

PATIENCE ecition

With thanks to the G+ OSR community that introduced me to Boorman's incredibly strange 1974 movie, *Zardoz*. May the glories of pulp, the fun of boundless imagination, never end.

With great thanks to the 432 heroes of the Stratometaship who make adventures into the weird and impossible more probable.

-Luka, January 2020

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LAYOUT Luka Rejec EDITING Someday PUBLISHING Olly Media Inc PATREON www.patreon.com/wizardthieffighter SITE www.wizardthieffighter.com

RRYP⊙ GET•A•HEAD

LUKA REJEC





—par Zardoz

"Zardoz speaks to you, his chosen ones. You have been raised up from brutality, to kill the brutals who multiply, and are legion. To this end, Zardoz your god gave you the gift of the gun.

The gun is good."

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INTROLOGUE



Hail reader, to this roleplay module. Well-come. We are all players here. Actors, gamers, hosts, explorers of the magic carpet rides of dice and imaginations.

I wrote this module for one simple reason: I thought it would be hilarious.

The module demolishes the constraint of overland travel so important to many traditional roleplay game books (until the wizard discovers how to fly or teleport) and replaces it with the shenanigans players would invent once they had control of a flying head.

If you are hosting a game and agree that your players seizing a flying head would be hilarious, then use this module as is. If you prefer to leave them crawling upon the surface of the terrestrial orb or plane or what-have-you, then insert a self-destruct switch in the head, and end the module with a wild scramble for safety.

This module is written in a very rules-loose, words-first way, which should make it easy to adapt to the system of your choice. Enjoy.

DEVASTATED VILLAGE

CLUES • WITNESSES • A BOMB!



"It came without sound! Rolling, choking cloud. Rain of fire! Flying, buzzing birds! Then stone-headed chicken-riders with pop-pop rods that sprayed death!"

The village had a name. It needs none now. Charred walls. Smoke roiling. Flickering flames. Smell of burnt pork and corn and straw. Eye-stinging. Roofs gone. Bodies. So many bodies. Gunned down, peppered with shot as they fled burning homes.

The heroes stop. The least Charismatic hero treads on a half-burnt plush terrier doll. The good spirits cringe. Cries for help resound.



CAN'T HELP THEM ALL!

The heroes have to choose where to help. A youth blubbers in shock. Barely coherent. Aldus? Aldus is their name.

- 1 A **burning school house**. Children trapped with their sheep and pets and creche-parent. Terrified. They witnessed nothing. *Without help:* half will die in the fire.
- 2 A shattered watch-tree. Village watchfolk pinned and bleeding. In agony. They witnessed the riders and the rays. Without help: both will bleed out in their broken tree.
- 3 A teetering wish-house. The pillars are riddled and charred. Preserved elders hiding in ancestor-boxes. Their visions witnessed the flying head. The buzzing drone-birds. They know much. Without help: the wish-house will fall, the ancestor-boxes will shatter, the elders' personas will fly their sacred spell-bound bones.
- 4 A **rich siro's chief-hut** is being doused, but not fast enough. The siro wails, their husbands, their wives, are in the cellar. They were in the woods, at the dolmen. They witnessed little, but offer gold and charms and an ancestral gun. Without help: their children, blood, adopted, and bonded, will be orphans.

CRY AND CLUE

Fires die down. Survivors creep back from the shattered garden-groves. A large pig breaks into a pantry. Soon, hungry swine are at the stores. Clamor. Uncertainty.

- 1 It was a giant that walked without sound! There are **no footprints**. Was it a ghost?
- 2 It breathed **smoke**! It breathed **flame**! Both abound.
- **3** The giant's **voice was a thunderstorm**. It hurt the ears. Aldus' ears bled when it shouted.
- 4 **Birds clawed and cut** at the villagers heads. They dropped nets on villagers. Survivors hid in the brambles.
- 5 Riders came on **giant chickens**. As big as donkeys, but twice as swift. There is a mess of bird footprints.
- **6** Ulya and Aksli shot back with arrows. **One fell** from its chicken. There is no corpse. There is blood.
- 7 Smith ran at one with her hammer. They waved their rods and set off fire crackers, and she fell dead. Her corpse is riddled with holes. Small in front, very large in back. Ugly metal pellets embedded in walls.
- 8 They had **giant heads and all the same face**. Sneering, leering face with blue and yellow headdress. Masks?
- **9** They **kidnapped youths**. Boys and girls. With weighted nets and convulsive wands. A baker's dozen are missing.
- 10 Here, Winsan found an amulet one of them dropped. An iron egg with a small hole. It is unsafe. Cursed. Handled roughly, it explodes, destroying limbs and faces. Left in the village, somebody will be badly hurt.



TRACKING HEAD

SIGNS • SIGHTED • SENTRIES



"They left for the rioting wilds! Fearless demons. See their trail. They know our weakness."

The raiders have left signs of their passage. They do not care about pursuit. Arrogant in their strength. In their soundless giant. In their pop-pop rods.

- 1 The **tracks of great birds**. Many. Broken plants. Trampled mud. Captives' footprints. Stumbling.
- 2 A dropped amulet glints in the mud. Brass and lead. Cartridge? Bullet.
- **3 Blood**. An injured captive?
- **4 Fresh cairn**. Sniffing hyenas. Youthful corpse. Stringy and dirty. Elaborate mustache. Arrow wounds. A raider?
- 5 Crumbs of food. Greasy and sweet. **Crumbled shiny papers**. Strange writing. Wrappers?
- **6** Stiff leg in a ditch. Scavenging land crocodiles. Pop one, scare the rest. Corpse. Whip marks on the back. Face gone. Pop-pop hole in back of neck. Fleeing captive?

THERE! ABOVE THE TREE LINE!

Something is amiss with that outcropping. It sways with the dwarf pines. It moves with the wind. It ... floats?

Tiny with distance, figures near the floating outcropping. Fires. Tents. An encampment? The raiders.

On the harder, hilly ground the trail is less the fossil of a stampede, but still clear. It continues into the dark spruce groves. Perfect spots for ambush.

Yes. Even there, see? The swaying, boxy thing in the trees? Not a hide. Some kind of watching machine? A golem?

