

# SHARK BYTES

THE UNOFFICIAL SAVAGE WORLDS FANZINE

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## From the Editor:

Welcome back, Loyal Savages! *Shark Bytes* has returned with a vengeance! This new incarnation of the fanzine you've all come to know and love is leaner, meaner, and more streamlined than its predecessor. No longer will you have to deplete an entire ink cartridge in order to print an issue. No longer will you wait months for new gaming material, wondering if *Shark Bytes* is dead or if JB has just burned out again! I'm here to tell you—*Shark Bytes* is alive and swimming!

We've got a ton of new material in the works, and an entire staff of Contributing Editors dedicated to knocking it into shape. Don't think you'll have to wait six months to see it, either—submissions classified as nibbles (i.e., submissions too small for a full-blown article, but too good to pass on altogether) will be made available as quickly as we can post them at [www.sharkbytes.info](http://www.sharkbytes.info).

Are you a budding author who wants to see your own material within these pages? If so, just go to the *Shark Bytes* website, click on "Contacts," and e-mail your material (being sure to include your full name, e-mail address, and Pinnacle Forum username) to the appropriate editor. We'll take it from there. Don't be shy! *Shark Bytes* has always been "by the fans, for the fans", and that's how we mean to keep it!

It's been a week since I took the reins as *Shark Bytes*' Assistant Editor, and the experience so far reminds me of the penultimate episode of *The Prisoner*, in which Leo McKern intones in a stentorian voice: "One week, my boy. One teeny-weeny week. Degree Absolute." The work has been exhausting, but also absolutely rewarding.

Special thanks to Matthew Mather for giving me the chance to help out, to JB Littlefield for providing guidance and artwork galore, and to Simon, Shane, Cheyenne, Storn and Niklas for being so generous with permission to use their artwork. I could not have put this issue together without the Contributing Editors; their work has been invaluable.

Now if you'll excuse me, I need to get The Drop on the next issue.

**M. A. Cutter**

*Assistant Editor*

May 22, 2006

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# TALISMAN TALES

## THE BIRTH OF SHAINSTAR

### **Savage Worlds' first open fantasy setting**

by Mark Swafford with Sean Patrick Fannon

*After assuming the responsibility of writing this column for Talisman, I spoke with Sean Fannon and Aaron Acevedo about what to write for the premiere issue. Aaron said he wanted to push Shaintar: Immortal Legends, first and foremost. I agreed. Sean said I should write about the little things that we did in our own Shaintar campaign, like using glass beads and M&Ms as Shaken markers. He said, "Write about using the three-prong plastic thingy you get with your pizza or empty dice cubes as flight tables. Talk about the truly awesome food and beer we used to consume in mass quantities whilst gaming."*

*Although these were great points to talk about, I felt the story of Shaintar needed be told first. Not the timeline of the in-game story, but the actual life of the game and how it came about. However, I didn't think my words were sufficient to tell its story, so...I cheated, and pinched the following from Sean's personal blog:*

At some point in 1977, while I was in the 7th grade, I came across an article in *GAMES Magazine* that discussed this amazing new kind of game. The writer had been invited to participate in a session of *Dungeons & Dragons*™, and his experiences filled my head with wonderment and, more importantly, all kinds of ideas on how a game like that might play out in my own hands.

I entered the role-playing hobby in a completely different way from most people. The usual means is to hook up with some people, usually through a friend, and become a player in an existing group. In 1977, in Cobb County, GA, there weren't many existing groups for a game that had only just come out and was trickling through the retail chains and hobby shops (bearing in mind that, back then, the hobby shops were mostly for your model train and rocket enthusiasts and wargame aficionados).

Not having the benefit of a body of existing players to introduce me to the intricacies of the game, I had my mom take me to Spencer's Gifts at the mall, where I purchased one of the original boxed sets of *Dungeons & Dragons*™ (the one with the powder-blue book inside with the same art as the box cover). I read it cover-to-cover multiple times, formulated in my head how the game seemed to work, and began recruiting my friends to start playing.

*Keep on the Borderlands* became the center of our gaming universe. I never really used anyone else's world, though, always thinking of things in terms of my own creative space. Showing the instincts of a game designer early on, I tinkered with the rules pretty heavily by the time I was in high school, eventually even running my own variant set. Terms like Eldakar (for the pure-blooded Fae) and Adepts began to emerge, as did the idea that magic should be internally

consistent and make a certain kind of sense, playing by a set of rules that could be at least conceptually understood.

After a long flirtation with a space-fantasy setting I created called *Starchasers*, which featured the same rules I had used for fantasy gaming (and where I created the winged race that I now call the Aevakar and the lizard-folk Dregordians), I discovered the *Hero System* through *Champions* and *Fantasy Hero*. As clever as some of the things I had done were, here was a really well-done, professionally-designed game system that I could really sink my teeth into and create a lot more ideas with. Thus began my eternal hunt for "the right system" to publish *Shaintar* with.

Of course, there was still no *Shaintar* at that point. It was the late 80s, and my return to fantasy gaming heralded the creation of a setting called, simply, "the Realm." The "To Catch a King" storyline was played out there, and to this day it remains one of the greatest gaming experiences of my life. Within that crucible was born some of my very best ideas, as well as a few not-so-great ones. The second campaign in that setting was also pretty damn good, but some things were starting to show wear at the seams as I tried to expand the Realm. At the end of that tale, I realized that it was time.

Time to start anew.

I don't remember what year it was, but there was a huge ice storm. There I was in Bogart, GA (outside of Athens). One of my very best friends, Brandon Biddy, had actually driven in from Atlanta for the express purpose of being snowed in with me and my wife at the time, Cheryl. As we whiled away the hours and days together, I broke out some hexagonal graph paper and began to draw a map. Cheryl and Brandon kibitzed, making sure my rivers flowed the way they should and that I had created the right topographical conditions for a giant desert. Thus, *Shaintar* was born.



# TALISMAN TALES

## WISDOM OF HEROES

by Mark Swafford

Thorg Firearm ran a piece of cornbread around the rim of his plate, sopping up the last bit of red gravy. Eldkossa, the heavily spiced dwarven beef roast, was a favorite dinner of his as a child and, although this meal wasn't prepared by a dwarf, the smell and taste still took him back to those easygoing days. The old dwarf popped the cornbread into his mouth and wiped the gravy from his lips with the sleeve of his shirt. The spice and peppers ran through his blood, and brought a flush to his face.

"Ah, there's the fire," proclaimed the dwarf.

"Had enough?" asked the Olaran barmaid.

"Aye lass, more than enough."

"That's three copper then, dwarf." While many would find her words abrupt, and maybe a little insulting, Thorg knew better. Olarans weren't known for their diplomatic skills. Olarans were straightforward. Thorg admired that about them, for dwarves were the same way.

"One second, lass," he said, and reached for his purse. A shock ran up his left arm and Thorg grunted in pain. The old warrior stretched and let the joint pop. He eased back into his chair and sighed heavily.

"Need the healer, dwarf?" asked the barmaid.

"Nay, just a friendly reminder of how old I'm getting. That's three copper you say?"

The barmaid nodded.

"I'll pay his tab for him, m'lady," said a light tenor voice. A silver coin plinked down on the table.

She turned at the sound. A man, not yet eighteen years of age, sat down opposite Thorg. The barmaid scooped the coins into her gloved hand and eyed them cautiously.

"I promise the coins are good," the young man said.

The woman, speaking as much to herself as anyone, said "You never know when some scum will try and pass off pewter coins as silver." She nodded to the dwarf, adding, "Tell me if you need anything else, Thorg."

"Aye, lass. And thank you, lad." Although Olaran women were taller and broader than most females on Shaintar, there was still a sway in this woman's hips that brought a wry smile to

the dwarf's face. Thorg rose from his chair and made his way to the fireplace across the room. The young Freelandier noticed the aging dwarf moved with a pronounced limp.

"Consider it payment, sir," the youth called out, but not yet crossing to the fire.

The dwarf raised both of his eyebrows at this, then pulled out a small pouch of tobacco and filled his wooden pipe with the pungent leaves. Soaked in wine spiced with cinnamon and clove, the smell soothed Thorg's nerves.

"Payment for what, lad? I've not offered items or services for barter." Thorg pulled a small branch from the fire to light his pipe. He puffed enough to let the tobacco glow in the bowl, drinking in the sweet scent.

"I require wisdom," the young man dared. "Wisdom from a hero."

Thorg Firearm limped his way back to the table and gingerly sat down in his chair. "And what makes you think I'm a hero, farmboy?"

"I...how did you know I was raised on a farm?" the Freelandier asked.

"Your tan skin and sun-bleached hair means you've spent many an hour in the sun. Your shoulders are the size of cannonballs, which says you've done hard labor for most of your life. Your hands are calloused, which means you've worked them well, but there's no scars on your arms, so you've never been in a fight." The dwarf stroked his salt and pepper beard. "You are a farmboy."

His ego wounded, the young man puffed his chest, proclaiming, "I've been in a fight. I've been in a lot of fights."

"Oh, really? Tell me about these battles then. They must truly be grand." Thorg smirked at the boastful boy.

"I fought down a bully in my town. I smashed his head with a rock and opened a big cut on his forehead. One of his friends tried to interfere but I punched him and broke his nose."

The dwarf belched up a huge cloud of smoke and began to laugh heartily. Tears pooled in the corners of his eyes. "Oh lad, I haven't laughed so hard in all my life."

