Callbacks? Callbacks? Callbacks? Right? Yeah.



Aaron King 42:59

And like, here's these two popular things, and we've put them into one thing. And so I was a little hesitant to write a lot of these because I didn't want it to be, Hey, do you recognise this? So I tried really hard to like cite my sources. And also, it is just a cheap little zine. It's not like a million dollar blockbuster. But I also tried to be like, legitimately transformative. And then like, it's not just a call back, except them to decline, which, but I want them to be usable, or evocative or inspirational. And I hope I did that.

C Chris 43:39

I definitely want to go Oh, my gosh, well, for sure. So that my, my master's is in creative writing with a focus on innovation and experiment. And I got really interested in like, meta text, and yes, weird things you can do with narratives. And so like you say, like, I'm really interested in like, the line between where something is, like, transformative and metatextual. And where something is, hey, remember this cute thing.

A Aaron King 44:12

And it's a hard line. And I think, I think, you know, my perception of where that line lies is different now than it was when I was 30, than it was when I was 25. And I'm sure that line will change again, and it's not like it has moved in a single direction it is wave back and forth. And so you know, there's a strong chance that in five years, I will take the Xen off the internet and shame. And then five years later, I'll put it back proudly, yeah.

C Chris 44:41

Or you be like, hey, remember this thing.

A Aaron King 44:45

And hopefully, in the meantime, it will have become very rare and valuable. But yeah, I mean, I think finding those inspirations is a strange thing. Like, you and I are old enough to have had a signature freakin amount of time, pre Internet yes. And like the the like weird urge to track stuff down and like to find something new that you've never seen before. That was like, easy to do back then because we were idiots and we didn't have access to Wikipedia. Hard to do, because that meant like physically travelling somewhere. Yeah. There's a way that you relate to important works in that way that is like different from, oh, I just learned about this thing. I order a copy. It'll be here in a week, or I'll download a copy. And I don't mean to say like, kids today have it so easy, or that one way is different than the other. It's just, or one way is better than the other. Is not what I mean to say. It is different, obviously.

C Chris 45:45

Yeah, they're just a fundamentally different experiences. Right? Fly. I was really, I was really into like, punk and stuff. I still am. But in my early teens, yeah, I became a real collector of my seven inch vinyl and besides. So I used to go to markets and like, hunt through racks of CDs and vinyl and looking for stuff that I didn't have. Unlike say, now, it's it's very easy to just look on eBay and be like, okay, cool. I'll have that. And it comes three days later. And I almost, I almost appreciate it now when someone recommends me something that is out of print, but I can't, I have to hunt for and search for.

A Aaron King 46:24

**A** Aaron King 40:54

And that was the other goal of the zine I think was just like, this is also just like a book review, seeing, like, these are my favourite books. I hope there's some mystique and how I've described them that makes you want to go and track them down. Like you can throw this zine away or give it to someone else. But like, if something in here seems evocative, that is because the book was so amazing. Like, please go find it. So please do and please go find while in the streets back, Jason back, please track down to like a physical copy of Dungeon magazine. 62. The cover is so cool.

**C** Chris 47:11

It's so it's like a weird Cova for dungeon. It's like a picture of a mini.

**A** Aaron King 47:16

Yes. It's like a photographed image of like a hand carved, physical scene from one of these adventures. And honestly, like a bunch of the adventures in here are very cool. They're not all good. But they're all a little strange. There's one about like, mages in suspended animation in the basement of a barn. And they come out as ghosts and are haunting this old widow. Like the idea that we have of a d&d as this kind of monolith of European fiction, I think, is often very true. And I don't mean to say like, no, actually, they weren't problematic. But I think there were like people just kind of writing their weird little things throughout the history of d&d. And this magazine. kind of shows like there's one adventure that's like, there's a mummy alligator in the swamp, and it's terrorising this Lizard Man, Shaman. And you have to help the Lizard Man and fight this mummy rot alligator. And it's just like, I love that. I don't want to do that.

**C** Chris 48:20

It's a weird issue because like you say, it's got some really like weird little quirky things in it that are very like not what we think of as being d&d. Right. And then it's got a kind of early Christopher Perkins adventure in it. That's just straight up d&d. Yeah, Dragon style

**A** Aaron King 48:42

was just like, there's a dwarven dungeon Yeah. And you go in deal with these dwarves there is a dragon like, it is everything you expect from d&d.