APPROACHES

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How to reach the floating thing?

- 1 The **Direct Approach**: right along the trail. Alert the sentries for sure. Kill the raiders one by one. Then take them en masse. A bloodbath.
- 2 Through the Spruce: slow going, but quiet. Easy to hide. Wild animals? Boar. Brambles. Pits. Get close to the encampment, then charge? Take out the Captains!
- **3 Subterfuge**: grab some raiders, kill them or bind them. Take their shorts and boots and rods and helmets. Should be easy enough. They would hardly expect it.
- 4 **Up the Cliff**: loop around the woods to that sheer scarp. Up, careful careful. Use ropes and pitons. A dangerous climb, but by night ... should work. Stuff climbers mouths, so they can't cry out if they fall. Avoid encampment. Come up right behind the outcropping. Easy to attack the Captains or sneak up onto the resting head.

SENTRIES AND RAIDERS EVERYWHERE

How strong? The **raiders are just strong enough**. Four life. One hit die. A raider should fall with each blow. But they're pretty good shots. **Captains are stronger**. Two or three blows each. And they're great shots. The **chickens are fast, but fragile**. **Scout golem** is the same. Big, **dangerous, but fragile**. Speed is their friend. Pitched battles? No, no.

Numbers? Enough to make a head-on-attack unlikely to succeed. Seriously, a head on attack is stupid.

Scout golems: □ (□ sleeping in camp)

Captains (in camp:

□ the thinker, **Meybel** (nearby raiders set traps and fight with advantage)

□ the killer, **Skeyn** (very good at combat, wields two pop-pop rods, one in each hand, always fights with advantage)

 Captives:

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 (human shields, soon enough!)

 Riding Chickens:

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When 30% of the raiders are dead, they retreat to the outcropping and summon the head. It arrives after 1 turn. When 60% of raiders are dead, they mount their chicken-birds and flee.

When both captains are dead, the other raiders flee. Fleeing raiders continue to shoot back at pursuers.

Want to abstract it? Skip all the detailed combat fighting? Fine. Show this table to the heroes. Roll d10 each turn of skirmishing:

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- 1–2: a random hero is downed $\Box \Box \Box \Box \Box$
- 3–6: stalemate. Roll an additional d10 next turn and apply all results. Yes. This can spiral out of control.

TALK TO THE RAIDERS

- 1 "This world of flesh is evil, evil! But Rrypo has saved us. We are saved and cannot sin. So we destroy and savage. We glut our bodies. We pop this world with our rods like a boil!" cackles Umpek Olderlaugh.
- 2 "The gun is good! The seed is evil! It brings forth life. Parasites! Earth eaters. Sun stealers. Water wasters. Cloud corrupters!" whispers Screaming Twobes.
- 3 "Kwaaak! Kwaaak?" oh, wait, rider's dead. That was the riding chicken.
- 4 "Go back. This is not your fight. We have the venison for Rrypo. We do not need to fight," the thoughtful Captain, Meybel.
- 5 "Ah! Seed-thick scum! Xeno sluts! You'd bugger your own fathers and birth monsters from his bursting chest! Rrypo told us of your kind, oh yes. Infected outlanders!" the not-so thoughtful Captain, Skeyn.
- 6 "Oh, lay off it, Skeyn. We've got them surrounded," sighs Meybel.
- 7 "Ha, but they wanted to kill the kids!" shouts Skeyn.
- 8 "They're all just stupid kids with weapons. Look at them. 'Heroes' ... barely fool farm hands with swords pulled from stones and fancy notions of prophecies and fame," growls Meybel.
- 9 "Well, let's offer them bound and trussed to Rrypo then. Let the angel of death decide what to do with them," sneers Skeyn.
- 10 "Oh, goodness! Interlopers! Attention! Sirs! Sirs! Interlopers!" the scout golem shouts.
- 11 "Ahahahahahahahahahahahaha <maniacal laugh> she loves me, yeah yeahahahahaha <snide laugh>" the other scout golem.

EXTERMINIST RAIDERS

RAIDER CAPTAIN (L3, VETERAN REAVER)

Middle-aged. Experienced and malodorous. Battered stone heads. No, a closer look: masks. Same as the others, but older. Scarred.

Otherwise, nearly naked, a little out of shape. Padded shorts with suspenders. Long-kicking boots. Clothes the color of dried blood. A uniform. And rods. Mechanical assemblies of metal and wood. Pop-pop rods? And those brass amulets tucked into their suspenders and belts, perhaps ammunition? Bandoliers?

- * World-weary: they don't worship anyone. Rrypo gives them food and orders and pop-pop rods. Surviving is good reward. Perhaps Rrypo is just an old liar? They could be convinced.
- **† Unarmored**: but they dodge arrow and sword well. Many years of experience in not dying. Fast, despite their looks.
- † Heavily Armed: their pop-pop rods are absolutely deadly. They shoot quickly, they shoot far, they shoot very, very well. They can take out a grape fruit at four hundred paces. Head? That, too.
- **† Quite Human**: under their weariness and grime, they care for their fellow raiders, try to protect them, to save them even.
- **† Magic Helmets**: their magic helmets protect them from critical hits. Their experience protects them from charm spells.



BRUTAL RAIDER (L1, CANNON FODDER)

Youthful. Callow and malodorous. Their heads, quite oversized. No, a closer look: masks. Of stone? A light stone it must be. All the same.

Otherwise, nearly naked. Padded shorts with suspenders. Long-kicking boots. Clothes the color of dried blood. A uniform. And rods. Mechanical assemblies of metal and wood. Pop-pop rods? And those brass amulets tucked into their suspenders and belts, perhaps ammunition? Bandoliers?

- **† Ignorant**: they worship Death and their angel head, Rrypo. Rrypo gives them food and orders and pop-pop rods.
- **† Unarmored**: they fall to arrow and sword like wheat to the scythe. If you get close enough. So many minions. Red-pants to the slaughter.
- † Heavily Armed: their pop-pop rods are deadly. They shoot quickly, they shoot far. Twenty pop-pop rods could take down three-score heavy horsemen at four hundred paces. Easy. Pop, clang, bang.
- † Quite Human: under their stupidity and ignorance and savagery, they're only human. Utterly banal in their evil. Can be seduced with kindness and ... seduction. Can be converted with magic or oldschool brainwashing.
- Magic Helmets: their magic helmets protect them from critical hits. Though that hardly matters, since they are all mere cannon fodder.