The young man's eyes narrowed on the old man. "I killed a minotaur once," he said biting.

The dwarf wiped his eyes off with his sleeve. "Oh ho? A minotaur, you say? Tell me."

"This big bull-man ran into my village, swinging his giant axe. He killed a lot of people." The young man paused. "He gored my father and slung his body into a bog." Forcing himself not to tear up, the youth continued, "Then he came for me. I pulled my dagger from its sheath. The thing slipped in a pool



of blood and fell on top of me.” The man’s tenor voice grew softer. Almost off-handedly, he added, “The dagger slipped through his ribs and punctured his heart.”

Thorg looked at the boy again. “So you killed a minotaur.”

The young man nodded.

“With your knife?”

Again the youth nodded.

“By accident?”

The boy raised his head, glaring angrily at Thorg. A moment more and he stood, loosed a short sword from its scabbard, and held it threateningly at the dwarf.

“Why do you mock me?” he challenged. “I would run you through.”

The dwarf sighed and tapped out his pipe. “Son, put away your pig sticker before I bend you over my knee and spank you with it.”

The young man quivered for a moment before thinking better of the situation and sliding his sword into its sheath.

“Now sit down,” Thorg chided.

The young man sat, chagrined.

“Just what wisdom are you looking for?”

“I want to become a hero,” the youth said.

“Why?” asked Thorg simply.

“Because heroes are admired,” the young man stated, as if it were common knowledge, “They’re rich, and songs are sung of them. They get all the glory, and they always get the woman in the end.”

“Really?” the dwarf smiled, “No one told me about this. I should really talk to somebody about it.”

“Are you mocking me again, sir?” the youth asked.

“No. I’m mocking the stories you may have heard about being a hero. You think heroes are rich?” Thorg pulled out his purse and dumped its contents onto the table. Seven coins—three copper, three silver, and one gold—bounced on the hard wooden table. “You think I’m a hero now?” he said, his voice becoming harder. “This is all I have to my name, boy.”

“But the songs...”

The dwarf interrupted, “There are no songs sung about me, farmboy.”

“Y...yes there are,” the Freelanders protested, “I heard one. A few months back, I did. I was in Shan and there was this bard there...”

Frowning, Thorg questioned, “Was he round, wearing garish blue robes? Did he lisp when he talked?”

“Yes, sir,” the young man said, “Yes he did.”

The dwarf repacked his pipe. “I hate to burst your bubble, boy, but I know the charlatan. His name is Elon Brightly, and his ego has ever more substance than his stories.” Thorg grimaced, adding, “Whatever song he may have sung about

me is pure rubbish.”

“You have to be lying, sir. I paid this man a good silver to hear the story of how you slew two gargoyles with just your shield.”

The dwarf coughed, swallowing the bile that ran up his throat. “I beat two gargoyles,” he cried incredulously, “with just my shield?” Thorg turned his head to the ceiling in frustration, then asked, “Boy, have you ever seen a gargoyle?”

The farmboy shook his head.

“Their claws will flay a man’s skin from his bones with one swipe of its hand. Its stony skin will stop any sword bite save for magic ones. If it were ever to sink its teeth into you, it would hold until you die, long after it has broken bone. If you ever meet one underground, you best pray for a swift death. It blends with the stone so well you’ll likely never see it until it’s too late.” Thorg sighed, offering, “Even if you were to hurt one, farmboy, it’d just take wing, fly off, and fight another day.”

Chided, the boy hesitated to speak further. Seeing the pause in the youth’s face, Thorg asked the young man’s question for him.

“And the women?” Thorg planted his left foot on the table and pulled back his pants leg to reveal a wooden leg, the end covered by a leather shoe. “What woman would want to bed a hero with a monstrosity like this? Or this?” The dwarf rolled up his left sleeve. The skin on his arm looked as if melted wax had been poured on and left to dry. “Women just love the sight of burned flesh, don’t they boy?”

The young man wasn’t the only patron in the inn to grow slightly sick at the sight.

“Sometimes at night, I can still smell the flesh cooking,” Thorg added.

The farmboy covered his mouth and clutched his stomach to quell the nausea.

The dwarf called out to the barmaid, “Tilya, get this young man a drink before he gets sick on your floor.”

The Olan lass drew a mug of beer from the keg behind the bar. The smell of it was enough to catch Thorg’s own thirst.

“Best make that two, Tilya,” he added.

Tilya nodded and grabbed another mug. When she brought them to the table, the young man grabbed one and gulped down half of what it held.

“Slow down, son,” Thorg cautioned. “Drink too fast and you’ll be twice as sick as what you’re trying to prevent. What is your name anyway, son?”

“Andrew,” the young man offered, “Andrew Benfellow, from Fadrin.”

“Fadrin?” Thorg reflected. “Nice place. Why did you leave?”

The young man shrugged his shoulders. “After my father was killed, there was no way I could keep the farm going by myself. So I sold it to one of our neighbors. I decided to take the money and journey the world to see what was out there.”

"And what have you found?" the dwarf asked.

Andrew sighed. "Very little, sir. Lies and backstabbing, mostly. I really don't know who I should trust and who I shouldn't. It's all so confusing."

"True, true. You're just young and gullible, my friend," said Thorg, smiling at thoughts of himself when he was the same. "Learning who to trust will come with time and experience. In the meantime, I can only say: Trust no one."

"But how can one go through life trusting no one? It doesn't seem like much of a life if you can't put your faith in others."

"That bard you met in Shan? That Elon Brightly fellow?" The dwarf paused long enough to savor a drink. "Should you have trusted him?"

Andrew sighed, saying, "I guess not."

Thorg continued. "Has there been anyone you've met in your travels that you'd fully trust?"

"No, sir," said Andrew, defeated.

"As well you shouldn't." With this, the dwarf took a long draw off his mug. "Mind you, I'm not saying there aren't ones out there worth your trust. Just be wary of the ones who want your company so much. Usually they just want your purse..."

The dwarf puffed his pipe, adding, "...or worse."

The young farmboy crossed his arms on the table and leaned in towards the dwarf. "What about my original question, sir? How do I become a hero?"

"I can't answer that, son," Thorg said flatly, "No one should be able to."

"Why not?"

The dwarf drew a deep breath from his pipe. As he blew the smoke aside he said, "Let me ask you this question: what makes a hero?"

The young man shrugged. "He saves the damsel in distress. He'll jump in front of an arrow to protect his friend. He'll slay a monster to save a village."

"Aye, admirable traits all. But do you know what makes a hero to me?"

Andrew shook his head.

"A hero is the constable who will wade into a bar fight without knowing who's armed and who's not. A hero is the priest who keeps preaching when no one hears his words. The farmer whose crops don't give the harvest he wanted, but can still feed his family during hard times. That's what makes a hero to me. The everyman that doesn't seek the glory and doesn't get songs sung about him, but keeps facing adversity head on." The older man raised an eyebrow the younger man. "It's not what you do that makes a hero, it's how it's done...and why."

"So it all depends on what people think a hero is?"

Thorg cocked his head and shrugged his shoulders.

Andrew frowned in thought. "You think I should have kept my family's farm going, don't you?"

"I think you should follow your heart, son." The dwarf settled back in his chair. "Is your heart really into traversing the world and seeking your fortune?"

The young man thought for a moment. "I don't know." He cast his eyes downward.

"Where is your heart?" The dwarf narrowed his eyes thoughtfully at the young man.

"I don't know. I just know it's not at the farm." The youth looked up, as if starting to understand. "It's just not my home, not anymore."

Thorg nodded and lifted his mug again. "I guess it's true then."

"What's that, sir?"

"Home," the dwarf said, the hint of a smile in his eyes, "is where the heart is."

"Yes sir, it is." Andrew smiled. As he stood, he placed another silver piece on the table.

"What is that for?" Thorg asked the young man, one eyebrow raised in curiosity.

"For the ale," Andrew said, "and for your wisdom."

The dwarf nodded and puffed on his pipe again. Andrew turned when he noticed Tilya had walked up behind him. He planted a kiss on the barmaid's cheek as he turned to go. The Olaran woman scowled but couldn't help but smile when his back was turned. Thorg Firearm chuckled quietly. Andrew made his way to the door, stopping just as he grabbed the handle.

"Sir, I just want you to know something before I go."

The dwarf nodded.

"I still consider you a hero." Not waiting for a reply, Andrew Benfellow opened the door and passed through.

"And you're my hero, too, old dwarf," Tilya said, leaning over to kiss Thorg on the head as she moved past.

The dwarf huffed and shoed the barmaid away with a wave of his hand.

"Oh, shut up," he chided, but still smiling himself.

Tilya deftly scooped up the coins as she walked away, laughing, leaving the dwarf to his pipe, his ale, and thoughts of his next adventure.



# Savage OGL? Not!

## Why *Savage Worlds* will never be released under an OGL

by Shane Lacy Hensley

Reprinted with Shane's permission from a post he made on the Pinnacle Forum in response to the query as to why *Savage Worlds* was not an "open system".



I will right off the bat admit that I liked the industry before far better than after. This has a lot to do with my personal tastes and I readily admit that. Pinnacle certainly didn't embrace The Change the way others did, and from a business point of view, there's no one to blame but me. In my opinion, the the OGL not only focused the industry away from other games, but also from

other genres. A book for *Deadlands* just wasn't getting on a shelf if there was a new book on dwarves, elves, etc. Since these things didn't interest us in the least, we didn't do them and thus weren't in a position to ride "the wave." Let me say once more to avoid the inevitable response—I realize this is purely my decision/fault, and I don't blame anyone for it. I sure didn't like it, though.

