
Commentary by dDemonicAngels

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To B or not To B

In this case the 'B' refers to BitTorrent. I know, I know, everyone does it. But it says lawful good on my personal character sheet of life and I'm generally pretty good about not wanting to piss off the ultimate Dungeon Master in the sky.

So it was with conflicted feelings that I actually decided to tread the international byways of peer-to-peer piracy. Er, I mean file sharing.

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Lost eTools Files

I didn't go there lightly. When I lost my hard drive back in November, I also lost my main eTools setup for Character generation. I managed to find all the add-on datasets for the splatbooks, but the core module was lost in the nether. Heck, I had even bought two core modules because I wanted to run eTools on my portable PC. Sure I could have used the first core module to load the portable, but that wouldn't be the right thing to do. That damn alignment thing again.

So here I've bought two core modules and somehow I couldn't find either one. Now of course the obvious thing to do is download the software again. Nope. Code Monkey Publishing no longer has the rights to eTools. So I can't even pay for another copy. What's a guy to do?

BitTorrent is Just Wrong!

I hadn't even thought about BitTorrent. I found it while searching the web looking for an alternative solution. Maybe somewhere there was a place I could buy it? The first option that came up was a BitTorrent website. I didn't even click on it. But then so were the second, third and fourth sites. That's what put it in my mind. But just as quickly I put it out of my mind. Not in my playbook. Even when I gave up in frustration, I didn't consider BitTorrent.

It was my new gaming group that made me consider it. When we met to feel each other out, I noted that one of the guys had the Player's Handbook on his portable. I remember thinking how useful it would be to have an online, searchable version on my own portable. Thinking about it later, I realized it must have been a pirated download because a PDF version of the PHB isn't a WotC option. At least it's not that I know of. All of which made me think of the eTools websites.

It took me another week of moral fencing to decide to go for it. I reasoned that I wasn't cheating anyone out of any money so no one was losing out. I technically had already paid for it and was ready to pay again if I could.

Don't Ask, Don't Tell

Let me take a step back now and explain that I'm not so completely clean as it sounds. I've got a don't-ask-don't-tell kind of policy about BitTorrent and piracy. My brother regularly copies movies and

lends them to me. He copies them from copies that he gets from friends. Somehow if I didn't do the copy for myself, it's not as bad. I know, I know, can I get any more wishy-washy?

It's the same thing for my daughter's iPod. A quick check shows that she's got 10 or so movies that I know I didn't pay for. In the back of my mind I'm justifying it by saying that someone, somewhere paid for it. Both my kids have thousands of songs on their iPods that didn't come out my pocket change. I guess I really don't want to know who gave them a copy and did they actually pay for it.

So yes, Mr Righteous turns out to be Mr Ambiguous. I don't want to contribute to the problem myself, but I'm ready to turn a blind eye when others do it. How convenient.

That First Step

Yes, I took the plunge and downloaded eTools. I wasn't ready for all the dataset addons that came with it though. I've bought 90% of them already though and actually still have the original files to prove it. Somehow they survived my disk drive holocaust on a separate computer. But what do I do with the 3 or 4 addons that I hadn't bought? Arrggh! Moral decision time again. In the end I loaded them too justifying it with the fact that I WOULD have bought them eventually had I the chance and that no one was being cheated. I know, I know, there's a special corner of hell for moral sell-outs like me.

But worse, while I was busy contemplating the selling of my soul, another more sinister temptation had raised its ugly head. There on the BitTorrent download page was reference to the D&D books in PDF form. Sweet Mother of all Turkeys! All I had to do was press the download button and they were mine!

Strike Two

You've probably guessed that I walked away at that point but you're wrong. I did it. I bent all the pretentious moral codes that I had surrounded myself with in order to live in this digital at-your-fingertips world. But this one cost me big though. I made sure my kids weren't around to see their old man burn his Righteous Indignation card.

Again, I worked at justifying this by reminding myself that I owned 90% of the books in the download, both 3.0 and 3.5 versions. And really, I just wanted it for the Serpent Kingdom splatbook which I knew I owned but couldn't find. My plans were to read up on the entries I wanted then flush the evidence off my drive.

Who's Going to Know?

It's never that simple though. Once you've got the books at your beck and call, it's easier to call up the PDF and do a search on the book to discover what 'shaken' refers to. Or to find a quick reference regarding the intricacies to the 'trip' action. I could easily have gone through the books that sat a few yards away on my bookshelf, but no, this was easier.

In this world of I-want-it-now, I had sold an even bigger part of my soul. I had become one of THEM. I mean, WotC already had my money for most of this stuff, right? Where was the harm? And I didn't look at the books I hadn't paid for, I swear! But it didn't matter. I knew WotC didn't sell PDF versions of these books and these copies shouldn't exist. I had done wrong.

Stepping Away From the Edge

My journey to the dark side didn't last long. The alignment thing won in the end and after a few nights tossing and turning, I flushed everything from my PC. Now I'm back to the printed form. I prefer the feel of books in my hand anyway.

But that doesn't change the fact that I did download the PDFs or that I still have eTools on my computer. As much as each of us has a moral compass to guide us, I fear that mine has wavered a bit too much in recent weeks. What will be the next temptation that comes my way, and will my alignment carry me through?

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