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THE POP-POP ROD

A magic gun-rod! Use two hands and send scarabs of lead whizzing, piercing, popping shortlifers like rancid grapes. Like blood-stuffed ticks. Skilled with using a rod? Or maybe a zappy wand? You'll figure these out. They're easy.

Pop-pop rods do as much damage as a great sword and have more range than a long bow. They eat brass amulets and spit out husks like pips. And oh, they shout! They shout so loud when they shoot.

And best of all, armor doesn't matter much. Roll 20+ and the target's head just pops like a melon struck by a mallet. Gusher!

RIDING CHICKENS (L2, SWIFT, LEAPING)

Like overgrown ostriches with wattles and comb. Teeth like a fox and claws on their wings like a bat. A nasty bite, a nastier kick. Big enough to carry a fat man or a hogshead of cider. Weaker than a horse.

- **† Outrun**: faster than a horse. Much faster than a running sapiens.
- **† Parting Shot**: the raiders shoot back, pop-pop, off their steeds!
- **† Jump**: flap flap the rudimentary wings for extra height. It can clear a rider on a horse if need be. And watch those kicky legs!
- **†** That Kick: stronger than a horse's, will do your head right in.
- **† Bite Back**: get too close, and it'll bite right back. Quick counterattack! Hurts like a dagger.
- **†** Not so Tough: Pike or axe, you'll break it. Crack its leg, it's down.

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SCOUT GOLEM (L5, SPOTTER, RUNNER)

Painted wood bound in iron. Eight long, prehensile legs. A giant spider of a machine. Eight eyes and parabolic ears. It is watching the raiders' trail.

- *** Very Watchful**: sneaking up on it or past it along the trail will be nearly impossible.
- Nimble Brachiator: with its chain-and-hook legs it can move through the treetops as fast as a horse across a field. No running human will catch it.
- **† Fragile Defenses**: its legs are easy to shatter, its body only a little less so. Get close, and it will fall swiftly.
- **† Legs Like Flails**: it only needs three to move, with the other five it can flail about. A scarecrow of destruction.
- Pop-pop Assembly: its belly opens to reveal metal rods that spew whizzing beetles of lead. Not accurate, but deadly (on a roll of 20+ a flying lead beetle pierces a skull or heart or artery, and the target dies). The assembly can be removed and used as a large gun-rod.
- **† Siren**: when it spots movement, bird calls. When injured, earpiercing klaxons. Its death will be heard.

SET PIECES AND PROBLEMS

Heading towards the floating ... head. Surreptitious and quiet, the heroes approach. Have them roll at least one d10. For each sneaky idea of the heroes, they roll another d10 and remove the highest number. For each loud idea, roll another d10 and remove the lowest number.

- 1 Thick dwarf pines. A **tangle**. Best crawl under those branches. Nasty, sticky, and slow.
- 2 A **pit**, half-filled with leaves. Could be a nasty fall! Catch yourself.
- **3** Loose rocks. Slip, stumble, scrabble. Could sprain an ankle.
- 4 **Deer**, resting. Easy to startle. They'll give you away.
- 5 A **thornbush**. Clinging. Draws blood. And in there, a **boar**! And her boarlets! Back away quietly. Waste a bit of time.
- 6 String. Vine? No, definitely string. **A trap**? A metal ball jumps up and goes bang. Tries to rip away a foot and a hand. Also, it's loud.
- 7 A creak. A rustle. Just wind? **Fox hole**! Pop, pop, pop. The death rod echoes through the wood. The chase is afoot!
- 8 Back at the trail? How? Did you get lost? Walk in circles? Oh, drat. It's **a patrol**. Three of them on chicken-back!
- 9 A captive. Young. Tired but unhurt. Bound to a tree. Save them? Get close, they start shrieking something about ... boobies? A bird whistles in the woods. Scouts? Move the captive from the tree, and bang goes the tree. Oh, also raiders are on their way.
- 10 Ululating war cries. Whoops. Bangs. They're behind you! Run, run forward quick! Hope it's not an ambush. Oh. You ran forward? Yes. It was an ambush. Surrounded. Rods pointed at you from two sides. This looks bad.



RRYPO THE HEAD

OUTSIDE • BATTLE • INSIDE



"The angel Rrypo flies! The angel of Death speaks with the roar of a brazen bell! Its anger is thunder! Fire! Smoke! Giant prehensile beard tentacles!"

The face of an ancient god. All-noble. All-knowing. All-grim. All-outraged. Its cold visage, its mouth a shout of hate. Its headdress blue and gold worn by winters beyond count. Its structure stone.

The head rests low above the ground. A long ladder, a knotted rope with a grappling hook. Those could reach it while it rests.

Awakened, it levitates higher. It moves, as though without inertia. Swifter than a man, slower than a horse. But relentless. Perhaps a leap from a high tree? A rope tied to a bolt shot from a great bow?

Up close, its surface is rough and ancient, scratched and pitted. Easy to grip with climber's fingers.

RRYPO TALKS. RRYPO DOES.

Not a battle yet. Perhaps the heroes observe it? Perhaps the heroes masquerade as exterminists?

- 1 "Rrypo speaks to you, his chosen ones! By the power of death you have been raised up from life! To perfection from the mutating, proliferating multitude!"
- 2 "You are made to kill and hunt and feast! To be the angel Legion. The leveller of the tillers and sowers and destroyers."
- 3 "Rrypo gives you the gift of the pop-pop rod. The pop is good! Cry out, the pop is good!"
- 4 "Love is evil. The seed is evil. New humans are the virus, the eaters of Earth. The chaos that destroys peace!"
- 5 "You are my children! I have created you. Made you whole and immaculate!"
- **6** Brass amulets, ammunition for the pop-pop rods, spill out of the mouth of Rrypo, like glittering vomit.
- 7 The great beard-tentacles of Rrypo quiver and reach inside its great mouth. It groans. Ripping sounds. Then the tentacles emerge, carrying great bundles of air trapped in translucent, impermeable bundles. Within: pop-pop rods and bang-balls and ammunition for the exterminists.
- 8 A bang like firecrackers, and a shower of shimmery paper packets, like a school of fish. The exterminists rejoice: processed manna from the mouth of Rrypo. Savory, sweet, and so incredibly satisfyingly deliciously crispy.