More objectively, the flood of D20 products overloaded the stores. They were then full up with product (which wasn't *Shadowrun*, *Deadlands*, etc.), and couldn't devote shelf space to anything else. When demand for D20 started to wane, they were in such poor financial shape with all the unsold D20 material that they couldn't order anything new. Many concluded that RPGs were dead (the common "wisdom" outside of Wizards of the Coast) and just stopped carrying us. At our height with *Deadlands*, our "turnout" peaked at 51%. That means 51% of stores who report to *Comics Retailer* said they carried at least one *Deadlands* product. That was back in the days when most of us think that we were everywhere (but I visit game stores everywhere I travel, and can personally attest that the 51% rate was probably more like 25%—WotC, White Wolf, and the store owner's favorite system was more often than not the norm). Remember I owned two stores for 10 years too, and could attest that even our sales on everything but the top two lines were weak. As a quick aside, this experience is what led me to embrace the internet and direct sales very early—as early as 1997. While this has kept us afloat, it's resulted in a self-fulfilling cycle that's hard to break.

On another personal note, the tone of the industry changed dramatically. It had been a friendly network of people who had risen through the ranks as freelancers, learned from

those with more experience, and finally became accepted by the "old timers"—Bill Slaviscek, Nigel Findley, and the owners of the various game companies such as West End Games, FASA, White Wolf, etc. That's certainly how I, Robin Laws, Matt Forbeck, etc., came to be where we are. But the OGL allowed people to skip the informal training part of the industry and go straight to publishing. While this certainly sounds like sour grapes, I think this new way of doing things produced a different kind of author who didn't have the same outlook or sense of community that the rest of us did. Before the influx of OGL people, the private industry lists were all extremely good-natured. We all knew each other so the usual internet anonymity didn't exist. Say something nasty and you could bet the next GenCon party was going to be no fun for you. Now there were literally hundreds of newcomers, and a sadly large percentage of them were rude and could care less what the others thought. Of course a few were fantastic, but they were the exception rather than the norm. Free country and all, but the industry changed quickly, and most of us old timers were not happy with the way things were turning out.

By this time there were literally hundreds of "crunch" (splat) books. Everywhere you looked D20 Gamemasters were saying "only official WotC books" could be used in their campaigns. Who could blame them? Some of the stuff out there was absolute crap, and the easiest way to sort through the chaff was to just stick with WotC, which was (supposedly) play-tested and certainly better thought out than most of their competitors. The benefit to publishers who did well with D20, like Green Ronin and Fantasy Flight Games, was quickly waning and even they quickly changed their tactics (Green Ronin with *Mutants and Masterminds*, which isn't really D20, and Fantasy Flight moving back to board games). Really great and different ideas—like Atlas' *Nyambe*—sold poorly, even though it was exactly the kind of product retailers said they wanted, but then didn't buy. Go figure!

With such stagnation in types of material (compared to a few years prior), I think interest from you guys and gals bottomed out. There just wasn't anything new to visit the game store for if you weren't a solid *Dungeons & Dragons*™ type, so sales in general continued to decline.

So now, in my humble opinion, the industry wasn't as fun anymore and sales were in the toilet unless you were in the right position to do D20 fantasy. There was a small movement to explore areas outside of fantasy, and we tried to embrace that. *Deadlands* wasn't our best effort—but there's more to that story than most know—and then *Weird Wars*, which I think is a fine game. Both sold extremely well (*Deadlands* D20 sold over 10,000 copies and *Weird Wars* sold 8,000), but our choice to release these D20 games had unforeseen consequences: people thought we had stopped making *Deadlands Classic*, and reported to stores that we were out of business as well. I even had a "fan" insist that we had stopped making *Deadlands Classic* at Origins, even though I had two new books there to prove him wrong!

Things were certainly tough, but we managed to get out *Black Circle*, *Lone Stars*, and *Great Weird North*, plus a few other projects, during this horrible time (including *Lost*



*Colony*, which John Hopler finished up on his way to a new career). But the damage was done and this was the final nail in the coffin. We stopped making *Deadlands Classic* books, I closed down the office, and started working at home with fulfillment companies handling all the shipping, orders, etc. (first Fast Forward, and then Studio2).

I wanted a new start, so I began working on *Savage Worlds* (then called *Wild Cards*). I also developed three pre-painted (non-collectible) games and two card games, but I just couldn't get the capital to make them happen. One of those developed into *Fields of Honor*, with battle flats replacing the pre-painted minis (also a result of our continued success with PDF sales). The other ideas I'm still working on, but will have to wait until the stars are in the proper alignment.

From WotC's point of view, the OGL was a decent success. They could eliminate two-thirds of their staff and concentrate on selling *PHBs* and *DMGs* over and over (which Ryan Dancey had identified as their best path to profit). Oddly, after he and WotC parted company, they walked an odd line they previously had said they wouldn't—producing new worlds (*Eberron*) and making adventures and other odd projects (the *Book of Vile Darkness*, *Sandstorm*, etc). There is a lot of talk that WotC will pull the OGL with the release of the next edition of *Dungeons & Dragons*™. I don't want to start rumors—you can find that all over the net, but it is an interesting idea since Ryan is no longer with them and was by far the “face” of the entire movement.

From an industry point-of-view, check out your local store. They still have lots of RPGs on the shelves, but how many of them are new? Most stuff I see is banged up crap from 3+ years ago that they (oddly!) won't discount and blow out. (Bad idea, retailers! Get that stuff out of there and buy NEW stuff that WILL sell!) The common store is in bad, bad shape. There are no breakout games right now, and RPGs are no

longer the bread-and-butter they used to be. Minis are doing well, but it's really hard to stock them right. And now PDFs are becoming serious competition as well (which is why we release PDFs after our books hit the stores now, except for “support material” like adventures which the stores wouldn't order anyway).

So much for the gloom and doom. The good news is that “old games” have returned. *Shadowrun* is doing great, as is *GURPS* and Palladium's ever-present *RIFTS*. Certainly *Savage Worlds* is doing well, and *Deadlands* looks like it might sell out before it hits the U.S. (Woot! Grab 'em fast!) The future will be very different for RPGs, I suspect.

Our model will be to release core books into the stores and continue trying to support them. That's the best of both worlds so long as we can give them products they'll stock and you'll buy. But if they don't order our stuff, and there's obvious demand from you we'll do whatever it takes to keep paying our bills.

That's why I think the OGL hurt the industry. It's one half of the reason we won't do OGL for *Savage Worlds*. And let's be realistic—it wouldn't be that big anyway because we're not *Dungeons & Dragons*™ (not D20—but *Dungeons & Dragons*™). Combine that with the absolute crap some people would make, and there's just no upside for us. Work with us and we can make sure that every product that comes out with the Savaged! logo on it is good, if not absolutely fantastic!

## OPEN GAMING RESOURCES

*The idea of open gaming was around before the OGL and it will continue to exist even if the rumors regarding Wizards of the Coast's intent to pull the OGL with the next release of Dungeons & Dragons™ turn out to be true.*

*The following links should give you a starting point for further investigation of open gaming.*

### Open Gaming at Wikipedia

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open\\_gaming](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_gaming)

### Free RPG Community

<http://www.freeroleplay.org/>

### Open Publication License

<http://www.opencontent.org/openpub/>

### Creative Commons

<http://creativecommons.org/>

### The GNU Project

<http://www.gnu.org/philosophy/licenseslist.html#>

## Other Licenses

### Wizards of the Coast OGL

<http://www.opengamingfoundation.org/ogl.html>

### Popular Games Based on the D20 SRD

<http://www.darkshire.net/~jhkim/rpg/srd/gamelist.html>



# ADDING PANACHE TO YOUR POWERS

## Using trappings to spice up your powers

by Colin Chapman

**M**agic is a cornerstone of fantasy role-playing. Unfortunately, despite its being of such importance to the game, all too often magic is described with no more flair than, “I cast a fireball.” As this article explains, spellcasting is easily made more exotic and interesting, thus enriching the role-playing experience in the process. Although the concepts described hereafter are applicable to any Arcane Background, I have chosen to focus on the Fantasy genre, and thus refer to “powers” as “spells.”

### Describing the Spell

You know what spell you want to cast, and who you want to target. You could simply leave it at that; however, by actually describing your spell’s casting and appearance you are able to turn even the most common spell into something of wonder..

- **Appearance:** What exactly does the spell look like? What substance forms its physical aspects? A blast spell with a fire trapping, for example, need not look like a simple ball of flame—it could manifest as a flaming skull, a pulsing fist, a glowing phoenix, etc. It’s still a *fireball*, but it need not look so. Consider the color or colors of the spell. Where magic is concerned you need not adhere to the expected. Why not make the fireball eerie green, pale blue, or even pink?

- **Motion:** If the spell has to cover a distance, how does it do so? Does it simply appear, or does it have to travel to its target? Once again, using the *fireball* example, does it fly through the air, and if so, does it fly straight, spiral, or zigzag? Does it simply appear out of nowhere and engulf the target? Does it bounce or roll along the ground?

- **Sound:** Sound accompanies the casting of many spells, and can range from the tinkling of bells to the rumble of thunder, from echoes of chilling laughter, to the crackle and sizzle of energy. Once again, giving just a little thought to this aspect of your spell gives it much more depth. The sound need not necessarily match the spell—why not have the fireballs sing as they fly through the air? Be creative!