**C** Chris 48:53

And it's so strange to look at that and be like cool Chris Perkins now like, he's not the head of d&d, but

**A** Aaron King 48:58

Let's see if anything else

ne's a top influencer if nothing else.

**C** Chris 49:02

He's a top influencer of d&d I don't know what his exact job title is. But like, imagine what the end will be like if Jason packout Chris Bobby's job. Like, oh, there's a desert adventure in here called grim Joel's by Jennifer stock.

**A** Aaron King 49:20

That's the word. Yeah, with the alligators much. Yes. It's so weird. And it's like a horror story set on a swamp island.

**C** Chris 49:30

Yeah, like it's so straighter than the direction that the game could have taken if like, I have nothing personally against Christopher Perkins. I don't know anything about the guy. But he obviously like he writes d&d, traditional d&d, like every adventure of his I've read has been very like this is a Dungeons and Dragons adventure.

**A** Aaron King 49:53

And sometimes it's great sometimes delivers perfectly

**C** Chris 49:56

Yeah, like he wrote an adventure call and this is why I'm gonna edit to remember to make it sound like I remember this off the top of my head. He wrote an adventure called a wizard fate, and dungeon 37. That's a very traditional d&d adventure. But I really love it. It's about this. It's just like a crawl through a ruined wizards tower. And it's very classic d&d, but it's really good. Again, I don't know what point I'm driving out here.

**A** Aaron King 50:34

I think I think, you know, it gets back to just what we were talking about, about these like, kind of adventure forms. And in like, making those forms, I guess it's also you probably heard in your fiction classes, like, sometimes a work of art piece of fiction, a movie painting or whatever, like, does something new. But sometimes it just does something better than has been done. Yeah. So it takes these forms you're familiar with and just says like, Okay, this is my best attempt at like, the ultimate form of that.

**C** Chris 51:07

Yeah, like wishes and traps exist for a reason. And it's because they resonate with us. So we

Yeah, like clichés and tropes exist for a reason. And it's because they resonate with us. So we keep telling them, I'm using them.

**A** Aaron King 51:19

Right. And it's, it's worth having people who can skillfully like redeploy them for a modern audience, like, you know, a doomed love story written in 1950 is going to have some familiar tropes, but also going to have some weird or problematic stuff, and someone will rewrite it for people right now, and it will feel better. And then in 20 years, it will feel weird and problematic. So there's nothing wrong with like presenting, like, here's the best wizard's dungeon that we can pull out. Like, we know you all have wizard dungeons. We're trying really hard with this one. And that's a great touchstone for people that are familiar with the tropes of gaming and want to dive in in that way.

**C** Chris 51:59

I mean, how many different versions of keep on the Borderlands do we actually need? Right? The answer is at least one more.

**A** Aaron King 52:07

Yeah. Give me another one in five years. I'll read it. I'll try to get

**C** Chris 52:11

Yeah. That's a project that that was, that was nearly what this podcast project was, was I'm gonna start a d&d related podcast, and it was nearly just running every extant version of keep and compare.

**A** Aaron King 52:25

And then you start running it in different systems.

**C** Chris 52:29

I want to run keep on the three colons Yes. What does that look like? I keep on the Troika lands.

**A** Aaron King 52:36

I love all that stuff. I love like village of Hamlet. I love I love dread, like,

**C** Chris 52:41

Chris 52:41

I would dread Jiwon against the setting of the hill giant? Yeah, it's called Great. Yeah. It's, like you said none of it is groundbreaking now. In fact, a lot of it isn't even good by modern standards, right? Blue superpower that keeps me coming back to it. And I don't know what that is.

A Aaron King 53:02

Right. And like, as someone brought up in the idea of like reading older stories, like there is just kind of an interesting historical aspect of seeing where we came from seeing the bits that got brought along and change. And often, like, for me, the interesting parts are seeing the bits that got left behind. Yes, not brought forward. Yes, like developing a sense of like, what has happened is valuable to me, partially, just so that I don't make the mistakes that other people have made like, this is free advice, you can see how people have been fucking up for 50 years, and then you maybe are better at not making that same mistake.