BATTLE: RRYPO DESTROYS!

"Who dared rouse the ire of Rrypo? Who failed to flee the visage of the angel of death? Behold! Receive your judgement!"

The floating head rises. Looms. It's the size of a four-storey manor! It turns ponderously, like a jerky stop-motion animation, to face the insects who would trouble it. It will destroy them.

A savage might think the head lives. No. It is piloted. An extension of the body and mind of a mighty wizard!

- * Armored Fortress: Do you have a great siege laser? A truck loaded with rainbow-contrailed rockets? A company of tanks? No? Then you have no hope of defeating the floating head in fair combat. If players insist, quote a life total suitable for a large house (about five times that of a dragon) and some massive damage reduction (its surface is hard rock).
- **Vulnerabilities**: Subterfuge or nimble cunning, trickery and infiltration through nose or mouth or eye, those are the only ways to defeat the mighty Rrypo for paltry short livers like these heroes. Use hooks, gliders, or nets to board.
- *** Single Faced**: the head can only attack in a hemisphere directly in front of it.
- **† Eye-studded**: the head is studded with biomechanical eyes recessed in its lithic surface, giving its pilot somewhat-pixellated vision in all directions. Except down.
- **† Blind Spot**: the crew can't see directly beneath the head.
- * Ablative Base: the base of the head is a thick, eyeless layer of aerolith. The rock makes it nigh-invulnerable to ground fire, and is strong enough to support the weight of the head when it lands. It is massive enough (around 1,000 tons) to easily pancake an elephant or a giant toothed chicken king.
- Inertialess Drive: the head ignores inertia. Strong winds barely move it. It can accelerate at 1g to a top speed of around 38km/h (~10m/s). That's a higher top speed than nearly every human sprinter, and a bit slower than a galloping horse. It can spin fast enough to provoke nausea in its occupants.

HEAD ACTIONS

The head is understaffed. Only the wizard and their assistant live on the head. They cannot do everything at once, so the head can only take two actions per turn. Turning and/or moving is an action. Still. Its attacks are deadly. Make this clear to players.

- **† Move and/or turn** with eerie grace and swiftness. In any direction. Including straight down.
- † Frightfully loud shout. Enough to permanently deafen nearby humans, make ears bleed. Frightening to medieval savages. If the head has also moved this turn, this is a free action (the microphone is next to the steering assembly). This also summons raiders.
- Fire disintegrator ray from the third eye crystal. The citrine ray blasts out, disintegrating about 13 kilograms of matter (including air). The ray weakens with distance and is completely ineffective beyond about 100 meters at sea level. As the ray passes through air, nearby objects are mildly burned. Denser matter explodes in a powerful fireball. Obviously, if the ray strikes a human body, that person will have a terminally bad day. By default, the ray will not target objects next to the head. Or the head itself. Ray batteries:
 □ | □ □ | □ □ | □ □ | □ □ | □ □ (recharge □ per 30 minutes)
- Expel noxious cloud from nostrils. The cloud obscures a large area, stings exposed skin, makes eyes water, and provokes coughing fits. Stay in it long enough, and you cough blood. It's quite debilitating. Gas tanks:
 C C (recharge C) per hour)
- Launch autonomous attack drones from the mouth. Buzzing, fourwinged golem-stirges. Fast and accurate, but fragile. A single blow from a fist-sized rock is enough to knock a drone down (though the odds are good it will still explode). There are two types: an antipersonnel fragmentation drone that sends shrapnel flying across a large area, crippling humans, and a penetrator drone with a high-explosive battery that disables vehicles, large draft animals, and of course individual humans. Head can launch up to 3 drones at once. Fragmentation drones:

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- [†] Flail giant prehensile beard tentacles. What look like stone ornaments are actually massive sarcolithic tentacles, each strong enough to lift an ox! Up close, their swing can easily break a rhino's spine, grab a human, lob a boulder, or push a mid-sized family sedan off a cliff (cue Wilhelm scream).

ENTER RRYPO THE HEAD

Walk in through the mouth. End up in the oral loading bay.

Crawl in through the nostril like a worm. End up in nasal control.

Break in through the eye. The crystal window is hard, it takes special tools and effort. End up in the wizard's apartments (former viewing deck).

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The world outside falls away. Becomes remote. A weak thing. A sonic wall dampens the noise. An olfactic scrubber removes odors. A mild zeta force curtain at the entrances fries mosquitoes and other smaller creatures (and quickly causes first sunburn, then welts and boils). An overpressure field protects against airborn particulates.

The walls are old. Very old. Covered in half-repeating fractal patterns. Drag your fingers across the patterns. Hear the minimalist music of the spheres.

Irising doors, like sphincters of metal and glass and rubber. The surfaces scuffed. Colors worn and wan.

Old paintings under acrylic. The oil dusty and dark. Savage mythologies and strange names on little brass plaques.

Glass-fronted niches with queer-painted glazed pots held in place by piano wires. Faded cardboard labels reference a strange count of years.

Now the struggle should be more even.

RRYPO'S CREW

Dramatis Personae

- 1 The **wizard**. Sam Plain. A liar. Pilot of the head.
- 2 The **assistant**. Alm. A devoted servant. Beautiful but naive. Handles all the other operations of the head (including the different weapons).
- **3** The **sentry golem**. 3ED. An ancient robot. Comically inept.
- 4 Penetrator **drones**. Any that remain. $\Box \Box \Box | \Box \Box \Box$



THE WIZARD (L3, SOFT) • SAM PLAIN

"I am Sam Plain and I am Rrypo. I have lived hundreds of years and I long to die. But death is no longer possible. I am immortal."

Sam is immoral. Cowardly. They execute the will of the ministry. Does the ministry even exist anymore?