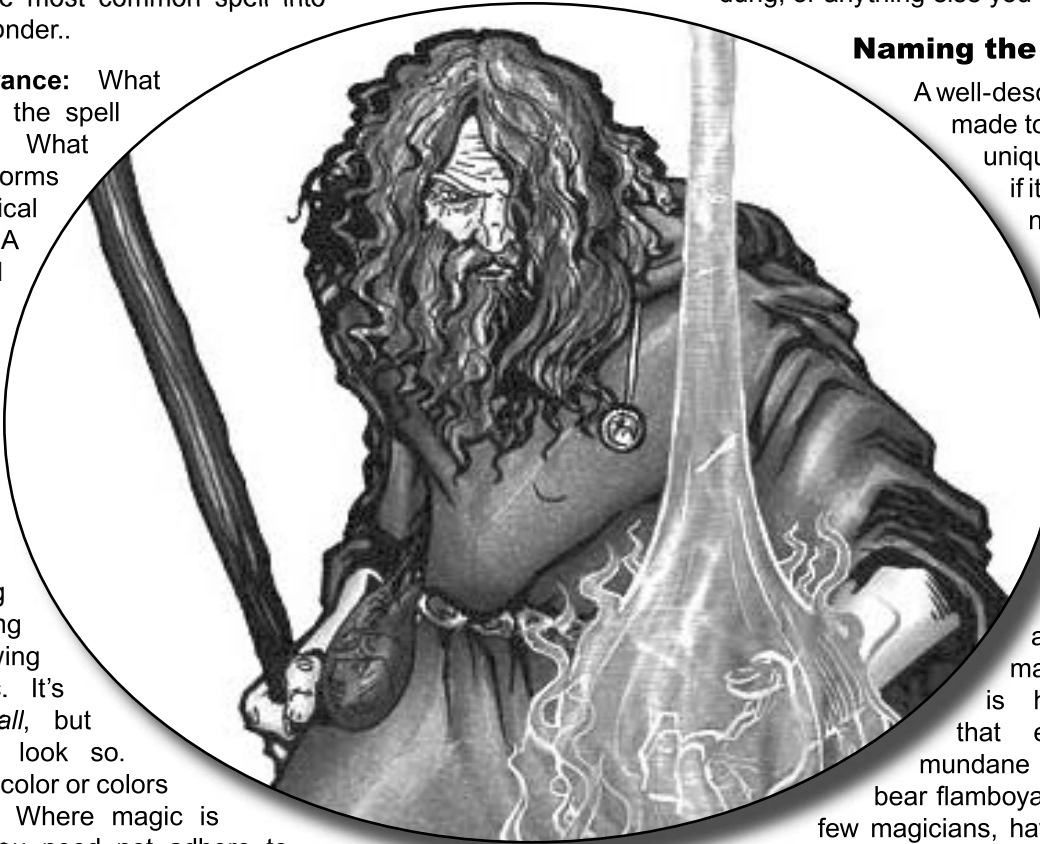
- **Smell:** Describing the scent of the spell can make it seem far more real to the other players. Once again, its scent, if indeed there is any, can be unique or unexpected. For example, a *fireball* may well smell of brimstone, but it could just as easily smell of lavender, dung, or anything else you desire.

### Naming the Spell

A well-described spell can be made to seem even more unique and impressive if it’s given a different name (although to avoid confusion, the original power’s name should always be placed in brackets afterwards)—for example, *Serleran’s Searing Orb [blast]*. Given the eccentricity and egotism of many wizards, it is hardly surprising that even the most mundane of cantrips often bear flamboyant titles. Precious

few magicians, having spent weeks (or months) creating a new spell, would give their unique creation a humdrum name like *fireball*. Instead, they would make it grandiose, taking pride in their personal achievement. Giving a newly-created spell a good name is satisfying and easy.

- **Descriptive Title:** The most vital part of any spell, the name often describes its effects, appearance, or results, and in many cases, a truly evocative name is all that’s needed to make a spell sound fantastical. For example, while *fireball* accurately describes a spell that produces a ball of fire, it is hardly flamboyant. Take a second to think of alternate or related words that can





be used to describe the same thing. In this case, words such as flaming, blazing, incendiary, conflagrating, scorching, burning, searing, and lambent, as well as sphere, orb, and globe, are appropriate substitutes for “fire” and “ball.” *Searing Orb* sounds far more exotic than *Fireball*, don’t you think? If you haven’t already, invest in a good thesaurus!

- **Creator’s Name:** A common practice, especially as regards the more egotistical or famous wizards, is that of appending a personal name to the front of a spell’s title. For example, an infamous pyromancer named Serleran may very well have created the *Searing Orb* spell, and named it *Serleran’s Searing Orb*.

- **Embellishment:** Wizards sometimes add extravagant descriptors to a spell’s title, particularly if they’re especially proud of the spell or excessively egotistical (as many wizards are). For example, Serleran might add a word such as excellent, magnificent, superior, superlative, brilliant, triumphant, etc. to the spell’s title. His spell might therefore be named *Serleran’s Superlative Searing Orb*.

- **Spell, Incantation, Dweomer:** Another common convention is an actual referral to the spell as being a spell, placed before or after the main description. For example, Serleran might name his fireball, *Serleran’s Searing Orb Spell* or *The Spell of Searing Orbs*. Alternately, he might choose to use a different word, such as *dweomer*, *charm*, *glamour*, or *weird*.

Making magic memorable takes imagination and a little thought, but the results are always worth it. Such efforts entertain both the GM and the other players, and will certainly enrich the game (and perhaps even garner some additional XP for role-playing). Anyone can say “I cast a fireball! A ball of fire flies forth and strikes my target!” However, if you bellow “I invoke *Serleran’s Searing Orb*! A ball of vivid green flame spirals swiftly through the air, shrieking, with the scent of brimstone in its wake!” you’ve just made the tired old *fireball* exciting, and its magic truly magical—as it should be!



# A CURIOUS DAME AND A PULPY GAME

## *The Ravaged Earth Society: Genesis of a pulp setting*

by Eric Avedissian

The big city, wet from the rain, began closing down for the night. The summer heat filled the lungs of the millions of doomed souls lost amid the concrete and iron jungle. Savage animals clawed their way towards the subways and bus stops to escape the rain. Twilight gave way to black night. A night lit by neon and bathed in the glow of lovers and losers, of passion and despair. Somewhere a gunshot rings out. Near the bus station, a drunk finds a quarter on the sidewalk. In a dank alley a painted lady sells her body for a ten dollar bill. The big city has its own language, its own temperament. Only by adapting can one ever hope to survive. I had decided to kick back at my desk with a flask of whiskey when she walked through the door. I noticed the heady scent of her perfume before I even looked up. "Are

you open?" she asked, her voice sensual and rich, but with a hint of fear. The voice of a girl who'd gotten in way over her head.

I looked up and saw her brunette hair, her full red lips, and her shapely nylon-covered legs. The black dress she wore left a lot to a man's imagination, and I had plenty of that.

"I'm open all night, doll," I answered. "How can I help?"

"I'm in trouble and I don't know where to turn," she said, sitting in the chair across from my desk. "I heard you were good at fixing things."

"I have my moments," I replied coolly.

She opened her purse and removed a tin cigarette case. Her slender fingers opened the case and pulled out a gasper. An angel with a tobacco habit.

"Mind if I smoke?" she asked. "I didn't mean to be so presumptuous."

I walked over to her and leaned on the desk. I produced my lighter and flicked it open. Her enchanting eyes gazed up at me while she leaned closer to light her cigarette, her hand trembling.

"Thank you," she said, puffing quickly.

"Now maybe you can cut through all this mystery and tell me who you are and how I can be of assistance."

"I'm Valerie," she said, her voice like silk. "Valerie Van Vos. I understand you investigate the strange and unusual."

"You'd be right about that, doll. That's my bag," I said, swallowing my last gulp of whiskey. "Is Something bothering you? Something that goes bump in the night?"

"You might say that," she said. "Can you help?"

I drew close to her so that our lips were almost touching. Valerie's smoky breath grew faster, more excited. We gazed in each other's eyes; she appeared panic-stricken, like a trapped rabbit.

"Please," she whispered. "Please...help me."

"Relax, doll," I said, "You ever hear of *The Ravaged Earth Society*?"

"No," Valerie stammered. "*The Ravaged Earth Society*? Who are they?"

"Not who, dollface. What," I said. "It's a role-playing game published by Double G Press."

"Role-playing game?" Valerie said. "I...I don't understand."

I sat back down at my desk and opened another bottle of whiskey. Then I grabbed a tumbler and offered her a drink. "Relax, dollface. You've got a lot to learn," I said as I poured the drinks.



The idea for *The Ravaged Earth Society*, or *TRES* as we like to call it, appeared in my mind during the summer of 2001. I'd been trying to develop a role-playing game ever since becoming addicted to the Pinnacle Entertainment Group's *Deadlands* game. There's so much I liked about *Deadlands*, and still do: the use of history and horror, the epic story line, the plethora of characters and events.

These things made *Deadlands* unique among RPGs, at least as far as I was concerned. My early design efforts lacked focus and depth. I experimented with a comedy superhero game. Let's just say that it was really awful, and leave it at that. Then I thought about the world of pulp. I enjoyed its free-flowing form, its emphasis on action and adventure and its over-the-top heroism and villainy. I imagined Flash Gordon meets Indiana Jones all wrapped up within a giant plot involving Martians, robots, and daring aviators. I immersed myself in the genre by watching old movies and reading all the pulp I could get my hands on.

