

# Pepper Knave

A fantasy adventure by Brad Buchanan

## George A. Morris Memorial Playground

The Morris Playground sits in the heart of the small coastal town called Gold Beach, Oregon. It was erected in 1963 across from the town's tiny library. The playground itself is little more than a field of patchy coastal grass surrounded by bushes, briars, and the occasional colorful splash of Indian Paintbrush. The playground equip-



ment is mostly painted iron and wood, worn and rusted by the salt air. There is a six-foot slide, a tall swing set with three swings, a jungle-gym, a couple of rocking-horse airplanes and a pair of seesaws. There are also three or four cement pipes that form tunnels around the playground.

The date is February 2004. It is breezy and misty, cold enough for a light jacket. A handful of bored moms chaperone two dozen kids who are running around, playing with balls and kites, and competing for the limited equipment.

### Tommy Ryerson

*From the ground, Alex, you see the sky in its permanent overcast through a few droplets of rain spattered on your glasses. You see Alan yelling at the other kids crowded around you. You see James trying to*

*help you up, and you see Graham – your kid neighbor who might be like your little brother if he wasn't so tall – you see Graham quietly sidling up to Tommy Ryerson, hoping to get the last laugh.*

*Tommy Ryerson is the school bully. Typically the teachers keep him in check, but right now you're not in school. Right now he's standing over you, dangling your father's compass just out of reach. He laughs, and his stupid slobbery bully laugh gets spit on your shirt. The other kids laugh with him. They're all so stupid.*

Tommy is a simple bully. Nearly two years older than Alex but still in his grade, he's bored and underappreciated. All he wants is attention, and he gets it by humiliating the smallest person he can find – in this case, Alex. He's taken Alex's compass, probably making fun of him for "wearing a necklace."

**Challenge:** The players should try to get the compass back. They can try to talk him down, fight with him, or any other plan they come up with.

An Investigation check of 15 will allow a player to recall an embarrassing detail about Tommy. A Subterfuge check of 15 will allow a player to invent such a detail. A style check of 15 will allow a player to make general insults and turn the crowd to their side.

If the party does not recover the compass quickly, Tommy gets tired and kicks Alex for 1 hp, then drops the compass and leaves.

### The Silver Swallow

*Suddenly you notice Graham is gone. Looking around, you spot him near one of the cement tubes, trying to catch a small bird. Even on a cloudy day the bird shines like its feathers are mirrors.*

*Graham disappears into the tube.*

If the party investigates the tube to find Graham and the strange bird, they arrive in time to see

them both disappear through a haze of static, like a poorly-tuned television. Graham never shows any fear, only curiosity. Ideally, the party follows them through. If they hesitate, a strong wind pulls them down and into the portal.

### **Pepper Knave: The Ragged District**

Pepper Knave is a huge, run-down urban sprawl of a city filled with fantastic inhabitants of every shape and size. It has the gritty, dirty feel of 19<sup>th</sup> century London, although the technology level is closer to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The Ragged District is a low-income industrial part of town containing a mishmash of factories and hole-in-the-wall curiosity shops. The streets are narrow and packed with people and animals and a few unidentifiable creatures, all wearing drab colors. They hurry from place to place with eyes down, and generally try and wave off attempts to interact.

*You find yourselves hurling through space, losing your sense of time and direction, until suddenly you are standing ankle-deep in a shallow fountain on one edge of a small square. Dilapidated buildings, three and four stories high, surround the square on all sides. Narrow alleys exit the square in five directions. The cloudy sky has a faint greenish tinge.*

*People of every shape and size rush back and forth before you, but if anybody noticed your sudden appearance they haven't shown it.*

*Abruptly your eye is drawn to a bright spot in the crowd. Graham is there, to your left, struggling with a tall shining figure.*

The shining figure is the Silver Gentleman. His shape suggests a top hat and tails, but his figure reflects everything around him as though he and his clothes were made of mirrored, liquid silver. He has no face, and never speaks. The silver swallow is his familiar, and sits on his shoulder when not doing his bidding. The Gentleman's

true objective is to acquire Alex's compass – kidnapping Graham is just a lure. Shortly after the players enter the District, the Gentleman will notice them and take off down the left-hand alley with Graham in tow.