The ministry demands youthful savages. Material to refresh the gene pools of the ministry. Once every few months they deliver a dozen captured specimens to a crystal pyramid atop a magic mountain. The specimens disappear and the ministry's pre-recorded message of approval plays.

Fight the ministry? Sam could not. Never could.

Sam Plain prefers to live, sleep, and eat on the bridge of the head. Sealed and safe from the world. Piloting the grand machine when required. Lost in solipsistic nonsense at other times.

Sam knew great and powerful magics once. Now. Not so much.

- *† Summon Viands* with a wave of their wand, the wizard brings a digestible meal from somewhere within 300 kilometers to their magic table.
- *† Eliminate Matter* with a different wave of their wand, the wizard removes up to 2 kilograms of matter from their presence to a random location 2000 meters away.
- † Voyerous Vermin the wizard use a magic needle to penetrate the brain of a small creature and settle there a pseudomorph of their personality. They then pilot the creature remotely and experience the world through its senses.
- *† Impressive Presence* the wizard shimmers and flickers, their rags becoming swirling robes of many colors, their posture straighter, their teeth whiter, their skin fresh and youthful.
- *†* Charm Person well, that's a classic.

From the pilot seat on the bridge, Sam can see everywhere within and without the head, speak from any wall within the head, or make the great mouth roar forward in Rrypo's bellow.

Sam is no warrior and has negligible combat abilities.

THE ASSISTANT (L2, DEVOTED) • ALM

"I am Alm! And who are you?"

The devoted (charmed?) servant of Rrypo is beautiful but naive. Have each player describe a feature their hero finds attractive. Alm has that feature.

"Oh, I do love Rrypo! Rrypo provides everything one could ever ask. And Rrypo is the most wonderful, capable magician! There is nothing you could want that Rrypo could not do!"

Alm is naive. Not stupid. They handle all the operations of the head, from engineering to main weapons, stocking the weapons for the raiders and bossing around the drones. And, they also keep the place clean and tidy.

Perhaps they not only worship Rrypo, but even love them a little? Perhaps this is trauma bonding. After all, they were a kidnapped youth brought up by 3ED the sentry golem and Rrypo's voice and illusory presence.

Alm is no warrior and has negligible combat abilities. Alm is not suicidal, and though they will protest loudly, they don't want to get killed. After all, they get to run the most amazing flying head in the world at the side of the ministry's most esteemed agent!



THE SENTRY GOLEM (L5, RUSTY) • 3ED

"Accept the Ministry! Worship the Ministry! Have some Tea!"

3ED is a charming butler-bot that was repurposed as an extreme-defense unit. Its metal-and-plastic body was once painted pink and red, but decades of harsh use have left itscruffy. 1ED and 2ED were destroyed and reused for parts long ago, but 3ED keeps their voice boxes and facemasks welded to its torso as souvenirs.

- *** 360 Vision**: sensors stud its body. It cannot be flanked or surprised.
- **† Extreme Armor**: its armor lets it completely ignore a large proportion of physical damage.
- Vulnerabilities: There is a better than even chance that 3ED will lose 20% of its life every turn of combat due to malfunctions. It is also vulnerable to electromagnetic and water attacks. Confused by illusions. Vulnerable to logical argumentation.

3ED is exceptionally fast and strong and competent in combat ... except when it malfunctions, which is often. It gets two actions per turn, but checks for malfunction after every action.

- *** Scuttle**: 3ED moves across floors, walls, and ceiling, extruding additional limbs as required. It is faster than a cat.
- **†** Flamer: 3ED douses several nearby targets in a wide cone with chemical fire. This dissolves armor and causes horrible burns. □ □
- Pop-pop Spray: 3ED sprays and prays up to 3 nearby adjacent targets at once, dealing horrible injuries. 3ED rolls attacks for each target separately, and results of 20+ are lethal headshots. □ □ | □ □
- **† Pop-pop Wand**: 3ED's arm swivels open and it takes a quick shot at a distant target. A result of 20+ is a lethal headshot.
- *** Whirling Golem**: 3ED attacks all adjacent targets with a whirling attack. It deals damage as a great sword.
- † Duelling Mode: 3ED focuses on a single target in melee combat. It attacks with advantage, and its blade limbs are effectively vorpal (decapitating its target on any result of 20+).
- **† Final Fury**: when 3ED realizes defeat is inevitable, it disables all the safeguards on its immolation core. It begins to beep ominously. Then deals terriffic damage to everything within a large area.

3ED DRONE MALFUNCTIONS

- 1 **Confused**. Loses next action. Then uses random attack on random target next round.
- **2 Break**. A limb snaps off. Its movement is slowed for a round, until it recalibrates its motor core.
- **3 Electric Surge**. All adjacent creatures suffer some electric damage and it loses 20% of its life, as something short circuits inside it.
- **4 Freeze Glitch**. It suddenly freezes for 1 round. Store all its missed actions. It performs all of them immediately when it unfreezes.
- 5 **Sudden Overdrive**. Its next successful attack deals double damage. And it loses 20% of its life.
- **6 Butler Mode**. Loses next action. 3ED stops fighting and starts apologizing and asking how it can be of service.





THE HEAD'S LAYOUT

FIRST FLOOR

ORAL LOADING BAY

Voluminous and dim, the lampstones in the floor barely glow anymore. An improvised ramp covers broad scuffed steps descending from mouth to floor. Worn out loading equipment and empty cargo boxes lay about.

A staircase decorated with faces leads up. Biometrically locked sphincter doors lead to the drone bay and the hall of engineering. A one-way sliding door opens out from the ka-mill bay.

Ancient paintings and miniatures tucked away in unlit wall niches.

DRONE BAY

Cluttered and smelling strongly of preservative grease. A gunk of dust mixed with old oil coats rarely washed handled and dials. Two light metal armatures hold fragmentation and penetrator drones ready to deploy. Empty boxes, old drone parts, and worn tools piled in the rear.

A double-locked biometric sphincter door leads to the weapons vault.

WEAPON VAULT

Lit by red emergency lampstones and smelling of explosive magic, weapon racks and cases fill this vault.

Most of the weapons are gone now, but there is still a large number of poppop rods, boxes of brass ammunition amulets, bandoliers and thigh boots about. There is also a box of exploding metal pomegranates tucked under a pile of musty maroon shorts.