Throughout this experience, the one nagging question that kept popping into my head was, "How would I pull this off?" What RPG system would be able to handle the pulp visions that were dancing through my head? Wizards of the Coast had released the D20 System—as well as a pulp add-on from the pages of *Polyhedron*; however, the system just didn't feel right for what I had in mind. I wasn't very familiar with too many other systems, so I put my dream on the back burner and reluctantly let real life intervene. I shelved a file of rough drafts, character sketches, and ideas in a filing cabinet where I stored all of my unfinished works—and there are many, unfortunately.

It looked like *Ravaged Earth* would end up being just another daft, fanciful dream. Another unfinished manuscript in a long line of the same. Then 2003 rolled around and everything changed. Pinnacle, the company that gave us *Deadlands*, published *Savage Worlds*, a game using an underlying system similar to that found in the *Great Rail Wars*. It was flexible and expandable. I liked the way it handled combat and character generation. In the summer of 2003 I posted several files for a game I called *Ravaged Earth—A Game of Weird Pulp Action* to the *Savage Worlds* group on Yahoo. Besides a description of the game, I included character backgrounds and powers for super humans, gadgeteers, mentalists, and magicians. I got a lot of positive feedback and interest from these postings, but nothing really developed beyond the feedback.

In late 2004, after dropping off the face of the Earth, I returned to the *Savage Worlds* Forum and had an opportunity to submit the first *Ravaged Earth* adventure to *Shark Bytes*, an unofficial *Savage Worlds* fanzine edited by JB Littlefield (hereafter referred to as Bill). The adventure, *The Quest for El Dorado*, was published in the third issue of *Shark Bytes*.

In late December, Bill asked if he could publish *Ravaged Earth* as a licensed product. He and Peter Leitch had started a game company called Double G Press and wanted *Ravaged Earth* to be their "flagship product."

How could I say no to that? One of the greatest opportunities of a lifetime had fallen into my lap and I took it. We negotiated

contracts in January, got the license from Pinnacle in March, and spent the rest of that year writing the sourcebook.

It's been an interesting and informative experience, to be sure. Most pregnancies happen in nine months. When this baby's born, it'll slap you back! *The Ravaged Earth Society* is filled with action, adventure, and thrills. It's all about over-the-top action and making the fantastic possible. It is truly worthy of the *Savage Worlds* slogan "Fast! Furious! Fun!"

I can just hear you all now. "Yeah, sure, you say that, but why should I plunk down my hard-earned dough for this game?" Well, besides using the *Savage Worlds* system we all know and love, *TRES* contains alternate rules for cranking up the pulp factor and making it even more exciting: like using bennies for dramatic editing for a more cinematic feel to the game. How about a new passel of Edges and Hindrances? Weapons and gear from the 1930s. More powers than you can shake a magic wand at. Rules for building robots and fantastic vehicles. An epic story line involving Martians, weird science, magic, monsters and Nikola Tesla. A Rogues Gallery of horrible creatures, major villains, gangsters, and cultists for you to battle. How's that for starters?

Here's the icing on the cake: go to the Double G Press website at [www.doublegpress.com](http://www.doublegpress.com) and register as a member. It's free, and by registering you'll get access to all kinds of exclusive content and goodies.

"And that's the whole story, dollface," I said. Valerie took the last drag of her cigarette before crushing it on the desk.

"Sounds like a pretty big workload you have," she said seductively.

"You have no idea," I replied. "I'm working on writing adventures, articles and NPCs for *TRES*. And Bill made me a *Shark Bytes* editor with my own column, to boot. I call it *Fedoras, Fists and .45s*."

"Catchy title."

"Thanks, dollface," I said, draining the whiskey bottle. "You know, I could use some help. We need submissions for *Shark Bytes*. Any adventures, adventure seeds, cool NPCs, Edges, Hindrances, powers; heck, anything catering to the weird and pulpy world of *TRES*. I need those submissions e-mailed to [editor\\_tres@sharkbytes.info](mailto:editor_tres@sharkbytes.info). Include your name and e-mail."

Valerie rose from her seat and walked over to me, her hips swiveling with a mesmerizing rhythm that would melt a lesser man. Her hungry hand reached for my chest and she drew herself closer. "So are you interested in taking my case?" she whispered in my ear.

"Not now, dollface," I said, pushing her away and turning towards my laptop. "I have to check my e-mail. I'm expecting a lot of submissions any time now."

# Lester Dent's Master Plot Outline

## Writing the perfect pulp story in 6000 words

by Lester Dent

**A**s an aspiring Pulp fictioneer (or Pulp adventure writer), you could do worse than to take the advice of Lester Dent, one of the most prolific writers of the Pulp Era. He once claimed that no story written following his Master Plot Outline ever failed to sell.

Approached by Henry Ralston, an executive at Street & Smith (the creators of *The Shadow*), in 1932 to write about a new character they were developing—Doc Savage—Dent wrote at least two Doc Savage stories each month, for each of which he was paid between \$500 and \$750 (quite a large amount in the 1930s). Between 1933 and 1949, he wrote over 150 of the 181 book-length Doc Savage stories that were published! For those not-in-the-know...Kenneth Robeson, was the name Dent used to write these stories.

### Introduction

This is a formula, a master plot, for any 6000 word pulp story. It has worked on adventure, detective, western and war-air. It tells exactly where to put everything. It shows definitely just what must happen in each successive thousand words. No yarn of mine written to the formula has yet failed to sell. The business of building stories seems not much different from the business of building anything else. Here's how it starts:

- A DIFFERENT MURDER METHOD FOR VILLAIN TO USE
- A DIFFERENT THING FOR VILLAIN TO BE SEEKING
- A DIFFERENT LOCALE
- A MENACE WHICH IS TO HANG LIKE A CLOUD OVER HERO

One of these different things would be nice, two better, three swell. It may help if they are fully in mind before tackling the rest. A different murder method could be—different. Thinking of shooting, knifing, hydrocyanic, garroting, poison needles, scorpions, a few others, and writing them on paper gets them where they may suggest something. Scorpions and their poison bite? Maybe mosquitoes or flies treated with deadly germs?

If the victims are killed by ordinary methods, but found under strange and identical circumstances each time, it might serve, the reader of course not knowing until the end, that the method of murder is ordinary. Scribes who have their villain's victims found with butterflies, spiders or bats stamped on them could conceivably be flirting with this gag. Probably it won't do a lot of good to be too odd, fanciful or grotesque with murder methods.

The different thing for the villain to be after might be something other than jewels, the stolen bank loot, the pearls, or some other old ones. Here, again one might get too bizarre.

Unique locale? Easy. Selecting one that fits in with the murder method and the treasure—thing that villain wants—makes it simpler, and it's also nice to use a familiar one, a place where you've lived or worked. So many pulpateers don't. It sometimes saves embarrassment to know nearly as much about the locale as the editor, or enough to fool him. Here's a nifty much used in faking local color. For a story laid in Egypt, say, author finds a book titled *Conversational Egyptian Easily Learned*, or something like that. He wants a character to ask in Egyptian, "What's the matter?" He looks in the book and finds, "El khabar, eyh?" To keep the reader from getting dizzy, it's perhaps wise to make it clear in some fashion, just what that means. Occasionally the text will tell this, or someone can repeat it in English. But it's a doubtful move to stop and tell the reader in so many words the English translation. The writer learns they have palm trees in Egypt. He looks in the book, finds the Egyptian for palm trees, and uses that. This kids editors and readers into thinking he knows something about Egypt.

Divide the 6000 word yarn into four 1500 word parts. In each 1500 word part, put the following:

### The First 1500 Words

First line, or as near thereto as possible, introduce the hero and swat him with a fistful of trouble. Hint at a mystery, a menace or a problem to be solved—something the hero has to cope with. The hero pitches in to cope with his fistful of trouble. He tries to fathom the mystery, defeat the menace, or solve the problem.

Introduce all the other characters as soon as possible. Bring them on in action. The hero's endeavors land him in an actual physical conflict near the end of the first 1500 words. Near the end of first 1500 words, there is a complete surprise twist in the plot development. Does it have suspense? Is there a menace to the hero? Does everything happen logically?

At this point, it might help to recall that action should do something besides advance the hero over the scenery. Suppose the hero has learned the dastards of villains have seized somebody named Eloise, who can explain the secret of what is behind all these sinister events. The hero corners villains, they fight, and villains get away. Not so hot. The hero should accomplish something with his tearing around, if only to rescue Eloise, and surprise! Eloise is a ring-tailed monkey. The hero counts the rings on Eloise's tail, if nothing better comes to mind. They're not real. The rings are painted there. Why?



## The Second 1500 Words

Shovel more grief onto the hero. The hero, being heroic, struggles, and his struggles lead up to: Another physical conflict and a surprising plot twist to end the 1500 words.

Does the second part have suspense? Does the menace grow like a black cloud? Is the hero getting it in the neck? Is the second part logical? Don't tell about it! Show how the thing looked. This is one of the secrets of writing; never tell the reader—show him. (He trembles, roving eyes, slackened jaw, and such.) Make the reader see him!