C Chris 53:44

Yeah, I find it really interesting that like, as a hobby, role playing games are still very nascent. Like we're still very early in the form. So we still have access to a lot of the original material, and we still have access to a lot of almost everything, almost everything. And we still have access to the majority of the people who were making it as well, for better or for worse. But at the same time, it's all like that whole, the oral tradition of it feels like it's disappeared.

A Aaron King 54:18

Right? There's no, I think about this a lot like novels or comics, a lot of what goes on in them is laid down in print, and passed down and you can track down an earlier printing and see the changes made. But so much of gaming is like there's no

C Chris 54:36

place, there's no artefact of play for a lot of the early hobby, right? And there's no place where like

A Aaron King 54:41

the best non GM players of the 70s 80s and 90s like broke down. You know, we do have played records from alarms and excursions or whatever. But there's no like, you can ask what makes a good adventure and people have lots of different answers. You can ask what makes for a good jamming thing. You know, just Advice. But there's no like, people don't say like, oh, I played with this awesome player once. And here's what they did. And there are suggestions out there for like how to be a better player at the table. But there's no, there's no Hall of Fame for players the way there's like, veterans. And I think that's really interesting to me. And yeah appeals to me a lot that there's this very temporal, temporary aspect to the games. And that's why I tried

to mention, like, Peter re ran these games like he's a high school teacher now, you'll probably never find his name in games, but like, I, he has informed me as a game designer, a GM and a player as much or more than, like so many books that I've read. And like, it's important to me to just like, at least keep that alive in my brain, if nowhere else.

**C** Chris 55:50

That's awesome. That feels like a really nice kind of organic place to wrap things up, I think. Cool.

**A** Aaron King 55:56

Yeah. One hour. Exactly.

**C** Chris 55:58

We arrived at a point, which is quite rare. So yeah, thank you so much for your time. It's been really great to talk to you.

**A** Aaron King 56:09

I had a great time. Yeah. This was very fun. I hope. So.

**C** Chris 56:13

For the people who are listening, who are you? What can you do? Where can they find your work? What do you got going on, et cetera. And I'll obviously put links to everything in show notes and all that.

**A** Aaron King 56:25

I'm Aaron king. The easiest way to find me is just on Twitter at Aaron MF king. And there's links to my app store and pictures of dogs that I dog sets and weird things that I see as a forever pedestrian walking around town. If that interests you. That's my life.

**C** Chris 56:45

Dog pictures. Great. Everyone loves dog pictures.

**A** Aaron King 56:47

Yeah, come for the dog pictures,

C Chris 56:49  
even people who don't like dogs. Like our pictures. Cool. Thank you so much for sitting down with me. I really enjoyed this. And it was really nice to dig into like a real old school adventure that I think a lot of people won't have heard of, as well. So that's fun.

A Aaron King 57:06  
Because a great time if anyone wants to play a d&d, find me online, we'll figure something out.

C Chris 57:13  
And I hope that maybe somewhere Jason PAC hears this and thinks, Okay, the 10 foot pole review isn't the only reaction to this. Eventually. I'm gonna try

A Aaron King 57:27  
to track him down. I wrote letters, I wrote letters to Dungeons and Dragons magazines. When I was ISIS.

C Chris 57:32  
It's to dungeon magazine tosses all the way through the late 90s. When I was a kid, I've got I've got rejection letters from Dungeon magazine and in a file in my loft. I never sold anything to them. But yeah. That's so cool.

A Aaron King 57:48  
I wrote, I wrote to Dragon about an article, I was a big fan of Dark Sun. And someone wrote this cool article about Dark Sun. And I wrote to the magazine, and I was like, I really like this article. Here's my ideas. And they forwarded it to the writer and he wrote back to me in like, 1997, or whatever. And it was just so neat to like, just know that these people are out there and being supportive. So a very funny thing.

C Chris 58:15  
Yeah, remember the night is when you could write to an author and it was a novel experience for them. And it wasn't like, oh, another decade on Twitter shouting at me.

A Aaron King 58:27



I did write him and I said, like, I think is very problematic. I'm telling all my friends. He's actually he was actually I want to say he was a cop as well. So that's no not

C Chris 58:39  
via snail mail.

A Aaron King 58:46  
To keep all of that out, that's not that's just for us.