

HELLBENDER Champions Campaign

Jean-Paul Galliard was an artist in Paris during the height of its cultural reign, 1925, when the streets were filled with poets, writers, and the avant-garde from all countries and in all fields. The world hadn't yet undergone the first of the World Wars, the fear of Man hadn't been driven into the collective human psyche by Hiroshima, and the world was still filled with optimism.

Still, individuals suffered. The myth of the starving artist working in a cold, drafty garret was born during this time, and like all stereotypes, it was based in truth. Jean-Paul was one such artist, sharing cramped quarters on Rue St. Croix with the poet Thierry and straining to meet each month's rent.

The problem wasn't that Jean-Paul had no skill. Technically, he was a master. But his paintings were spiritless, the composition stiff and lifeless. After repeated rejection, he began to only work desultorily, spending more and more of his time in the cafes and music halls, borrowing money which he spent on clothes and entertainment instead of rent and food.

After defaulting on his share of the rent for the third month in a row, Jean-Paul staggered home one night to find Thierry awake and ready for a fight. They argued, then they came to blows, and then Jean-Paul sobered to find himself standing over Thierry's prone body, a broken wine bottle in his hand. Horrified, he wrapped a cloak around his roommate's body and hauled it outside, pretending to be carrying a drunk friend. He left it in an alley several blocks away, and ran home to clean up the blood and restlessly pace the floor, wondering what to do. Unable to sleep, he picked up a brush and tried to paint away his distress.

Jean-Paul's muse was, apparently, a dark one. The work he finished over the ensuing week or two was disturbingly good, and a few friends encouraged him to build up enough to show. But after a few weeks, Jean-Paul's muse deserted him.

He didn't have to think very long to decide what had to be done. Part of every artist longs to walk in the shadows, risking damnation for immortality. Jean-Paul brought that longing to reality. For the next year he killed, one victim a month, and painted, much more than one painting a month. On the second month of his second year of murder, he was arrested, jailed, tried and executed.

If Jean-Paul's inspiration was found in darkness and death, it was no surprise that he found much to inspire him in Hell. Blood, flesh, excrement, dirt, anything that came to his hands became art. The more he was tortured, the more he created. Finally, Satan brought him before his throne.

Hell was no place for creativity; so this upstart artist who dared find inspiration in Hell would be sent away. The damned soul who could only paint if he killed would be forced to save life. And the murderer who had ushered so many souls to Hell in his life would usher even more to Hell in his death. Jean-Paul was made into Hellbender and sent back to earth to suffer his damnation.

Free (he hopes) from Satan's eye, Hellbender knows he only has one chance. While he'll do Satan's work, giving Evil a foretaste of Hell and acting as an ever-present warning of the wages of sin, he'll also do what he can to make restoration for his crimes. Hellbender's only hope is to do enough good to redeem his soul on Judgement Day.

Hellbender makes no secret of his powers and identity, although he is somewhat reticent about his past by preference. He enjoys a small vogue among heavy metallurgists and death rockers (who amuse him with their naïve attempts at evil) and is generally loathed by Christians and the like. Currently working for the King of Malta, Hellbender is enjoying himself, perhaps, a little too much for his own good.