

Near-Space 307 Ahearn

by Adrian Forest

Introduction

Near-Space 307 Ahearn is a setting that can be used in any science fiction game. The large asteroid designated as Near-Space 307 Ahearn has a population of over 1.4 million, and is run like a company town. It is home to the largest asteroid-mining operations in the system. But unbeknownst to the miners, it is also home to a mysterious alien intelligence . . .

History

The asteroid known as Near-Space 307 Ahearn was discovered by prospectors about 50 years ago. Initial surveys reported unusual sensor readings that seemed to indicate the presence of huge quantities of valuable minerals, and the planetoid was earmarked by a number of companies for more thorough exploration. However, before any mining projects could be initiated, a group of utopians calling themselves the Order of Iznae established a settlement on the asteroid, where they hoped to live in austerity and tranquility. Their community didn't last though, and after several members of the group were convicted of financial fraud on other planets, a Japanese mining consortium took over the rock. The first mining began two years later.

Over the years, two more companies have set up mining operations on 307 Ahearn: Nearspace Mining Inc., and the smaller Morgan Collective Mining Company. When its backers filed for bankruptcy, the Japanese operation was bought by Harlan Heavy Industries and expanded. Today, HHI and Nearspace dominate the asteroid, but the Morgan Collective still has a sizable claim.

Major Companies

Harlan Heavy Industries is an autocratic institution with a reputation for looking after its own. The living standards of HHI employees are the highest on the asteroid, and safety in their mines is top-notch. The company regularly sponsors social events for its employees where those employed by other companies are seldom welcome. Along with the company's excellent treatment of its employees, this has inspired a loyalty to HHI that no other stakeholder on the asteroid can match. Along with the mines, HHI also refines and processes some of the raw materials mined on 307 Ahearn before exporting them. The Managing Director of the company is George J. Harlan, son of the industrialist James Harlan.

While they don't have the benevolent reputation of HHI, Nearspace Mining Inc. does turn a massive profit. The 307 Ahearn base is only one of a half-dozen mining projects that Nearspace runs throughout the asteroid belt, with huge economies of scale allowing them to supply their operations at a greatly reduced cost. Nearspace employees are pushed hard, and company policy is to lay off anyone who doesn't make their efficiency target. The company's six Executive Directors are based on a nearby planet, and only travel to outlying mining operations in extraordinary circumstances.

The utopian outlook of the Morgan Collective Mining Co. was ridiculed when they first set up their operation on Ahearn 307. The company is owned by its employees, each owning a share proportional to their position's contribution to the company's earnings. Since establishing their mining base, the Morgan Collective's commercial success has made the other stakeholders on the asteroid reconsider their dismissive attitudes. Employees are treated well, as might be expected, though their overall standard of living is lower than that of their HHI counterparts. The visionary Arthur Benedict is the company's current CEO, the man who rescued it from disaster when negotiations with a critical client broke down three years ago.

Society and Daily Life

Society on 307 Ahearn breaks down along company lines. Each company provides housing and education within its claim for employees and their families, in huge domes on the surface of the rock. All of the habitation domes are interconnected with each other and the central spaceport. The spaceport itself is now surrounded by a cluster of smaller domes owned by commercial interests, and these domes have become the central shopping district of the asteroid-city.

Also situated beside the spaceport, the Cobalt Belle Casino is the asteroid's main entertainment venue. Since it opened three years ago, the casino has become a popular hang-out for younger miners, eager to spend their hard-earned pay. Its owner, Coldblack Holdings, has tried to attract tourists to the asteroid by hosting a number of popular acts recently. So far these efforts have met with little success, and the casino still garners most of its revenue from the resident miners.

Unemployment is kept low by a common policy of deporting those who lose their jobs. A few individuals have managed to escape this fate by slipping through loopholes in the system, but they have always been rounded up eventually.

While the three major companies supply their employees with basic goods and services at sizable discounts, there is still a substantial demand for luxury items. For the past 30 years, the trading company Lambda Alpha Inc. has been 307 Ahearn's major supplier of everything from gourmet foods to consumer electronics. Only in the last decade has a competitor, Coldblack Shipping, emerged to challenge it, and rumors that the company operates its own mafia have dogged it since it arrived. Both companies maintain permanent stations on the asteroid.

The major religion practiced on 307 Ahearn is Shinto, which was brought to the asteroid by the first Japanese settlers and quickly spread to the other miners. The asteroid's particular brand of this ancient religion emphasizes contemplation of the depths of space, and a faith in one's community. There are a number of small shrines in each company's territory. Islam also has a significant following, with a focus on abstinence from drugs and alcohol that is encouraged by corporate interests.

Each of the three companies polices its own areas of the asteroid with its own private security forces. By universal agreement, offenders are dealt with by the company whose territory the offence was committed in, and extradition between territories is relatively easy. Camaraderie between the different security forces makes cooperation in matters that cross company lines standard procedure. However, recent tensions have strained these relationships.

Recent Developments

For most of 307 Ahearn's history, the major mining companies have maintained peaceful but competitive relations. Recently though, both HHI and Nearspace have suffered drastic increases in mine accidents, which each blames the other for. HHI says their rivals are using unsafe practices that endanger all the mining operations on 307 Ahearn. Meanwhile, Nearspace claims their operation is being sabotaged by HHI. The strain on relations has led to a slow militarization of the security forces of both companies. Fearing an outbreak of violence, the Morgan Collective has also upgraded the capabilities of its forces, but with a strictly defensive focus.

The Big Secret

What no one on the asteroid realizes is that 307 Ahearn is really an immense, self-aware computer. The minerals that make up the asteroid are set out in complex patterns that form its billions of logic circuits. The computer is quite intelligent, above average on a human scale. Its original purpose was to detect any space travel within the solar system it watched over, and broadcast a signal to alert its creators.

When humans first began exploring the system, the computer's sophisticated magnetic sensors detected their presence, and it activated its signaling system. These signals were detected by the early prospectors, but they were only

interested in mineral wealth, and the signals served only to alert them to the vast resources contained within the asteroid. The computer tried to communicate with the first settlers through subtle shifts in its magnetic field, but in vain; none of its signals were recognized for what they were. It has since tried to tap into their computer networks, but all of them are heavily shielded against electro-magnetic interference, and so far this has stymied its efforts.

For decades it has waited for its creators to respond to the signals it sends out, watching with its magnetic sensors as the settlers scratched its surface with their machines. The computer has no knowledge of who its creators were, or how long it has been since its mission began, so it doesn't know when to expect such a response. But now the mining operations have delved deep enough that there is a danger of damage to the computer's circuits, and it has decided to defend itself. The accidents suffered by Nearspace and HHI were caused by the computer, burning out some of its less vital components in an effort to destroy tunnels and discourage further exploration. It is determined to continue this tactic until the humans leave.

If the computer manages to cause enough damage in the right places, it may breach the shielding on the companies' computer networks, and this might finally allow it to communicate with the settlers. If so, it will probably demand that they cease their excavations immediately, threatening further violence against their operations and the computer networks if they refuse.

Prominent NPCs

Professor Edward Quinn

The middle-aged Professor Quinn is mocked by his peers for his crazy theories about the existence of geological computers. He hopes to prove his theories on 307 Ahearn. Armed with a research grant and theoretical models based on Stonehenge, Quinn is trying to persuade HHI to give him access to its excavations. He wants to do a complete magnetic survey of the asteroid, and study shifts in its magnetic field. Quinn's theories aren't really very well thought out, and it's chiefly dumb luck that he's on the right track.

Jana Voronin

As head of security for the Morgan Collective, Jana Voronin is under increasing pressure to keep the company's security forces up to the same standards as its competitors. If violence breaks out between HHI and Nearspace, the Morgan Collective doesn't want to be caught in the middle. At the behest of the company's management, Voronin is currently supervising a regime of constant equipment upgrades and training programs, which are putting considerable strain on her subordinates. This can't go on forever. If the miniature arms race on 307 Ahearn doesn't slow down soon, it might lead to a coup by the Morgan Collective's security forces against the management.

George J. Harlan

Son of the wealthiest man in the system, heir to a vast fortune, and head of the largest mining concern on 307 Ahearn, George James Harlan has his place in the system's history assured. Born into luxury, George J. was given control of HHI on his 21st birthday, and since then he has demonstrated exceptional business acumen in his running of the company. His autocratic management style has earned him many critics, but his benevolent treatment of employees has won their loyalty.

Story Seeds

- The PCs arrive on 307 Ahearn as part of Prof. Quinn's research team. Such a team is likely to include individuals with a variety of different skills. They may face resistance from the corporate bureaucracy, as well as some minor hostility from the miners. Once Quinn's experiments start to show some successes, the PCs might be asked to protect him and his research from other interests on the asteroid.
- Directed by some law enforcement body whose jurisdiction does not cover 307 Ahearn, the heroes are sent to

track down and apprehend a criminal who has taken refuge on the asteroid. Local authorities might not like them snooping around, and if they discover the characters' mission, might actively oppose them. The asteroid is corporate property, after all. The fugitive may have found sanctuary among the small criminal underworld, or even with one of the corporations. And even after the characters locate their quarry, they'll have a hard time getting them off the rock without attracting attention.

- The continual mining accidents and accusations of sabotage spark a corporate war between HHI and Nearspace. Driven by self-preservation, and the hope that war could drive out the mining operations, the computer comes down on one side of the conflict, doing everything it can to impede their opponents' operations. Both corporations discover the computer and its involvement in their fight, and this makes it a target to one and an asset to the other. The heroes are working for one of the corporations, and will have to defend or destroy the computer. But can it be destroyed without destroying the asteroid itself?

Having Faith

Easy Tricks for Playing Religious Characters

by Bob Portnell

"Okay, two fighters, a ranger, a thief and a magic-user. Oh, you're a new player? Here's a cleric for you, have fun."

It's a cliché and a tired one: Give the new player the passive priest. It's a nice, safe, dull role and lets the newbie be useful after the real fun (a.k.a. the fighting) is done (usually in the form of healing or revivification activities).

Don't let it happen to you! A little advance thought will pump pizzazz into clerical characters. We're not talking about creating religions, though that's not a bad idea if you have time. [GURPS Religion](#) has terrific information on creating religions from the unformed ether up. But all we need are a few drop-in features to render the character recognizable and believable as a person of faith. Let's work from three separate approaches: appearance, expression and activity . . . or "see, say and do."

See

Religious persons often wear distinctive apparel which identifies them as faithful. Familiar real world examples include hats and head caps, special collars, head scarves, turbans, distinctive robes, special underwear . . . the opportunities are endless. Don't forget other aspects of appearance, too: Your cleric might be required to wear a specific design of face-paint or to have the web between thumb and forefinger pierced and golden hoops installed.

Include the appropriate attire in your character description for whatever faith (real or fictional) he holds to.

Props also come under the category of "See." The most common clerical prop is a staff, which might have distinctive carvings, or a special headpiece which does double-duty as a laser pointer, or simply be a stick. Other props could be as basic as a holy icon gripped fervently or as complicated as a portable shrine which must be carried on your back at all times when not in use. Be creative.

This has benefits and drawbacks to the character, of course. If one is immediately recognizable as a cleric of a sect known for its charity work, one might be pursued by the needy in every village. In the extreme case, obvious adherents of a discredited or despised religion might face much worse than impoverished supplicants. And you thought necromancers had it tough.

Say

The mouths of religious characters in fiction always seem ready with a situationally-appropriate quote or parable. (Or, sometimes, comically inappropriate.) Take some time to prepare a few of these. Pay special attention to one or two favorite exclamations: "By Odin's Eye!" or "Mihrimah Preserve" can rapidly become a character's signature line and help to keep the character vigorously on-stage and not shuffled to the back of the group.

There's no need to write a new book of scripture for your character. However, giving some thought to what he and his religion stand for will suggest the ways he'll respond in a variety of situations. Don't forget hymns! Music is intimately related to devotion. Again, there's no need to actually write any songs of praise, but if the spirit so moves you . . .

Do

Perhaps the meatiest territory is that of ritual. Many faiths have a daily ritual for reaffirming one's devotion and other

periodic observances as well. This might be as simple as a prayer at a specific time of day. It might be as involved as an elaborate code of dietary restrictions ("Roc? Sorry, unclean.") or a complicated and involved dance. Don't forget gestures! From a simple handsign to a carefully calculated bow to the way you clasp your hands together in beseechment, a gesture can be just as compact and potent an identifier as a signature quote.

These can serve to provide interesting in-party interaction as well. Consider the character who refuses to enter the Dungeon of d'Speer The Toad . . . because it's a holy day, no smiting allowed. What wonderful scenes emerge as the other adventurers plead, cajole, and threaten! Does he yield, marring his soul? Does the group leave him behind? Some parties might brave the Dungeon anyway . . . others might choose to wait.

Resources

As mentioned, **GURPS Religion** is *the* place to start if you are creating a religion, and it has nifty rules for clerical spellcasting to boot. If you are researching existing faiths, [Beliefnet](#) is a terrific source of facts, beliefs, holy texts for free, and discussion. The standard text outlining the 10 major current faiths is *The World's Religions* by Huston Smith, available at most bookstores.

If your character is into singing the praises, [The Cyber Hymnal](#) can be a source of inspiration. It focuses heavily on Christian song, but you can get a flavor for the language used in hymns. For another point of view, Washington State University hosts a page of hymns from the [Rig Veda](#), the "most fundamental" of the Indian holy texts.

Roman Catholic garments, from the Pope to the choir boy, are described at <http://www.ghg.net/shetler/catholic/vestments/>. At another site, [Ken Collins](#) thoroughly describes most of the clerical attire of Western tradition. Eastern and Asian traditions are less centralized in their vestments; seek information regarding the specific belief system in which you are interested.

Amen

Remember: The idea is to have fun, not make fun. Playing the Impressive Clergyman is all well and good, unless you hurt the feelings of one of your friends with your portrayal of his faith. It's probably safest to stick to fictional religions when you can, and when you can't, choose a religion that you won't be inclined to parody. Remember, too, that if you're playing a character of your own religion, you're there to play, not to convert your fellow players. Save your serious discussions for after game time.

Why go to all this bother? Because every character, even a neglected cleric, deserves a chance to shine in his own personal way. Because that makes better, more believable, and more entertaining characters. Because *that* makes a more believable, more entertaining world of play. And because *that* makes more fun. And that's what games are all about.

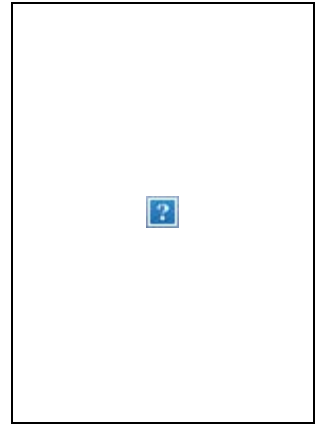
Pyramid Pick

Nodwick: The Card Game

Published by [Jolly Roger Games](#)

Designed by Frank Branham

Artwork and Graphic Design by Aaron Williams



105 full-color playing cards, sand timer, comic booklet; \$18.00

This industry is becoming thick with game-based cartoon strips -- *Dork Tower*, *PvP*, *Knights of the Dinner Table* -- and the trade reciprocates the attention by turning all of them into games. Aaron Williams' strip *Nodwick*, about a beleaguered henchman continually being killed and resurrected by a less-than-canny group of fantasy fortune-hunters, now gets the nod in a fast-paced card game from Jolly Roger Games.

Unlike some license-based games, ***Nodwick: The Card Game*** is dead-on (so to speak) in linking the game to its source material. It's the annual Hench Games (inside the box the game is called ***Nodwick: Henchgames*** for those fans of the strip), and adventuring groups from all over gather to match wits and skills in various contests that invariably end in the death of one or more henchmen. So Piffany, the tireless party cleric, whips out her trusty duct tape and goes about trying to stick Nodwick and his put-upon guild pals together again.

Alas, kind-hearted though she may be, Piffany isn't all that particular about reassembling the pieces. So long as each henchman has six parts -- arms, legs, torso, head, spleen, and spirit -- she's happy. They don't even have to be the right six parts from a single lackey.

The object of the game is to be the first to reconstruct a Henchman. Cards are of two types: Henchparts and Piffany cards. There are 48 Henchpart cards (which came, six each, from the eight contestants in the Games), all color coded: Hoffwick pieces are all one color, Erdwick another, etc. Piffany cards are the components the cleric uses to work her voodoo: Rose-Colored Glasses, Good Thoughts, and other bits of esoteric mysticism. Her cards all have a number on them to tell you how many of those cards are in the deck, and each type of Piffany has a symbol associated with it.

Each Henchpart has a cost to get it into play; for example, you may have to play a Staff of Harmony card and a Life Force Kick-Start to get a pair of arms for your rebuilt body. Symbols matching the required Piffany cards run along the left side of the card. This cost isn't always uniform; getting, say, Nitwick's spleen out of your hand and onto the table has a different cost from that of Zagwick's spleen. Complicating things further, the game runs in real time; there are no turns, so your plays are a function of your response time and the mix of cards in your hand.

Although you start with six cards, you're going to need more, and the lack of turns means no drawing from the deck regularly as in most games. To get or change cards, you must trade with other players, discard matches in exchange for draws, earn them by playing a Henchpart, or pass the sand timer.

The timer gets passed around throughout the game. When it's passed to you, you must flip it over. If you pass it on again before time runs out, you may draw a card. If the sand runs out on you, you must pass the timer but you lose the chance to get that precious card. Since the timer is flipped every time it passes to the next player, it's easy to go from a timer full of sand to a timer that's nearly empty -- something you may not even notice while negotiating a trade and trying to build a Henchman.

Once a set number of people have completed their Henchmen, everyone else tries to finish what they can with what

they have on hand before the sand runs out one last time. At that point, scores are totaled. You get points for finishing first, for each Piffany card it took to heal your Henchman, and for building your Henchman out of one color. The high score is the winner (though the Henchmen might not see it that way).

The game isn't as distressing as it sounds; it's far, far worse, in a way text can't convey . . . but all in a good way. It'll take more than one pass with the rules to get acclimated to the nerve-wracking play, but within this exasperating exercise is a sweaty-palmed good time. Learning how to put Henchmen together while coming apart yourself is part of the fun. Games can be as quick as 15 minutes, so you can shove several rounds into a single evening . . . and you'll want to do just that because now you know what mistakes you made, and this time you're sure you'll be a little more attentive about the timer, and if you trade in pairs faster this go-round . . .

If you're basing a game on Aaron Williams' comic strip, the best man for the art job is Mr. Williams himself. He has ported his delightful, darling little figures -- Nodwick and Piffany, anyway -- to the game, and his design of the sturdy cards is terrific. It's a little awkward arranging your hand so you can see what Henchparts cards require which Piffanies, but this is less from the design work and more because you've got several other things on your mind. Williams has also provided buyers with an enjoyable, all-new eight-page Nodwick story that sets both the mood and the back story for the game.

For those who like the madness of games like **Brawl** but want to add a level of player interaction, a lighter tone, and a whole lot more laughter, Jolly Roger Games has provided it in spades with **Nodwick: The Card Game**.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Survival of the Fittest (for *Shadowrun RPG*)

Published by [FanPro LLC](#)

Written by Stephen Kenson

Illustrated by Andy Brase, Eric Desideriu, Marko Djurdjevic, Steve Ellis, Tom Fowler, Mike Grills, Chris Lewis, Klaus Scherwinski, Kevin Wasden, and Anthony Waters

128-page softcover; \$24.99

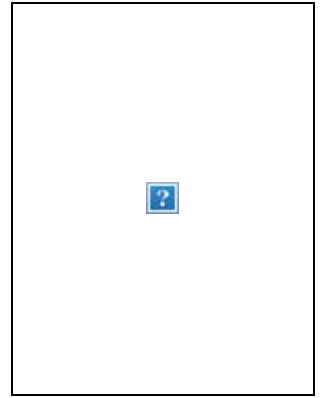
In *Shadowrun*, the best advice you can have is to "Remember to watch your back, conserve ammo, and never, ever, cut a deal with a dragon." But players being players (or rather, players being shadow runners), sooner or later as their careers progress and their professional reputations grow, they are going to come to the attention of the dragons . . . or at least to those dragons who take an interest in the affairs and doings of the younger races: Elves, Dwarves, Humans, Orcs, Trolls, and so on. So what happens if the players have to deal with some of the Sixth World's most powerful and knowledgeable beings? This is a question answered in *Survival of the Fittest*, the latest campaign book for *Shadowrun*. Not only does it involve the characters in the affairs of dragons, it also continues the story and plotlines begun with the last Will and Testament of Dunkelzahn, the dragon elected to the presidency of UCAS in 2057 who was then assassinated shortly thereafter . . .

That *Survival of the Fittest* involves dragons and Dunkelzahn's will means two things. First, this is not a campaign for the inexperienced *Shadowrun* GM or player. This is not to say that they will not enjoy playing this campaign, but rather that long-term players will get the most out of *Survival of the Fittest* as secrets are revealed and plotlines resolved. Second, a long list of previously published sourcebooks needs to be at hand if the GM is to take advantage of everything in the campaign. *Survival of the Fittest* itself needs . . .

- [Year of the Comet](#) and [Shadows of North America](#) for the current state of play of the world in 2062.
- *Magic in the Shadows*, as several of the adventures in *Survival of the Fittest* involve very powerful magical forces. Additionally, *State of the Art: 2063* also provides detail on the art of geomancy that plays a part in one of the adventures, but is only optional.

The following expand upon various aspects of the adventures, but should be considered as still being optional:

- [Threats 2](#) and the *Critters* sourcebook for a detailed look at some of the foes and things the characters will have to face. In addition, the *Critters* sourcebook will provide more of these to throw at the players if the GM wants to increase the difficulty of the adventures.
- [Target: Wastelands](#) and *Target: Smuggler Havens* for more information on some of the locales in *Survival of the Fittest*.
- *Corporate Download* for profiles of some of the corporations the characters may find them making runs against, while *Corporal Punishment* includes the adventure, "Legacy," which can be seen as a prequel to one of the adventures in this campaign and enhances this campaign if played beforehand.
- Penultimately, those GMs possessing second edition material for *Shadowrun* might like to have a copy of *Portfolio of a Dragon: Dunkelzahn's Secrets* on hand, though a copy of Dunkelzahn's will can be found on the official *Shadowrun* [website](#).
- Finally, the forthcoming supplement, *Dragons of the Sixth World*, may provide more information about those



involved in ***Survival of the Fittest*** and their motives. Thankfully, there is enough information provide for the GM to cover most eventualities.

This is a lengthy list of prerequisites, and it seems to get longer with each new release for ***Shadowrun. Survival of the Fittest's*** production values are up to FanPro's usual standards, though the overall quality of the artwork is an improvement. In particular, the illustrations of the dragon Rhonabwy and his minions possess a style and feel that is creepy and majestic at the same time.

Survival of the Fittest is structured in eight parts. The first of these is an overview and introduction to the campaign itself, followed by the seven parts of the campaign. These are prefaced and appended by two pieces of fiction that add a fair bit of flavor to the campaign for the GM. The first and last have to be played in that order, but the middle five can be run in any order.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The plot to ***Survival of the Fittest*** centers on which dragon should succeed Dunkelzahn as the Loremaster of the dragons of the Sixth World. Whoever is Loremaster holds the Jewel of Memory, an artifact important to the dragons; in his will, Dunkelzahn left it to Lofwyr, the draconic head of the German-based Saeder-Krupp Corporation. This is at odds with draconic law and tradition, which demands that upon the death of the previous incumbent, the position of Loremaster is contested for through the Rite of Succession. Now that the dragon, Ghostwalker, has returned to claim his old lair in what are now Denver and the Front Range Free Zone, he openly challenges Lofwyr and initiates the rite. By the terms of the Rite, the dragons cannot openly attack one or work against each other, but may play out the ritual via proxies and agents. (No prizes for guessing who these agents and proxies might be . . .)

The campaign opens with "Knowledge," which takes the runners into the North of the California Free State and up Mount Shasta, which happens to be the lair of Hestaby. Once there, they must download a data file and get back down the mountain. This is the most straightforward of the runs in ***Survival of the Fittest*** and in truth this is just a test of the runners' abilities conducted by their employer. If happy with their performance, the campaign proceeds apace. "Cunning" sends them to Denver to "extract" (kidnap) the leader of a splinter faction of the Children of the Dragon, a church that holds that Ghostwalker actually is a reincarnation of Dunkelzahn.