If the players examine the Gentleman more closely, they see that he has a hand around Graham's wrist and seems fully impervious to Graham's attempts to break free.

If players follow the Gentleman successfully, they will see him pull Graham through a solid brick wall at a dead end, leaving their trail cold. If they ignore the Gentleman, he will quietly disappear with Graham.

### **Porthos**

At this point in the story Porthos the shopkeeper will show up. If the party followed the Silver Gentleman to a dead end, Porthos may find them in the street. If they did not, inclement weather may drive them to a nearby business – which just happens to be Porthos' shop.

Porthos is a titan of a man, seven feet tall and nearly as broad. He is a veritable bull in his own china shop, always breaking things. Porthos is a generous person and is truly concerned for the party.

He brings the party into his shop where he engages them a discussion about their lost friend. Porthos expresses sympathy – the Silver Gentleman is often seen taking children who appear in the square, and nobody ever sees them again.

During the discussion he notices Alex's compass, and (though tempted to buy it) pulls out a book to show them that the compass is actually a rare and powerful artifact that can align the stars for its owner – if one only knew how to talk to the stars.

From this point forward, the compass becomes a good luck charm, and should give a +1 circum-

stance bonus to its bearer on any rolls involving chance.

Upon being pressured, Porthos reveals that he doesn't know where the Gentleman takes the children, but he knows who you might ask: A rooftop urchin named Parker who's tricky but might be able to lead them, or the rag hag who is crazy, but knows where everybody goes.

### **Parker**

Parker is a clever rooftop urchin girl who actually does know plenty about the Gentleman's operation. She wears tattered but colorful clothes: An iridescent diamond-patterned top stolen from a travelling troupe, and trousers patched in five places.

Parker is wary of the group at first. Mention of Porthos' name will lower her guard a little bit. A bribe will do a lot more. Some smooth talking will do the job as well, but it may take time.

If players attempt to engage the character romantically she will show restrained interest in Alan, but will ignore Alex and James.

If the party is successful in acquiring Parker's assistance she will lead them directly to the factory. However upon arrival unless the party has sufficiently swayed her or bribed her, she will reveal their presence to the Silver Gentleman.

### **Rag Hag**

The other option for the party is to seek the crazy lady who has such keen eyes and sees everything that happens in her district. She will be suspicious of them, and will not accept bribes. After some persuading (or intimidating) she will talk about where the children are taken, revealing enough information for the party to piece together which factory they have to go to.

### **Crumb's Garment Warehouse**

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One way or another, the party will learn that their friend was taken to Crumb's Garment

Warehouse, a large block building on the corner of Anchory and Ferm with filthy yellowed windows.

The warehouse is run by Old Crumb, a huge chimpanzee with a bad temper. The operation is really a sweatshop where kidnapped children are forced to sew cheap clothing for no pay.

*See the map of Crumb's Garment Warehouse.*

### **The Trap!**

Graham is being held in a cell on the basement level. There are a few other kids in the cells, all new arrivals and frightened. The party will find it relatively simple to reach Graham undetected, but it's a trap! Crumb and a number of subordinate chimps appear and capture the party with a net. Crumb steals Alex's compass and leaves the party locked together in the cell.

### **Escaping the Cell**

The group is jailed in a cell. There should be strong hints in the cell that someone has escaped before. A light red herring (of keys on the far wall) is in place but actually they need to move a box beneath a bunk to find a tunnel previously dug that leads to a different part of the warehouse.

### **Navigating the Warehouse**

The group now has their run of the warehouse to try and find the Silver Gentleman and recover Alex's compass.

### **Confronting Old Crumb**

The party can find Old Crumb and try to teach him a lesson, or they can leave him alone.

### **Rescuing the Kids**

The party can attempt to lead the other kids in the sweatshop out of the warehouse, or cut them loose to wreak havoc.