HALL OF ENGINEERING

A smell of ozone and mild dilapidation pervades the hall. The talking stone that monitors the health of the head is blinking a lot of amber and blue lights. Bare wires and empty bays indicate missing consoles and tool boxes. Several fitted metal cabinets line the walls. There also appears to be an upside-down bathtub.

An unlocked sphincter door leads to the battery bay.

Heavily used but still serviceable tool chests have been stored hastily in the cabinets. A profusion of well-thumbed manuals and books on operating the head have been stored in a potato sack under the bathtub. They are mostly not inaccurate. A dissassembled engineering drone has been hurriedly stuffed inside a gutted console. Its name tag reads Johnine.

BATTERY BAY

Cool green and blue lampstones illuminate the cozy, warm confines of the battery bay. Capacitation crystals, flux reliquifiers, and a ka-potentiality vat occupy most of the space. Cables hang about like a metal spider's cobwebs. A console beeps sadly.

An unlocked sliding door leads to the ka mill bay.

Three pre-loved paperbacks of now-forgotten ancient figurative artists have been tucked behind a loose panel of the battery control console.

KA MILL BAY

A brass monster of wheels and screens and lights and loading bays looms, dominating the room. Heavy pipes and cables lead to the battery bay. Both ha-ba diffusor ovens are fully functional and ready to distil souls (ka) to power the magic head. An metal gurney gathers dust in the corner. A couple of wheeled cabinets hold old scalpels, drills, and other quasi-surgical tools.

A lever operates the one-way sliding door to the Oral Loading Bay.

SECOND FLOOR

×

RECREATION CAVITY

A vaulted cavity lit by fading yellow lampstones. The walls are painted with once-cheery natural scenes of extinct flora and fauna. Dust, time, and grease have formed an ochre patina over the frescoes. Plastic and tubular steel furniture has mostly been piled up in one corner. Sacks of empty cans and containers lean against the stairwell. A flat-panel crystal ball display occupies pride of place on a couple of wooden fruit cases covered with a decorative shawl that really ties the whole room together.

The central stairwell leads up and down. A locked and bolted trapdoor blocks access to the third floor. Three regular sphincter doors and two biometric sphincter doors line three walls.

The flat-panel crystall ball display remote control wand has fallen behind the polyester cushions on the comfortable sofa.

HEAD (WC)

A claustrophobic, tiled room, full of arcane plumbing. It would provide sanitation for many types of humans and satisfaction for none.

There are no doors. This is a private space.

The water is a bit ruddy, but drinkable.

CREW QUARTERS

A dim, low-ceilinged room that smells of old socks and rye. Five color-coded beads with overhead lockers and under-bed chests line the walls. One bed seems used, the others are neatly made and covered with decayed plastic sheets. A shrink-wrapped grand painting titled "Massu being evil in the sight of the Lord" dominates one wall. A yellowish mold has consumed about a third of it.

There are no doors, but small lenticular crystal balls afixed to the wall provide a proxy 360-degree view of the outside world.

A plush golem named Bunneh is locked in the chest under one bed. The golem is waiting to be given to its new master.

NASAL CONTROL

A chunky pump of grey metal, whirling turbines, and cracked rubber dominates the room. Tubes lead from the wall and out through the nostrils to gas dispersal nozzles. Air circulators should prevent the gas from backflowing. A small, cryptic control console activates gas release and the gasrefilling system, which breaks down volatile compounds from the head and vats to recharge the gas tanks.

There are no doors, but a slender person could crawl out through the head's nostrils after removing a circulator.

Seven progressively thicker paperback novels stored in a cardboard box. Someone removed all the titlepages. Perhaps they are a series?

GAS CHAMBER

Three large tanks dominate the gas chamber. One is certainly for caustic gas. The warning labels on the other two have worn out. Perhaps they are less dangerous now?

There are no doors, but a security grill blocks a safety pressure vent that exits around where the head's right ear would be.

Several duct tape rolls have been neatly stacked next to a cleaned patch of floor for a repair job that was never carried out.

GOODS VAULT

Dim light and a smell like old biscuits greet the visitor. Teetering towers of tins, piled pallets, broken boxes fill most of the room, like the nesting material of some strange dragon bird. A rough path leads through the debris to large plastic containers of foil-wrapped preserved calorie bars with strange, sickly sweet flavors.

There are no other doors here.

Under a pile of beef jerky boxes lies an ancient coffin or sarcophagus filled with dessicated grave earth. It has been empty for a long time.

THIRD FLOOR

BRIDGE

The dim, vaulted hall is dominated by mothballed consoles and sheetcovered egg-shaped command chairs. Two consoles are active and though dust-free, covered in grease and crumbs. The first controls the head's movement and voice, the second controls the ray weapon. A colorful rug badly covers trapdoor to the the stairs. The plastic-panel walls are covered with a profusion of amateurishly laminated paintings by old masters.

The sliding door to the observation deck are bolted from the other side. A faulty permanent Alarum Mk 3 spell delivers a mild jolt and a taste of bitter citrus to whomever touches the door.

One control console was gutted long ago and is now used to store a selection of ancient booze. The drinks have been untouched for decades.


OBSERVATION DECK LEFT (WIZARD'S LIVING ROOM)

A stagnant smell of half-washed human, old clothes, yellowed books, and burnt plastic assails the nose. An egg-chair, foot-stool, and rug ensemble dominates the room. The view through the head's great eye is obscured by potted plants, cobwebs, some kind of mildew, and a couple of clothes lines. The rest of the deck is a barely contained mess, with clothes piled in boxes and unused furniture piled up in one corner.

A broken sphincter door gapes open to the next room.

The mummified corpse of a cat, the long-lost familiar Shubbie, is slowly turning to dust beneath a collapsed pile of coffee-table books.

OBSERVATION DECK RIGHT (WIZARD'S BEDROOM)

The human smell is stronger here. A massive, out-of-place bed lurks in one corner. Sitting cushions, throw pillows, and an ornate marble coffee table complete the rest of the room. Empty tins, cans, and plastic cutlery have been piled up in one corner. The view through the greasy glass of the eye is unobstructed. Small niches excavated in the walls contain painted lead and plastic figurines of ancient gods.