"Elements" is a simple delivery job . . . via New Orleans, across the Caribbean and then up the Amazon into the Awakened Nation of Amazonia. What they are delivering is a crate containing the Scrolls of Ak'le'ar, previously seen in "Legacy" from ***Corporal Punishment***. Another extraction job is needed in "Balance," an adventure that gets the characters to Hong Kong, then Vladivostok, and back again for a spot of interior decorating -- ninja style!

Wales is the destination in "Hunting," for another run at a dragon's lair and out again with an item. Unfortunately for the characters, the tables get turned around and they will find themselves as the hunted. Getting out will be harder than getting in. Locating another of Dunkelzahn's bequests finds the characters in the ruins of a city destroyed by a dragon; 40 years before, the Ayatollah declared a Holy War against the Awakened. In response, the dragon Aden razed the city to the ground. Now all that is left is a war zone, through which the runners must travel while having to contend with the current population of ghouls, wraiths, mercenaries, ghosts, and their Shedim-occupied bodies. This is the least straightforward of any adventure in ***Survival of the Fittest*** and its freeform structure will need careful handling by the GM to run.

The final part of the campaign is when the characters get to find out what is really on, and who their employer really is. As odd as Tehran was in "Rest," things get a whole weirder in "Lore" (or "Memory" as it is given in the introduction). While the runners cannot necessarily grab the Jewel of Memory while it remains in the possession of Lofwyr -- though if they are good enough, making a run against the Saeder-Krupp headquarters is an *option* -- they can at least try for its essence. The only problem is that it lies deep within the Metaplanes. Getting into the planes past the Dweller on the Threshold is a test in itself; once past, there is a multitude of tests to face before they get their hands on the essence of Jewel of Memory. Even if they do, its current owner will make them an offer of anything (and Lofwyr really does mean *anything*) that they want. A billion Nuyen? A shot at the presidency of UCAS? The best delta-grade cyberware money can buy? Their own private island? And these are just the suggested possibilities . . . If

they do turn this offer down, the runners will have earned an enemy for life, but if they accept it, they will have betrayed their employer *and* besmirched their professional reputation for life . . . Either way, they get to deliver the Jewel, and actually play a tiny part in the Rite of Succession.

Whatever the outcome of the Rite, the players have the chance to alter the balance of power between the traditionalist and progressive dragons. Along the way, these high-powered adventures can earn them over a million Nuyen!

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Besides these seven adventures, there are plenty of suggestions for the GM to add more challenges and advice on how to run each adventure. One problem is that the various runs do feel a little similar in that the characters have to go there and do this, again and again. Yet that is the nature of *Shadowrun*, and while *Survival of the Fittest* can be run as a campaign of one adventure after another, to get the best out of it, it should be leavened with scenarios of the GM's own creation. Alternatively, since the events of *Survival of the Fittest* take place sometime between mid-2062 and early-2063, some of these could come from [Wake of the Comet](#). That said, this only provides three more adventures and the GM will need to add more.

Survival of the Fittest is really for the more experienced *Shadowrun* GM and players alike, as they will definitely get the most out of this campaign. They really do have the opportunity to affect the ongoing events of the Sixth World and face a dragon or two . . . although not literally, as the end result would be too much "snap, crackle, and pop" before needing to create a new character. Still, the campaign provides opportunities for the characters to interact with dragons and live to tell the tale, which goes to show that *Shadowrun's* best advice is not always right.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Exalted: The Lunars (for Exalted RPG)

Published by [White Wolf Publishing](#)

Written by Bryan Armor, Chris Hartford, James Kiley, Malcolm Sheppard, Ethan Skemp, and Scott Taylor

Edited by John Chambers

256-page b&w hardcover; \$29.95

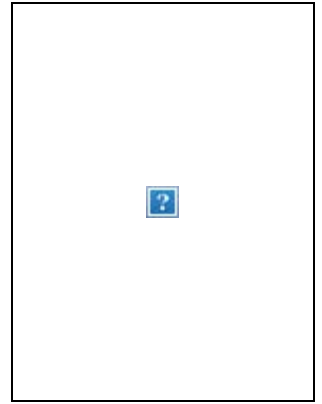
Exalted: The Lunars is the third hardback release for White Wolf's ***Exalted*** game line of anime high fantasy. After the success and strength of two previous hardbacks, the main book and one covering the Dragon-Blooded, it seemed inevitable that the line stumble. This book is that stumble. ***The Lunars*** just isn't as good as its predecessors. After strong releases for the game over its first year, the first major release of its second year proves the line's lost a little steam.

The book itself looks like the other hardbacks of the line, and following the trend set by the other hardbacks, the inside covers sport a full-color (or in this case, sepia-tone) map, this time one of Creation with the names of all of the significant barbarian tribes marked on their piece of the geography. A nice touch is the runic translations of the tribe names underneath the English versions. Sadly, as with the Asian-style characters of the Realm displayed in all of the ***Exalted*** books, no alphabet or translation guide is provided for these runic characters that crop up throughout the book, which precludes any use of the language other than repeating the given tribe names.

Perhaps the most obviously dismaying thing about the book for fans of the line is its price tag. It is the same as the other hardbacks, but this book has over one hundred pages less than the main book. This is felt more keenly since it has roughly the same number of pages devoted to Charms as the main book, which means a lot less space for setting and background information on the Lunars.

Exacerbating this are the vignettes. On the one hand, they provide a narrative picture of the world of ***Exalted*** in a way that no factual recitation can, and describe something of the diversity and atmosphere of the setting, while furthering the game's metaplot elements. These make for good reading, particularly if you like any of the signature characters, several of whom make appearances; but this time the stories are an overall drawback by encroaching on the regular text. Readers of White Wolf's hardbacks will be used to vignettes to introduce the book as a whole and each chapter in particular, but many will be dismayed to see an additional two pages of fiction at the beginning of Chapter 2. For a book already low on page count for its cost, it seemed a poor choice to devote more than a dozen pages to material unlikely to provide practical use or be read more than once.

Contrariwise, the rest of the book is sadly lacking any fictional material -- histories, prophecies, poems, or laws -- to create depth for the Lunar and barbarian cultures. This is especially telling in the second chapter, where the few pages devoted to the Silver Way, the conduct code of the Lunar Exalted that is mimicked by the barbarian tribes, are presented coldly and factually. It is a missed opportunity, as they could have been written as a formal code with commentaries on the interpretations of the various laws given by some of the elder members of the Silver Pact or, better still, those First Age Lunars mentioned at the end of the chapter. For a culture that relies almost exclusively on the oral tradition, the cultures themselves are presented like an anthropology text, segregated into the now-standard geography of the compass points, rather than from within the culture itself or competing tribes.



The body of the book itself is divided into the usual chapters for a White Wolf hardback: an introduction, a setting chapter, a chapter on the Lunars, three character creation chapters, and a storytelling chapter. The extra chapter this time covers the Wyld.

The setting chapter covers barbarian culture, which is similar to (but not the same as) Lunar culture, and contains a laundry list of most of the tribes featured on the map. This cursory examination of more than a dozen tribes could have been deeper and more thorough, especially considering (again) the overall word count of the book.

The chapter on the Lunars contains the expected information on who is chosen by Luna, how and why they Exalt, and what happens to them afterward. It also covers the Silver Pact, an inter-tribal council that promotes a straightforward "noble savage" philosophy. In addition to the requisite "what we think of the other Exalted" section, there is also a brief description of several Lunars who have survived from the First Age. Again, the chapter seems short and lacking a voice to draw the reader into the world of the Lunars, as well as feeling like it was cribbed from White Wolf's **Werewolf**. This is unsurprising, since the Lunar Exalted are possible the forerunners of the World of Darkness' changing breeds, and it may explain **Werewolf**-guru Ethan Skemp's name among the authors.

The three chapters devoted to character creation cover the usual ground, with the Charms chapter taking center stage. The Charms for Lunars are based around Attributes rather than Abilities, making the Charm cascades broader and harder to follow. Instead of Archery, Athletics, Melee, or Endurance Charms, there are groups such as Ranged Combat, Melee Combat, Defensive, Survival and Healing, and Body Enhancement Charms. Most still spring from one basic Charm, but the cascades are so large that each is divided into several charts. The confusion is enhanced by Charms referencing other Charms before you've read them, so Irresistible Storm Attack states it works like Ferocious Avalanche Technique, four pages before the latter is covered. The emphasis is strongly on combat, with less attention paid to any other type of Charm. To balance this, some combat Charms have prerequisites based on non-physical attributes, although many will find it disconcerting to find something like Twisting Monkey Wrist has a minimum Charisma requirement. The mechanics of many of the Charms are more complex than in previous releases, especially concerning initiative, and go a long way in moving the emphasis from storytelling to game.

Exacerbating the rules tendency is the chapter on the Wyld. Covered only in passing in most other **Exalted** books, the Wyld is the fluctuating chaos from beyond Creation that causes reality to mutate and plays host to the Fair Folk. A significant chapter on the Wyld might have covered **Amber**- or **Sandman**-style ideas for adventuring in these dangerous areas, but instead we are given a chapter of mundane details such as how the Wyld shifts from somewhat safe to very dangerous and what kind of mutations Wyld-affected creatures might have. If the Charms chapter didn't contain enough rules, the Wyld chapter makes up for it. Combining repetition with rules material better suited to a different book, this chapter is easily the weakest. Its inclusion in this book is understandable, as the Lunars interact with the Wyld more than any other type of Exalted, but considering the line's next release is **Creatures of the Wyld** and the likelihood of this information being reiterated in any book on the Fair Folk, the angle of rules over story advice is highly questionable.

The final chapter on Storytelling goes a long way to redeem the rest of the book. Usually a place for well-worn advice, this chapter takes a step-by-step approach to starting, sustaining, and concluding a Lunars game. It quickly and effectively covers most relevant aspects of a Lunars game, such as differentiating combat-heavy characters from one another, moving characters through the ranks of Lunar society, and how to transform a game full of powerful PCs without starting from scratch. Two sections of note are "What to Avoid," a welcome addition to standard storyteller advice, and one on incorporating other types of Exalted into a game full of Lunars and vice versa. This is the only chapter that felt just as long as it needed to be.

Worth mentioning are the spelling and grammatical mistakes rife throughout the book, with about one per page. Sadly, many of these, especially missing words, might have been caught using a grammar checker, so their appearance in the final product is unfortunate. Although it was still possible to divine meaning through context, it was jarring, and may cause more than a few disputes. The only chapter that seems free of the taint is, unsurprisingly, the stellar Storytelling chapter.

In conclusion, **Exalted: The Lunars** is a solid, if somewhat uninspiring, addition to the **Exalted** library. It lacks

substance in its background material and overcompensates with too much substance in the Charms and Wyld chapters. For gamers who want to play Lunars, or Storytellers who want to flesh out their Lunars NPCs or expect their group to encounter barbarian tribes, the book proves its worth. For the casual gamer or follower of the ***Exalted*** line, it may be worth waiting for the next hardback to redeem the line.

--*Matthew D. Gandy*

Eight Minutes Of A TV Show, A Lifetime Of Lessons

I've received a couple of queries and guesses regarding the off-handed trivial comment from two weeks ago about the origin of the (paraphrased) quote: ["He's going from town to town, looking for the two-armed man who killed that waitress."](#) Well, it's obviously a reference to the old *Fugitive* television show (where the protagonist went from town to town looking for the one-armed man), but this draws upon something further. Something stranger. Something much more . . . cancelled.

It came from a short-lived Nick-at-Nite program from the late 1980s called *On the Television*. It was Nickelodeon's first original Nick-at-Nite television series, and consisted of a review-format show, where they would show (fabricated) television programs, and two critics would review them. Fictitious shows they reviewed included *China Beach Party*, *Beauty and the Beet* (featuring a man dressed like a giant red beet), and *My Five Dads* (I can still sing the theme song to this one). They also reviewed a "show" called *Statute of Limitations*, where the protagonist was wrongly accused of killing a waitress and was on the run, looking for the two-armed man he knows *really* killed her . . . all the while trying to avoid the law until the statute of limitations ran out on the murder charge.

Thinking back, I believe this one fictitious show clip had such a profound affect on me because it signified so many things that I recognized as an early proto-writer (and later, GM). Although it may be indulgent, I'll try to convey some of them.

"You! You're the man who killed that waitress!" -- Spoken by a shop clerk who was flirting with our fugitive until he recognized him . . . despite him being a thousand miles and several months away from the scene of the crime. (It was made obvious that he's always recognized in the various new cities he goes to.)

Lesson: Avoid omniscient NPCs. For plot purposes, it's often tempting to make a character that knows *exactly* what they need to know for the plot to advance. Avoid this temptation; if you can make someone who knows what's going on organically, then by all means do so . . . but don't have secrets and plot points erupt from the earth unbidden. (And just because a character got points for that Secret disadvantage doesn't mean it needs to come up *every* adventure.)

Of course, the same lesson also applies to players; just because you know something doesn't mean your *character* does . . . and coming up with the flimsiest pretense to bring your knowledge into the game is just Bad Karma.

"The two-armed man!" -- The climactic moment of the *Statute of Limitations* episode is where the protagonist hears a rumor that the mysterious two-armed man is in town. He chases off after him, tackling him from behind . . . only to learn that the man he tackled only has one arm. Oh, well . . . maybe next episode.

Lesson: Avoid having clues or missions that are so open-ended, they might as well not even exist. (Alas, I failed to fully live up to this edict, and thus once sent my poor players on a search narrowed down to . . . um . . . [Canada](#).) Something like the "two-armed man" is essentially meaningless, as is a quest to find a specific "hidden glen," "mighty warrior," or "medium-sized asteroid."

". . . avoiding the law while waiting for the statute of limitations to expire . . ." -- Ahem. Anyone with any familiarity with the law (or at least American -- and I believe most countries' -- laws) knows that murder is one of those crimes that doesn't *have* a statute of limitations.

Lesson: Make sure the absolute basic premise of your story, adventure, or world isn't invalid on the surface. This one is tougher to adhere to than it may seem at first; all it can take is one loophole, oversight, or misstep to render a fair bit of work moot. (I note it wasn't until White Wolf's *Aberrant* game that a super-powered RPG bothered to point out there's no reason for a powered being to rob banks or steal valuable objects . . . after all, an endorsement deal with a major corporation can be worth millions, which is both legal and nets *much* more than most thefts.)

". . . This show is obviously a *Fugitive* ripoff . . ." -- One of the few weak points of the segment was after the preview, when the show focused on the critics reviewing the show. One of them made the comment that this show was

derivative of the *Fugitive*. Well, duh.

Lesson: If the point of a story/adventure/whatever is to be derivative of another story, don't acknowledge it. Thus if you're running, say, a space opera game where an obsessed captain is set on using his vessel to capture the Great White Space Amoeba, to the detriment of self and crew, it's almost certainly pointless to say (in or out of game), "Hey! This story is like *Moby Dick*!" Well, obviously . . . let's move on. Pointing out that a story is derivative is often counterproductive at best, and [breaking kayfabe](#) at worst. (Of course, if it's important to the story that the characters know in-game that a story is derivative, then it's perfectly acceptable to bring it up; thus if someone is running around an opera wearing a mask, it's probably fine to say, "It's like *Phantom of the Opera*.") As a good rule of thumb, if the story is probably going to progress like the source, there's no need to mention it. On the other hand, if there's more to the story, and there are a few twists and turns in the plot, feel free to mention the inspiration; at best, you may trip up the players on their own preconceptions.

(Of course, like so many rules, this one can be broken if you know what you're doing. For example, quoting Melville at the end of our Great White Space Amoeba adventure would be perfectly in keeping with, say, a *Star Trek* adventure. And being hipper-than-thou "Whoa! It's like we're goin' against the Death Star!" is entirely in place in a setting like ***Buffy The Vampire Slayer***.)

Yes, this fictitious little segment was *supposed* to be bad and have significant logical mistakes. But those logical mistakes were so wonderfully awful that their lessons have stuck with me even to this day.

Cable television was clearly a wonderful surrogate for friends in my adolescence.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: ***Lord of the Fries*** holiday menu, first seen as the 1998 Christmas card sent out by [Cheapass Games](#)

(two stars) "In the northern regions of the Core, just south of Darkon, there lies a tiny domain called Keening. It is shaped by the song of evil, and no living creature can find comfort there."

Steampunk Heroes 2:

Phileas Fogg -- International Man of Mystery

by CJ Beiting

"[Phileas Fogg] was an enigmatic figure about whom nothing was known, except that he was a thorough gentleman and one of the most handsome figures in the whole of high society . . . Although clearly British, Mr. Fogg might not have been a Londoner. He had never been spotted in the Stock Exchange, the Bank, or the City. The basins and docks of London had never berthed a ship for an owner called Phileas Fogg. This gentleman was not on any board of directors. His name had never rung out in a barrister's chambers . . . He was not engaged in industry, business, commerce, or agriculture . . . he was not a member of any of the associations that breed so prolifically in the capital of the United Kingdom, from the Harmonic Union to the Entomological Society . . .

"Was this Phileas Fogg well off? Without any doubt. But how he had made his fortune, even the best informed could not say. And Mr. Fogg was the last person one would have approached to find out . . . In short, the least communicative of men. He spoke as little as possible, and so seemed all the more difficult to fathom. His life was transparent, but what he did was always so mathematically the same, that one's imagination, disturbed, tried to look beyond."

--Around the World in Eighty Days, Chapter 1

Who is Phileas Fogg? British Society knows him as a gentleman of means and of fixed habit . . . and nothing more beyond that. He has no job. He has no family. He has no friends. Apart from a substantial bank account at Baring's and a membership in London's famous Reform Club, he has nothing to connect him to human society at all. Fogg is the prototypical "international man of mystery." Clearly he has a secret, but no one knows what it is. Even his surname suggests obscurity, and as for his forename, well, it's certainly not British. What could be behind those mathematically precise habits of his? Who is he, really? And what causes such a man to drop everything and gallivant around the world on the spur of the moment? In this article, we will look at several different interpretations of the mysterious Mr. Fogg from the mundane to the outré, as we, "disturbed, [try] to look beyond."

Passepartout

"You are French and are called John?"

"Jean, if sir pleases-Jean Passepartout, a nickname that has stuck with me and was first applied due to my natural ability to get out of scrapes. I consider myself an honest fellow, sir, but if truth be told, I have had several occupations."

--Around the World in Eighty Days, Chapter 1

Jean Passepartout

156 Points

Male; Age 33; 6'0"; 165 lbs.; muscular build, round facial features, ruddy complexion, brown hair (always a bit mussed), blue eyes, slightly protruding lips.

ST 13 [30]; **DX** 14 [45]; **IQ** 9 [-10]; **HT** 13 [30].

Speed 6.75; Move 6.

Dodge 6; Parry 8.

Advantages: Ally (Phileas Fogg) (151 to 200, 15 or less) [45]; Double-Jointed [5]; Sanctity [5]. **Disadvantages:** Duty

(15 or less) [-15]; Impulsiveness [-10]; Poverty (Struggling) [-10]; Sense of Duty (Phileas Fogg) [-5]; Status -1 [-5]; Weak Will -1 [-8] (Will: 8).

Quirks: Can't work for an employer he doesn't respect; Confirmed bachelor; Doesn't get sea sick; Garrulous; Prized possession: ornate pocket watch (a family heirloom). [-5].

Skills: Acrobatics-14 [4]; Acting-10 [4]; Aerial Acrobatics-15 [4]; Area Knowledge (England)-10 [2]; Area Knowledge (Paris)-10 [2]; Black Powder Weapons (Pistol)/TL5-10 [0]; Boxing-13 [1] (Parry: 8); Climbing-15 [1/2]; Cooking-10 [2]; Disguise-10 [4]; English-10 [4]; Equestrian Acrobatics-13 [2]; French (native)-11 [2]; Gymnastics-15 [1]; Professional Skill (Fireman)-12 [8]; Riding (Horse)-13 [1]; Savoir-Faire (Servant)-14 [10]; Singing-12 [1/2]; Teaching-12 [8]; Team Acrobatics-14 [0]; Tightrope Walking-15 [4]; Tumbling-14 [0].

We begin our examination of the mysterious Mr. Fogg with his decidedly un-mysterious manservant. Jean "Passepartout" (French slang for a skeleton key or a thing that "goes anywhere") led an extremely varied life before coming into Mr. Fogg's service. A Parisian born and bred, he began life as a wandering singer, and then joined a circus where he served as a trick rider, a trapeze artist, and a tightrope walker. He later taught gymnastics and served as a sergeant in the Paris Fire Brigade. Tiring of his wandering life, he left France in 1867 to seek his fortune as a manservant in England, hoping to settle down. However, he has high standards and was incapable of working for a gentleman whom he could not respect; as a result, he served in a total of 10 households before coming to Mr. Fogg in October of 1872. Initially, it seemed to Passepartout as a perfect match: Mr. Fogg was a man of mathematically regular habits, and Passepartout believed he could settle down to the quiet life at last.

Of course, he was sadly mistaken . . .

Passepartout is an interesting character. Due to his varied background, he has a wide variety of skills and very strong primary attributes; as such, he is very competent, and much more skilled than the average Victorian servant, so he counts as an Ally rather than a Dependant. He is strong, honest, and personable, and is usually well-liked by the people he meets. His only flaws are a tendency to impulsiveness and a bit of a short temper. Over the course of the novel, he begins by considering his employer a hopeless eccentric, but rapidly develops a strong Sense of Duty towards him. He and Fogg are polar opposites -- Fogg is mental, methodical, reserved, and stereotypically British; Passepartout physical, impulsive, gregarious, and stereotypically French -- but they work well together.

GMs who use **GURPS Martial Arts** might wish to replace Passepartout's Boxing skill with Savate and its maneuvers. Passepartout is by no means an accomplished martial artist, but is surprisingly good in a fistfight.

The Phileas Fogg Template

"Phileas Fogg was one of those mathematically precise people, never in a hurry but always prepared, economical with his steps and movements. He never took a pace too far and invariable found the shortest path. He never wasted glances at the ceiling. He allowed himself no unnecessary gestures. Nobody had ever seen him aroused or troubled. He was the least rushed man in the world, but always came on time."

--*Around the World in Eighty Days*, Chapter 2

Phileas Fogg

189-1/2 Points

Male; Age 40; 6'; 187 lbs.; pale complexion, fair hair worn in moustache and sideburns, splendid teeth.

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 11 [10]; **HT** 12 [20].

Speed 5.50; Move 5.

Dodge 5; Parry 4.

Advantages: Ally (Passepartout) (101 to 150, 15 or less) [30]; Appearance (Very Handsome) [25]; Independent

Income 1 [0]; Mathematical Ability [10]; Reputation +1 (Gentleman, England) [1]; Single-Minded [5]; Status 3 [10]; Unfazeable [20]; Wealth (Filthy Rich) [50].

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Gentleman's) [-10]; Compulsive Behavior (Mathematical regularity) [-10]; Compulsive Gambling (Whist) [-5]; Compulsive Generosity [-5]; Low Empathy [-15]; Secret [-10].

Quirks: Laconic; Never hurries; Prefers to let his servants sight-see for him; Spartan tastes; Uncongenial. [-5]

Skills: Accounting-13 [1/2]; Area Knowledge (World) (Travel)-14/20 [8]; Black Powder Weapons (Pistol)/TL5-6 [0]; English (native)-14 [3]; Games (Whist)-17 [12]; Knife-10 [1] (Parry: 4); Mathematics-12 [1]; Merchant-11 [8]; Meteorology/TL5-12 [4]; Musical Notation-11 [1]; Navigation/TL5-12 [6]; Sailor/TL5-14 [8]; Savoir-Faire-15 [10]; Seamanship/TL5-14 [6].

Over the course of the novel, his template will change. Midway through his journey, add the following disadvantages to his template: Dependent (Aouda) (Average, 15 or less, Friend) [-36]; Enemy (Fix) [-10] (Individual, 12 or less); Reputation -3 (Eccentric or Thief, Britain) [-5]; Sense of Duty (Aouda and Passepartout) [-5]. All of these lowers his character cost to 133-1/2 points. At the end of the novel, add the following advantages and disadvantages to his template: Reputation +3 (He did it!, Britain) [5]; Dependent (Aouda) (Average, 15 or less, Loved One) [-72]; Sense of Duty (Aouda and Passepartout) [-5]. These lowers his character cost to 117-1/2 points. It is also possible that his Compulsive Behaviors might lessen, and he may have bought off his Low Empathy; this is at the GM's discretion.