When writing, it helps to get at least one minor surprise to the printed page. It is reasonable to expect these minor surprises to sort of inveigle the reader into keeping on. They need not be such profound efforts. One method of accomplishing one now and then is to be gently misleading. The hero is examining the murder room. The door behind him begins slowly to open. He does not see it. He conducts his examination blissfully. Door eases open, wider and wider,

until—surprise! The glass pane falls out of the big window across the room. It must have fallen slowly, and air blowing into the room caused the door to open. Then what the heck made the pane fall so slowly? More mystery.

Characterizing a story actor consists of giving him some things which make him stick in the reader's mind. Tag him! Build your plots so that the action can be continuous!

## The Third 1500 Words

Shovel the grief onto the hero. The hero makes some headway, and corners the villain or somebody in: A physical conflict. A surprising plot twist, in which the hero preferably gets it in the neck bad, to end the 1500 words.

Does it still have suspense? The menace getting blacker? The hero finds himself in a hell of a fix? It all happened logically? These outlines or master formulas are only something to make you certain of inserting some physical conflict, and some genuine plot twists, with a little suspense and menace thrown in. Without them, there is no pulp story.

These physical conflicts in each part might be different, too. If one fight is with fists, that can take care of the pugilism until next the next yarn. Same for poison gas and swords. There may, naturally, be exceptions. A hero with a peculiar punch, or a quick draw, might use it more than once.

The idea is to avoid monotony: Action, atmosphere, and description. The secret of all writing is to make every word count!

## The Final 1500 Words

Shovel the difficulties more thickly upon the hero. Get the hero almost buried in his troubles. (Figuratively, the villain has him prisoner and has him framed for a murder rap; the girl is presumably dead, everything is lost, and the different murder method is about to dispose of the suffering protagonist). The hero extricates himself using his own skill, training or brawn.

The mysteries remaining—one big one held over to this point will help grip interest—are cleared up in course of final conflict as hero takes the situation in hand. Final twist, a big surprise, (This can be the villain turning out to be the unexpected person, having the "Treasure" be a dud, etc). The snapper, the punch line to end it.

Has the suspense held out to the last line? The menace held out to the last? Everything been explained? It all happen logically? Is the Punch Line enough to leave the reader with that warm feeling? Did God kill the villain? Or the hero?

**Editor:** The contents of this article were posted to the alt.pulp newsgroup in October, 1995 by Jason A. Wolcott; and were taken from *Bigger than Life: the Creator of Doc Savage*, by Marilyn Cannaday (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1990), a biography of Lester Dent. It is reprinted here without permission—no challenge to its copyright status is intended or inferred. The wording—offbeat and stilted as it is—is, to the best of our knowledge, Dent's.

# Plan Before You Publish

## Questions every author should ask

by Levi Kornelsen

What follows is solid advice for anyone thinking about writing or publishing a role-playing game or supplement. Personally, I wouldn't put pen-to-paper without first making sure that I could answer all of these questions. Doing so could save you a lot of headaches on down the line!

### What is the game about?

*The Pulse* is set after an apocalyptic event that has terrible effects on the human mind. This is a game about survivors. In the sense of surviving under hardship. In the sense of surviving prison. In the sense of 'a rape survivor'. This is a game about people that are hurt, hungry, damaged, hardened, and hanging on to life and love with a white-knuckled grip.

### What do the characters do?

They barter, wander, fight, lead, follow, negotiate, starve, eat, drink, burn, rest, bleed, go mad, stave off madness through companionship, and sometimes, they die. They get caught up in small-group conflicts that are fueled by scarcity, hardship, and a need for companionship that is sometime slighted—sometimes explosively so.

### What do the players, including the GM (if there is one), do?

They players, including the GM, work together to drive the characters into and through their hardships, actively bringing out the issues that plague these characters in situation-based play. The GM has and uses the rules to generate situations driven by scarcity that will hit on these issues, hard.

### How does the setting, or lack thereof, reinforce what the game is about?

The Apocalypse itself is the result of a solar accident—something is wrong with the sun. Something magnetic and complicated, that caused seizures, killed people, wiped out electronics, and drove everyone feral for months. The only way to remain stable is to avoid being alone too long. Of course, there isn't enough of anything, and you can't trust anyone.

### How does character creation reinforce what the game is about?

The focus of the mechanics will be in highlighting what things the character can give a group of survivors in the setting, what they need from others in it, and the issues that drive them to and away from other survivors.

### What types of play styles does the game reward (or punish)?

Having a variety of approaches available through teamwork will be rewarded. Internal conflict at a low level in the group will be rewarded. "Lone Wolf" behavior will be punished.

### How are behaviors and styles of play rewarded or punished in the game?

Some game resources, and some forms of "healing," will only be possible to gain through social contact, some with teamwork, and some with others which are bickering-and-tension-related.

### How are the responsibilities of narration and credibility divided in the game?

The game will use a GM that has general ownership over the current situation itself; players will have fairly standard levels of character ownership. The game setting outside these things will be open for input to everyone, and details of the situation that are mainly flavor will also be open for input from everyone. Credibility is based on a consensus led by the GM, informally.

### What does the game do to command attention, engagement, and participation?

All situations will have elements of danger to the characters—psychological as well as physical. Almost all situations will also have potential rewards available. The group of players as a whole will constantly need to choose what kind of dangers they wish to face; they'll usually have a lot of choice, but every path is dangerous.

### What are the resolution mechanics of the game like?

A poker-hand-like mechanism I'm building out of another system of mine, with a few twists—when a character 'pushes' with a trait, they also increase the backlash they face.

### How do the resolution mechanics reinforce what the game is about?

There ain't no such thing as a free lunch. Characters will often be packing around little injuries of various kinds—physical, social, psychological, you name it.

### Do characters in the game advance? If so, how?

Yes. That's gonna see some changes. Advancement and Backlash are going to get tied in—a little like *Fallout* in *Dogs in the Vineyard*, but only a little.

### How does character advancement, or lack thereof, reinforce what the game is about?

Advancement is tied strictly to conflict and risk. Advancement isn't actually going to be possible without risking injury of some kind (be it physical, mental, or any other form).

### **What sort of product or effect do you want the game to produce for the players?**

I want the players to feel that the world is terrible. I want them to know that they can't live without each other. I want them to feel their characters wavering between becoming too hard to stay sane, and too sympathetic to stay alive, and needing to make choices right there.

### **What areas of the game receive extra attention and color? Why?**

The conflict system for the game will allow for any form of conflict, and will require "antes" and "bets" for injuries in any conflict. Injury types described will encompass several kinds of physical, mental, and interpersonal trauma.

Scarcity. All situations will be created from a base of scarcity. The whole "Western" vibe. Because all of those play together in my head to make a space for something where players can be assured that their characters are cool and badass—and then let that stand as backdrop for them to hit things that aren't hard or badass at all.

### **Which part of the game are you most excited about or interested in?**

The altered resolution mechanic, which will hopefully look and feel like playing a hand of poker for high stakes. The idea of stripping everything down to bare fundamentals, in so many different ways, both in the rules, the setting, all of it.

### **Where does the game take the players that other games can't, don't, or won't?**

Guilt. Every character in the game has done wrong. Horrible wrong. They need to live with it. They need to forgive themselves. They need to forgive each other. They can never forget. It gives reasons to struggle against both sympathy and becoming hardened.

### **What are your publishing goals for the game?**

I intend to write *The Pulse* and to format it as a digest-sized book. I may self-publish, or may accept an offer from a small-press company that's interested in "imprinting."

### **Who is your target audience?**

Players that want to play in a game that clearly defines a situational style of play based on hardship, and want support for a level of intense decision-making not normally available in mainstream games.

**Editor:** These questions were lifted from a thread started by Levi Kornelsen over on RPGNet. For those of you that don't know, Levi is the author of *Perfect 20*, an implementation of the popular *D20 System*™ that seeks to break the D20 SRD down to its simplest form. It's worth a look, even if you aren't a D20 fan. Just swing by Levi's website: [http://members.shaw.ca/LeviK/Perfect20\\_2005.pdf](http://members.shaw.ca/LeviK/Perfect20_2005.pdf).

This article uses a game Levi is in the process of developing—*The Pulse*—in all of the examples.





# Power Armor 101

## House rules for using power armor in *Savage Worlds*

by C.A. Pryde

The *Savage Worlds* rulebook describes three basic types of powered armor for infantry: Scout, Battle, and Heavy. This article offers expanded descriptions and additional options for all three types of armor. I have written this supplement as a set of “house” rules; therefore, this material has not received any sort of approval or input from the authors of the *Savage Worlds* system. It should not in any way be construed as a set of “official” rules or a product of Pinnacle Entertainment Group, Great White Games, or any affiliated organization.

### Fitting

Powered armor is meant to fit like a second skin, albeit a very bulky second skin, and allow an almost complete range of natural motion for the wearer. Powered armor carries its own weight (effectively negating the weight penalty described in the core rules for unfitted armor), but wearing poorly-fitted armor still causes problems. A poorly-adjusted suit of armor confers a –2 penalty to the Pace of the wearer. The bulky suit also reduces the wearer’s range of motion so that a –1 penalty to all Agility checks and Agility-based skills is applied. Finally, wearing the armor quickly gets uncomfortable. The wearer suffers one level of fatigue for each day spent in the mismatched suit, plus a second level immediately following any battle fought in the armor. Characters can recover one level of fatigue for each hour spent out of the powered suit. These fatigue levels could potentially incapacitate a character.

