

Contests

Contests & Design Challenges

GAZETTEER WRITING CONTEST

WINNER

Ethan Sincox: "Valek's Landing," governed by mage Valek Rostennius, on the shore of Lake Escaya.

A funny thing happened with this contest. Although many site visitors downloaded the black and white map, and several asked questions about the challenge in email-- when it came down to the deadline we had, strange to say, only one entrant. I can't account for the surprising lack of response to this event so many expressed interest in, but it is what it is. Possibly our closeness to the Easter holiday interfered with some folks' writing time.

In any case, although his entry stands alone, I have to say that as an editor, author, and experienced world builder, Ethan's submission has everything I was hoping to see for a contest entry. I have no doubt that in any circumstances I would have had his entry in my "to be considered" pile, and to judge from its quality he was very likely to make it to the finals on straight-up merit alone.

In a terse 700 words, Ethan keeps the Valek's Landing name but expands it into the tatterdemalion outpost of a mage and governor charged with exploiting a valuable magical ore in the area. He neatly presents geographic features in the style of an old-time gazetteer without letting them overwhelm the more substantive parts of his writing. He accounts creatively for interesting map features, and hints at enough of the goings-on that a thoughtful writer or game master can tease out plenty of adventure threads and story hooks from this one simple entry.

Ethan Sincox is an avid and talented woodworker who writes about his craft, a technical writer, and a skilled world builder working with a friend to document the campaign world his entry is placed in. Thank you, Ethan, for this top-quality submission. You really do this map justice, and you definitely deserve recognition for your creativity and writing.

Doing yeoman's work as he has done, I'm happy to confer all the rewards of this contest on the man who spent some time thinking and putting quill to paper, and producing a masterful gazetteer entry as a result. **As Grand Prize winner, Ethan receives:**

- The Gazetteer Writer's Manual: Creating Travel Guides to Fictional Worlds
- A full-color poster map of Valek's Landing
- Admission to our upcoming "Create a Gazetteer For Your World" workshop.

[Click here to read his winning entry.](#)

Teramis extends a heartfelt thanks to Brett Pisinski and Alyssa Faden for their willingness to judge this contest, even in the middle of absolute Kickstarter insanity on Alyssa's part. My gratitude goes out to you both, and to Alyssa for the contribution of the wonderful map featured in this contest.

Ever tried your hand at gazetteer writing? Well, you might want to try it now. It's a great way to win books and prizes in celebration of our launch of **The Gazetteer Writer's Manual**. [The contest runs this week only](#). Read on for details!

The Book

On March 27th we're releasing our first how-to book, **The Gazetteer Writer's Manual: Creating Travel Guides for Fictional Worlds**. This shows how to create a gazetteer for your fictional world or adventure setting: what to include, what to leave out, and how to tackle the process. It is co-authored by myself and [Bruce Heard](#), the creative talent behind TSR's line of Gazetteers in the Mystara setting.

This is a great resource for anyone who wants to pull together the highlights of their setting and present it as a game supplement, a quickstart guide for players, or as background info for fictional works.

CONTEST & PRIZES

In keeping with the spirit of the Gazetteer concept, I thought it would be fun to have a contest in which you do a little gazetteer-style writing of your own. If you submit an entry, you have a chance at these prizes:

- **Grand Prize** is admission to the upcoming "**Create a Gazetteer for Your World**" **workshop**. This workshop will happen later in April.
- **The top two entrants** as determined by judging will receive a **full-color poster map** of

Valek's Landing, the location featured in this contest, beautifully hand-colored by the cartographer.

- **All finalists receive a copy of The Gazetteer Writer's Manual**, and their entries will be published here at this website.
- After finalists are selected, we'll award an additional three copies of The Gazetteer Writer's Manual in a **random drawing**. Everyone who submits an entry in the contest will be eligible for this drawing.

And even if you don't submit an entry, you can score a terrific map suitable for gaming and fiction uses by downloading the Valek's Landing map on this page. See the **MAP DOWNLOAD** section for details.

CONTEST RULES

The Place

Every gazetteer needs a place to feature, right? Well, this contest is spotlighting Valek's Landing, a scenic location created by gifted cartographer Alyssa Faden. The inset at the top of this page is a sample of the map--more on that in a minute.

The World Building (The Contest)

Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to download the complete map at the bottom of this page and write a gazetteer-style treatment of the location. The entry must be a minimum of 500 words and a maximum of 2000 words long. The sweet spot is probably in the 1200 - 1500 word range, but work within the minimum/maximum as you need.



If you're new to gazetteers, they are books that list and describe places. That description can range from simple landmarks and geography, to history and more. Here's a good example of an old-fashioned gazetteer from the 19th century: the [East Indian Gazetteer by Walter Hamilton](#) from 1828 (downloadable in its entirety at Google Books). This is not the only way to go about gazetteering, but browsing through this classic will give you some ideas if you haven't worked with gazetteers before.