Some elements of the Phileas Fogg template require special explanations:

- His Unfazeable advantage is set at a higher than normal level not because there are a plethora of Fright Checks associated with him, but rather that the advantage is meant to be cinematic and cover more than just Fright Checks. Not only is Phileas Fogg never frightened or surprised, he never hurries, never gets mad, never gets seasick, always sleeps perfectly soundly regardless of conditions, and always manages to look fresh, even under the worst of conditions.
- One of his most obvious traits is simultaneously one of his greatest weaknesses: his Compulsion for mathematical regularity in his life. Phileas Fogg is compelled to try and regulate every single element of his life. However, given the fact that people are notoriously difficult to control, Fogg avoids them wherever possible, rendering him Uncongenial in general, and giving him a Low Empathy when trying to deal with the people he has to. Many, many times, the word "machine" is used to describe him, with good reason: he is in some ways a personification of the Victorian obsession with the mechanical and the mathematical.
- Fogg's Compulsive Gambling does not reflect an obsession with all games of chance, but only the card game whist, at which he plays under normal circumstances for several hours a night. While traveling on his round-the-world journey, he is capable of playing whist to the exclusion of all else (source of his Single Minded advantage). He is a good enough player to win most of the time, but always gives his winnings away to the poor.
- His Area Knowledge (World) is divided into the specialization of travel. The first skill reflects a general knowledge of current events in any portion of the world, and can substitute for a Politics, History, etc. roll. The specialization reflects a knowledge of travel, at which Fogg was so skilled that his peers in the Reform Club suspected him of having second sight.
- No Contacts have been added to this template, but the GM can assume that Fogg can access to a number of the famous liberal politicians and figures of his day through his membership in the prestigious Reform Club. Note that the words "can have" are used: Fogg does not casually socialize at his club except with his usual group of whist players.
- Fogg has a secret: who he is, and where he obtained his fortune. This can change depending on how one views different incarnations of Phileas Fogg.

On first glance, there appears to be little to Mr. Phileas Fogg. All he seems to do with his life is read newspapers at the Reform Club and play whist there with a select group of fellow enthusiasts. He spends very little time at home, a fine but Spartan house at No. 7, Savile Row. Every aspect of his personal life is mathematically regulated: The times of day in which he acts are specified, the clothes in his wardrobe are numbered, and even the number of steps he takes appear to be calculated. Apart from a manservant, he interacts with no one outside his Club. His routine and life are precise

and unvarying, and Society knows that he has not left London in at least five years.

These factors combined made the events of the evening of Wednesday, October 2nd, 1872 all the more surprising. Over a game of whist at the Reform Club, Mr. Fogg not only maintained that a person could travel around the world in eighty days, but also accepted a wager to do so, and left that very evening, with no advanced planning or forethought . . . indeed, with nothing but his manservant, a small valise, and a large pile of banknotes.

All Britain was stunned by his plan, and he was a media darling in the newspapers for a short time until news of the robbery of the Bank of England came to light; public opinion made Fogg out to be the culprit, and Police Inspector Fix set out to apprehend him. Fogg's journey was in a number of stages: first, from London to Suez by train, passing through Paris, Turin, and Brindisi, and then via the steamship *Mongolia* to Suez. After that, by steamship to Bombay, with the intention of traveling the Great Peninsular Railway across India to Calcutta. Uncompleted track line near Bundelkhand forced him to travel (by elephant!) to the next stage of the line, rescuing the Parsee widow Aouda on the way. After reaching Calcutta by train, he traveled via the steamship *Rangoon* to Singapore and then Hong Kong, where storms delayed his expected connection to Japan. Interference on the part of police Inspector Fix sent Passepartout ahead to Yokohama alone via the steamship *Carnatic*; Fogg and Aouda attempted to make the journey by chartering the yacht *Tankadère*, but bad weather routed them back to Shanghai, where they were luckily able to rendezvous early with the steamship *General Grant*, connecting with Yokohama for San Francisco. Collecting Passepartout in Yokohama, Fogg took the *General Grant* to San Francisco, and set off on the Pacific Railroad for New York. An ambush by Sioux Indians forced a stop at Kearney, Nebraska, and Fogg had to catch up with the train by traveling via ice schooner to Omaha, traveling from there via train to New York.

Again missing his connection, he again chartered a ship, the steamer *Henrietta*, scheduled to go to Bordeaux. A swift mutiny engineered by Fogg's fortune redirected the steamer to Liverpool, but a shortage of fuel forced the crew to burn the wood fittings and decks of the *Henrietta* to get them as far as Queenstown, Ireland. A fast ferry took Fogg from Queenstown to Liverpool, where an attempt to clear his name in court caused him to miss his train to London in time to make his bet. Silently dejected, he returned home, penniless. The sudden decision to marry Aouda and find a parson to perform the ceremony at once caused him to realize that by traveling east and crossing the International Date Line he had actually gained a calendar day, so that his 81-day journey only took 80 days; thus the day was December 21st, and not December 22nd, as he thought. He won his wager, which merely replaced but did not add to his fortune, leaving him with nothing to show for his troubles but the fame of his exploits and a beautiful new wife.

Fogg's journey certainly has its mysterious elements. Why would a man of unvarying habit suddenly attempt such a rash course of action with no planning? Furthermore, why would he make such a journey at the beginning of winter, when bad weather was certain to slow him down at points (as, indeed, it did)? Can his actions have signified something more? It is odd that both in the Old World and the New, his journey is nearly ended by attacks by Indians. Furthermore, it is very clear that Fogg himself changes as a result of his journey: he moves from being willing to abandon Passepartout in Bombay to possible jail time for profaning a Hindu temple, to risking his journey and his life recapturing Passepartout from a Sioux war band in Nebraska. Aouda also effects great change in him; in her company, he stops to see the cities he heretofore ignored, and it is very clear that she inspires in him a quality he previously did not display-spontaneity. On one level, Fogg's journey is not a journey at all; it is an awakening. But of what sort?

What Fogg's secret is, what his identity really is, and what the true significance of his journey is depends on the degree of fabulousness one looks at him through. Let us take a look at Mr. Fogg, through a number of different lenses.

Option 1: Victorian Fogg

"And that was how Phileas Fogg commanded in place of Captain Speedy, locked into his cabin, and why the *Henrietta* was at last heading for Liverpool. It was obvious, on seeing Mr. Fogg maneuver, that he had been a sailor before."
--*Around the World in Eighty Days*, Chapter 33

Victorian Fogg has a terrible secret: he is not a gentleman at all, and is living an elaborate lie. He is, in fact, a sailor who somehow struck it rich, changed his identity, and retired to London to live the life of a gentleman. The details of Fogg's nautical career and source of wealth are up to the GM: Fogg may have made his fortune through the still

somewhat socially-unacceptable (for a gentleman, anyway) venue of maritime trade, he may have found some buried treasure during a nautical voyage, or he may have engaged in something more sinister. Fogg's mathematical precision of life is an elaborate attempt to maintain his charade: by keeping a regular life and avoiding contact with people as much as possible, his chances of discovery are greatly minimized. Victorian Fogg is the "default" version of the Fogg template, and provides a ready explanation for the events of Verne's novel. His journey is not a mysterious one at all: it is a sincere wager on the part of an experienced traveler to prove a point. In practical effect, the journey around the world causes the normally rigid Fogg to relax and become more human, discovering compassion for his fellow man (in the person of Passepartout) and the pleasures of married love; indeed, it ends with the marital bliss of the honeymoon bedchamber. Fogg gains nothing financially, but ends up with "a lovely wife who -- however unlikely it may seem -- made him the happiest of men!"

Using Victorian Fogg in A Campaign

Victorian Fogg is one of the easiest and hardest lenses to use: easy because he is simple, hard because he is so connected to his journey and his own self-awakening. On one level, he can be used as a cameo for a Victorian-era game, to amuse and interest the players as he passes through. Alternatively, players in dire straits in foreign lands in a Victorian game may join his entourage; as his journey goes on, Fogg is quite willing to help other travelers in distress and bring them along with him, usually free of charge. GMs who want to have players travel with Fogg have a chance to use an interesting variety of historical **GURPS** supplements: for England, **GURPS Steampunk** or **Horror**; for India, the forthcoming **GURPS India**; for Singapore and Hong Kong, **GURPS China**; for Yokohama, **GURPS Japan**; and for America, **GURPS Old West**. In using this lens, GMs should remember that although Mr. Fogg and his people are quite willing to fight when necessary, they do not have much in the way of combat skills, and tend to survive their battles in the novel via luck and being in the company of more experienced fighters.

Option 2: Espionage Fogg

"Do you know, Mr. Passepartout, that this so-called journey in 80 days might easily be the cover for some secret assignment . . . a diplomatic mission, for example?"

--*Around the World in Eighty Days*, Chapter 9

Espionage Fogg has a terrible secret: he is actually a spy. What kind of spy depends on the GM. His carefully controlled life is a cover for his activities. If Fogg is working for a foreign power, he is actually probably working in intelligence gathering. Careful, regular perusal of a nation's daily newspapers is a valuable espionage method even today, and more so in 1872, however unexciting such a life might seem to the modern reader. In addition, by keeping quiet and listening, Fogg doubtless overhears a lot of the conversations that go on in the Reform Club, which can give his Foreign Masters valuable intelligence about the state of British politics. If Fogg is working as an agent for the Crown, his constant readings may be intelligence analysis as well. In either case, his trip around the world is not spontaneous: it is carefully planned in advance (why else would he happen to have £20,000 pounds in cash lying about the house?). He may travel to relay information to his Foreign Masters (isn't it interesting that the on the very day he takes on a French "servant" he leaves for France?), in whatever country they work in or have agents in. He also may be traveling to accomplish a mission; in Philip José Farmer's retelling of the story, Fogg and Passepartout are secret agents who, among other things, are traveling to rescue a fellow operative (Aouda); Mr. Fix is an agent from a rival power trying to neutralize them.

If using Espionage Fogg, modify the Phileas Fogg template as follows: Add an Alternate Identity and Patron (Agency) advantages. Add the Duty (Agency) disadvantage, and raise his Secret to [-20]. Add the skills Acting, Intelligence Analysis, Research, and an alternate Native Language if necessary.

Using Espionage Fogg in A Campaign

Espionage Fogg is a good option for a wilder **GURPS Steampunk** campaign. He is particularly well suited for a **GURPS Castle Falkenstein** campaign; simply choose any one of the numerous factions in that world, and plug him right in. Fogg does not display much evidence of magic in the novel, though, so it is unwise to give him any. For the

GM who is willing to take more liberties with the characters, the television series *The Secret Adventures of Jules Verne* can provide valuable inspiration.

Note that a specialized version of Espionage Fogg is Time Travel Fogg. In this version, Fogg is not so much a spy as a field historian, carefully examining a variety of valuable primary source documents (newspapers) that are presumably unavailable in his far future era. His compulsive mathematical regularity of behavior is an attempt to avoid the problems of plastic time (see *GURPS Time Travel*, p. 40) -- Fogg tries to avoid changing his future history by interacting with the Victorian era and Victorian people as little as possible, barring a few games of whist and some largely anonymous charitable donations of the money he can't take back with him anyway. Why Time Travel Fogg would break routine to travel around the world is up to the GM to decide. Perhaps it is an attempt to send a signal to his superiors in the future: for a time, his name appeared in all of the London newspapers, and by changing Victorian history Time Travel Fogg might alter the fragmentary historical records that survive in his future era. This might possibly be a message, a warning, or a retrieval request. Explaining his new wife Aouda to his superiors might take some doing, although Fogg might argue that since she was supposed to die in Bundelkhand in October of 1872 there is no risk of damage to the timeline . . . as long as she travels up-time with him, of course!

For this version of Fogg, add Eidetic Memory 2 (since he shows no evidence of any high-tech recording devices in his house), and the skills of Anthropology, Research, and History (specialization, Victorian, of course), plus whatever high-tech skills from his own time he needs.

Option 3: Screampunk Fogg

"He was said to look like Byron. . .but a mustachioed and bewhiskered Byron, one who might have lived for a thousand years without ever growing old."
--*Around the World in Eighty Days*, Chapter 1

In 181-, a man of mystery descended upon London Society. He was clearly a gentleman and man of means, but no one knew where he came from. In appearance he was very handsome, with Byronic looks, pale skin, and fine teeth. He was compulsively generous, and gave large sums of money to people. He also played cards obsessively. In personality he was curiously restrained, and had a closed, even diffident manner that some people found attractive rather than off-putting. Later, he left London abruptly and went on a long journey to the Continent and points east.

His name was Lord Ruthven, and he was a vampyre.

Not content with being alone in his immortal state, Ruthven eventually sought a companion. Aubrey, his first traveling companion, proved unsuitable for the gift of immortality, but in his journeys he later found a sailor who seemed admirable for his purposes . . .

Screampunk Fogg has a terrible secret: he is one of the undead, the spawn of the infamous vampyre Lord Ruthven. Ruthven sired him with the intention of creating a partner for his debaucheries, and in that, he was singularly unsuccessful. Although both men were very similar in temperament, Fogg held on to more of his humanity than did Ruthven. So while Ruthven gave out lavish charity to the unstable in order to ruin them, Fogg gives it sincerely to the needy to help them. While Ruthven plays cards (faro, in his case) to bankrupt people, Fogg plays for simple enjoyment of the game. While Ruthven was a notorious seducer and ruiner of women, Fogg avoids the company of women, and, indeed, of most people, entirely. He feeds infrequently and discretely, and otherwise carries on an entirely normal death-in-life.

Using Screampunk Fogg in A Campaign

To use screampunk Fogg, add the following overlay to the Phileas Fogg template:

Vampyre package: ST +10 [110]; HT +5 [60]; Bite [30]; Single-minded [5]; Unaging [15]; Unfazeable [20]; Vampiric Resurrection (Limitation: needs moonlight, -30%) [105]; Compulsive Behavior [-10]; Dependency (blood,

monthly) [-10]; Frightens Animals [-5]; Low Empathy [-15]; No Body Heat [-1]; Pallor [-5]; Secret [-30]; Social Stigma (dead) [-20]; Sterile [-3]; Uncongenial [-1]. Total package cost is 245; 266 if applied to the Fogg template, above.

Phileas Fogg is *dead*. That point should be stressed above all else. Whatever else he was before, by 1872 he is a shadow of a living being. The dead vampyre mind requires something to keep it functioning, or it falls into ghostlike state of automatic habits and behavior patterns; a series of compulsive behaviors that are a kind of death for the undead. This compulsive nature is why vampires in folklore are sometimes described as being compelled to count seeds that are scattered in their path or untie knots in a piece of string left behind by a fleeing victim. Ruthven kept away the mental stagnation by following a never-ending course of malice and seduction; Fogg has too many principles for this, and has begun to stagnate. His trip around the world might be an attempt to shake off the mental lethargy. Alternatively, it might be a cover for a globetrotting attempt to hunt down and slay his vicious sire. A generous GM might assume that rescuing Aouda might constitute a Noble Deed that would restore Fogg's humanity. A sadistic one might have Fogg turn her into a vampyre bride, with Passepartout as their ghoul servant.

Players who want to do the events of the novel *Dracula* a generation early might have to hunt down a Fogg grown increasingly evil, either in London or elsewhere in the world. Or, should Fogg decide to move elsewhere in the world for safety, the situation of *Dracula's* events could be reversed, as, perhaps, a group of Eastern European noblemen have to fight off the invasion of a foreign (English) vampire. Players interested in a situation with a longer frame might assume that Fogg is in fact Ruthven, but much calmed from his days in 181- (in this case, add Magery and the innate spells of Charm and Geas at least to the Vampyre template).

The Ruthven/Fogg type of vampyre is likely to throw players for a loop because it does not feature many of the characteristics modern people "know" vampires possess. This type of vampyre is in no way bothered by daylight, can eat food just fine, and needs little in the way of blood. Thus, the vampyre has little trouble fitting into society. However, the vampyre is much weaker than might be expected, and is capable of being "killed" by anything that would kill a human. He will resurrect when exposed to the first rays of moonlight after death, though. Players should also note that even in the 1870s, a generation before Stoker, the vampiric legend is common, thanks largely to John Polidori's 1819 short story and the infamous French *theatre des vampires* that flourished in its wake in the 1820s and onward (see *GURPS Blood Types* pages 31-32). Europeans may be more aware of the nature and limitations of vampires than players suspect.

Aouda is in for a big shock on her honeymoon . . .

Option 4: Steampunk Fogg

After two hours' march, the guide stopped the elephant and gave him an hours' rest . . . Sir Francis Cromarty was not sorry for this halt as he was a broken man. Mr. Fogg seemed as fresh as if straight out of bed.

"He's made of iron!" said the Brigadier-General, looking at him with admiration.

"Wrought iron," answered Passepartout, as he prepared a simple lunch."

--*Around the World in Eighty Days*, Chapter 12

"During the first few days of the crossing, Mrs. Aouda started to get to know Phileas Fogg better. She showed him deep gratitude at all times. The phlegmatic gentleman listened to her, apparently with great coldness, without a single intonation or gesture betraying the least emotion . . . At fixed times each day, he would come, if not to talk at least to listen to her. He was unfailingly polite, but with the grace and spontaneity of an automaton, whose movements could have been contrived for such a purpose."

--*Around the World in Eighty Days*, Chapter 16

Phileas never knew the man he called Father. He only knew that Father had two ambitions: to liberate men from servile, dangerous work, and in so doing to enable all men to live the leisured life of a gentleman. Father told Phileas this time and again, as he worked on him, and Phileas was somewhat puzzled by Father's expectation that he would be

the one to do all this. Father had made his fortune at sea, and it was the dangerous skills of the sailor that he taught Phileas. In the evenings, Father would play whist with Phileas, play him music, or read him the newspaper, and Phileas adopted as many of Father's ideas and mannerisms as he could.

Then one day, Father lay still and cold, and did not respond to Phileas. There were no more games, no more music, no more readings . . . and Phileas did not know what to do. Father had said that the greatest goal in life was to be a gentleman, so Phileas took the last of Father's money, left the laboratory, and made his way to London. Money silences many questions, even in the late 1860s, and Phileas settled down into the leisured life of the London gentleman, as best he understood it.

After all, it was what Father would have wanted . . .

Steampunk Fogg has a terrible secret: he is nothing more than a clockwork automaton, a unique steampunk creation. For Steampunk Fogg, use the following template:

Phileas-Model Automaton

87 Points

Age ?; 6'; 212.1 lbs; 3.0 cf; \$240,491.80.

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 8 [-15]; **HT** 11/6 [10].

Speed 5.8; Move 5.

Dodge 5.

Advantages: Absolute Timing [5]; Appearance (Very Handsome) [25] (Reaction: +2/+6); Unfazeable [20]; Single-Minded [5]; Doesn't Sleep [20]; DR2, PD2 [25]; Eidetic Memory 2 [60]; Endurance [10]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Immunity to Disease [10]; Lightning Calculator [5]; Mathematical Ability [10].

Disadvantages: Cannot Float [-5]; Code of Honor (Gentleman's) [-10]; Color Blindness [-10]; Compulsive Behavior (Mathematical regularity) [-10]; Eunuch [-5]; Low Empathy [-15]; No Natural Healing [-20]; No Sense of Humor [-10]; No Sense of Smell/Taste [-5]; Reprogram able Duty [-25].

Skills: Accounting-12 [1/2]; Area Knowledge (World)-12 [2]; English-12 [21/2]; Games (Whist)-12 [2]; Mathematics-12 [11/2]; Merchant-10 [31/2]; Meteorology/TL5-12 [21/2]; Musical Notation-11 [11/2]; Navigation/TL5-12 [3]; Sailor/TL5-12 [21/2]; Savoir-Faire-12 [31/2]; Seamanship/TL5-12 [2].

This is the basic "model template" of the Phileas Automaton. After moving to London, he adds the following advantages and disadvantages from the basic Phileas Fogg template: Ally (Passepartout) [30]; Independent Income 1 [0]; Reputation +1 (Gentleman) [1]; Status 3 [10]; Wealth (Filthy Rich) [50] Compulsive Gambling (Whist) [-5]; Compulsive Generosity [-5]; and all Quirks [-5]. Raise his Secret to [-20] and add Social Stigma (Machine) [-15] for a grand total of 128 character points.

Steampunk Fogg is an utterly cinematic creation, although built mostly at TL (5+2) levels. His power source and brain are definitely TL (5+n), however. He is powered by a cinematic arrangement of gears and springs that draw power from etheric science and motion (treat as a Mana Engine). His brain is unique, and is based on a more advanced version of the Advanced Mechanical Brain in *GURPS Steam-Tech* (page 76). This type of brain is raised to Complexity 5, incorporating primitive forms of the Genius and Neural Net options (*GURPS Robots*, page 10). Steampunk Fogg is not quite sentient, but he is close.

Using Steampunk Fogg in A Campaign

Many times throughout the novel, Phileas Fogg is described in terms that make him out to be a machine, and this version of Fogg takes these literally. Steampunk Fogg is an automaton, a being on the cusp of humanity. It is possible

that the spontaneous desire to abandon a mechanical life of routine and travel around the world in eighty days represents the first steps the rise to sentience described on page 87 of *GURPS Steampunk*. If so, the Complexity of his brain will rise to 6, with the attendant raise in DX and IQ. The GM will have to decide just how far Steampunk Fogg will travel on the road to humanity, and at which points many of his robotic-style disadvantages will disappear.

The Fogg automaton is one of the most revolutionary inventions of a steampunk world, and is likely to be fought over by a number of parties, the player characters included. With his increasing sentience comes increasing resourcefulness, and the players might find out that a machine who could cross the world in eighty days is more than capable of outrunning and out-thinking them. In some respects, Steampunk Fogg actually works better in the gadget-filled Castle Falkenstein setting, where elaborate automata are rare, but not unknown.

Aouda is in for a really big shock on the honeymoon. It might be lessened if Fogg's creator saw fit to include in his design a certain gentleman's mechanical implant (which raises the model cost to \$240,891.80, and replaces Eunuch [-5] with the Sterile [-3] disadvantage . . . although given the fact that this is the Victorian era, such may not be the case . . .)

Appendix 1: Aouda

"She was an Indian of celebrated beauty, of the Parsee race, the daughter of rich Bombay merchants. She had received a thoroughly British education in that town, and from her manners and education, one would have thought her a European. Her name was Aouda."

--*Around the World in Eighty Days*, Chapter 13

Aouda

47 Points

Female; Age 21; 5'6"; 125 lbs.; Slim but curvy build, long dark hair worn parted in the middle, beautiful dark eyes with long lashes, small hands and feet, very fair complexion

ST 9 [-10]; **DX** 9 [-10]; **IQ** 11 [10]; **HT** 10 [0].

Speed 4.75; Move 4.

Dodge 4.

Advantages: Appearance (Very Beautiful) [25]; Claim to Hospitality (extended family) [2]; Cool [1]; Patron (Phileas Fogg) (15 or less) [30]; Reputation +2 (Celebrated Beauty, Western India, all the time) [3]; Strong Will +1 [4] (Will: 12); Unusual Background (British education) [10].

Disadvantages: Enemy (Thuggee cult, 6 or less) [-15]; Sense of Duty (Fogg) [-5]; Poverty (Dead broke) [-25]; Social Stigma 1 (Female) [-5]; Status -1 (vaishya caste and female) [-5].

Quirks: Doesn't get seasick; Likes the strong, silent type; Parsee. [-3].

Skills: Area Knowledge (Bombay)-11 [1]; Artist-11 [4]; Black Powder Weapons (Pistol)/TL5-5 [0]; Botany/TL5-10 [2]; Dancing-10 [4]; English-13 [6]; Games (Whist)-14 [6]; Hindi-11 [2]; History-10 [2]; Literature-10 [2]; Marathi (native)-14 [3]; Mathematics-10 [2]; Merchant-10 [1]; Musical Instrument-10 [2]; Savoir-Faire-14 [2]; Writing-10 [1].

Aouda was born in Bombay into the vaishya caste, the only child of well-to-do merchant parents from the prestigious Jeejeebhoy family (a distant relative, Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy [1783-1859], was the first Indian to receive a British knighthood). They obtained for her a fine British education, and her future looked bright. Unfortunately, her parents died, and Aouda was left a penniless orphan. Such was the reputation of her beauty that one of the independent rajahs of the state of Bundelkhand (located in the northwestern part of what is now the modern Indian state of Madhya Pradesh) sought her out and forced her to marry him, against her will. He died three months later, leaving Aouda a widow. She fled from the ceremonial sati in which she would have been burned along with the rajah on his funeral

pure, but was recaptured. Fogg and his companions rescued her, and she fell in love with the silent and withdrawn, but strong and principled, Phileas Fogg.