Wearing armor is uncomfortable, even when the armor fits well and has a regulated environment. Much of the discomfort is psychological—it results from the wearer’s inability to do routine things, like scratch an itch. Characters encased in powered armor accumulate one level of fatigue after spending a day in the armor. This fatigue level will go away if the character spends an hour out of the powered armor; GMs should not apply this fatigue level if it will incapacitate the character. Characters will never accumulate more than one fatigue level in this fashion.

### Power

Mechanized battle armor uses a modular power system with a set of removable power cells. Suits of powered armor are supplied with multiple batteries. This means that units in the field can replenish their suits’ energy quickly, by swapping out power cells, rather than having to wait through a recharging process. Given the proper tools, replacing a spent power pack requires only five or ten minutes. With successful Repair check, a good mechanic can rush the process and accomplish it in one minute. Power cells can also provide energy for other pieces of equipment.

The *Savage Worlds* rulebook mentions that most powered armor can function for about a week before running out of power. It also states that combat will reduce this duration. As an elaboration of this rule, powered armor uses up half an energy cell for each day of operation. Battle suits and heavy suits are each equipped with four power cells; scout suits carry six cells. This means that a battle suit will run for eight days on four fully-charged cells. If a character engages in more than two full rounds of combat in a given day, the suit depletes a full energy cell. Constant running combat thus effectively reduces a suit’s energy supply by half. You could obviously take this energy concept a bit further and create some more specific rules and situations for power cells, but I suggest not trying to make things too complicated, in an effort to preserve to the “Fast! Furious! Fun!” aspect of the game.

### Specific Armor Notes

#### Scout Suits

Scouts rely on stealth to keep them alive on the battlefield. Many scouts carry special camouflage blankets made with strips of color-changing material; once deployed, these “ghillie” blankets provide extremely effective visual camouflage to supplement the suit’s electronic stealth features. Deploying a ghillie blanket takes two rounds. As long as the scout does not move from her location, the blanket grants the scout a +4 bonus to Stealth rolls against observers (but not automated detection systems).

#### Battle Suits

Battle suits turn regular soldiers into supermen; they make a warrior faster, stronger, and tougher. Several variations exist for traditional battle armor. Soldiers operating in non-traditional environments (underwater, weightless on a space station, or ascending cliffs in mountainous terrain) often refit their suits with special systems. A suit refitted for space combat will mount a small thruster pack with maneuvering jets. Troopers operating in mountainous terrain often equip their suits with special grapple lines and climbing gear.

To represent these alterations in the game, the GM will need to make a few minor adjustments to the standard battle suit rules. Troopers in specially outfitted battle suits do not gain the normal bonuses to Pace and jumping. Instead, they gain alternative movement abilities. It falls to the GM to fit specific abilities to specific situations. As an example, though, a suit configured for underwater combat might move in any direction at half the wearer’s normal pace. A battle suit fitted

with climbing equipment might grant the wearer a +4 bonus to climbing checks, as though he is using advanced climbing gear, and such a suit could negate the need for climbing checks in many circumstances.

## Heavy Suits

Heavy suits often provide the fire support for their smaller brethren. This usually means equipping the suit with a heavier version of the traditional weapons: a heavy machine gun, plasma cannon, or bazooka. Fire support, however, is only one of several roles that a heavy suit can fulfill.

Units in field combat have many significant non-combat needs: medical care, engineering support, long-range communications, command-and-control, and the like. With their upgraded carrying capacity and computer systems, properly-outfitted heavy suits can help to fulfill many different roles. Field medics can go into battle carrying advanced diagnostic tools and special supplies. Officers can equip themselves with upgraded information systems that help them to monitor and direct their soldiers. Engineers can pack along the special tools that allow them to assess and repair the most common battlefield suit malfunctions and damage.

And a heavy suit can support the bulky transmission equipment required for orbit-to-ground communications or long-range laser or radio contact.

Altering an existing heavy or assault suit for specialty use requires only a slight modification of the existing rules. Start by working out the job description that the suit's wearer will fulfill: demolitions expert, communications tech, combat medic, or whatever fits the situation. Then take away the heavy suit's normal +2 Shooting bonus and reapply that bonus to another skill consistent with its new function—healing, communications, or repair, for example. This alteration represents the replacement of the targeting system with other relevant tools, such as technical manuals and diagnostic systems. Finally, downgrade the suit's heavy weapon to a normal weapon (such as a battle suit would carry), and treat the heavy suit as instead carrying special equipment appropriate to its function. A communications officer might carry a folding satellite dish for ground-to-orbit transmissions, while a demolitions expert might pack along detonators and charges.



# A Mysterious Man in the Corner...

## A plethora of NPCs for use in any setting

by William Reger

### Tomas “Cutter” Cain

**Wild Card/Extra Background:** The local crime boss known as “Cutter” Cain started on the docks as an enforcer. He was smart enough to realize this career was not good for the long run and took over for his boss upon his boss’s sudden retirement. Having built a solid enforcement organization, Cain used it to take control of all the smuggling done in this port city. Now those who want to ship illegal goods, and legal goods safely, have to go to one of Cain’s agents. Big shipments go through Cain himself. Cain has dark, tousled hair, black eyes, is reasonably young (late 20s) and ambitious.

**Rank:** Seasoned; **XP:** 20

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d8

**Skills:** Fighting d8, Guts d6, Intimidation d6 (+2), Knowledge (Smuggling) d6, Notice d6, Persuasion d6, Stealth d4, Streetwise d6, Swimming d4, Taunt d6 (+2)

**Pace:** 6”; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 6 (+ Armor bonus); **Bennies:** 3; **Charisma:** +0

**Edges:** Level Headed, Strong Willed

**Hindrances:** Bloodthirsty, Cautious, Quirk (tells a victim what he is going to do to them before trying to do it)

**Special Abilities:** None.

**Gear:** Nice clothes, has leather armor (or a bulletproof vest) under his shirt (torso only), hidden knife (Str+1), silver-tipped sword cane (as Rapier), several trained bodyguards, and access to his organization and its funds for purchase of weapons and extra muscle, if needed.



### Myra Morningstar

**Wild Card/Extra Background:** Myra is a local waitress at one of the most popular bars in portside. She is attractive, witty and quick. She turns down more offers in a single night than most girls get in a lifetime. If you can get past her coy shell you will find a woman who keeps her ears open and looks out for her friends.

**Rank:** Novice; **XP:** 0

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d4, Vigor d6

**Skills:** Fighting d4, Guts d6, Healing d4, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Persuasion d6, Stealth d8, Streetwise d6

**Pace:** 6”; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 5; **Bennies:** 3; **Charisma:** +2 (looks)

**Edges:** Alert, Attractive

**Hindrances:** Curious, Loyal, Vow (Minor, won’t settle for just any man)

**Special Abilities:** None.

**Gear:** \$500, waitress outfit

### Attia Hessa

**Wild Card/Extra Background:** Attia Hessa is a charismatic young black woman who makes her living telling fortunes above a magic shop. Some say she is a fraud, while others swear she can foretell the future. Whatever the reality, things happen when Attia is around and she is very convincing.

**Rank:** Novice; **XP:** 5

**Attributes:** Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d4, Vigor d6

**Skills:** Faith d8, Guts d6, Healing d4, Investigation d6, Knowledge (Occult and Paranormal) d6, Notice d6, Persuasion d6, Stealth d4, Streetwise d6

**Pace:** 6”; **Parry:** 2; **Toughness:** 5; **Bennies:** 3; **Charisma:** +2

**Edges:** Arcane Background: Miracles (Voodoo; Powers: *burst* and *spirit touch* (see special abilities)), Charismatic

**Hindrances:** Pacifist (Major)

**Special Abilities:** Draws the Storm (An uncanny knack for drawing events to happen to her and everyone around her); Power: *spirit touch*; Novice, Power Cost 3, Duration 3 (1/round), success contacts a spirit willing to talk, on a raise you contact the spirit you are seeking. On a 1 you contact a hostile spirit who will attempt to possess you! You must have a focus to draw a specific spirit. Treat the spirit as a neutral extra and try to persuade information from him.

**Gear:** \$500, soothsayers outfit, fortune-telling paraphernalia (tarot cards, crystal ball, etc.)

## Sheriff James Jackson

**Wild Card/Extra Background:** This small town sheriff comes across as a nice man, looking out for his townsfolk and keeping the undesirables from staying in town. The civic community loves him and everyone says he is a hard-working, almost driven man, especially since his wife was killed by a passing drifter. What the community doesn't know is that the Sheriff killed his wife when she found out about his secret life and framed the drifter for the crime. The Sheriff is the masked leader of a secret organization called "The Wild Hunt." They believe hunting intelligent creatures like men is the best way to keep fit and strong. They lure wanted men and drifters to town, and then kidnap them and set them "free" in their preserve for the hunt.

**Rank:** Veteran; **XP:** 45

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8

**Skills:** Driving (or Riding) d6, Fighting d8, Guts d6, Intimidation d6, Investigation d6, Knowledge (Law) d6, Notice d6, Persuasion d6, Shooting d8, Stealth d8, Streetwise d6, Survival d6, Tracking d6

**Pace:** 6"; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 6 (+2 Armor bonus); **Bennies:** 3; **Charisma:** +2 (when dealing with average law-abiding citizens)

**Edges:** Connections (Locals trust him), Connections (The Wild Hunt: large area, few but powerful members)

**Hindrances:** Overconfident, Vengeful (Major)

**Special Abilities:** None.

**Gear:** \$100, normal clothes, body armor (chainmail or bulletproof vest), saber or machete, badge, handcuffs or rope, Pistol (with holster and five magazines) and Shotgun (or Crossbow with bolts).

