

# Game On!

We are about to get started on the “*Shackled City*” adventure path, as serialized in *Dungeon Magazine* (and later as a compiled and enhanced hardcover) during 2004 and 2005. The full series will take a group of 4 to 6 characters from first to level 20. How long it will take, I have no idea.

The “Adventure Path” concept is a little different than a monolithic adventure. The installments of the AP are quite discrete, often with several months passing between episodes. The good news is that you will have (mostly) plenty of time for creating items, making friends, spending loot, visiting other locations, or just being lazy between adventures.

## Required Reading

*Shackled City* will be taking place within the context of my world of Suleria. If you haven't already, the first place you should visit is our campaign website:

<http://webpages.charter.net/kwilliams00/weblog/scblog.html>

The link above is the only thing you need to remember – All of the campaign documents, links, journals, etc can be accessed from here. It ain't pretty, but it is easy to use and loads quickly.

The intention is to keep game-related exchanges on the blog as much as possible. Sometimes I get lost trying to keep track of which campaign is which, lose email between work and home, or get the sequence all screwed up. We will still make lots of email, but at least here we have a record of what was actually done and when.

To comment on a post, create an account with google.com (they don't send spam or sell your address, no worries, just keep your profile hidden), log in, and comment away. The whole shebang will be archived each month. Blogger is part of the Google Empire, so one account will get you to the spreadsheets, documents, and the Blog.

We will also be using Google collaborative spreadsheets and documents. This will allow the group to keep a comprehensive list of just about anything, available from anywhere, and capable of being updated by any member of the group. Hopefully, this will simplify the process of keeping track of plot elements and NPCs.

We will try this – if it sucks balls, we can go back to email.

## Character Creation

For general guidelines, use the character creation section of the *Suleria House Rules*, linked from the website above. Certain character classes have an opportunity to shine in this series - some less so. Here are a few points to consider:

- There are a few overland treks but generally the action is urban or underground, limiting some of the strengths of “woody” classes.
- There will be many NPC interactions, including a fair amount of politics, so you might want to limit the number of flatulent, nose-picking, Tourettes-afflicted savages in the party (of course, there's always one...).
- Classes that excel at knowledge skills will be a huge benefit, and help keep the plotline fairly clear. Knowledge skills will be extremely useful – ALL of them, even local history and nobility

(Suggest you check out the “Able Learner” feat from RoD). Expect to be rolling a bunch of knowledge checks. Might want to pump that Gather Information skill a bit as well.

- When planning out your character’s advancement, be advised that there is a roller-coaster ride from about L12 to about L16 during which you won’t have a lot of down time. Otherwise, the plot can develop as slowly or quickly as we like. No rush between adventures, usually.

This series is balanced for 6 “elite array” characters with a 32-point buy (we will be using 34 points). Now, *Men of Action* almost never need to, but you might want to keep a backup character ready to flesh out just in case. For continuity’s sake, I would encourage everyone to try and salvage your existing characters in case of an “accident,” but unfortunately, that isn’t always possible. Heh.

I will be handing out experience after each section, approximately every 12 game hours or so. I will be keeping track of your overall xp myself, and I’ll let you know when it’s been updated. As always, if you are taking a funky feat or PrC, let me know – I have to read up on it, too. If it is REALLY funky (like implied membership in an organization), we might have to do a little one-on-one. I’ll try not to slow things down too much.

We are using Fantasy Grounds, obviously. Find or make yourself a few tokens for familiars, companions, etc – they should be 50x50 pixels max for a medium critter. If you think you might be enlarged, make a 100 pixel one, too.

Once each player decides on a basic character concept (Race, Class, Etc), I will get with you individually about backstories and whatnot. In addition to your regular feats and abilities, I will offer characters a list of optional “traits” to choose from. These traits are mostly for character development, and have very minor benefits and drawbacks. Your choice of Race, Alignment, and Class will determine what sorts of traits you get to choose from, and they will be offered in secret (shhh..). Normally I don’t get too involved in character personalities, but in this case I will be - but with OPTIONS only. If my ideas are lame, just say, “hey, that’s lame” and I’ll butt out. I might respectfully modify a backstory, but I won’t force you into anything.

Once you complete your backstory, mail it to me as a .doc or .pdf and I will put it up on the site if you like.

Paladins, for some reason, tend to be a pain in my ass (both as DM and player). Newcomers to Suleria who are planning on running a Paladin need to get with me before we play, so I can give you a quick rundown on what I expect from them (i.e. my own personal Paladin Rant©).

## Gameplay Notes

The city of Cauldron is absolutely central to the story – it’s more than just a place, it’s a character. It is important that the party have some kind of emotional tie to the place, which is why I will try to give out interesting backstory tidbits that will hopefully give them a tangible stake in Cauldron’s future. As you gain experience and reputation, some of you may very well end up having other responsibilities as well. There are ample opportunities for operating a business, holding an official position, running a guild, or whatever it is that heroes do when not actively saving the world. Cauldron, for all its faults, is home.

Poor choices are definitely punished - not always with experience loss or character death, but by the slaying of children and the suffering of the weak. Your characters should have the attitude that what they do does make a difference; remember that you are not just some shmuck off the street. As the party’s reputation builds, citizens will increasingly look to you for guidance, hope, and redemption. You will (hopefully) find that burden quite heavy.

In the course of events, there will be times when you need too...ummm...withdraw. I will state categorically that there is no “level boss” you are incapable of defeating - however, there are a few that, if the combat begins badly, may well TPK the group. Know when to fight another day. If there is a time-

critical element, it will probably be obvious. Do not barrel ahead if you are weak – the AP system, because it is built around magazines (and therefore with limited space), tend to consist of a few very tough fights instead of a bunch of relatively easy ones. If you are weakened significantly by his minions, the boss is gonna cream you. Smack, smack, splat.

And now, a quick word about good, evil, and getting things done: You will meet evil people - heck, you will have allies that are evil whether you like it or not. If you attempt to pick a fight (or even refuse to deal with) every person of questionable character, there will be much suffering. Common interests can make strange bedfellows in Cauldron.

There are a TON of NPC's here - More than a hundred, in fact. This will give you an opportunity to get to know the denizens of Cauldron and develop some interesting relationships with them. Big fun. However, keeping track of who is who will be a serious job – I respectfully suggest that the party appoint a secretary for this. It will also make things easier if you elect one person the party treasurer, to keep the books and the loot list. I will offer what help I can, but honestly, I consider this your job, not mine.

Now, the way I have written all of this up, Shackled City must sound like some boring exercise in domestic policy relations – I assure you it isn't. There is loot, gore, and glory aplenty. We can make as much or as little of the politics as you like.

## **The File**

The .zip contains over 200 graphics, scanned from both the hardcover and Dungeon Magazine. I opted for doing it this way so we could use some really high-rez maps, and everyone gets to see all of the great artwork that came with this product. Paizo did a really awesome job with this, as you will see.

To install the files just extract them into your “c:\program files\fantasy grounds\campaigns\shackled city\images” directory. Cake.

## **Conclusion**

Welcome to Cauldron. The world always seems to need saving, and this time it's your turn.