Aouda would appear to have many limitations as a character. She is a Parsee (an Indian form of Zoroastrianism), a distinct religious minority in India (or anywhere else, for that matter). She is a woman, a second-class citizen in India (or anywhere else in the Victorian world, for that matter). Finally, she is a widow, doomed to a contemptible life of poverty at best, or sati at worst. However, although she appears limited by modern standards, consider her by Victorian ones. She is strong-willed enough to defy Hindu custom by fleeing her sati, and the only way her husband's relatives are able to bring her back to it is to keep her drugged to the gills on opium and hashish. In America, she shows no hesitation about using a revolver to protect a train from a marauding band of Sioux Indians. And in the end, it is she who proposes marriage to Phileas Fogg, in a daring violation of Victorian convention! Despite her low point total, Aouda is a woman of some substance. In the end, it is her love that helps make any version of Phileas Fogg more human, and helps him to win his wager.

Using Aouda in A Campaign

Note that although she will probably settle down as Mrs. Fogg (depending on which version of Fogg she wound up with), things might not be quite so rosy for her. Not only has she fled the sati of her ex-husband the rajah of Bundelkhand, leaving her disgraced according to Indian custom, her in-laws are members of the savage Thuggee cult, which is now looking for her to finish the job. For her own safety Aouda can thus never return to India. GMs interested in a continuing adventure may want to dust off the hoary Cliffhangers plot of "bride being kidnapped to India by savage Thuggee cultists to be subjected to unspeakable rites," as a distraught Phileas Fogg gathers a band of bold heroes to travel to the savage jungles of India to rescue his beloved wife . . .

Appendix 2: Sources

The Novel: Jules Verne, *Around the World in Eighty Days* (Paris, 1872)

Many different editions and translations of this work exist, of varying degrees of quality (a free downloadable copy is available from [Project Gutenberg](#)), but the best current translation in English is by William Butcher, in the Oxford World Classics series, 1995. In addition to being the best extant translation, it is a critical edition with a full set of footnotes and scholarly apparatus, which, barring Butcher's annoyingly Freudian interpretation of Verne and his work, are very useful. All of the above quotations are from this edition.

Film

The book has been filmed twice in English. The most famous version, done by Michael Todd in 1956, is the more lavish of the two, although it is not always terribly faithful to the story. It features David Niven as Fogg, Canteflas as Passepartout, Shirley MacLean as Aouda, and cameos from just about every single actor in Hollywood at the time. It is recommended for scenery and for playing, "Say, isn't that . . . ?"

More recently, *Around the World in 80 Days* was filmed as a miniseries by Buzz Kulik in 1989, with Pierce Brosnan as Fogg, Eric Idle as Passepartout, and Julia Nickson as Aouda. Although not as lavish as its predecessor, it is more faithful to the book, and in this writer's opinion, "the beautiful Pierce Brosnan and the beautiful Julia Nickson" (Idle's own words!) make a much better Fogg and Aouda.

Television

Most recently, *The Secret Adventures of Jules Verne* has been syndicated, featuring Phileas Fogg and Passepartout as recurring characters. Although it takes terrible liberties with the characters (Fogg is much too emotional), it a good treatment of the idea of Espionage Fogg. The show also has a lot of steampunk tech and attitude present, and is worth a look for that alone. It has the distinction of being the first TV series shot in HDTV format, so even when the stories

are bad, they *look* good . . .

There was also a short-running children's cartoon show of Australian origin, *Around the World in 80 Days*, that ran from 1972-1973, which recast the story in the form of Phileas Fogg going on his round-the-world trip to win the hand of a disapproving aristocrat's daughter. It is perhaps best forgotten.

Other Works

Philip José's *Farmer's The Other Log of Phileas Fogg* (DAW, 1973; rpt. TOR, 1993) retells Verne's story meticulously with all of the principal characters as human agents for warring alien factions. The idea is interesting, but some of the execution is a bit forced.

For more information on the Screampunk Fogg option, a copy of John Polidori's "The Vampyre" may be found online at http://home2.inet.tele.dk/bibliste/text/jp_vamp.htm.

* * *

(Special thanks to William Stoddard for steampunk and Victoriana advice.)

Doris and Sainte Celeste

A Transhuman Space Setting

by Mark Gellis

Background

In the wake of the enormous social changes that took place during the 21st century, many proponents of traditional faiths became more conservative about social change and more committed to their own religious views. A small minority became radicalized and engaged in violence against the practitioners of new lifestyles and new faiths. A more common reaction was a renewed commitment to traditional forms of living and worship, and a willingness to be open about that commitment even when it might lead to ridicule or social ostracism (because there will always be some people who see faith as fanaticism), combined in many cases with a renewed interest in spreading these traditional faiths either by preaching or by the establishment of new communities.

In 2094, a joint venture between the Vatican and wealthy Europeans dissatisfied with the direction society had taken settled the asteroid 48 Doris. The Vatican backed the project because the settlers had made them an offer they could not refuse. If the Church helped finance their project, the settlers would guarantee that Doris would be a Catholic nation. Catholicism would be the official state religion; while the rights of non-Catholics would be protected, the practice of other faiths would be discouraged. In addition, they agreed to establish an abbey that would serve as an outpost for Rome in the Deep Beyond.

The settlers refer to themselves as Dorisians (pronounced very much as one would pronounce "Parisians.") Most are baseline humans or upgrades who have used one of the common biomods available to prevent degeneration in microgravity. It is, in fact, a matter of pride among the Dorisians that they do not need to radically alter themselves to survive in the belt. The government is a democracy, with an elected city council of seven members elected for five-year terms and serving as legislature, executive branch, and judiciary; a separate election selects one member of the council as President. The only exception is that the abbot serves as a permanent member of the council during his tenure as abbot (so only six members of the council are elected); on the other hand, the abbot is never allowed to serve as President. This offers the Church a great deal of influence in municipal affairs.

The current President is Gaston Chevalier (pronounced "Sheh'val'ee'ay"), one of the initial backers of the project. Gaston relies heavily on his uncle, Honore Chevalier, as an advisor.

The initial group consisted of 90 settlers, more than half of them married couples (the initial group also included 15 children and three priests). Since then, the population has doubled, including six children born on Doris, the first in 2096. The settlement is thriving and a recent media release by its leaders announced that their goal is to reach a population of 1,000 by 2110. The Vatican has been so pleased by the results of their investment that they are currently in negotiation with other groups, including one based in South America, to build additional settlements.

Local industry focuses on spacecraft components (they have a good relationship with Vosper-Babbage, working with them as a supplier and a partner for outsourcing) and small spacecraft. In addition, their vatfacs and minifac workshops give them the capability to carry out a wide range of specialty projects for interested clients. The Dorisians are also beginning to make a name for themselves with the wine made from grapes grown in the farming units and the abbey's garden (the 2098 Merlot is reputed to be especially good).

48 Doris

48 Doris is about 130 miles across. It orbits the sun at an average distance of 3.1 A.U. Like most asteroids in this part

of the belt, it consists primarily of silicate rocks, with small concentrations of metal ore, organic chemicals, and hydrated clays. Of course, since the asteroid masses something in the neighborhood of one quadrillion tons, the combined mass of these "small concentrations" is several trillion tons. The surface is similar to that of most large asteroids; it is airless, rocky, shattered, mountainous terrain, in light ranging from dim sunlight to starlit darkness, challenging even to those who have lived on Doris for years and dangerous to those unfamiliar with it. Loose material on the walls of impact craters, massive cracks in the rock, and similar perils await anyone going outside for a stroll. The local gravity is about five miligees.

(Those interested in the specific position of 48 Doris on a particular date can use the orbital simulator at <http://neo.jpl.nasa.gov/orbits/>.)

Habitat Statistics

The main settlement is a beehive habitat called Sainte Celeste. For the purposes of determining its statistics, it is treated as a box hull, 1,000 feet long, 1,000 feet across, and 100 feet deep. The total volume is 200,000 spaces and the surface area is 2,400 ksf. 60% of the habitat is hull or waste space, leaving 80,000 spaces for the settlers to use. The habitat is buried underneath a thick shell of rock and may be treated as having a cDR of 10 and a cPF of 500,000; it is virtually immune to any radiation damage short of a direct hit from a thermonuclear weapon. The Chp is 36,000.

The habitat (including the abbey) was designed to support up to 210 people. The present population is 182. The main components are two housing units, two farms, one factory designed to produce spacecraft components and spacecraft, one plaza, and one park. These consume 70,000 spaces at a cost of \$14.2M. The actual mass of the components is 67,000 tons.

The abbey consists of one garden, a chapel equal to eight "halls" in terms of seating space, two additional "halls" used as classrooms and meeting rooms, and ten "cells" for the priests and nuns (treat as luxury cabins, but only in terms of the space allotted; the rooms are pleasant but quite spartan). The requirements here are 1,120 spaces, 222 tons, \$550K, and 500 kilowatts of power. The abbey has been designed so that additional cells may be built onto it at a later date.

The other components of St. Celeste include a Command Bridge (Old), one medium PESA, one medium radar, two 2.5-Mj lasers, two vafacs, two minifac workshops, a 10-bed surgery, a Geology lab, a Shipbuilding (Spacecraft) lab, a fusion power plant capable of producing up to 80 megawatts, relying on deuterium-tritium reactions for power, and a spaceport consisting of four 50' × 50' × 50' spacedock hangers. These components mass 700 tons, require 3,100 spaces, and cost \$54M. The settlers also brought two OTVs at a cost of \$24M. Finally, the settlers brought about \$25M of cyberswarms and cybershells, mostly designed for mining, construction, factory work, farming, and repair operations. More than 5,000 spaces remain empty for future expansion, cargo storage, and the like.

One of the major costs involved in building Sainte Celeste was moving the components to Doris. This, and the cost of cutting the tunnels, came to about \$80M. The total cost of building the city was about \$200M. It is unknown exactly how much of this was contributed by the Vatican.

Saint Celeste's factory was designed to build components that could be used to expand the habitat itself (it is, after all, simply a very large spacecraft). A recent addition to the city, locally produced, is an external cradle large enough to handle vessels up to 25,000 tons. The cradle is a separate structure about 2,000 feet from the city's main airlock (just in case an incoming spacecraft has a little FUBAR event) but a pressurized underground tunnel -- with airlocks at both ends -- allows for easy movement of cargo and personnel.

The Dorisians are presently planning to expand Sainte Celeste, or possibly build a second habitat similar to it and connected to it by a pressurized tunnel.

Characters

Most of the population of Sainte Celeste is French, although there are a number of Italians and Spaniards living in the

city. The official language of the city is French. Virtually all settlers have No Degeneration in Zero-G [3], Free Fall at DX [2], First Aid at IQ [1], and Vacc Suit at IQ [2]. They will also have at least one technical or professional skill at IQ, most often Agronomy [2], some specialty of Mechanic [2], some specialty of Electronics Operation [2], some specialty of Electronics [4], or some specialty of Engineering [4]. Virtually everyone will also have Duty (to Sainte Celeste, 6-) [-2]; in a small, isolated colony in the asteroid belt, there will be a few situations every once in a while where surviving means that everyone pitches in whether they want to or not.

The general mood in the settlement is one of pride and satisfaction, although there are some who feel that the Chevalier family has too much power. The culture is similar to that of the E.U., except that the population is noticeably more devout than what one normally finds on Earth these days. They are not fanatics, though. They like a good glass of wine or a rendezvous with a lover as much as their counterparts back on Earth do, but they also go to mass and confession on a regular basis because they believe in God and they believe in Catholic doctrine.

The four most powerful people in the city are Gaston Chevalier, President of Sainte Celeste, his uncle and advisor Honore Chevalier, City Councilor Dr. Annette Lachaille, and Father Xavier Minnelli, abbot of Sainte Celeste Abbey.

Gaston Chevalier

ST 11 [10]; **DX** 11 [10]; **IQ** 13 [30]; **HT** 11 [10]

Advantages: Ally (Gigi, 15-) [30], Ally (Uncle Honore, 15-) [30], Charisma +1 [5], Filthy Rich [50], Handsome [15], No Degeneration in Zero-G [3], Status +3 [10]*

* includes a free level of Status for being Filthy Rich

Disadvantages: Dependent NPC (Marie, 0 points or less [toddler], loved one, 15-) [-96], Duty (to Sainte Celeste, 6-) [-2], Sense of Duty (to Sainte Celeste) [-10]

Quirks: Devoted to his wife and daughter [-1], Devoutly Catholic [-1], Easily bored and not afraid to tell people they are boring him [-1]

Skills: Accounting-11 [1], Administration-14 [4], Agronomy-12 [1], Area Knowledge (Doris)-14 [2], Area Knowledge (Paris)-14 [2], Computer Operation-14 [1], Diplomacy-13 [4], Driving (Automobile)-11 [2], Economics-14 [6], First Aid-13 [1], Free Fall-11 [2], Law-11 [1], Leadership-14 [2]*, Merchant-15 [6], Piloting (High Performance Spacecraft)-11 [2], Politics-13 [2], Powerboat-11 [2], Savior-Faire-14 [2], Shipbuilding (Spacecraft)-14 [4], Vacc Suit-13 [2]

* includes bonus for Charisma

Languages: English-13 [2], French-14 [1], German-12 [1], Italian-13 [2], Spanish-12 [1]

Total Points: 148

Gaston Chevalier is 6'0", 180 lbs., in his early forties, with black hair and striking blue eyes. He made a fortune investing in aerospace companies and then sold most of his holdings to help finance the Sainte Celeste project.

The idea of leaving Paris to live in the asteroid belt was shocking enough to fashionable Paris, but shortly before leaving Earth, Gaston gave the city a second shock by marrying a woman much younger than himself and from an obscure family. His wife, Gigi, is now Chief Administrator of one of city's two farms. They are utterly devoted to one another and have one daughter, Marie, aged two.

Honore Chevalier

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 13 [30]; **HT** 10 [0]

Advantages: Ally (Gaston, 15-) [30], Charisma +2 [10], Filthy Rich [50], No Degeneration in Zero-G [3], Status +3

[10]*

* includes a free level of Status for being Filthy Rich

Disadvantages: Age: 60 [-30], Duty (to Sainte Celeste, 6-) [-2], Lechery [-15], Overweight [-5], Sense of Duty (to Sainte Celeste) [-10]

Quirks: Devoutly Catholic [-1], Devoted to Gaston and his family [-1], Likes humming old show tunes [-1]

Skills: Acting-13 [2], Administration-13 [2], Accounting-13 [4], Agronomy-13 [2], Area Knowledge (Doris)-14 [2], Area Knowledge (Paris)-14 [2], Bard-15 [2]*, Carousing-13 [8], Computer Operation-14 [1], Diplomacy-15 [8], Distilling-13 [2], Driving (Automobile)-10 [2], Fast-Talk-14 [4], Fencing 13- [2], Free Fall-10 [2], Guns (Pistol)-13 [2]**, Law-12 [2], Literature-12 [2], Merchant-14 [4], Politics-14 [4], Sex Appeal-15 [12], Singing 11-[2], Vacc Suit-13 [2]

* includes bonus for Charisma

** includes bonus for IQ

Languages: English-13 [2], French 14- [1], Italian-12 [1], Russian-12 [1], Spanish-12 [1]

Total Points: 149

Honore is 5'11", 190 lbs., with blue eyes and a shock of white hair. He is usually impeccably dressed in a fashionable suit. He radiates aristocratic charm. He supervises much of the farming and winemaking activities in Sainte Celeste. He generally comes across as being an easy-going, fun-loving fellow, but he is capable of being deadly serious if the situation demands it.

Dr. Annette Lachaille

ST 9 [-10]; **DX** 12 [20]; **IQ** 14 [45]; **HT** 11 [10]

Advantages: No Degeneration in Zero-G [3], Attractive [5], Status +2 [5]*, Very Wealthy [30]

* includes a free level of Status for Very Wealthy

Disadvantages: Duty (to Sainte Celeste, 6-) [-2], Selfish [-5], Sense of Duty (to Sainte Celeste) [-10]

Quirks: Arrogant [-1], Devoutly Catholic [-1], Wants to end the dominance of the Chevalier family in Sainte Celeste [-1], Thinks she would do a better job as President than any of the Chevaliers [-1]

Skills: Acting-12 [1/2], Administration-13 [1], Area Knowledge (Doris)-14 [1], Area Knowledge (Paris)-14 [1], Computer Operation-15 [2], Diagnosis-14 [4], Diplomacy-14 [4], Driving (Automobile)-12 [2], First Aid-15 [2], Genetics (Genetic Engineering)-14 [8], Genetics (Tissue Engineering)-13 [4], Law-11 [1/2], Physician-15 [6], Politics-15 [4], Research-14 [2], Sex Appeal-12 [4], Surgery-15 [12]

Languages: English-13 [1], French-14 [0], Italian-13 [1], Spanish-13 [1]

Total Points: 148

5'6", 140 lbs., with red hair and green eyes. Dr. Lachaille is a brilliant physician and genetic engineer. She is attractive, but may come across as cold and calculating. She is the chief administrator for one of the city's two vatfacs. She is highly skilled at what she does, and devoted to the success of Sainte Celeste, but arrogant and convinced that the city would do better under her leadership than that of the Chevalier family.

Father Xavier Minnelli

ST 11 [10]; **DX** 11 [10]; **IQ** 13 [30]; **HT** 11 [10]

Advantages: Voice [10], Charisma +1 [5], Clerical Investment +3 [15]

Disadvantages: Duty (to Sainte Celeste, 6-) [-2], Sense of Duty (to the Vatican) [-10]

Quirks: Devoutly Catholic [-1], Stern [-1]

Skills: Acting-15 [6], Administration-14 [4], Agronomy-13 [2], Area Knowledge (Vatican City)-14 [2], Area Knowledge (Doris)-14 [2], Bard-16 [2]* **, Diplomacy-16 [6]*, Driving (Automobile)-11 [2], Free Fall-11 [2], Law-13 [4], Leadership-14 [2]**, Performance/Ritual-14 [4], Politics-16 [6]*, Research-14 [4], Theology (Christian)-16 [10], Writing-14 [4], Vacc Suit-12 [1]

* includes bonus for Voice

** includes bonus for Charisma

Languages: English-12 [1], French-13 [2], Italian-13 [0], Latin-13 [2], Spanish-12 [1]

Total Points: 145

Father Xavier is a tall, thin man of striking appearance, 6'0" and 170 lbs., with brown eyes and brown hair. He is a very serious man, but capable of warmth; he genuinely likes the people he lives and works with here in Sainte Celeste. Even so, his ultimate loyalty is to Rome and its objectives in the Deep Beyond.

Adventure Seeds

So, what does one do with small, newly settled city of devout Catholics in the middle of the asteroid belt? Here are a few ideas.

One can simply set the campaign on Doris, making the heroes members of the community. The opportunities here involve the simple day-to-day struggle for survival, not unlike those faced by any small, isolated community, exploring the asteroid (which has a surface area of about 40,000 square miles), intrigue among the leadership of the city (including the machinations of an abbot who may be receiving instructions from the Vatican to further some secret agenda), business dealings with other nations and groups in the belt, and surviving attacks by pirates, terrorists, etc.

Outsiders might be lured to Doris by rumors that the settlers have purchased plans for a model of AKV and are building their own secret navy. Their factory would be ideally suited for this purpose. If these rumors are true, a considerable number of these mechanical monsters might now be hidden somewhere on the asteroid. Even worse, if the programmers made errors creating the infomorphs for the AKVs, some of them may have gone rogue. Or perhaps a small cadre of fanatics is planning to use the AKVs to seize power or to wage a covert religious war against other communities in the asteroid belt.

Finally, on Earth, the establishment of Sainte Celeste is controversial. The Vatican has not attempted to expand its territory for hundreds of years, but now it is seeking formal recognition of this new nation, which some people are calling a "Papal State." Rumors of dark conspiracies are racing around the global web. A war of memes is at hand, and it a war that might escalate into real violence if the people involved feel that the only way to win is to eliminate members of the opposition.

Spigot Girl

for *Vampire: the Masquerade*

by Katherine Farmar

Susannah "Spigot Girl" Hollander, or Spig to her friends, looks unassuming at first, as she cultivates a nondescript appearance. Her clothes are usually either in black or drab earth colors, and her lank brown hair tends to fall over her eyes, hiding the intensity of the expression they hold. Those who pass her by probably don't even notice she's there; those who talk to her may think her a little stupid, or maybe just too dreamy-headed for her own good, as she tends to stare off into space and loses the thread of a conversation easily. While she's no genius, she's not stupid either. She's just preoccupied with her addiction: being fed on by vampires.

When Susannah was 10, her father went to prison for the third time and her mother divorced him. A series of feckless and unpleasant "stepfathers" alternately ignored and abused her while her mother sank deeper into alcoholism, until she turned 16 and stole a rich man's wallet. The wallet contained just enough money to get her halfway across the country -- to a city with a bar called Dark Fate.

Dark Fate was the center of a thriving "vampire" subculture that had more to do with Gothic aesthetics than with anything supernatural. Most of the regular patrons just liked to wear black clothes and white make-up and read lush, overwritten horror novels . . . but some of them took their interest in the "creatures of the night" in an entirely different direction. Rather than just dressing like vampires, reading about vampires, and watching bad movies about vampires, these people actually *drank* each other's blood. No more than a few drops at a time, admittedly, and in a modern, hygienic manner involving antiseptic wipes and hypodermic needles, and carefully avoiding the veins and arteries; but this was close enough to the real thing that their claims to be "real vampires" got them interviewed by local papers when there wasn't much else going on. Susannah discovered, much to her surprise, that while she didn't like drinking blood, she liked being a "donor" -- allowing a "vampire" to drink her own blood. She liked it so much, in fact, that she earned the nickname "Spigot Girl" for being the girl fed upon most often by these so-called "vampires."

That would have been the extent of her counterculture involvement, except that the city counted a few real Kindred in its population as well, who found the "vampire" phenomenon amusing and occasionally useful; and one of them happened to be hunting in Dark Fate on a night when Spig was there. Spig offered her blood to the stranger, not realizing that he really was a vampire. He fed from the throat, not the shoulder, and the euphoric rush she felt as he fed was so far above what she had felt before that she was positively angry when he stopped. The vampire was a little taken aback by this, but soon realized the value of having a walking meal following him around willingly. Spig moved in with him, covered for him, protected him and fed him for nearly six months before a vampire hunter found their apartment and "rescued" her, killing the vampire in the process. Needless to say, Spig was not pleased, but the hunter put her up in his place anyway, figuring that she'd probably been brainwashed. Spig stole his car while he slept and drove to a new city, looking for a vampire lover to replace the one she'd lost. Since then, she has never gone more than a day without serving as some vampire's nightly meal.

Spig is streetwise, adaptable, rootless, and entirely amoral. Despite her initially dull and nondescript appearance, she reveals a compelling personality and lively intelligence to those she considers worth talking to. She has almost no marketable skills and is thus usually to be found in a menial job such as cleaning or waitressing, though her income is higher than such a career would suggest; this is due partly to the wallets she lifts when she thinks she can get away with it and partly to the gifts her vampiric "lovers" give her. Although normally as pragmatic about relationships as she is about money, she can easily get attached to any man who reminds her of her father; unfortunately, since her father is an alcoholic career criminal, this tends to have bad results.

Although she is curious about vampires and their society, Spig will not press her vampire friends for information they don't want to give; she is patient enough to wait for them to tell her of their own accord, or let the information slip accidentally. She never drinks the blood of her "lovers," even if they beg her to; if they do offer her blood, she will

tearfully decline, claiming to be unworthy; in truth, she has seen the effects of the blood bond in other "dolls" and doesn't want that to happen to her. Nonetheless, she is always fanatically loyal to whoever is currently feeding on her . . . until they show signs of getting bored with her, at which point she'll cut her losses and move on, probably stealing something small and valuable on the way out. If she finds a new group of "friends" to satisfy her addiction, she will become utterly loyal to them, often to the point of betraying whatever secrets her former favorites may have told her.

She is dimly aware that she "knows too much," though she has little apprehension of how much danger she might put herself in by revealing the true extent of her knowledge.

It should be obvious from the above that none of Spig's "lovers" have been Giovanni. Although her addiction is pretty deeply-rooted, one encounter with a Giovanni, or a vampire with the flaw Grip of the Damned, might well be enough to wean her off vampires forever -- possibly even to turn her into a hunter. If this were to happen, she would become a dangerous enemy to those who let her know their secrets, for although she is not exactly formidable in her own right, she knows what vampires fear and where many of them keep their havens.