## Natasha Comuniski

**Wild Card/Extra Background:** Natasha learned early that her only love was power. With power you could harm those who displeased you and reward those who did not. The only power a person could get was what they could take, for power was never given. Natasha turned her natural charms to building her personal empire. She sought out elderly males with wealth but little sense, seduced them and murdered them, taking their wealth to aid in the next hunt. Now she is fabulously wealthy and has begun her next stage, the control of her personal kingdom.

**Rank:** Veteran; **XP:** 50

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d10, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6

**Skills:** Fighting d6, Guts d6, Healing d6, Investigation d6, Knowledge (Drugs) d10, Notice d6, Persuasion d8, Shooting d6, Stealth d6, Streetwise d6

**Pace:** 6"; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5; **Bennies:** 3; **Charisma:** +2

**Edges:** Attractive, Charismatic, Filthy Rich

**Hindrances:** Greedy (Major), Vengeful (Minor) and Wanted (Minor; after her first murder she was accused but skipped town with the loot, changed her name from Hildrake to Comuniski, and now is wanted for trial. She secretly seeks to have the witnesses—everyone at the wedding—killed.)

**Special Abilities:** None.

**Gear:** She wears the newest fashions and has expert help in her makeup. She usually has several drugs in her purse and knows how to mix them to form knockout and poison mixtures. She will also carry a hidden dagger and a small pistol (if available). She has access to the fortunes of several victims.

## Jeremy

**Wild Card/Extra Background:** Jeremy is the typical old salt found hanging around ports and other transient locations. He is gruff, smells bad, and generally invisible to those who are not looking for him. Still he knows what is going on, where it is going on, and often who is involved. For the right price, generally a bottle or hit for his habit, he will be happy to let you in on the local happenings!

**Rank:** Novice; **XP:** 15

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

**Skills:** Fighting d8, Guts d6, Notice d8, Persuasion d6, Stealth d6, Streetwise d6, Survival d8, Tracking d8

**Pace:** 6"; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 5 (+1); **Bennies:** 4; **Charisma:** -2

**Edges:** Alertness, Urbansman (as Woodsman but applies in urban areas only)

**Hindrances:** Elderly, Poverty, Habit (doesn't bathe often), Habit (minor, legal drug)

**Special Abilities:** Blends into the Background (Treat as invisible -4 notice unless you are looking specifically for him!). Survival works for finding "free" food in the urban areas (cities) for Jeremy.

**Gear:** \$5, layered mismatched clothes, a hit of his habit, a dagger and a dirty pack.

# MORE BANG FOR THE JUNGLE

## New weapon stats for *Tour of Darkness*

by Markus Finster

In the Player's Guide to *Tour of Darkness*, some weapons are mentioned without having an entry in the gear list. Here are stats so you can outfit your players or Charlie with additional weaponry! Missing stats? That's a load o' bull!

Some of the weapons mentioned can be found in the *Savage Worlds* rulebook. These are: M2(HB), M1919, the Flamethrower and the MP-40.

### The RPD machine gun

The RPD is a belt-fed machine gun formerly manufactured in the Soviet Union and China. It can be fired from a prone position with the built-in bipod, or from the hip with the aid of a sling. It is fed by refillable non-disintegrating links. In Vietnam, you'll find the Chinese-manufactured Type 56. It was later superseded by the newer RPK.

Gun	Range	Damage	RoF	Weight	Shots	Min Str	Cos	Notes
RPD	30/60/120	2d8	3	16.5	100	—	550	AP 2

### The SKS rifle

The SKS was intended to replace the Mosin Nagant rifle in the Soviet Forces, but as production of the AK47 and its sister rifles increased, the SKS was soon phased out of service.

Gun	Range	Damage	RoF	Weight	Shots	Min Str	Cost	Notes
SKS	24/48/96	2d8	1	8	10	—	300	AP 2

### S&W .38 Revolver

Gun	Range	Damage	RoF	Weight	Shots	Min Str	Cost	Notes
S&W .38	12/24/48	2d6	1	3	6	—	200	AP 1

### CAR-15/XM177 rifle

The stats of the CAR-15 were printed in the official *Tour of Darkness* errata and are here repeated.

Gun	Range	Damage	RoF	Weight	Shots	Min Str	Cost	Notes
CAR-15	20/40/80	2d8	3	5	20	—	Military	AP 2

### Lee-Enfield No. 4

Gun	Range	Damage	RoF	Weight	Shots	Min Str	Cost	Notes
Lee-Enfield	48/96/192	2d8	1	8	10	—	Military	AP 2

### M14A1/Squad Auto - Clarification

The entry for the M14 has the stats for both variants of the weapon: The RoF 1/3 refers to the semi- and full-auto capable versions of the rifle.



# The Fountain of Life

## An adventure for *50 Fathoms*

by Michael Schau

### Introduction

While staying in port for some much-needed supplies and repairs, the characters roam the town and explore the local drinking holes. As the night draws to a close and the characters are on their way back to their ship for a good night's rest, a man stumbles from a side-alley right into one of the character's arms. He's bleeding from a severe gunshot wound in the chest and clutches a rolled-up map in his right hand. He shoves the map into any character's hands while rasping:

"Don't let them g... Don't you go... Stay... The apes....."

And with that, he dies, just as a group of thugs come running from the same alley from which he just emerged. The thugs demand that the characters hand the map over and are willing to resort to force should the characters refuse to do so.

**Shady types (1 per character):** Use Typical Pirate stats (Page 136 of *50 Fathoms*).

**Shady leader (1):** Use Veteran Pirate stats, but make him a Wild Card (Page 136 of *50 Fathoms*).

The burglars will flee if they lose more than half their number or if their leader goes down.

They will report back to their captain, Joseph Porter, aboard the *Dark Angel*, a pirate frigate.

### "We're being watched!"

Examining the map reveals that it shows a rather detailed area in the southern part of Torath-Ka. Several landmarks are noted, including something called "Fountain of Life".

If the characters decide to set sail to investigate immediately, they will quickly find that they are being followed by another ship, the *Dark Angel*. (If the characters want to finish other business first, don't worry. Just have the crew of the *Dark Angel* show up at the right moment. They just found another way to get to the right place somehow.)

The *Dark Angel* will only pursue, not engage—unless given no other option.

### Journey to the City of the Fountain

Once the characters reach Torath-Ka, they can set out to find the Fountain of Life. Roll twice on the Torath-Ka encounter table.

Following the instructions on the map (and somehow always feeling like they are being followed), they finally reach an ancient, crumbling city with a giant temple at its center. That temple is the location of the Fountain of Life.

Unfortunately, the ancient city is inhabited by some ape-like creatures who are highly intelligent and try to keep anyone away from the Fountain Of Life by force, attacking any human that enters the city. Have the characters



encounter two groups of attacking apes on the way to the temple.

### Guardians of the Fountain of Life

(1 per character) Wild Card

The Guardians of the Fountain of Life are a modified version of the Mutant Ape found in Butch Curry's *Savage Beasts*.

These apes are about 7 feet tall and covered in shaggy, grey-white fur. They roughly resemble gorillas, but are more upright. They also have larger tusks and bloodshot eyes.

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d12+1, Vigor d10

**Skills:** Climbing d8, Fighting d10, Guts d10, Intimidation d8, Notice d8

**Pace:** 8"; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 9

**Special Abilities:** Size +2, Berserk: If Shaken or Wounded, the ape must make a Spirit roll at -2 or go berserk (as per the Edge). Its Smarts drops to d6 (A) while berserk. Leaping: The ape can leap 4", +1" per raise, on a Strength roll.

**Gear:** Claws (Str+1), Bite (Str+2)

### The Showdown at the Temple

The characters should be able to make it to the temple in the center of the city, only to find that Joseph Porter and his crew have beaten them to their goal by mere minutes. While his crew keeps the characters at bay, Porter himself takes a drink from the Fountain of Life, hoping to live forever. Being a true villain, Porter gloats for a couple of minutes, mocking the player characters, but suddenly discovers the "gift" of drinking from the Fountain. Porter rapidly changes into one of those ape-like monstrosities that inhabit the city!

Realization dawns on the characters that all those ape-things outside were once humans, too, most likely explorers and adventurers like the characters themselves.

Just then another horde of apes attack and the characters get the chance to fight their way out of the city along with the hired guns. The apes will pursue them for about a mile or two, but will soon return to the city, because they are magically bound to the temple after drinking from the Fountain of Life.

**(Wild Card) Ape / Guardian of the Fountain of Life (6):** see above.

**(Wild Card) Changed Joseph Porter (1):** use the stats for a Guardian of the Fountain.

**Crew of the Dark Angel (10):** use Pirate stats (page 136 of *50 Fathoms*).

**Veteran Crew of the Dark Angel (5):** use Veteran Pirate stats (page 136 of *50 Fathoms*)

### Aftermath

Having discovered the secret of the Fountain of Youth and with only newly-gained wisdom to claim as booty, the player characters may decide to take down the *Dark Angel*. This may be advisable if the PCs want to avoid being hunted for the murder of Joseph Porter. The frigate has a remaining crew of 20 (5 of them are Veteran Pirates), plus any survivors from the city.

If the characters manage to capture the ship, they capture the following booty, in addition to the ship: 1x Plunder and 1x Pillage.