There are no more doors. This is the last room.

A wizardly manual on lampstone carving has been used to prop up one leg of the coffee table.

NOW YOUR HEAD

OPERATION · GAME CHANGES · CHALLENGES



"Ahh! You have found me. You have seen me. I was immortal. I am immortal. I am dead. Oh ... look ... blood. After centuries, blood. Oh, Ministry! Ministry! I am free!"

Was it battle? Was it words? Was it Sam Plain slumps to the ground, a gentle smile on their lips.

The head. Rrypo. The heroes own it now.

Outside, perhaps, the savage raiders still shout and whoop? Do they even know a new master now controls the great flying head? There is the microphone. There is the switch. The voice will be the same.

FLYING THE HEAD

It's hard, but not impossible. Sure, the head is a bit run down. Sure, it needs a full crew complement to function effectively. But it should work, right?

ROLES & OPERATIONS

- * not really essential
- ** essential for combat operations
- *** essential for basic operations

***Captain:** gets to sit in the biggest, comfiest chair, and shout at people. Hears voices from the Ministry. Has priority control over the microphone.

*****Pilot:** controls the flight of the head. Can ram targets. Has secondary control over the microphone. Can jump over to control the disintegration ray instead.

****Weapons:** has primary control over the disintegration ray and the targetting options. Has secondary control over the nasal gas emitters and the great loading tentacles. Has the override keys to the weapons vault.

****Bay Control:** has primary control over the loading bay drones (missing) and the secondary drones (fragmentation, penetrator). Has primary control over the loading tentacles.

*****Engineering:** controls the power plant of the head, decides who gets extra power (performs with advantage) and who gets minimal power (disadvantage). Currently, there is never enough power for every crew member to perform something at full efficiency. Has primary control over the repair drones (missing). Has secondary control over the mini ka mill.

***Ka Processing:** controls the ka mill that generates potential soul energy to power the ship. Basically a kind of necromancer? Also, has secondary control of the medical cubicles (missing).

***Internal Security:** controls access to the weapons vault and the sentry golems (only 3ED was still active). Has a two-way line to the ministry.

GAME CHANGES

The heroes now control (own?) a rather large flying fortress with a disintegrator, powered by crushed souls. The game has just changed.

Travel: overland travel is no longer a major challenge. Terrain is no longer an obstacle.

Serial Dungoneers: if you are playing a dungeon-crawling game, you can turn your game into a dungeon-hopping serial. New dungeon every session, heroes get in and out as quick as they can.

Speed: the head is not very fast (about as fast as a quick land vehicle in your world), but it's a flying machine. In combat it can't escape every enemy, but over a longer distance, it can almost always escape.

Coveted: every politico in the realm wants this kind of super weapon for their own defense. Or, barring that, to take it out. At least covertly. An unaligned group with this kind of firepower looks like a threat to every democratic leader and tinpot despot in the world.

Mobile Home Base: so long as the heroes can retreat to their mobile home base, they can rest and resupply. This is obvious to everyone.

Hard to Hide: it's a giant floating head. It's very obvious and can't be hidden. Perhaps far out to sea, or high up in the air, but that's about it. The heroes' enemies can always find them (and start scheming how to deal with them).

NEW GOALS

Notice how the head is not fully operational? Getting it working again would be easy hooks to dangle in front of the players. Make each goal worth about half a level's worth of XP per hero. That should work.

- 1 Acquire **loading bay drones** to move cargo and operate the oral defenses. Out west there's a pre-historic drone factory that some subhumans have turned into a temple of doom.
- 2 Find **repair drones** for engineering. There are a couple currently serving as dancing curiosities for a splendidly rich and popular despot in the north. The despot doesn't want to give up her metal dancers.
- **3 Medical cubicles** would make it possible to repair major trauma! And reuse bodies after ka extraction. A fabled healing temple in the east is using magic boxes that sound very much like the cubicles in question.
- 4 Internal security needs **more EDs** and there is a holy stepped-pyramid tomb in the south, where the honored ancestors are protected by plassteel guardians that sound just like the EDs. Oh, and as a bonus ... once recovered, one of the EDs divulges that there exists a fifth glorious artifact: the drive delimiter.
- 5 The drive delimiter removes the speed limit from the head. With this artifact, the head becomes, potentially, a spaceship. 1g inertialess drive? Yes, please! But, apparently, it is worn as a sacred crown by the high king of a central cosmopolitan empire. If the sacred crown were ever lost, the good and just empire would collapse in war and fire. A side-effect of wearing the drive delimiter significantly increases the charisma of humanoids.
- 6 The **atmospheric bubble field** is a sixth item that is needed to survive in hard vacuum (and properly heat the damned heat). It was traded for some jelly beans with a savage subterranean cannibal civilization. The pasty, pale post-humans use it to create a breathable atmosphere in their deepest cities. Removing it will force them to the surface, causing another devastating war. And cannibalism.

NEW CHALLENGES

The heroes think they're on easy street now? No. Just the challenges have changed. Be certain to throw at least one of these challenges at the heroes whenever they use the head in battle, too.

- 1 Weather: the head's heating is down and it gets very cold.
- 2 Atmosphere: flying too high, the air gets very thin.
- 3 Generic Malfunction: something can always fail in the head. This time its the general mechamagical field. Until it's fixed, every human in the head has a permanent, annoying headache 3Hz thudding headache.
- 4 Drive failure: the head floats motionless. And are those harpies?
- 5 Sanitation vat failure: suddenly the biocrete walls begin to seep ... sanitation vat fluids. This is a smelly problem. Turns out somebody flushed a plastic toy potato. Requires either a proper plumber, or some kind of magical shrinkage and scuba diving.
- 6 Oral failure: the mouth closes and won't open. Until the artificial jaw muscle is manually reset with an electric wand, entrance and exit is only through the nostril.
- 7 Weapons failure: the weapon stops working. A short circuit? Rats in the walls? It will repair itself, but an exterminator is required. And better mouse traps.
- 8 Battery breach: the batteries suffer a crystal wall breach and require new organic crystals to recover. Until then, the head can only perform a single action per turn.
- 9 Fuel reserves low: the head needs fresh ka. The easiest way to get it is by using the mini ka mills to process some sentience into fuel. Those two murderhoboes passed out in front of the caravanserai should be enough for a few months.
- 10 Birds: a flock of birds crashes into the head, jamming the nose, smearing the eyes, and getting stuck in the mouth. Better secure the cleaners as they go outside.
- 11 Slugs: drawn by the biocrete structure's sweat, a plague of slugs has somehow infested the head, crawling out of every orifice.
- 12 Cockroaches: it was inevitable, considering all the food waste. And now, somehow, their numbers have exploded. They're breeding in a disused water tank.
- 13 Evil thieves disguised as merchants: they want to steal the head.
- 14 Evil thieves disguised as noble knights come asking for help against a dragon, they want to steal the head.