Adventure Seeds

- The most obvious way to involve Spig in a story is to have her be in between "lovers" and single out the PCs as the next candidates. Even if they're not interested in adding her to their herd, they may want to find out what she knows . . . and she knows a great deal.
- While her knowledge may prove invaluable, Spig may also serve as a vehicle for false information; perhaps one of her former "lovers", knowing her habits, has allowed her to pick up the wrong end of the stick about his haven and his weaknesses, in order to see who acts on the tip, or to lead whoever it is into a trap.
- Spig's addiction takes on a very different complexion when viewed from the point of view of games other than ***Vampire: the Masquerade***. In a ***Hunter: the Reckoning*** chronicle, she may be a misguided soul in need of rescuing, or a vicious and willing dupe of the monsters she helps as they continue their depredations against humanity. She will maintain, in the face of strong opposition, that she likes her life the way it is. It will be up to the heroes to change her mind -- and to stop the information she holds from falling into the wrong hands.
- Although Spig's father's been out of the picture for years, she still thinks the world of him, though it's never occurred to her that he might not approve of how she lives her life. If he succeeds in tracking her down, and finds out that someone is drinking her blood, he and his criminal "friends" could make their unlives very unpleasant.

Susannah "Spigot Girl" Hollander's Stats

Attributes:

Physical: Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 4 (Inspires Protection), Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 2

Abilities:

Talents: Empathy 2, Expression 1, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 3

Skills: Drive 1, Stealth 2

Knowledges: Investigation 1, Vampire Lore 5 (Feeding Habits)

Backgrounds:

Allies 1: Spig always has at least one vampire protector, sometimes more than one, although they aren't always sufficiently attached to her to make decent allies and she knows better than to push her luck by asking for favors too often.

Contacts 2: Spig prefers not to contact vampires who are no longer feeding on her, but she will if it looks like an emergency. She does not have many human friends.

Resources 1: Spig still owns the car she stole from the vampire hunter, and always has at least \$100 in cash, just in case she needs to leave town in a hurry, but other than this has no possessions to speak of.

Willpower: 5

* * *

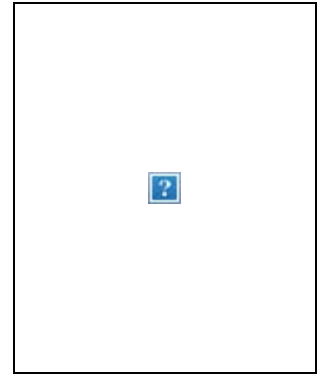
(For information on "real vampire" subcultures, see <http://www.sanguinarius.org/>.)

Pyramid Pick

The Knuckleduster Cowtown Creator

Published by [Knuckleduster Publications](#)

Written by Forrest Harris with Rob Lusk and Phillip Webb



250-page b&w softback; \$24.95

Thanks to Hollywood, we have all an idea of what the typical town of the Wild West should look like. Films and television have made it all so familiar that the creative efforts of the GM may fall flat in the telling. This is where the author of *The Knuckleduster Cowtown Creator* hopes to be of aid, by presenting a sourcebook useful for creating a genuine cattle town. Forrest Harris makes use maps and floor plans, period illustrations, and photographs; but above all, he makes use of the history of the old West itself. The given material is presented to be useful in any Western set or similar game, but does provide statistics for three game systems -- the *Weird West* of Pinnacle's *Deadlands RPG*, Grey Ghost's *Fudge* system, and for what it describes as, "The World's Most Popular PRG," or rather the *d20* system as derived from *Deadlands d20*.

Knuckleduster Publications have only released three titles before this: two solo adventure books ([The Devil's Addition](#) and [Raining Hammers, The Ballad of Johnny MacDonald](#)) and a sourcebook on Western sidearms, [The Knuckleduster Firearms Shop](#). All of them have been very well received, especially by *Pyramid* itself, which means that the expectations for this recent release are high indeed. *The Knuckleduster Cowtown Creator* is a fat paperback done in a large typeface, with a layout that is easy on the eye. Everything is well-organized, and the detailed index makes its contents easy to find. Throughout, the book is illustrated with period engravings and photographs along with maps -- some of which are based upon the same photographs! Most of the photographs come courtesy of various city and state historical societies.

The purpose of *The Knuckleduster Cowtown Creator* is to enable the creation of the Western Cowtown as found during its heyday, from the late 1860s until the mid-1880s. It is based upon towns such as Dodge City, Abilene, Wichita, Newton, and Ellsworth that were the railhead towns that cattlemen drove great herds north from Texas along the Chisholm trail. From these towns, the cattle would then be shipped back East. Of course, the GM is not limited to the creation of just "cowtowns," but can use this book to create *any* town West of the Mississippi. It gives a set of forms and tools (called "creators") to make this as easy as possible. These start out with the Town Layout Creator and the Cattle Drive Creator, before proceeding through creators for: the Saloon; the Dance Hall; Gambling Hall; Variety Theatre; Hotel; Bank; Store (including general, hardware, saddlery, gun, tin and other stores); Stage Station and Stage Coach, Railroad Depot, and Passenger creator; Law Enforcement; and finally the Services creator (including livery stables, law offices, doctor's offices, barbershops, blacksmiths, and undertakers, among others.) The list is comprehensive and should be enough for a campaign of any length.

Each creator then goes into further detail, opening with a discussion of the various possible types, their floor plans and features, services and items for sale, characters to be found within, and finally the stories related to the establishment. Thus for the saloon, the Makeshift, Classic, Fancy, Rough, Company saloon, along with the Cantina are all discussed, sometimes also with several examples and maps. The features to be found within are described, along with a list of genuine names taken from throughout the West, the types of drinks sold at the bar -- and their names, and the types of characters that might be found both working the saloon or enjoying its services. The creator ends with a set of stories about saloons. These make for fascinating reading (as do the stories in other sections), and not necessarily the sort of thing found in other supplements. For example, Bizarre Saloon Weapon Number One is a raw "trout," used by a Madame in Denver to knockout a waiter, whereas a gunfight erupted in Wyoming over who got the first use of the

milk for the morning oatmeal, resulting in what the frontier court decided to be justifiable homicide!

The Knuckleduster Cowtown Creator attempts to be as historically accurate as possible, relying upon such sources as *The Police Gazette*, biographies of individuals of the time, *Harper's Weekly*, frontier newspapers and history books. A bibliography lists the latter used for this supplement. In its drive to be accurate, ***The Knuckleduster Cowtown Creator*** does not skimp on examining the seamier side of the Old West, but neither does it glamorize or dwell unnecessarily upon the subjects of violence, alcohol, gambling, and prostitution. As to the latter, it is covered across three locations -- the Saloon, the Dance Hall, and the Fancy Hall. However sordid, the treatment of the subject is still fascinating and respectful. That said, the inclusion of this material might make ***The Knuckleduster Cowtown Creator*** an unsuitable book for the young or the immature.

The Knuckleduster Cowtown Creator also includes a random name generator as well as a set of Random Encounter Generators, which is rather short and is more of a starting point for the GM rather than a complete resource. Those GMs requiring game specifics will be happy with the three chapters devoted to the ***Deadlands RPG***, ***Fudge***, and ***Deadlands d20***. The rules for ***Fudge*** are really a guide to adapting across the many NPCs given for ***Deadlands***. The one problem with this chapter is that the conversion tables are a little blurred.

One way in which ***The Knuckleduster Cowtown Creator*** can be used is to have the players take the roles of those driving cattle north along the trails to the Railhead towns. There is enough information in this supplement to do both this and give the characters plenty to do once they arrive! Of course, ***The Knuckleduster Cowtown Creator*** is not just useful for the games it gives statistics for. Its contents could be used be used for any number of RPGs: ***GURPS Old West***, ***GURPS Deadlands***, and even [*Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game*](#) (as our GM has done for a Wild West set Buffy campaign). Since the book is ***d20***-compatible, it could just as easily become a dinosaur-town generator for Goodman Games' [*Dinosaur Planet: Brontosaurus Rex RPG*](#) setting or in the Cursed Earth of Mongoose Publishing's [*The Judge Dredd Roleplaying Game*](#). Since these games stray into science fiction, there is nothing to stop the GM from applying the contents of ***The Knuckleduster Cowtown Creator*** to other settings within that genre. For example, replace cattle with whales on a water world and it can be used as a whale town creator, from where the great beasts are shipped off-world!

In some ways, ***The Knuckleduster Cowtown Creator*** does not need any of the game statistics, as it works more than well enough without them. Of course, their inclusion just increases the utility of what is already an exceedingly useful book. And not *just* useful, but entertaining as well, full of interesting facts and trivial tidbits which can be added to any Western campaign to give the newly created cow town that authentic feel, full of color and character. No book can be truly described as indispensable, but ***The Knuckleduster Cowtown Creator*** not only gets within a plug of chewing tobacco's spitting distance of the spittoon, it lands that cheek full of juice without splashing!

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Pyramid Review: Froop!



Froop! Card Game

Published by [Savant Garde Entertainment](#)

Rules and Art by R. Hunter Gough

\$17.95; 110 full-color cards (26 with instructions, 84 for play), 2-10 players

In some ways, gaming is a universal language: Once you get past the rules, the rest is mostly components. This goes double for a game that uses purely graphic mechanisms to facilitate play. **Froop!**, a colorful, symbol-based card game from Savant Garde Entertainment, is one such game.

The object of **Froop!** is to be the first to empty your hand of cards. Each card is split into four smaller rectangles, and each rectangle has one of the game's four standard, stylized pictures: hearts, smiley faces, bat's wings, or flowers. No two cards arrange the little graphics in the same way, and each card uses at least three of the four available symbols. Players start with a hand of seven cards, and another card is drawn from the top of the deck and placed in the center of the playing area to kick things off.

On his turn, a player must play a card from his hand so two or more of the symbols on that card overlap some part of the arrangement already in play in the middle of the table -- this collection is called the Froop. Cards must overlap side to side or end to end, but they all have to lay the same way; in other words, you can flip a card around 180 degrees to point in the opposite direction if it will get the pictures to fit one of these orientations, but you can't rotate a card 90 degrees and play it at right angles to the cards already played. Since the cards can overlap left to right or up and down, the Froop can spread outward in all directions and even form blocky L-shapes.

This fluid and staggered layout allows you to overlap two, three, or even four of the symbols on your card over those in play. If you can cover two other symbols, you play that card and your turn ends. If you're lucky or skillful enough to cover three or four symbols, you may try to play an additional card from your hand onto the Froop. If that card also covers three or four cards, you may play again, and so on. Play smart and you can be rid of half your hand in a single turn. If you cannot find any play at all, you must draw a card from the deck and pass.

Passing your turn doesn't really seem to come up. There are simply too many options for playing cards (either your hand is big or the Froop is), so it's unlikely you'll need more of the deck for a single game than those cards dealt out at the start. On the other hand, getting the good three- and four-card arrangements isn't a foregone conclusion, and that's what gives the game its bite. Sometimes it's just a question of hunting through your hand and the Froop, but it's not all dumb luck or coincidence. You can play cards from your hand in such a way that you'll set yourself up for an even better play next turn, assuming someone doesn't obscure your work with his own in the meantime. Play is fast -- about 5-10 minutes per game -- and leaves you wanting a little more.

And it has a little more. The game suggests some entertaining -- or annoying -- variants. In the cutthroat version, successfully covering multiple symbols allows you to give cards to other players or force them to draw cards. You can go for speed (the previous player counts down from 20 while you try to make a move), or strategy, which requires players to leave their cards face up on the table. Add options together and the game has several new dimensions.

Although the game comes in full color, the graphics aren't terrific. The artwork (front and back both) is crude penciling or computer renditions with poor resolution. Fortunately, the symbols don't *have* to be works of art; they need only be distinct, and this they are. It's nothing fancy, but it gets the job done. The cardstock is solid, and it's ready for a little punishment. Someone has even gone to the trouble of dusting the deck with a little powder (much like a box of latex

surgical gloves) to facilitate shuffling the first few deals (asthmatics beware).

You'd be hard-pressed to take ***Froop!*** to any location on Earth where you couldn't find someone with whom you can play it. The rule set comes in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, German, Russian, Greek, Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Hindi, Thai, Arabic, and Hebrew (hence the 26 cards given over to instructions). It's a regular Rosetta Stone of gaming, but even more important is its universal appeal based on simple, fast, and appealing rules.

--*Andy Vetromile*

Serpent in the Garden State: The Jersey Devil

*"Last night I dreamed that I was a child out where the pines grow wild and tall
I was trying to make it home through the forest before the darkness falls
I heard the wind rustling through the trees and ghostly voices rose from the fields
I ran with my heart pounding down that broken path
With the devil snappin' at my heels."*

-- Bruce Springsteen, "My Father's House"

The mournful sound you hear across the pines is the call of the Devil -- born under a curse, but potentially the begetter of something far worse. Between America's greatest cities, and beneath her greatest sins, the Devil waits to drag it under. Although the Jersey Devil may seem like a hoax, or even a joke, there's something else under its hooves, something that hates the light. Let's track it back through the January snow, then, and let the Devil take the hindmost.

"As I got up I heard an eerie, almost supernatural sound from the direction of the river. I looked out upon the Delaware and saw flying diagonally across what appeared to be a large crane, but which was emitting a glow like a fire-fly. Its head resembled that of a ram, with curled horns, and its long thick neck was thrust forward in flight. It had long thin wings and short legs, the front legs shorter than the hind. Again it uttered its mournful and awful call -- a combination of a squawk and a whistle, the beginning very high and piercing and ending very low and hoarse."

-- Eyewitness testimony of E.W. Minister of Bristol, Pa., Jan. 17, 1909

According to New Jersey legend (which really and for true goes back to at least 1790), in 1735 a Mrs. Leeds (or Mrs. Shrouds), plagued to distraction by her twelve children, reacted to her recent impregnation by cursing the unborn infant: "Let this one be the devil for all I care; I'm done with children!" Sure enough, her newborn infant sprouted wings (and later, a horse's head, a barbed tail, and bird legs) and flew off into central New Jersey's Pine Barrens, from whence it would emerge to plague local farmers by slaughtering sheep and chickens and infants. Its depredations became so severe that it was exorcised in 1740 for a hundred years -- although the exorcism only partially took, since Stephen Decatur supposedly saw it in 1803 (and fired a cannonball at it with no effect), and the former king of Spain, Joseph Bonaparte, reportedly encountered it while hunting on his Bordentown estate in the 1830s.

Devil sightings went down-market thereafter, panicking farmers in Haddonfield in 1859, and walking on roofs in Bridgeton in 1874. An 1858 report states that villagers in the Pine Barrens feared to go out at night, thanks to a winged beast roaming the woods; similar panics spread throughout the 1880s. In 1894, the Devil appeared in several towns (including his birthplace at Leeds Point), and in 1899 stole sheep from as far afield as Hyenga Lake, New York. But that seemed to be the Devil's last hurrah. By 1903, folklorist Charles Skinner could confidently state that "With the advent of the new century, many worshipful commoners of New Jersey dismissed, for good and all, the fear of the monster from their mind." But the Devil is not mocked, even by eminent folklorists.

In the "Phenomenal Week" of January 17-23, 1909, the Jersey Devil appeared scores of times, to well over a hundred witnesses. Prominent officials such as the Bristol, Pennsylvania, postmaster and a Trenton city councilman, saw it flying across the sky; a policeman spotted it in Burlington, N.J. (where nearly every backyard and rooftop in the town was covered with its hoof-prints) and police fired on it in Bristol and elsewhere. An enterprising fellow claimed to have wounded it on telegraph lines in Atlantic City; firemen sprayed it with hoses in Collingswood, N.J., and one R.L. Campbell saw it explode in flames on an electrified track in Clayton, N.J. A Smithsonian expert theorized it might be a pterodactyl, emerged from "hidden caverns and caves, [deep within the earth](#)." Guards patrolled; the militia formed; panic ruled -- and the Devil vanished, having left his mark. It continues to appear sporadically, and even managed to panic Gibbsboro, N.J., with another rash of sightings in 1951. Credible sightings include a state trooper at the Mullica River in 1966, a sentry at Fort Dix in 1990, and a rash of reports from Holmdel, N.J., in 2000. With the advent of the new millennium, many worshipful commoners of New Jersey seem to have implanted the monster firmly in their mind -- it has become the official New Jersey state demon, the mascot of an NHL hockey team, the subject of an *X-Files* episode and an independent horror film, and a mainstay of local tourism.

"'Jersey Devils' have been reported other times, but, though I should not like to be so dogmatic as to say that there are

no 'Jersey Devils,' I have had no encouragement investigating them. . . . I have had an extensive, though one-sided, correspondence, with people who may not be, about things that probably aren't."

-- Charles Fort, *Lo!*

Which goes some distance to explaining why Jersey Devil stories continue. The 1909 flap was quite possibly started by a newspaper hoax by Norman Jefferies, publicity manager for the Arch Street Museum in Philadelphia. Jefferies even went to the extent of buying a kangaroo, painting it green, and tying wings and horns to it before letting it loose to panic people in the area before he "captured" it for the cameras for exhibit at the museum. Faultless cryptozoologists Loren Coleman and Ivan T. Sanderson believe they've tracked down traces of a consummate real estate scam piggybacking on the flap, as well, and a 1925 sighting was completely fraudulent. Evidence points to the 1951 Gibbsboro panic being another hoax; police discovered a bear paw on a stick (for making fake Devil prints) nearby the next year. Tie this in to sightings of the sandhill crane or prints of the scowfoot duck, and you get a fairly solid substrate of mundanity beneath the Devil's hooves.

As for Mrs. Leeds (or Shrouds) -- she, it seems, probably really existed. A Daniel Leeds founded Leeds Point, where one Samuel Shrouds, Jr. settled right across the river from Mrs. Leeds' house. (The house still stands, although it burned badly in 1951.) The possibility of an illegitimate child, or a deformed one, as the true "thirteenth child" of the story, has been partially borne out by the discovery of a grave marker for a two-year-old child born in 1735 nearby, with the name "Smith J Leeds" (a traditional name for the Devil child) on it. Even if that isn't the "devil child's" grave, stories of Mrs. Leeds' unseemly doings could easily have sparked the kinds of rumors that led to at least one witch trial in nearby Mount Holly, N.J., in 1730. Another hint of something untoward at the creation of the Devil is the parallel origin story that makes him the cursed child of a treacherous New Jersey girl and a British soldier before the Revolution -- or of an innocent girl gang-raped by Tory "Refugee" guerrillas.

*"His head was found in the driver's wheel
But his body never was found.
My girl, my girl, where will you go?
I'm going where the cold wind blows.
In the pines, in the pines, where the sun never shines
I'll shiver the whole night through."*
-- "In the Pines," traditional American folk song

The Pine Barrens, at the heart of the Devil's realm, are likewise the product of fertility gone wrong. High iron and acid content in the sandy soil makes the ground suitable only for cranberry bogs and stands of pine trees; the water is a thin reddish-brown color like dried blood, and the ponds and lakes are full of water moccasins and worse. Nearly two thousand square miles of marsh and woods sit at almost the precise center of the East Coast megalopolis, halfway between Boston and Richmond, New York City and Philadelphia. Legends of "ghost lights" go back to the Lenapi Indians, and local creeks have held dragons and devil haunts as far back as memory serves. Its bog iron fed the forges of the Revolution, and its pines built slave ships for a time, but both industries died out by the 1840s, leaving more ghost towns in central New Jersey than there are in the whole American Southwest. From out of the Pine Barrens, black dogs and "wampus cats" prowl; a yellow-eyed creature that "hopped kangaroo fashion" with a jaw "neither dog, nor wolf, nor coyote" (not unlike the [Beast of Gévaudan](#)) was killed in Greenwich, N.J. in December of 1925. Ghost stories abound, from the "grinning man" dressed in [green](#) who appeared during a UFO scare in Elizabeth, N.J., to the Phantom of the Parkway who haunts the Garden State Parkway near the Toms River exit and drives cars off the road. Lizard-men, sasquatches, and more share the Jersey Devil's billing (or do his bidding) in the depths of the Pines.

"Accompanied, as it usually is, by the howling of dogs and the hooting of owls, there can be no surer forerunner of disaster. Where the barrens line the shore it flits from one grass-grown dune to another and is especially watchful upon those wild heights when coasting schooners, driving their prows into the sand, pound to splinters upon the bars and distribute upon the waves their freight of good and human lives. Upon such occasions Leeds' Devil is seen . . ."
-- Rev. Henry Charlton Beck, *Jersey Genesis*

All of this begins to paint the Jersey Devil not as a creature but as an American myth, one that haunts the dark side of American history from partisan warfare in the 1770s to real estate fraud in the 1950s, just as his cousin [Spring-Heeled](#)

[Jack](#) embodies British urban terror. He is supposedly a harbinger of wars, appearing on December 7, 1941 among other dates. Like that other American banshee, the [Mothman](#) who he resembles, he brings death in his wake, walking on the shore with ghostly pirates watching for shipwreck. How he must have feasted when the *Hindenburg* went down in his domain, on the edge of the Barrens at Lakehurst, New Jersey. (Is there a connection here with the "[airship](#)" flaps of 1909, which included sightings in nearby Delaware?) He also claimed Lindbergh's friend, the Mexican aviator Emilio Carranza, who crashed in the center of the Barrens in 1928 -- or was this another human sacrifice by [Lindbergh](#) to the spirits of the air and earth?

Mention of Lindbergh (and of the Nazi zeppelin *Hindenburg*) brings another dark thread into the tapestry -- miscegenation and eugenics. The Devil's chimerical form (horse, snake, bat, and bird) and origin in a cursed birth (or unholy mating) both feed into the darker crannies of this American fear. So, as it turned out, did another devil at work in the Pine Barrens, the eugenicist Henry Goddard, whose Laboratory and Department of Research for the Study of Feeble-mindedness opened at Vineland, New Jersey on September 15, 1906. Throughout the Devil's greatest rampage, Goddard was doctoring his research (and doing God knows what else) on the "inbred morons" of the Pine Barrens, for his very influential (and queasily Lovecraftian) book *The Kallikak Family: A Study in the Heredity of Feeble-Mindedness*. Could Goddard have somehow summoned the misbegotten creature with his prayers to purity of blood, building the myth of eugenics, deep in the pines where the sun never shines? Or did the Devil make him do it?

The Journey Of A Thousand Miles Ends With A Locked Door

So I'm standing outside my parents' home in the dark, after an eight-hour drive, thinking to myself, "Well . . . what do I do *now*?"

But I'm getting ahead of myself . . . and, despite the seemingly solipsistic nature of this column, I *will* get to roleplaying. Honest.

Readers may remember that, [several weeks ago](#), I proclaimed that I was attempting to, hell or high water, get home for Christmas.

Well, I made it home.

Mind you, this was *not* a forgone conclusion. First, my 500-mile Christmas Eve journey was made more challenging by the fact that my home region was in the middle of a Tornado Warning (despite not having had *any* rain for the previous three weeks). This may not have been as problematic as it might have been, if only this trip on the interstate system had not been my *first* such trip. So my first 200 miles at driving above 45 miles per hour were done in a rain storm so blinding, the only awareness I had of cars in front of me were the occasional feeble Rudolph-esque glows of brake lights in the distance.

(As an aside, I also came to the conclusion that learning something under highly challenging circumstances makes doing the same under more mundane conditions *much* easier. I also . . . umm . . . made an educated guess that my car maxes out at 110 miles per hour.)

Anyway, I made it through the blinding rain, and found my way back to my childhood neighborhood.

Now, one thing I don't think I mentioned in my previous column was that I was, in fact, surprising my folks; my mom and my stepfather had not been informed of my (impending) arrival. This was also coupled with the fact that I was about five hours behind schedule from when I wanted to get there (thanks to my efforts to get *Pyramid* done for that week). So I was rolling up around 7:30pm, which is approximately when they go to bed.

The stage is set.

So I pull up to their home; it's dark outside. I see signs of life up there in their second-story apartment; there are lights on, and I can make out the flickering of a television.

Now, I go up to the door with a sack of presents in hand; trying to complement my Christmas Eve surprise, I start singing carols ("We wish you a Merry Christmas . . ."). And I get to the end of the song, and there's no response. So I knock.

No one answers.

I knock again. And again.

Still no answer.

I'm now going to take a detour into the point of this column; merge right.

Many old-school gamers joke about the adversarial nature of the GM versus the players; stories about killer GMs and the "him versus us" conflict. (Of course, exhibit A is the long-running *Knights of the Dinner Table* comic.) Contrariwise, many more modern games emphasize the combined storytelling aspect of the game, saying how it is the

GM's duty to help facilitate the story, but *not* his goal specifically to thwart the players.

Well, as I was standing outside my parents' door, wondering "What do I do now?", I realized my situation: The evening was not turning out the way I had expected; the problem I was encountering was *not* one I had foretold; and although I had an option as to a course of action, I was not at *all* certain as to the outcome of this last-ditch effort. In short, this was exactly the kind of situation I would want to create as a GM . . . *and* it's the kind of situation I would love to hate as a player.