For this contest we're looking for something more than just a geographical breakdown of Valek's Landing. **Your submission must have three elements in it:**

1. An interesting, unique, well-presented concept about the location. The important thing here is to create a setting that pops, however you choose to do that. This element will get the most weight in the judges' grading of entries.

2. A story hook. If a character comes to this place, what might they encounter or learn about that lends itself to adventure? This is a story hook that a GM can use in a role-playing game, or a fiction reader will read and say, ah, I see why this place is worth telling stories about.

3. A relatively *brief* description of the physical location and the most noteworthy things about the place, in addition to the concept elements from #1 and 2. Think "travel guide": you're going to this place or traveling through. What's important to know about the physical location? This shouldn't overshadow your concept and story elements, though.

The Deadline

Entries are due by Noon (Eastern time) on Monday, March 25. Email them to gazetteer [at] deborahchristian [dot] com. Please put "Contest" in the subject line.

Judging

I'll make a first pass through entries and select up to five finalists (depending how many entries come in). Then our two guest judges, Alyssa Faden (the map cartographer herself) and Brett Pisinski of Wicked North Games, will be scoring and voting on the final entries. Winners will be announced on March 27, the same day the Gazetteer Writer's Manual goes on sale.

(We'll have more about the judges on this page soon.)

GETTING STARTED

1. Download the full-sized Valek's Landing map at the link below. **You will need to share this page in order to access the map (the buttons are on the map itself).**

This is a large map, so make sure you have about 11 megabytes of room to store it in and a photo viewer that lets you zoom in and out as you need to examine different parts of it. Alyssa's crammed a ton of detail in this, and though you won't have room to write about it all, you'll want to think about it as you plan out your gazetteer submission.

2. Note the distance scale at the bottom left corner. This is so you have a frame of reference for the terrain. Also, building outlines each represent a single building, not blocks of structures run together.

3. The place name is flexible. Alyssa named this Valek's Landing and has her own backstory about it--but you don't need to keep this moniker. Rename it as you like, and flesh out this setting as you like. What you write is inspired by this map, but you can call it whatever suits your world.

MAP DOWNLOAD

To access the map, first share the page with one of the share buttons **on the map** below. Once the map displays clearly you can right-click on it to save it to your drive. Happy gazetteering, and we look forward to reading your entry!

Terms of Use. If you want to use this map for something other than our contest, you're welcome to! We're releasing it under a [Creative Commons 3.0 by-nc-sa license](#). That means you can remix, tweak, and build upon this work non-commercially as long as you attribute the artwork in this manner: "Original map by Alyssa Faden (<http://www.facebook.com/AlyssaFadenCartography>)".

Questions about the contest? Leave a comment below and I'll answer as soon as possible.

ABOUT OUR JUDGES

Alyssa Faden



Alyssa had the good fortune to be born in England and therefore did all of the usual geeky things - live roleplay, Dungeons & Dragons, drawing fantasy places - while in the middle of real-world castles and ancient barrow mounds. Not many are honored to have grown up in a city established by the Romans, with intact Roman walls and a Colosseum, but Alyssa was and she fully embraced it in every respect. Is it any wonder that she was the first to be playing Dungeons & Dragons in her school? With a lust for the unknown and the magical country of "America," she emigrated in 1998 and has been spreading 'home country historical goodness' via the mediums of cartography and table-top games ever since. Alyssa has recently worked for Paizo, Gygax Magazine, Kobold Quarterly, Silver Gryphon Games, R.Scott Taylor and Jon Brazer Enterprises and is the creator of the Torn World setting. Be sure to check out the Kickstarter link below for more on Torn World.

Kickstarter

<http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1471855235/torn-armor>

Alyssa's maps are available at the \$5 level in pdf format, and in print at the \$25 level.

Torn World Website

<http://www.tornworld.com>

Alyssa's Cartography Page

<https://www.facebook.com/AlyssaFadenCartography>

Brett M. Pisinski



Brett is one of the partners behind Wicked North Games, a company that is active in the d6 revival in the indie rpg market. Their goal is to take the classic D6 System they all grew up playing and take it into new territories. Their Westward project, which was Kickstarter funded, brought a western-flavored steampunk world to life, and they've just announced their next setting, called Transcience.

Brett resides in Durham, New Hampshire. He has a degree in Graphic Design; his hobbies outside of gaming include brewing (craft beer & homebrew), art, hiking and writing. He's currently working on a personal game design blog that chronicles the adventures of his company and partners within the industry, and where this crazy path takes them.

Wicked North Games, LLC / Co-Founder

<http://www.wickednorthgames.com>

brettski [at] wickednorthgames [dot] com

Click here to see previous contests and winners:

[World Building Tips Scavenger Hunt \(Mar 2013\)](#)

[Best Person, Place, or Thing Contest \(Nov 2012\)](#)