- **15** Evil thieves disguised as starving villagers come begging for help for their village, for food, for support against some goblins. They want to steal the head.
- 16 Evil thieves disguised as ambassadors come offering an alliance with a local ruler. They want to steal the head.
- 17 Raiders in the dark: colonial soldiers dressed as natives try to steal the head.
- 18 Raiders in the fog: bandits dressed as colonial soldiers try to steal the head.
- **19** Raiders in the water: natives dressed as bandits try to steal the head.
- 20 Flying raiders on gryphons try to steal the head.
- **21** Flying raiders on wyverns try to steal the head.
- 22 Banker offer good loans in the hope the heroes will forfeit the contract and they will be able to seize the head.
- 23 Teleporting wizard shaman sorcerors try to steal the head.
- 24 Crystal-waving nutjobs appear and claim they are from the Ministry and want their head back.
- **25** Paranoia strikes: everyone is obviously out to get the heroes and steal their heads.
- **26** Assassins disguised as youths in distress, looking for help to save their relatives.
- 27 A noble army of longbowmen and yeoman pikemen and knights in shining armor lines up to see the head off from the lands it has entered. They ask the monster beholder in the sky to leave.
- **28** A giant walking monster with artillery breath presents a terrifying threat. It can actually damage the head!
- **29** A ragtag mercenary band uses guerrilla tactics, nets, grappling hooks, and several ancient rocket launchers to try and bring down the head. They can actually damage the head!
- 30 A Ministry Flying Fist appears! Could it be the equal of the head? It looks like it's trying to deliver a knockout ramming maneuver!

OTHER QUESTS AND MISSIONS

Not everyone wants to steal the head, of course. But ... it's so big and obvious, and if it's not outright evil and deadly anymore, perhaps it could help?

- 1 A medical scholar needs to be **transported** to Central City after the outbreak of a strange blood plague. Perhaps the plague comes aboard with the scholar. Perhaps the scholar is already one of them.
- 2 An outpost of religious hermits has to be **resupplied** after a natural disaster. Perhaps it turns out the hermits brought the disaster on themselves by burning down the sacred grove of the local majority population and torturing the local priests.
- 3 Trouble in an important border town must be **investigated**. Pale, glittering humans have been reported crawling out of mirrors and crystals. Stealing people. Eating raw flesh.
- 4 With outlying forts falling, the border town must be **defended**. First comes a peasant rebellion, demanding the government help them. Then the mercenaries revolt and leave. Then the glittering humans in their crystal suits appear. Can a single head defend a whole city?
- 5 Regardless of the outcome, the central government decides to cut its losses and evacuate its high-level administrators. The head must evacuate key personnel from the green house in the secure government compound in the middle of the city. Leaving the border citizens to the flesh-eating glittering humans.
- 6 The demand comes from the glittering humans. They want the head. It belongs to them. They are the Ministry. Their leader is Minister Maggot. Unless the head is returned, they will drown the whole nation in blood. The government wants to acquiesce.

There is only one choice, obviously: overthrow the central government and lead the armies to a final confrontation with Minister Maggot on the plains of Karm Eggido! Or, perhaps, a rogue **assassination strike** on Minister Maggot's giant levitating crystal lotus of destruction. That should solve the problem.

IS IT ENDED?

CHAOS • UPSET • EVER CHANGES



"No! My precious world! You have broken it!"

Should cry no referee, no game master ever. The world is not yours, it is your table's. It only lives in the play suspended in a scintillant net of playful imagination. The players, you included, make it and remake it and unmake it every time you meet. Let it change. Breathe. Grow. Suffer. Wilt. Die.

And breathe again.



AUTHORIAL AUTHORITY

Do not trust authors. They use words, and words are tricksy, lying things. They twist, flutter, and get all funny when you mix them up and try to use them on another person. The author pretends to authority. The game designer pretends to create a game for you.

No! These are just toys. Toys that players bring to life at your table in their own way, using tricks and hacks learned from a dozen games, a hundred movies. Embrace that. Make the toy your own. Break it, fix it, change it.

The author has written some other game modules. Things like the Ultraviolet Grasslands, where Get A Head would be right at home. And things like Witchburner and What Ho, Frog Demons! where it would take a bit more work. He lives in a home with too few cats and dogs.



MUSIC'S GHOST

Artemiev, Edvard - *Dedication to Andrei Tarkovskiy* - Solaris/The Mirror/ Stalker (1990) - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8iimnIgyjls

Beethoven - *symphony* - Number 7 in A major opus 92, 2nd movement, Allegretto (1812) - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vCHREyE5GzQ

The Claypool Lennon Delirium - *Amethyst Realm* - South of Reality (2019) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cHyzNmQa9Q0

Goldsmith, Jerry - *The Revelation* - Planet of the Apes Soundtrack Suite (1968) - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q31QTZd1y6k

King Gizzard and the Lizard Wizard - *Planet B* - Infest the Rats' Nest (2019) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qtTi_uyYynA

Ministry - *Jesus Built My Hotrod* - New Wave For The Next Generation (1991) - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GXCh9OhDiCI

Villagers of Ioannina City - *album* - Age of Aquarius (2019) - https:// www.youtube.com/watch?v=SrVmSJ5CHc4&t=3476s





HOPEFULLY NEXT MONTH!



THANK YOU FOR YOUR PATIENCE AND SUPPORT, EVERYONE!

FIN.

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