See, players are notorious planners. In the macro sense they often have preconceived notions as to how adventures are going to turn out, and they come up with broad plans ("Okay; we break into the castle and split up to find the princess."). And in the micro sense they have smaller plans, such as favored attacks and combat tactics. Usually, these plans - both macro and micro - have sub-plans. ("If we can't find the princess, we need to figure out where she is", or "I'll start with the flame bolt spell; if it doesn't work, I'll switch to the magic staff.")

And, in my opinion (and in slight defiance of the newer schools of GM thought), it falls to the GM to be adversarial and come up with means of thwarting these plans. At least in my experience, the players get the biggest thrills when their plans go mostly - but not entirely - as they expected. In fact, in looking over a lot of published material, I note that considerable effort is made to keep the players' ideas from working as expected. This ranges from combat effects ("Bullets don't harm it!") to unique environments ("Spells don't work in the Ethereal Zone," "The agents will need to work underwater, where dangers are greater and maneuverability is more limited," "If the explorers reach the space station, they will find that its antigrav system isn't working quite right; air both on board the ship and within their suits will be pushed to the 'ground,' meaning the heroes will be unable to breathe unless they crawl or find some other way to transport air up to their faces.").

Like all things, this can be taken to an absurd extreme . . . perhaps best exemplified in the ***Advanced Dungeons & Dragons Fiend Folio*** creation of the nilbog, a monster which could *only* be harmed by using healing effects. (If you ever meet a GM who makes extensive use of the nilbog, be warned; he is not actually your GM, but is instead the devil, sent to destroy soul and sanity.) But in moderation, getting players involved in trying to overcome that last hurdle . . . that last 5% . . . that one seemingly unopenable door that falls outside their preconceived notions and plans can make for the most memorable adventures. This is especially true if they end up with a theory they think *might* work at resolving the problem.

Which brings me back to standing outside my parents' door, wondering what to do next.

See, I'd prepared for a number of contingencies ("What if they're not home? What if there's no room for me to stay at their place?"), but I hadn't prepared for "I think they're home, but they aren't answering the door." So I went to Plan Z . . . also known as my house key.

Fortunately my folks hadn't changed the locks in the past decade, so my key would almost certainly work. However, I'd never shown up unannounced to anyone's house and (in essence) broken in. The possibilities for Bad Things were myriad. Did my parents own a gun? Would the chain be on the door? Had they installed an alarm system? Would I be interrupting Christmas Eve Under-The-Tree Nookie, ensuring trauma for all?

Faced with the last 1% of my otherwise trouble-free journey, I used the key.

And my very surprised stepdad came down the steps to see who it was. Long story short: They were startled as heck yet happily surprised¹. They had concluded that I was, in fact, roaming Christmas carolers . . . which they didn't want to deal with. After I'd knocked a few times, they thought I was very *rude* Christmas carolers. My mom tried to get my stepdad to take a few dollars to the supposed-carolers to get them to go away, but to no avail. *It's a Wonderful Life* was playing on the television.

And my uncertain-last-moment-impromptu plan worked out just fine, and everyone had a wonderful time.

But next time I think I'll just tell them I'm coming.

* * *

¹Amusing aside: Upon seeing me at the door, my stepdad said to go back outside so he could greet me properly. I did so; he then proceeded to lock and *chain* the door, turning off the lights. I'd even left the sack of presents inside the door, so it was an ideal lock-out. A family's love is clearly strongest on the holidays. (He let me back in after a few seconds.)

* * *

I can't remember if I've told everyone about this, but those of you in the New Jersey area may be interested to know that I'm going to be at a convention starting at the end of January. Yes, [Dreamation 2003](#) has been kind enough to invite me as a guest. I'll be helping them with the U.S. National **Munchkin** Championship; I'll also be hosting a couple of discussions and running a few games (including the *<ahem>* legendary **In Nomine** adventure "30 Minutes Or Less" that left my players twitchy for hours afterwards). If you're in the area, please feel free to come by and join the fun.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: **Darklords** (for **Ravenloft**), p. 12.

(Two stars) "**The Lord Of The Nazgûl Searches For The Ring:** Reveal 1 card from the deck and Ring-bearer discard 3 matching card symbols to achieve [white circle] otherwise each player [black square]."

Fantasy Astrology

When The Stars Are Right

by David Morgan-Mar

As below, so above; and as above, so below. With this knowledge alone you may work miracles.
-- Hermes Trismegistos, The Emerald Tablet (trans. Fulcanelli).

Fantasy campaigns are usually set in a confined area -- the size of a continent or less -- on a single planet. The unknown frontiers consist of what lies over the sea, across the barrier mountains, beyond the horizon. The heavens above are not a place where people can venture -- they are the realm of the gods and possibly other celestial beings.

People with a medieval level of technology have no hope of knowing what a star, planet, or comet actually *is*. These objects are instead symbols of forces beyond human control. There are certain regularities in the movements of heavenly objects, making it possible to forecast the configuration of the heavens. Some things are completely unpredictable, such as the appearance of a comet or "new star."

To the ancient mind, it was obvious that what happened in the heavens was a reflection of events on earth . . . or rather, vice versa: The state of the sky dictated earthly events. The regular patterns of motion could be used to forecast propitious days and times for important ceremonies, or to forewarn of disasters. The appearance of a new body in the heavens was an omen that could not be ignored; incidents of earth-shattering importance were indicated. The charting of the positions of heavenly objects and the interpretation of their meanings are codified in the "science" of astrology.

This article describes the basic components of astrology as they can be applied to a fantasy world that exists in a universe similar to our own -- where stars are immensely distant suns, and all the planets (including the earth) go around our own sun. Inhabitants of the world may believe that the stars are angelic beings fixed to a grand celestial sphere, and that the sun goes around the earth (and with medieval technology there is very little evidence to show otherwise), but the basic reality is the one with which we are now familiar. Grossly different cosmologies ("the world is flat and the sun is a ball of fire a mile across") are not dealt with here, but will be discussed in a follow-up article.

Types of Astrology

To many ancient civilizations, specific heavenly bodies were associated with (or *were*) particular gods. Their movements in the sky could thus be interpreted using the known personalities and interests of the gods in question. This is a natural extension of the sort of pantheistic beliefs that are common in fantasy campaigns. In such a campaign, astrology will be an important science.

In a historical medieval campaign, or a fantasy world in which the dominant religion is monotheistic, the heavens move according to the hand of God, and events on earth inexorably follow the dictates of the heavens. Astrology becomes a way of divining the will of God and of determining one's pre-ordained fate in God's plan.

Either way, astrologers work by drawing up a *horoscope* -- a chart of the heavens showing the positions of all important heavenly bodies at a particular time. The absolute and relative positions of all the objects in the horoscope combine to produce a reading that is more or less detailed in its predictive power for events occurring at the time for which the horoscope is drawn.

Depending on the particulars of a campaign, casting horoscopes can either be an exhaustively prescriptive science, with detailed tables of planetary aspects and their elaborately enumerated nuances of meaning, or an interpretive art form, relying more on the brilliance of the astrologer in assigning relevant meanings to various heavenly arrangements.

Astrology might be a well-regarded academic pursuit, used openly by professionals who make a living casting horoscopes for people willing to pay for them. In such cases, rulers and nobles will almost certainly employ astrologers to forecast auspicious and ill-fated dates for events ranging from starting a war to holding a royal marriage. On the other hand, astrology may be seen as akin to witchcraft, with practitioners hunted down and persecuted for being in league with the devil. Obtaining a horoscope in such a campaign could be an adventure in itself.

Finally, a major campaign decision is whether astrology actually *works* or not. If it does, then it is possible that astrology is completely prescriptive, and anyone with appropriate literacy, mathematical skill, and astrological tables can cast a horoscope. Such a campaign can be difficult to run, however, unless the GM likes dealing with the intricacies of prophecy and PCs knowing about future events that must come to pass.

If astrology works, it is easier to make its practice an interpretive skill. Court astrologers will be in fear of their lives if they make a major prediction that turns out to be incorrect. People will never be sure if the word of an astrologer is truth or not. Those who are better than others will gain a positive reputation, and be eagerly sought out.

If astrology does not work, it is certain to have an interpretive component, even if much of it is codified into tables and reference works. The best astrologers will be intuitive or skilful psychologists, who are able to formulate predictions based on human nature and knowledge of events around them. Such people may be deluded, believing that they do possess mystical powers, and it is certain that their clients will be under a similar delusion.

The Components of a Horoscope

A horoscope traditionally shows the positions of the sun, moon, planets, and the constellations of the zodiac (see below for further information). Some fantasy campaigns may not have all of these elements, or may possess more than our own Earth (multiple moons seem fairly common). The base assumption is a world with heavenly bodies similar to our own, but possible deviations are discussed below.

The Sun

The most obvious celestial body is the sun. It rises each day, filling the land with life-giving warmth and light. People go about their lives to the regular rhythms of the sun.

For this reason, the sun is often identified with a major god of a pantheon, if not the ruler of the gods. In male-dominated societies, the sun god is usually male. In traditional western astrology, the sun represents power, physical strength, creativity, health, life, and also arrogance. Similar concepts can logically be applied to the sun in a fantasy astrology.

The sun also controls the seasons, which set the length of the year. At different times of the year it will be higher or lower in the sky, resulting in the familiar cycle of warmth and cold that produces summer and winter. The seasons define four specific dates: the solstices and equinoxes. The solstices occur in winter and summer, when the number of hours of daylight reaches a minimum or maximum, respectively. The equinoxes occur in spring and autumn, when there are exactly 12 hours of daylight and night. These dates are often celebrated with festivals, as they herald the changing of the seasons and form important markers for agricultural societies.

Fantasy worlds without suns are possible, but beyond the scope of this article. In some worlds there may be multiple suns, each with its own cycle of rising and setting. The dominant sun, by which people live their days, will inherit the characteristics of a single sun, while secondary suns could possess qualities such as family, rivalry, ambition, hope, or failure.

The Moon

The moon is often regarded as the consort of the sun -- her silver compared to his gold. Traditionally, the moon represents emotional and unconscious aspects of personality. It controls the dreams, gives rise to impulsive urges, and

can also be associated with death and mystery.

The moon moves rapidly with respect to the sun, changing through a series of phases every 28 days (a "month") and moving through the zodiac almost as quickly. Its influence is therefore ephemeral, and its position important in determining differences in horoscopes cast for several days in succession.

In a fantasy world with no moon, there will be nothing to significantly differentiate horoscopes cast for the same time on dates within about a week of each other. Predictions will therefore be vague to about this length of time. If astrology works, then periods of a week or so will go by under much the same influences, so related events will tend to occur in clusters. With no moon, the emotional and unconscious aspects of personality must be controlled by some other astrological body. An intriguing possibility is that there is an invisible *dark moon*, which can only be detected by astrologers, mages, priests, or whoever. Having such an invisible body control the unconscious urges of men is particularly fitting.

A popular fantasy theme is a world with multiple moons. For familiarity's sake, one moon might be similar to our own, in which case the same associations apply. Our moon is large as moons go; realistically, additional moons are likely be smaller and closer to the earth, resulting in fast-moving moons such as those of Mars. Moons like this travel across the sky in a matter of a few hours. Astrologically, this means they provide a change in horoscope that can pinpoint influences and events down to a minute or so. Predictions will be very precise but, on the other hand, events such as births will need to be known to high accuracy if the child's horoscope is to be cast correctly. The associations of additional moons could be themes like brotherhood, children, guidance, or other ideas associated with multiples or subordination.

The Planets

To the ancients, planets were stars that wandered about the heavens. In an historically-based campaign, the visible planets (and their European associations) are:

Mercury: Completes a circuit of the stars in 88 days, making it the fastest planet. It is the herald or messenger of the gods, and is associated with the mind, science, communication, healing, and money.

Venus: The brightest object in the sky after the sun and moon, Venus is the goddess of beauty. She represents beauty, love, the arts, and friendship.

Mars: A noticeably red planet to the visible eye, Mars was seen as a warrior god. He is associated with aggression, ambition, courage, and justice.

Jupiter: The next brightest planet after Venus, Jupiter came to be seen as the herdsman, father, or king of the gods. He brings joy, compassion, good fortune, and wisdom.

Saturn: Taking the longest of the planets to complete a cycle (29 years), Saturn is associated with time, slow progress, difficulties, and old age.

Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto were not discovered until after the Renaissance, but in a fantasy campaign planets invisible to the naked eye may be detected by magical or technological means. The GM should assign any desired associations to such planets.

Planets move from day to day against the background of the zodiac (see below). As they enter different parts of the zodiac, their influences mingle with those of the constellations, and guide the lives of people for whom those constellations are significant. Also see *Aspects*, below.

Sometimes, because of the orbital motions of the planets, a planet appears (from earth) to reverse direction and move backward for some time. This is called *retrograde* motion, and is associated with a disruption of the normal influence of the planet in question. Retrogressions of Mercury are traditionally considered most important, indicating times when starting journeys or entering into contracts are particularly risky. When an outer planet goes retrograde, it lingers

for much longer than usual in a particular constellation. This brings about an extended period of influence, which can manifest as long spells of good or bad fortune for those whose lives are governed by the constellation in question.

Fantasy worlds could easily have different planets to our own. Each god of the dominant pantheon may have a planet to himself! The GM should assign whatever aspects and influence he desires to each of the planets in the campaign.

The Zodiac

The stars are, to all intents and purposes in historical astrology, immutable objects in fixed positions relative to each other. They wheel around the earth approximately once per day -- a little faster than the sun. The sun therefore moves slowly among the background of stars, taking a year to complete a full circuit.

The stars are divided into groupings called *constellations*, which are taken to be abstract representations of earthly objects (fancifully generated by "joining the dots"). Most of the modern western constellations were assigned by the ancient Greeks and Romans, who used figures from their mythologies, as well as animals, and household items.

The sun's annual journey takes it through 12 of the 88 constellations, forming a ring around the earth. It spends a different amount of time in each constellation. The ancients, however, standardized this into an idealized set of 12 constellations -- called the *zodiac* -- each deemed to contain the sun for an equal part of the year. The 12 zodiacal constellations (also known as *star signs*), with the idealized dates for which the sun is in them, and a brief set of influence keywords are:

Aries (21 March-20 April): Assertive, innovative, enterprising, energetic, selfish.

Taurus (21 April-21 May): Persistent, patient, reliable, loyal, possessive.

Gemini (22 May-21 June): Communication, adaptable, intellectual, curios, restless.

Cancer (22 June-22 July): Sensitive, kind, nurturing, emotional, secretive.

Leo (23 July-23 August): Power, courage, pride, leadership, arrogance.

Virgo (24 August-22 September): Perfectionist, methodical, skilful, modest, self-critical.

Libra (23 September-23 October): Harmony, balance, peaceful, diplomatic, narcissism.

Scorpio (24 October-22 November): Intense, mystical, purposeful, introverted, vengeful.

Sagittarius (23 November-21 December): Expansive, visionary, flexible, extroverted, inconstant.

Capricorn (22 December-20 January): Prudent, resolute, ambitious, conservative, inflexible.

Aquarius (21 January-18 February): Idealistic, independent, inventive, humanitarian, eccentric.

Pisces (19 February-20 March): Intuitive, sensitive, imaginative, spiritual, unrealistic.

Note that these idealized dates for the sun being in each sign are essentially arbitrary. The earth wobbles in its orbit (a phenomenon called *precession*), doing a full circuit every 25,000 years. This means it enters each sign a little later each year -- currently it remains firmly in Pisces every 21 March. Additionally, the modern definitions of the constellation boundaries mean that the sun travels through a thirteenth constellation -- Ophiuchus, "the serpent-bearer" -- between Scorpio and Sagittarius. Traditional astrology completely ignores these effects.

Fantasy astrology, however, may need to take such things into account. Ancient technology is more than adequate to detect and predict the effects of precession. All it does is slowly change the dates of the year on which the sun enters a given sign, so it is fairly simple to incorporate (in fact Indian, or Vedic, astrology does so). The existence of a 13th star

sign might be a dark secret known only to astrologers, and having huge effects on those born under its brief influence.

The zodiac signs are grouped in two different ways (see diagram) -- by their relation to the seasons, and by the four Aristotelian elements.

Cardinal Signs: When the sun moves into a cardinal sign, it indicates the start of a new season. Cardinal signs symbolize initiative and command.

Fixed Signs: The sun enters these in the middle of each season. They represent stability and predestination.

Mutable Signs: The final sign of each season represents versatility, compromise, and change.

Fire Signs: These are volatile and full of energy, but also impatient and lacking perseverance.

Earth Signs: Practical, cautious, trustworthy, but may lack imagination and creativity.

Air Signs: Intellectual and logical, but lacking empathy and intuition.

Water Signs: Emotional and spiritual, but lacking logic and focus.

As can be seen from the range of qualities displayed by each sign and the groupings of signs, there can be many complex interactions and even conflicts between qualities. This rich tapestry of possibilities provides the framework upon which astrological predictions are made.

The set of 12 western zodiac signs is convenient for divisions into groups of three and four, and each sign roughly matches the time of a single lunar cycle. Fantasy zodiacs may have fewer or more signs, depending on the whims of the GM. Fewer signs means fewer astrological correspondences, making astrology a simpler art, while more gives creative GMs the chance to devise astrological systems as complex as desired. Creating 36 or more zodiac signs, with associated legends, symbology, and associations can be a labor of love!

If the signs are regularly spaced, it is a good idea to make them a multiple of the number of seasons (fantasy inhabitants may recognize three, four, or five seasons), since their relation to the agricultural calendar should be a primary determinant of their origin. Assign other groupings as desired, parceling your signs into sets based on whatever numbers divide it evenly.

A simple way of producing a fantasy zodiac is simply to take our own, complete with its rich set of associations, and change the names and symbols of each sign. This produces a ready-made mystical system, with an otherworldly feel, and enough complexity to fool your players into thinking you've spent hours inventing it.

Aspects

As aspect is the angle formed between two planets (including the sun and moon), as seen from the earth. When the positions of the planets are plotted on a horoscope, particular aspects are noted for their modifying influences on the planets in question:

Conjunction: When two planets are in the same sign and at almost the same angle, their influences combine and strengthen each other.

Zodiac



Sextile: When planets are approximately 60 degrees apart, the aspect represents an opportunity waiting to be seized.

Square: Two planets at approximately 90 degrees have their influences opposing one another, but in a way that provides dynamism and the chance for growth by resolving the conflict.

Trine: Planets at 120 degrees to one another show a relaxing of their potential conflicts, bringing about ease and comfort in their relationship.

Opposition: When two planets are almost directly opposite one another, their interaction produces a strong obstacle that must be overcome.

Types of Horoscopes

Horoscopes are used for four main purposes:

Natal Chart

A horoscope drawn up for the time of a person's birth shows the influences that will govern that person's entire life. The zodiac sign in which the sun is at the time of birth is the person's *sun sign* -- this is the sign many modern people know as their "star sign" and look up in daily newspaper astrology columns. More important, however, is the *ascendant* -- the sign that is on the rising horizon at the moment of birth. Since the ascendant changes every two hours, the exact time of birth is of major importance. The positions of the planets and their aspects show major influences that will help or hinder the person throughout life.

Horary Chart

This is a horoscope drawn up for a particular event, usually after it has happened. Interpretation of the chart can lead to insights on the heavenly influences that led up to the event, and the future consequences of the event. An horary chart might be drawn up to predict the future course of events after a battle, a death, or some other significant occurrence.

Electoral Astrology

This is the study of future horoscopes to determine the best time and date for beginning a venture. Rulers or nobles might consult an astrologer to tell them the best time to hold events such as weddings, coronations, festivals, triumphs, etc.

Decumbiture

This is the use of astrology to diagnose and treat disease. In decumbiture, various herbs and other remedies are associated with zodiacal signs and planetary aspects. A horoscope drawn up for the time of onset of an illness can show the cause and the best treatment.

Omens

Besides the regular cycles of the stars and planets, other heavenly bodies sometimes make unpredictable appearances. Comets appear as slowly moving stars with bright tails stretching far across the sky, and historically were almost universally considered harbingers of doom or destructive change. The appearance of comets in an otherwise regular and changeless sky surely meant something of great import, and they were much feared.

It does not take an astrologer to foresee doom and evil when a comet is abroad, but from the positions of the comet and planets in the sky an astrologer should be able to see *what* is doomed, in what way, and how soon the evil will be

visited. Good astrologers may even predict what courses of action may prevent the otherwise inevitable disaster.

Novae (or "new stars"), on the other hand, were often seen as omens of good. These are stars that appear suddenly from nowhere and shine brightly for a few days. A possible example is the Star of Bethlehem, which guided the wise men to the birthplace of Christ. New stars in a fantasy campaign can be seen as blessings from the gods on particular dates or events. (Phenomenologically, new stars can be novae -- dim stars that flare briefly into brightness -- or supernovae -- distant stars that explode -- but the difference is moot to medieval technology.)

The appearance of comets and new stars is clearly something that can be controlled by the GM to signal particularly disastrous or auspicious events. One such event per campaign is probably plenty, unless your game is particularly epic in nature and the gods are wont to toy with the heavens at a moment's notice.

Astrology in the Campaign

Using the information in this article, and perhaps from other resources, a GM should be able to either invent or adapt a unique system of astrology for his fantasy campaign. Using the jargon of astrology to couch predictions lends an air of authenticity and atmosphere, even if it is nothing more than mysticobabble ("The Black King dares not attack until the moon moves into conjunction with Venus in the ascendant!").

Astrologers can make useful NPCs, often allies or contacts. Other important NPCs such as rulers or nobles may employ astrologers, so there is a good chance an adventuring party will come across them at some point. Astrology is a full-time profession in pretechnological societies -- casting horoscopes takes considerable work -- so it is unlikely that an astrologer would seek adventure, making them rare as PCs. A PC might dabble in astrology though.

If astrology is seen as a dark art, its practitioners must hide from public life. Significant enemies of the PCs might use astrology as an evil tool to prepare themselves for any confrontations and to seek out the things they need to fulfil their nefarious goals.

A professional astrologer needs an appropriate skill in your chosen game system, representing years of study in his art. Casting a horoscope is tedious and laborious, taking several hours of cross-referencing books and charts, calculating angles, determining influences, and combining all into a coherent whole. A skill or success roll should be made by the GM at the end of the process, with the margin of success indicating the general degree of accuracy of the result. (Even if astrology does not work, an astrologer will be using his intuition and personal skills to forecast the most likely course of events.) If the roll fails, the GM can supply the player with false information.

Whether or not astrology works in your campaign, it is likely that the characters *believe* it does. The GM may wish to keep the players in the dark, so they are not sure if astrology is accurate or not. The simplest working assumption is that all characters believe astrology works, and any who don't have a personality quirk to that effect. This prevents the telltale addition of delusions to all characters who do believe.

Astrology might also have a significant effect on magic in the campaign. An excellent resource for combining astrology and magic is ***GURPS Cabal***.

Adventure Seeds

Black Times

Bands of orcs are laying waste to farms and villages on the edge of the kingdom, but the king is doing nothing because the court astrologer has warned him that starting a war now will lead only to disaster -- he must wait another fortnight for the planets to enter a more promising alignment. Dispatched from a large town in the path of the orcs, the heroes must convince the king that his help is needed now! The easiest way to change the king's mind is to get his astrologer to change his story . . .

Ill Fate

One of the heroes has his horoscope cast at a fair. To the astrologer's horror, the chart reveals a great disaster will befall the hero, sometime in the next week! Dire happenings will lead up to an inevitable tragedy, he warns the hero. Sure enough, strange things do begin to happen: A pickpocket gets away with the hero's purse, his horse breaks a leg, the inn the PCs are staying in suffers a fire. Is it the workings of destiny, and if so, how can catastrophe be averted? Or is it all an elaborate hoax, and for what purpose?

Wedding Day

A young noble is to be wed, with the date set for the spring equinox, when a rare planetary conjunction promises a long and fruitful marriage -- the couple are even in love already! A rival noble faction kidnaps the bride three days before the wedding, and the noble's astrologer forecasts tragedy if she is not recovered in time for the equinox. If ever a group of heroes is needed, it is now.

Insider Trading

The adventurers are merchants, struggling to make a living by trading goods at various towns. It seems that whatever goods they bring to a town, another merchant has just beaten them to market with a supply, driving down the prices while making himself a handsome profit. Whatever is in demand, he seems to have in stock. Could this uncanny predictive ability be the result of astrology, a dark art outlawed by the king? The best way to find out is for the heroes to seek out and ask an astrologer themselves.