### **The Silver Gentleman's Tower**

The Silver Gentleman has a laboratory in a tower above the warehouse. The party has to make

their way to the tower. Once inside they will find otherworldly astronomical and astrological experiments. They encounter no resistance inside the tower.

### **Facing the Silver Gentleman**

The party arrives in time to find the Silver Gentleman on the roof, using the compass to realign the stars. He is singing to them with a mysterious music. His goal is to align the stars to bring himself good fortune. Set-up for future campaign – the Silver Gentleman has fate on his side from now on.

The party must devise a way to retrieve the compass from the Silver Gentleman. They may be utterly unsuccessful, they may push him off the roof. It's possible that once the stars are aligned he simply vanishes into the sky, leaving the compass for Alex to retrieve.

### **The Collapse**

Once the stars are aligned, an earthquake begins, and slowly gravity reverses, causing the party to float up into the night sky. They hurtle toward the stars at an incredible speed, and at last find themselves waking up in the rain at Morris Playground.

### **Back at the Playground**

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If there is enough time, the party may be able to manage one last encounter with Tommy Ryerson. Having gained confidence from their wild adventure they teach him a lesson.

## Character Bios

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### Alex Little

A player character. Age 11. An intensely curious, undersized, intellectual young man. Always reading books or chasing rabbits around the backyard. Named for Alice Liddel of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

Physical 9, Mental 13, Social 10. Investigation 4, Science 3, Medicine 1, Computers 1, Repair 1, Performance 2, Subterfuge 1.

Inventory: Brass compass.

### Alan Wood

A player character. Age 12. A charismatic kid that's usually well-liked. Not winning any fights or acing any tests, but the others look up to him. Plays baseball. Named for Alan Alexander Milne, author of *Winnie the Pooh*.

Physical 10, Mental 10, Social 12. Long-range combat 1, Combat defense 1, Athletics 1, Science 2, Computers 1, Leadership 4, Performance 1, Subterfuge 2, Style 3.

### James Young

A player character. Age 11. Physically strong, feels like he can hold his own against anyone (though it's not always true). He's got moxie, this one. Plays baseball among other sports. Named for James Matthew Barrie, author of *Peter Pan*.

Physical 14, Mental 9, Social 9. Unarmed combat 3, Melee combat 2, Long-range combat 1, Combat defense 2, Athletics 2, Medicine 2, Leadership 1, Intimidation 3, Style 1.

### Graham Sierra

An ally of the players. Age 10. The youngest member of the group, but maybe the most adventurous (and likely to get into trouble). A scrapper - good at getting out of tricky situations. Named for King Graham of *King's Quest*, published by Sierra.

Physical 9, Mental 10, Social 10. Unarmed combat 1, Melee combat 2, Long-range combat 2, Combat defense 2, Athletics 2, Stealth 2, Performance 1, Intimidation 1, Subterfuge 2.

### Tommy Ryerson

The neighborhood bully. Age 13. Older than the other kids, not too smart but knows how to get his way.

Physical 14, Mental 10, Social 10. Unarmed combat 4, Combat defense 3, Athletics 1, Intimidation 3.

### Silver Gentleman

The mysterious antagonist of the story, the Silver Gentleman is a noble in pursuit of powerful artifacts.

Physical 11, Mental 12, Social 14. Combat Defense (Metallic) 10, Investigation 2, Science 5, Medicine 2, Artifact Lore 8, Leadership 4, Intimidation 2, Subterfuge 2, Style 1.

### Porthos

A shopkeeper in the Ragged District who knows more than he should. Mentor figure to the party.

Physical 12, Mental 12, Social 11.

### Parker

A cunning rooftop urchin.

Physical 11, Mental 8, Social 13.

### Rag Hag

An old lady that sees everything.

Physical 8, Mental 8, Social 7.

### Old Crumb

A huge, old chimpanzee wearing a wool coat and a cabbie cap. A cold and ruthless personality. Runs a sweatshop in the Ragged District.

Physical 14, Mental 12, Social 9.

## Credits

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