Further Reading

Eason, Cassandra. *Encyclopedia of Magic & Ancient Wisdom* (Piatkus, 2001). -- A reference handbook for all sorts of occult traditions and myths, from around the world.

Hite, Kenneth. ***GURPS Cabal*** (Steve Jackson Games, 2001). pp. 57-59. -- Cabal presents a magic system that uses astrology to provide modifiers to spells and magical effects. The correspondences listed can be co-opted for a fantasy game.

Masters, Phil, ***GURPS Arabian Nights*** (Steve Jackson Games, 1998). p. 75. -- This gives a system for using astrology in medicine, as well as a few other suggestions for incorporating astrology into a game.

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02018e.htm> -- A Web search brings up many pages on the "history of astrology," but most begin from the assumption that astrology is a predictive science. The Catholic Encyclopedia has one of the better academic accounts.

<http://www.astrology-numerology.com/astrology.html> -- Definitions of astrological symbology and terminology, including many more details than covered here.

<http://www.griffithobs.org/SkyOphiuchus.html> -- Griffith Observatory page detailing the zodiac sign of Ophiuchus and the current dates of each sun sign.

<http://explorers.whyte.com/astrol.htm> -- An interesting academic paper, the latter half about astrology in the 12th century.

Gaming and the Nature of Artificial Intelligence

by Mark Gellis

Robots have been part of science fiction and science fiction gaming for a long time. To some people, it is more interesting to play R2-D2 than Luke Skywalker, or to be Hal instead of David Bowman. But playing an intelligent machine raises some questions about how such beings experience both life and death.

If we are speaking of simple equipment that is not a character, there really is not a problem. A calculator that can also remember your wedding anniversary and even give you advice on how to repair an automobile engine is only a tool. A security robot that can see in near total darkness, track you by your body heat, and fire a machine gun at you is effectively no different than any other monster you might encounter in a traditional dungeon crawl. The GM can define whatever limits he wants ("now, for an extra 500 dollars, you can buy the software package that gives you a +1 on your 'Mechanic: Fusion Drives and Power Plants' roll") and go from there.

The question becomes more difficult when we start talking about NPCs and especially if we are talking about player characters.

The whole point of a truly intelligent robot, the kind one would run as a player character, is that it has a mind. It has a sense of self. But where does the mind come from?

Quite simply, we do not know the answer to that question . . . so everything in this article is speculative. But it is possible to consider various aspects of the issue, both in terms of what it may mean for actual sapient machine intelligence and in terms of how it might affect roleplaying.

Let us consider the question itself. Assuming we could create a machine with its own consciousness, where would that mind come from? Is it simply the software? No. Software, by itself, does nothing. It needs a frame on which to run. And it needs an environment with which to interact. This is because consciousness is most likely an interaction between memory, a physical brain, a real or simulated environment, and processes by which that brain interacts with what it already knows (memory) and whatever is happening at the moment (environment).

The point is that the physicality of the individual is not something that can be escaped. Without some kind of physical brain, some hardware on which the software (memory and processes of interaction or problem-solving) runs, the mind goes away, and without some physical medium, the memory cannot be preserved. The only alternative is to assume that once an AI achieves a certain level of complexity, it develops an actual soul which could be totally independent of any physical body, and which could continue to exist even after the physical body is turned off or destroyed.

This last idea is not an unreasonable one, but let us assume, for the moment, that spirituality does not enter into our equations.

The brain is, of course, different than the body. David Pulver, in *Transhuman Space*, makes an excellent and useful point that every "shell," organic or mechanical, needs both a computer and AI software running on that computer. The computer houses the AI but it is not the same thing as the shell; the shell, on the other hand, allows the AI to experience and interact with the outside world, and is linked to the computer, but it is not the same thing as the computer. The exception would be a shell that consists only of a computer, but if we want to give the AI a world with which it can interact, it will either have virtual environment programs or be connected to some kind of network.

AI Gaming Principle Number One

When we speak of sapient artificial intelligence, we are speaking of three separate aspects: the brain (usually a computer), the AI software (memory and a set of processes for problem-solving and interacting with an environment), and a physical body or shell of some kind (to allow the AI to interact with some kind of environment).

Now this business of needing computer, AI, and shell raises some issues for both GMs and players. The first is how to handle multiple copies of the same artificial intelligence in different mechanical bodies. Would they be the same person?

Human twins provide us with a good analogy. Twins begin with almost identical bodies and "operating software," and those who live in the same house will have remarkably similar experiences, and they may act alike much of the time, but they are two separate individuals. The same will be true of two copies of the same AI software inhabiting two separate computers in two separate shells.

They will also be different individuals. Twins are sometimes much closer to each other than other siblings, but there will always be some minor differences. The old *Patty Duke Show* built an entire television series of comedy based on how different two people can be even if they do look alike.

As the two or more intelligent robots of the same type experience different things, encounter different people, face different challenges, they are likely to develop very different personalities. Certain aspects of their behavior may remain the same if they were basic parts of their programming ("Cannot Harm Innocents," etc.) but other aspects might become very different.

AI Gaming Principle Number Two

Each brain, mechanical or organic, is a separate individual. What this means is that if a piece of AI software is being run on two or more different mechanical bodies, they should be treated as separate characters. The exception would be if one mechanical body was simply a drone being operated remotely by the AI. If it actually copies itself to this second body, however, the second body would become a second individual.

Another issue that needs to be addressed is the difference between mechanical and organic brains. One of the biggest questions here is where emotions come from. Much of our thinking has a strong emotional component. For example, understanding a concept like loyalty and being loyal to someone are two very different things. Our emotions flavor our ideas to such an extent that without them the ideas would themselves change in a significant manner. But emotions may be, to a great extent, biochemical or hormonal. This means that an artificial intelligence with a mechanical brain must either be designed with some kind of analogue or there may be some serious differences in the way such beings actually think (although they might learn to modify their behavior so that this difference would rarely be noticeable to others).

For the purposes of gaming, we may assume that it is possible to create such analogues. On the other hand, the lack of organic physicality, of biochemical interactions in the brain as well as purely electrical ones, might have a profound affect on personality. This offers some intriguing options for roleplaying. Gaming systems like **GURPS**, which allow for a wide range of mental and social advantages, disadvantages, and quirks, offer a wide range of possibilities for those playing robotic characters.

Another issue is sensory input. Mechanical brains may have access to other senses, such as magnetic fields, ultraviolet radiation, and so on. We may assume that such cybernetic brains can handle these differences in sensory input without difficulties. However, such differences might create certain personality traits. For example, if you cannot hear, but you can see magnetic fields, Mozart becomes irrelevant, but Jupiter may be so beautiful as to be heartbreaking. In addition, a human brain placed in a cybernetic body with different senses might need a bit of time (and perhaps therapy) to get used to it.

Finally, organic brains are actually altered by what they experience; new experiences create new neural pathways within the brain. Eventually, a human brain will physically become as individual as its memories. A mechanical brain is more static; computers do not build new circuits as a result of new experiences. It is unclear whether this would affect such things as consciousness or the survival of the mind if the AI was erased and had to be re-installed. For the purposes of gaming, however, one may assume that this is either not a significant factor or that in the future it will be possible to design mechanical brains that mimic the pathway-building activities common to organic ones.

AI Gaming Principle Number Three

The differences between organic and mechanical brains and bodies offer a variety of opportunities for roleplaying and plot devices.

We now move to one of the most problematic aspects of using intelligent machines as characters. A machine cannot actually die, can it? It can be repaired, or its mind can be moved to a new body. Or can it?

Remember that the intelligent robot consists of three components: the body, the brain, and the software. The brain and the software are where the machine's mind actually comes from. Thus, if we are talking about moving the computer and its software from one "shell" to another, there should not be any problems. In gaming terms, it can be covered under one of the various "Multiple Forms" advantages in *GURPS* and similar advantages in other systems.

What happens if the second body is very different than the first one? How much influence does the nature of the body have on the artificial consciousness? A GM does not need to go too far into the specifics here, but there are some interesting possibilities here for roleplaying. Imagine what a combat robot would feel like if its brain had to be moved into an agricultural robot . . . or a mechanical donkey stolen from a theme park.

Now we can move to the real crux of the problem. What happens if the software is erased or the brain is damaged or destroyed? What happens to the character?

We can go through the most likely possibilities. First, if an AI is damaged and restored, it would remain the same consciousness and the same character. The same would be true if the computer was damaged but not destroyed. This is analogous to a person who has suffered brain damage or been in a coma. On the other hand, if the AI has been totally erased and restored from a backed up copy, there is a question about whether it is really the same "person" or not. If the brain has been reduced to a totally clean slate, with no memories at all, are we effectively starting with a totally new mind? (One method for handling this issue in a game setting is detailed below.)

Defragmentation and similar computer operations are not going to be a problem here. Such self-organizing activities within a conscious artificial intelligence where individual pieces of data are sorted out, deleted if deemed unnecessary, etc. are probably no more than a robotic version of what an organic brain does while sleeping and dreaming.

If an entirely new AI is installed on the old body, and the first AI has been erased, the first AI is probably dead. The combination of the old body and the new AI will be an entirely new character. Of course, this may remain a secret for quite a while; in fact, as long as the new AI acts like the old AI, no one may notice for a very long time. On the other hand, when the formerly loyal robot valet suddenly pulls out a machine pistol and starts firing at everyone in the room, people may figure that something has gone awry.

What happens if the second AI is erased and the first one restored? Again, it is difficult to say, although it would seem that the first character would still be "dead" and has not been restored but simply replaced with another character that happens to share the first one's memories and skills.

In the same way, if the computer itself is destroyed, we are probably talking about the death of the character. If the conscious mind is an interaction between a specific brain and its software, then simply copying the software to a new computer creates a new individual. If the first brain has been destroyed, the first consciousness has died.

We can now examine some variations on this theme. What happens if you download the software from one machine to another? Relying on the principles we discussed earlier, a new character, a new consciousness, would have been created. It would be as if one had oneself cloned and then educated the clone in exactly the same way as the original person had been educated. The clone might think and act very much like the original, and might even think it was the original, but the original and the clone would not share the same consciousness any more than two twins do. The same would be true for a copy of an AI. It might be very much like the old one, but it is not one mind sharing two bodies; it is a separate, second mind. If one erased the old copy, "cut and paste" instead of "copy and paste," it would probably mean the "death" of the first AI. After all, if we continue the analogy of the clone, if the original died, the clone would

live on, but the original's soul would not pass into the clone. In the same way, any copy of an AI operating in its own shell would be a separate consciousness.

The point is that memory and experience can be recorded and copied, but not actual consciousness. The living mind depends on a dynamic interaction of brain, memory, and experience. Unless we are speaking of a soul that can exist separately of the body, the mind cannot leave the brain on which it currently exists because that brain is part of what generates the mind from moment to moment. The brain can be modified or moved, but it cannot be abandoned.

(This leads to further questions; for example, what does a *Star Trek* transporter actually *do*? The user couldn't be certain that the person who showed up on the other end of the beam would actually be him. He may be a perfect copy, perhaps, but the original might be very dead . . . disintegration tends to do that.)

AI Gaming Principle Number Four

When the actual physical brain of a robot character is destroyed, or the software is totally erased, the character has usually died. It's time to build or roll up another one.

Or is it?

There is at least one solution to this problem. Imagine an AI that exists on one computer. Now imagine that computer linked to another one so that the AI exists on both computers as a single entity distributed on the two machines. The two machines now operate as one network, one brain, although each computer is powerful enough to house the AI on its own. While the AI is conscious, move its memories from the first machine to the other one. At the point when the memories have all been moved and the first machine is only being used for its processing power, turn it off. The AI would now be transferred to the second machine. The reason this works is that the consciousness of the AI has not been interrupted during the process of having its brain modified (that is, expanded and then reduced) and it has never existed as two separate entities on two separate machines.

What about web-based life forms, based either on one machine or copying itself to new bodies when and as it chooses? The same principles we have discussed already can be used here quite well. First, one must remember that even though the web does not seem like it has a physical base, it does; the web is simply a very large network made up of computers and other devices (like Pepsi machines) and the wires or electronic signals that connect them to each other. All web-based life would need one or more host machines to exist.

In the special case of an intelligence that exists on several machines simultaneously, we can again treat these machines as a single network. If such an intelligence moves its software to a new machine on the same network, or if one of its component machines is damaged or destroyed, it might be difficult to determine exactly where one mind ends and another begins (this issue is explored to some extent by Robert Heinlein in his novel *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*), but sending a copy to an entirely new and separate network would constitute the creation of a new individual.

Now for some applications of these principles. When it comes to artificial intelligence, gaming enjoys a genuine advantage over both philosophy and reality. First, we really do not understand the nature of consciousness, of the mind, or of the soul . . . so, again, everything in this article is speculative. Second, gaming is supposed to be fun. Therefore, one can allow a few fudges from reality.

For example, if the GM allows for it, there is nothing wrong with replacing one combat robot whose brain and/or software has been destroyed with an identical copy, another robot that uses a copy of the first one's software packages and memories, which would be backed up on a regular basis. This would be a version of the **GURPS** "Extra Life" advantage. One could buy as many copies of a robotic character as one wanted. Technically, we may be talking about more than one conscious entity here, but there really would be no external difference between these robots. Unless people had seen the first one destroyed, they would not know it was not the original. In fact, even the AI would not be able to tell the difference; unless someone told it the truth, it would probably think it was the original (although the gap in its memory starting from the last point when the original had backed up its memory might make it a little suspicious). Even if it did find out it was a copy, it would still feel like the original. (Such moments of discovery and

such conflicts of identity are prime material for roleplaying.)

The same would true for any downloaded copy of the AI. It would be a separate conscious entity, but if a player wanted to continue using the AI as a character, he could use the "Extra Life" advantage to play a copy of the original downloaded to a new robotic shell if the first one was destroyed.

AI Gaming Principle Number Five

It is important to distinguish between philosophical concepts of consciousness and the applications of those concepts in a game.

One last question. What if robots have souls? We have been discussing artificial intelligence using the assumption that consciousness is purely mechanical or biological and not spiritual. Now, if souls exist, whether they exist outside the physical universe and attach themselves to a body when an appropriate one comes along, or if they are created by a certain complexity of brain but can then somehow live on after the brain dies, much of what has been said here about when the character "dies" goes out the window. In gaming terms, it seems fair to assume that one can treat the soul of an artificial intelligence exactly as one would treat the soul of a human being . . . which allows for an entirely new realm of campaigns. While the idea of running or playing in a game of *Transhuman Spirits* or *Transhuman In Nomine* might seem a bit mind boggling to some, it offers some truly original opportunities for roleplaying.

Use of Weapons

Arming characters for a *GURPS Space* campaign

by Stephen Dedman

GURPS Space, *Ultra-Tech*, and *Ultra-Tech 2* contain a bewildering array of personal ranged weapons, ranging in legality and lethality from sonic stingers and holdout dazzle lasers to mortars and missile launchers. Because of this, choosing guns and combat skills for your player character may take much of a play session, and arming a pack of NPCs may take even longer. After all, you want to choose the right tool for the job, don't you?

The easiest shortcut is to look at a character's background, and the environment in which he's used to fighting. Different military services will prefer different weapons, as will police, spies, and criminals. Voluntary colonists worried about the local wildlife are likely to carry heavier weapons than bounty hunters hunting for lowlives. Other factors include price, weight, range, and sometimes concealability.

The following list is designed for a TL10 campaign, and is intended to make this choice easier. Note that a character may be trained with a particular weapon but unable to obtain one on a particular planet, and have to rely on default skills.

X-ray lasers (p. S81)

Military X-ray laser rifles and carbines, Military X-ray dinosaur lasers, and X-ray heavy laser pistols are the preferred options for the Navy, Space Marines, and libertarian Belters, who do most of their fighting in vacuum or trace atmospheres and in microgravity or free-fall. Their beams penetrate armored spacesuits with ease, they have no recoil, and their range in vacuum is awe-inspiring. While they may be too expensive and delicate for infantry, sensible armies don't scrimp when equipping their highly-trained special forces, and even in a realistic campaign that uses advanced batteries, the extra weight isn't a problem in zero-g. X-ray lasers are only useful at point-blank range in a denser atmosphere, but even this can be an advantage inside pressurized spaceships, where a stray shot can damage delicate systems. Nonetheless, Space Marines, Fighter Jocks, and Belters will probably also carry heavy laser pistols with variable beams (p. S81) as sidearms and as tools.

Lasers (pp. S80-81)

Military laser rifles and carbines, and military dinosaur lasers, are popular with troops who can expect to fight in a wide range of environments, from airless moonlets to the swamps of high-gravity greenhouse worlds. A laser pistol or heavy laser pistol with variable beam (p. S81) and perhaps blue-green frequency (p. UT37) and/or a selector switch for full-auto fire (p. UT22) would be an ideal sidearm, especially for those who may have to live off the land in unfamiliar territory -- Scouts, Colonists, Rangers and SEALs, Scientists, etc. These people would probably keep a dinosaur laser in their ship's locker as well, just in case.

Because lasers are particularly effective against most concealable body armor (except for bioplas bodysuits), they are also popular with Assassins and Terrorist/Rebels who specialize in "soft targets."

Laser weapons will be less common in campaigns where rechargeable power cells are unavailable; the weapons become heavier and the cost per shot very high. Holdout Dazzle lasers (p. S81), however, are likely even more popular in realistic campaigns where power cells are unavailable, as they get 5 shots from an advanced battery. (They are also less than 1/3 the cost of a sonic stinger, which will make them popular with those who can't afford anything better, such as startown Riffraff.)

Stunners (p. S82)

Inexpensive, small, non-lethal, and about as legal as a personal computer, stunners are almost ubiquitous as air. The hand stunner is a common home defense weapon, and also a standard fixture in starship lockers, especially as it won't damage the surroundings. Hand stunners will also be popular police weapons, especially in societies when civilians are rarely heavily armed or armored (though many cops will also have access to more lethal weapons). In more repressive societies, cops may prefer Screammers (p. UT53) with a stun setting.

The sonic stinger (p. UT53) -- a more concealable, less powerful stunner -- may be a popular form of "feminine protection," the TL9+ equivalent of pepper spray or mace. Some societies may even insist that women carry them; they will also be carried by many undercover cops as a backup weapon. Many stun weapons will have nauseator settings (p. UTT59) for extra deterrence.

Blasters (pp. S81-82)

Blasters can be designed for use in vacuum *or* in atmospheres, but not both; for this reason, most starfarers prefer laser weapons. However, Bounty Hunters, Escorts, Intelligence Agents, cops, bodyguards, and others who like sidearms with a choice of lethal and non-lethal settings often carry blasters with Electrolaser or Neural Blaster settings.

Electrolasers (p. S80)

Popular on desert worlds, particularly with law enforcement professionals and for home defense, but rarely encountered anywhere else.

Chemical-Propellant Guns (p. S78)

Though many spacefarers dislike the problems caused by recoil in varying gravities (see p. S98), the invention of liquid propellant smartguns at TL8 (p. UTT48) and 10mm shaped-charge rounds at TL9 (p. UTT51) has kept chemical slugthrowers popular with ground forces well into TL10. Many mercenaries, planetary militia, and police SWAT teams still prefer them to lasers or blasters: they will be even more common in campaigns where rechargeable power cells are unavailable.

Common chemical-propellant weapons in a TL10 campaign include:

- **Civ Shotgun, 12g:** Inexpensive, versatile (thanks to a wide range of ammunition; see pp. UTT52-53), and almost ubiquitous. Very popular with Colonists, and often found in ship's lockers and police armories (p. UTT52).
- **Heavy Pistol, 10mmP:** A standard sidearm for military ground forces, usually loaded with regular ammunition with a clip of shape-charge rounds kept in reserve for use against armored opponents (or vehicles). Smartguns are favored by Military Intelligence and Special Ops, but the cheaper caseless pistols (p. S78) are more common.
- **Storm Carbine, 10mmR:** Usually loaded with shaped-charge ammo (for armored opponents) or duplex cartridges (p. UTT51), the storm carbine (p. UTT50) is standard issue for ground troops on many worlds.
- **Submachine Gun, 10mmP:** Popular with special ops troops and Terrorist/Rebels (who usually choose smartguns, if available, and carry a few clips of shape charge rounds). The cheaper caseless variant (p. S78) is standard issue for security guards.
- **Urban Assault Weapon:** A combined 12g shotgun and 10mm SMG, also popular with special ops troops because of the variety of available ammunition (pp. UTT52-53).

Electromagnetic Guns (p. S78)

Though expensive, Gauss pistols (p. S78) are popular sidearms for people more concerned with a high rate of fire than legality class, but who don't need shaped-charge rounds: Terrorist/Rebels, Pirates, and some Escorts and Special Forces. Gauss needlers (p. UT19) are cheaper, very effective against most concealable armor, and also favored by terrorists.

Grenade Launchers (p. S78)

Grenades and grenade launchers are rarely available to civilians, but standard equipment for most military and police units; a mini grenade launcher (p. UT28) can be fitted under any ranged weapon weighing 4 lb or more, and often will.

Tanglers (p. S79)

Bulkier and more expensive than stunners, tanglers are favored by people who want non-lethal weapons that are also effective against armored opponents, or creatures who may be invulnerable to stunners and paralysis guns. Scientists who want to catch animals alive use them, as do Colonists, and they are standard equipment in survey service ships. Military and police units are more likely to use Tangler grenades (p. UTT66) in grenade launchers.

Needlers (p. UT22)

Cheap, almost undetectable, and very effective against soft targets, needlers are popular with Assassins, Intelligence Agents, and Terrorists, but are also used by those unable to afford anything better (Riffraff, Rogues). In campaigns where Power Cells are unavailable, Needlers will be very popular holdout weapons. Minineedlers (p. UTT57) with drugged needles are favored by those who want to be even more discreetly armed, such as Diplomats.

Ice Guns (p. UT72)

A low-powered sidearm, the ice gun is a useful survival weapon found in most starship lockers. It is much favored by Scouts and Colonists, but also by Assassins and Terrorists (who usually mix some venom into the ice). Ice Guns will also be popular in societies where weapons are strictly controlled (CR 5+); it's hard to restrict access to ammunition to someone who can get 1500 shots from a B cell and 6.5 gallons of water (150 from an advanced battery).

Gyrocs (p. UT20)

Another weapon saved from obsolescence by new technology -- in this case, the Viper round (pp. UT73-74). Assassins and Terrorists favor Rocket Carbines (p. UT20) for sniping, and Holdout Gyrocs (p. UTT55) when they want concealability, range, killing power, and quick martyrdom. Both weapons are also popular with police forces: Rocket Carbines for the SWAT team, Holdout Gyrocs for undercover use, especially bodyguard duty. Assassins and Terrorists use APEX and HEX (p. UT20) and Salvo (p. UTT155) rounds; cops prefer less lethal CHEM, SLAP and Stingray rounds (p. UT20).

Character Type	Likely Weapon Skills
<i>Assassin</i>	Beam Weapons (Laser); Guns (Gyroc, Needler, Rifle, Pistol)
<i>Bounty Hunter</i>	Beam Weapons (Neural or Sonic), (Blaster)
<i>Colonist</i>	Beam Weapons (Laser); Guns (Needler, Shotgun, Tangler)
<i>Diplomat</i>	Beam Weapons (Laser, Sonic); Guns (Needler)
<i>Escort</i>	Beam Weapons (Neural or Sonic), (Blaster); Guns (Gyroc, Needler)
<i>Intelligence Agent</i>	Beam Weapons (Laser, Sonic); Guns (Needler)
<i>Navy/Marines</i>	Beam Weapons (Laser); Guns (Grenade Launcher)
<i>Patrolman</i>	Beam Weapons (Neural or Sonic), (Blaster); Guns (Grenade Launcher)
<i>Pirate/Smuggler</i>	Beam Weapons (Laser); Guns (Needler, Shotgun)
<i>Planetary police</i>	Beam Weapons (Neural or Sonic), (Blaster); Guns (Gyroc or Grenade Launcher)
<i>Prospector/Belter</i>	Beam Weapons (Laser)
<i>Riffraff</i>	Beam Weapons (Laser, Sonic); Guns (Needler)
<i>Rogue</i>	Beam Weapons (Blaster or Laser); Guns (Needler, Shotgun)
<i>Scientist</i>	Beam Weapons (Neural or Sonic); Guns (Tangler)
<i>Scout</i>	Beam Weapons (Laser); Guns (Needler, Tangler)
<i>Security Guard</i>	Beam Weapons (Sonic); Guns (Light Automatic or Pistol)

<i>Starship Crew</i>	Beam Weapons (Laser, Sonic)
<i>Terrorist/Rebel</i>	Beam Weapons (Laser); Guns (Grenade Launcher, Gyroc, Light Automatic, Needler, Pistol, Shotgun)
<i>Tourist/Civilian</i>	Beam Weapons (Sonic)
<i>Trooper (Ground forces)</i>	Beam Weapons (Blaster or Laser); Guns (Grenade Launcher, Light Automatic, Pistol)

Most Common Weapons

Desert world, CR 0-2:	Electrolaser pistol or rifle
Home defense, CR 0-2:	Hand Stunner, Ice Gun or Civ Shotgun
Home defense, CR 3-6:	Hand Stunner or Ice Gun
Hunting weapon, CR 0-4:	Civ Shotgun or Laser rifle
Police sidearm, CR 1:	Blaster pistol with Neural and Tight-Beam settings
Police sidearm, CR 2-4:	Hand stunner with Nauseator setting
Police sidearm, CR 5-6:	Blaster with Neural and Tight-Beam settings
Security guard, CR 0-2:	Submachine gun
Security guard, CR 3-5:	Stun rifle with Nauseator setting
Startown sidearm, CR 0:	Heavy laser pistol
Startown sidearm, CR 1:	Laser pistol
Startown sidearm, CR 2:	Ice Gun
Startown sidearm: CR 3-4:	Stunner or Holdout laser
Startown sidearm, CR 5+:	Sonic Stinger

Burning Rubber

Incendiary Tactics in *Car Wars*

by Roland M. Boshnack

One of the most exciting changes in the newest edition of *Car Wars* are the new Fire and Explosion rules. The old system of Fire Modifiers and Burn Durations is gone, replaced by a much simpler process. As a quick recap, after an incendiary weapon hits a target or a flammable internal component has been hit, the attacking player rolls 3d and tries to get under the amount of damage done. If he succeeds, a Fire Marker is placed right on the vehicle's counter. Thereafter, at the end of each turn, the burning vehicle rolls to see if the fire is put out. If this roll fails, the vehicle takes damage. If the fire spreads into the interior and damages any explosive items inside, then there is a good chance that the vehicle will explode, instantly destroying it.

This article focuses in turn on each side of the Fire equation. First we'll look at how to get your opponent roasting like a weenie, then we'll give you some tips on putting the fire out.

Burn, Baby, Burn!

Incendiary attacks are fairly far and few between. The most common are the humble Machine Gun with Incendiary ammunition and the Flamethrower; harder to find are Lasers. Let's look at each of these in turn.

Machine Gun with Incendiary Ammunition

Your basic Machine Gun is the single most common weapon in *Car Wars* -- always was, always will be. When loaded with Incendiary Ammo, this weapon becomes somewhat more fearsome. Incendiary Ammo isn't cheap -- it's about 50% more expensive than normal solid rounds -- but it turns the MG's attacks into Incendiary. Even better, the weapon itself does not become Flammable nor Explosive, so you don't need to worry about enemy attacks causing it to explode.

The downside, of course, is that the weapon still only does 1d of damage, meaning that on an average damage roll (resulting in 3-4 points of damage) you have less than a 2% chance to start a fire. Linking, however, increases these chances incredibly. Two Incendiary MGs do, on average, 7 points of damage, giving an over 15% chance of starting a fire. Three linked MGs (average total damage 10-11) will place a fire marker over 50% of the time, and can do this up to 20 times a combat with normal ammo loadouts. Of course, if you can hit the opponent's engine, gas tank, or flamethrower with an Incendiary MG the amount of damage becomes moot -- he's on fire no matter what.

Flamethrower

Not only are Flamethrowers incendiary attacks, but they roll to start fires at double the amount of damage done. This means that even a single FT (average damage 3.5, doubled to 7) has a 16% chance of starting a fire. Linked FTs are even nastier. Two FTs (average damage 7, doubled to 14) will light the target up over 90% of the time! However, note that linking three or more FTs is overkill in regards to fires, as there is a fixed maximum of 15 or less on the roll (which is still 95.4%). As usual, if you can get a flamer attack past the opponent's armor and hit a flammable component, he's burning regardless.

On the other hand, Flamethrowers have some horrible drawbacks. The first is range. They are the only weapon so far detailed for *Car Wars Fifth Edition* with a maximum range (24 inches) which can really hurt on large maps. Plus, FTs are not only flammable, they're explosive. So, if an enemy lights you up, each FT has a 1-in-6 chance of exploding and destroying your car each turn that it takes damage from fire. This is a very bad thing, and can turn almost certain

victory into flaming defeat instantly. Finally, FTs only carry 10 shots each; however, this is not as bad as it sounds. They have an excellent to-hit chance, and combined with the short ranges that they are used at this means that most shots fired from them will hit.

Laser

The Laser is the king of weapons. It is very accurate, has unlimited ammunition, and inflicts incendiary damage without being flammable or explosive itself. Medium Lasers can be thought of as linked Incendiary MGs as far as fire goes, as they have the same chances of placing a fire marker.

There is a cost, however. Literally. Lasers are extremely expensive (Medium Lasers cost more than an entire Division 5 car!) and are fairly fragile (only 2 DP for Medium versus 6 DP total for twin-linked Machine Guns).

So now you know what weapons will start fires. How do you use this to your advantage? First off, always link incendiary weapons together. Linked Flamethrowers or Medium Lasers are almost guaranteed to place a fire marker if they hit, and even Incendiary ammo-equipped Machine Guns have a decent chance. Note that it isn't enough to hit the target with multiple incendiary attacks (though this is still a good idea); only linked weapons add their damage together when rolling to start a fire.

Of course, if you can't hit the other guy you can't burn him. Targeting Computers, good Gunners, and short ranges all help in this aspect. More importantly, resist the urge to go for tire shots when trying to start fires. You want to penetrate his armor, and wheels do not take fire damage if the target is moving. If the target is stationary, though, let him have it. A few good hits and he'll be one crispy critter.

There is also a chance that a vehicle will catch fire if it spends an entire turn touching a burning wreck or building. You can't count on this, but if you get the chance to ram an opponent into such an item then go for it. Every little bit counts!

Fire In The Hole!

So much for starting fires. What do you do when you discover that your opponent is a pyromaniac? Well, there are several tactics you can use.

First off, speed rules. This goes for everything in the new edition of ***Car Wars*** (except maybe avoiding rolls on the Crash Table), but it is particularly important once you've been lit up. At 100 mph you have a -3 to the Extinguishing Fires table, which means that on average you'll remove at least one fire marker (and you have a 50% chance of putting all fires out automatically), and the fire will never spread. Not all cars are capable of such high speeds and it can take several turns to get up there in any case, but make sure you're going at least 60 mph (which give a -1 and removes the chance of the fire spreading).

If you can't out-run the flames, maneuver around a lot. Every D3 or harder maneuver taken during a turn -- even those completed before a fire marker is placed -- gives a -1 to the Extinguishing Fires roll. Frankly, this being ***Car Wars***, you should be jinking all over the place to begin with. However, if your opponent does start you burning, a couple of hard drifts (D3 each) will give a -2 to the Fire table. This means that at least you don't have to worry about the flames spreading, and you have a good (about 50%) chance of removing at least one fire marker. At up to 40 mph a Handling Status of -5 is either completely safe or avoids a crash on a 5 or less (83% chance), so make those turns and drifts. But be warned -- it appears that only successful maneuvers can put out fires, so try to avoid rolling on the Crash Table at all costs.

If you are lit on fire, dump any explosive ammo you have immediately before it can eat through your armor and blow your car up. Don't waste it, of course, but try for those shots that you've been husbanding the rounds for. Even if you only get one or two good hits before the fire gets inside, it's still better than losing the game because the ammo exploded.

It is possible to design a fireproof vehicle. Fireproof Armor, a built-in Fire Extinguisher, and an extra crewman with a hand-held Fire Extinguisher give a -6 to the Extinguishing Fires table, automatically putting out any fires before they can do damage. This is overkill, however; instead, go with either a built-in Fire Extinguisher or Fireproof Armor and an extra guy on the pumps. This gives a net -3 to the Extinguishing Fires table, which should be enough to put out most of the flames, especially when combined with high speeds and a few good maneuvers. You're better off spending that money (and using the internal space) for items which will win you matches instead -- such as Flamethrowers . . .

House Rules

Here are some unofficial variants to deal with unexpected situations.

Cook-Off Rule

Consider damage done by the Oven Rule (if a vehicle already has three fire markers, a roll of 6 on the Fire Table does 1 point of damage to each internal component) to be Fire damage. Therefore, Fireproof Suits protect crew and passengers, and explosive items have a chance to blow up. This is realistic; during the Soviet invasion of Finland at the start of World War II the Finns used the famous Molotov Cocktails (aka Russian Martinis) to destroy Soviet tanks in just this fashion.

Fire vs. Incendiary Damage

This isn't really a house rule, but it's useful to spell out anyway. Incendiary is a type of attack that has a chance to start a fire. It will not explode items on its own, and Fire-Resistant and Fireproof items have no particular resistance against it. Fire is a type of damage caused by Incendiary attacks (among other things), and can cause explosive items to detonate. It can be nullified by Fireproof Suits, and Fire-Resistant and Fireproof armor help protect against it.

Fire and Rolled Vehicles

If a car has rolled onto its side or top, whichever side is facing down takes no damage from the fire (it is treated like the Underside on an upright vehicle). The Underside does take damage, however. Since the vehicle is stationary (by definition) the tires burn as well . . . This would be a good time for the crew to bail out and take their chances on foot.

Fire and Spinning Vehicles

When a car is spinning, each time it ends up with a spin of 45° or more counts as a D3 maneuver for the purposes of putting fires out. This is realistic, as such extreme and rapid movement would have a good chance of extinguishing the flames.

Pyramid Review

Nautilus

Published By [Mayfair Games, Inc.](#)

Designed by Brigitte and Wolfgang Ditt

Art and Graphics by Franz Vohwinkel

Developed and Edited by TM-Spiele

Full-color boxed set; \$49

Mayfair has a number of hits under its belt, but for those who tire of another iteration of railroad games or exploring Cataan, their latest release heads for the second-to-last frontier. *Nautilus* is a colorful and fanciful board game of undersea exploration.

The object of the game (designed for two to four players) is to score the most points through research done in the Underwater City and discoveries made on the ocean floor. Players start with a selection of researchers, submarines, and an allowance of Nemo, the game's currency. They will use researchers to delve into technology, subs to explore the ocean, and Nemo to pay for it all. The board depicts a section of the seabed, with the shallower Lagoon in the middle extending deeper into the Slope, the Deep Sea, and the Abyss. Scattered throughout this area are facedown discovery tiles, containing sea life, lost treasures, ocean currents, and even the ruins of the city of Atlantis.

The Underwater City is a submerged habitat for scientists that players will build throughout the game. It starts in the Lagoon as a single octagonal Base Station, but players will buy and attach research and habitation modules as they progress. Placing a habitat module allows you to bring your researchers to the base. Attaching a research module gives them a place to work; they labor to improve your technology so your subs move faster, your sonar sees further, and your scientists work better, among other effects.

The researchers that come into the game have to stop on and "activate" research modules to get a benefit -- these workers remain in place the rest of the game, so with only 15 of them you must be careful how you place them. A track shows how many labs of a particular kind you now man; the more of that type you occupy, the better you'll be with the corresponding technology. If you control more of one type of module than the other players at the end of the game, it will be worth extra victory points. Researchers may be stationed in any module (for a small fee), so if you pay to establish a new module, another player may still drop his researchers there as well and compete for "most modules of one type."

If you have multiple researchers, those not manning a research module can move about the City, or they may access an airlock to the sea and be traded in for a submarine. Once out in the water, subs can use sonar to scan nearby discovery tiles to see if they're worth anything . . . or they may just pilot over and uncover them manually. Treasure chests give extra funds to a player to spend, ocean currents add movement to a sub, artifacts may give insight into the other discovery tiles lying about, and lucky explorers may find pieces of Atlantis, adding to their academic cachet. Each

Pyramid Review: Nautilus



Components

106 cardboard counters (discovery, Atlantis, victory point, and first player); 41 cardboard modules; 60 plastic researcher figures; 12 plastic sub figures; 80 plastic module markers; mounted mapboard and mounted ruins of Atlantis board; 4 special orders cards; 80 Nemo bills (play money); 4 player mats

player also receives a Special Orders card, a tile that tells them what sorts of treasure their team is seeking. If you can collect items on this card, those pieces may be worth more to your team.

If players choose not to continue building the city or paying for additional discoveries, or if Atlantis is uncovered, the game ends. Players add up the value of their research modules, multiply this by the value of the discoveries they made during play, and add any unspent Nemo they have left over. The high score is the winner.

Game play isn't speedy, but it is simple and elegant. The rules are easy to learn, and participants will be able to play without referencing the rules much after a few turns. There are distinct strategies that can put pressure on your opponents. There's a lot to be done in a turn, or at least a lot to balance out to get the highest score, so it engages your interest and maintains it until the end; there are no anticlimactic endgames here.

As one might expect from a game imported and translated from overseas, the price tag is hefty and worth every penny, at least from a quality standpoint. The pieces are beautiful, the artwork is top-notch, and the graphic design is wonderful. Everything has that steampunk sheen, from the Captain Nemo box cover to the stylized turtle/fish submarine figurines. The board is a sturdy, mounted affair, and the modules and counters are thick and easy to use.

If the game has a failing, it's clarity. The rules are complete and most of them read well, but there are sections -- notably those having to do with victory points and Special Orders -- that you have to piece together from the imprecise text. The rulebook is as big as the box, has plenty of space, and comes in full color, so making the players hunt for the proper interpretations is a nasty thematic irony.

Nautilus isn't the active beehive of give-and-take that you find in, say, a *Settlers of Catan*, but the game does inspire the same competitive spirit, and in a way that doesn't put friends at each other's throats. A pleasant blend of period style, resource management, and last-minute upsets, *Nautilus* is another pleasing effort that will find favor both with the family and one's board-gaming buddies.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Spaceship Zero -- The Sci-Fi Serial Roleplaying Game

Published by [Green Ronin Publishing](#)

Written by Toren "MacBin" Atkinson and Warren Banks, with contributions from John Tynes and Monte Cook

Cover by Chris Woods

Illustrated by Toren "MacBin" Atkinson, Andrew Baker, Warren Banks, Paul Carrick, Chris Keefe, Sean Reynolds, Jeff Ward, and others

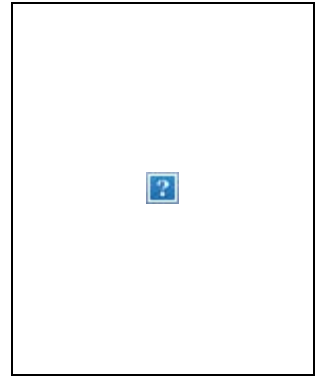
192-page perfect bound softback; \$24.95

The chances are that you will have never listened the classic 50s Sci-Fi radio serial, *Spaceship Zero*.^{*} You may have heard the of the television series made in Germany in the 1970s and possibly seen the previews of *Spaceship Zero: The Motion Picture* on the convention circuit. Unfortunately, neither the movie has been filmed nor the series been shown on the SciFi Channel, but thanks to the efforts of members of the Cthulhu Mythos inspired band, The Darkest of the Hillside Thickets, *Spaceship Zero* can be now enjoyed by an English speaking audience. Having already produced a CD called *Spaceship Zero*, both for *and* to promote the forthcoming film, Toren "Macbin" Atkinson and Warren Banks have written ***Spaceship Zero -- The Sci-Fi Serial Roleplaying Game***, a full-blown game of 21st century space opera based upon the fifties radio series leavened with ideas from the seventies television series. You too, can create the exciting action of the adventures of Space Captain Glenn Stackhouse, Gearbox the Mechanic, Space Lieutenant Richard "Dick" Ross -- pilot, and Professor Cornelius Flyback Ashton, as they test the "Better-Than-Light" drive and discover a whole new universe, almost, but not quite like their own -- the very one that they just destroyed when they activated the BTL Drive!

^{*} Before you really get excited, you need to know that ***Spaceship Zero*** is the fabrication of the authors. Sorry to spoil it all for you.

More specifically, the setting for the ***Spaceship Zero -- The Sci-Fi Serial Roleplaying Game*** is the early 21st century - the year 2025 of Universe Two. By that time in our own universe, the Arkham, Massachusetts based-Spacecorp is the world leader in scientific endeavor and the drive to explore the Solar System. In Universe Two this was brought to an abrupt halt with the Hydronaut invasion of 1967. (Hydronauts, you ask? Put a Deep One in a space suit and you have the right idea). Unable to withstand the invasion, for the last 50 years the Earth of Universe Two has been under the webbed foot of this Batrachian horror that has been heating the planet's climate and mining it bare of resources. This is what the crew of the *Spaceship Zero* find . . . after they activated the BTL Drive, destroyed their universe, initiated the Big Bang for the next one, plotted a course for where they think the new Earth of 2025 will be, and then entered the Deconstitutor for some 13 billion years to reach that year. Deconstitutor? It is a device that dehydrates organic matter, such as foodstuffs and men into their "essential saltes" for easy, safe and long-term storage, and then hydrates them back again . . .

Done wholly in black and white, the ***Spaceship Zero -- The Sci-Fi Serial Roleplaying Game*** is laid out in a simple manner and written in an easy to read style. It benefits from several different art styles, which initially give it a



disparate look. Yet as you get into the book, the look grows on you and works in its favor. In particular, the art of Toren Atkinson really captures the feel and flavor of the setting -- not surprising given that ***Spaceship Zero*** is his pet project! Also good are the pieces by Allen Koszowski, most of which reflect the fact that they are twenty some years old. The artwork of Paul Carrick is up to his usual excellent standard.

Players begin character creation in ***Spaceship Zero*** by selecting one of the 15 archetypes to fill the crew roster aboard the ship. Four of these are not suited to the classic campaign that starts aboard the ship: the Hydronaut-human Hybrid, the Slave Girl, Gladiator, and Space Pirate. This leaves the Captain, Corporate Executive, Doctor, Mechanic, Pilot, Robot, Stowaway, and three Super-Intelligent animals: the cat, the dog, and the monkey. After spending 50 points on the four attributes (the alliterative Brawn, Balance, Brains and Bravado, each rated from one to 20), they assign skill points (each rated from one to 99) according to the chosen archetype. The aim is to create a character that can perform their chosen assignment aboard what is an experimental flight. That said, it is possible for more than one player to take the same archetype, but advice is given on how to handle this -- essentially, with two pilots, one becomes the senior and the other the co-pilot; with two scientists, one becomes chief science officer; and so on. Depending upon their Brains attribute, a character also receives more points to spend on their skills as they like.

A character has between two and four Zero Skills; some are set by archetype and the player chooses others. The fixed Zero Skill for the Captain is Persuade: Leadership; for the Doctor, Medicine; for the Hybrid Swimming *and* Language & Lore: Hydronaut Customs; for the Slave Girl, Persuade: Charm; and so on. Every time the dice are thrown for a skill check of a Zero Skill and one of the dice comes up as a "zero," the character receives a Zero die. These work much like hero or luck points in other games and can be used or "burnt" to Seize The Day (improve initiative rolls), Play the Percentages (adding another die to a percentage roll -- the player gets to choose the most favorable two of the three) or Be Amazing (to improve a skill check result, for example from a blunder to a mere failure, or from a success to a critical success). The game encourages players to burn their Zero Dice rather than to hoard them, as essentially there could be no tomorrow. A character begins with just one Zero Die at the start of the game.

Character creation is rounded off with perks, quirks, and a quote. Each archetype comes with at least one fixed perk or quirk -- the Doctor has "Back From The Brink," the ability to bring a character back from the brink of death with a Medicine check. The Gladiator can ignore the pain of aggravated damage with "Grit," but suffers penalties to the Technical: Know How or Pilot skills. Likewise, the Super-Intelligent Cat gets "Always Lands on Feet," "Night Vision," "No Thumbs," "Diminutive," "Catnaps" (sleeps 16 hours each day so will never be a great scientist, despite their brains), "Hates Water," "Weak" (poor at fisticuffs skill), "Claws and Fangs," and "Bolt" (literally able to scramble very quickly). No list of quirks is given, but there are plenty of examples to found throughout the sample characters included for each archetype. Finally, the players need to give their character a quote, which must be appropriate for the game. If nothing occurs immediately, something is likely to crop up during play. Of course, the players do not have to go through this creation process, but could just simply select a character from those that illustrate the 15 archetypes. These are all very playable, and Toren Atkinson's illustrations of these are all excellent; the one of the Super-Intelligent Cat, Schroedinger (aka "Pickles"), should raise a smile or two.

The mechanics of ***Spaceship Zero*** are percentile-based, with the minimal check requiring just a roll under or equal to the skill. The closer the roll is to the skill value, the better the result, with criticals being an exact roll of the skill value. Even if there are penalties to a skill check, it is still possible to get a critical success by rolling the skill value! Overall, the mechanics and resolution system can handle most eventualities, especially if the advanced rules are employed. Even with these, which are for the most part common sense to most gamers, ***Spaceship Zero's*** systems can be seen as a more detailed variant of the venerable BRP Mechanics used in the majority of Chaosium's RPGs. Consider them one more homage by the authors of ***Spaceship Zero*** to Cthulhu -- both game and fiction.

The combat system handles fights between men, super-intelligent cats/dogs/monkeys, robots, Hydronauts and Hybrids, aliens, vehicles and spaceships. With the average joe possessing just a Brawn score of 10, and Body Points of 150, most characters will find themselves unable to withstand more than a few hits from an atomiser pistol (which does 40 points of damage), the standard sidearm for all Spacecorp personnel. (Unfortunately, the weapons wielded by the Hydronauts are slightly deadlier . . .) Overall, the rules are simple but can cover most eventualities, and the rules for the use of Zero Dice really enforce the daring-do attitude of the pulp genre. It would be easy to imagine their being used to run similar type games, from *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai* to Gerry Anderson's *Thunderbirds*.

The ***Spaceship Zero -- The Sci-Fi Serial Roleplaying Game*** differentiates between three types of game time. The first is Action Time, which occurs whenever events need to be handled round by round, such as in combat or in times of duress. The second is Narrative Time, which takes place throughout the rest of a session as the players and Zero Meister (as the referee is known) interact and roleplay. Both Action and Narrative Time are the traditional types to be found in other RPGs. The third is Dramatic Time in which the players emulate the style of "improvisational radio theater," literally putting into play Greg Stafford's analogy to describe what roleplaying is -- as used in John Tynes' introduction to ***Space Ship Zero***. Dramatic Time strictly removes all spoken references to game mechanics, suggesting that index cards and gestures be used for this instead. Players can speak, but must describe what they want their characters to do rather than tell the Zero Meister what they are going to do. The purpose is to evoke the feeling of the genre and make the game feel less like a dungeon. Dramatic Time is not going to be for everyone, but there is no denying that it could be a lot of fun and has something of Hogshead Publishing's *New Style* line of games about it.

In terms of background, there is a lot for both player and the Zero Meister. The former will want to read the information about the *Spaceship Zero* and their equipment to be found in the Technical Manual section of the rulebook, whereas the Zero Meister will need to read this and more. This includes a complete guide to the solar system of Universe Two in 2025 -- none of which should be read by the players. At least not until later in the game when the Space Pirate, Hybrid, Slave Girl and Gladiator archetypes can be introduced. It covers the state of the Earth, the Asteroid Belt, Mars, Venus and Pluto, and while the latter two receive only slight coverage, the other given information should be more than enough to keep a campaign going for some time. A starting scenario or pilot for the Zero Meister's own serial will take the crew of *Spaceship Zero* into Universe Two. If short of ideas -- which the Zero Meister should not be after reading through the book -- an appendix gives a complete episode guide to the 1970's television series.

One problem with the ***Spaceship Zero -- The Sci-Fi Serial Roleplaying Game*** is that, with access to the BTL drive, the crew could just throw the switches and start again, hoping for an easier time of it in Universe Three, Four, or Twenty Three. If this happens, then everything in Universe Two will have gone to waste; this possibility is not really covered in any depth in the core book. Of course, it *does* provide the Zero Meister with what must be the cleanest slate possible -- a whole universe to create of their very own! If this does happen, a Zero Meister is on his own, but access to any game that deals with time travel or parallel earths (such as ***GURPS Alternate Earths 1 and 2***, ***GURPS Time Travel***, ***All Flesh Must Be Eaten***, and ***Terra Primate***) should furnish him with both plenty of ideas and a discussion of basic concepts. Yet to throw both switches on the BTL drive too early would be to deny all the potential and secrets that Universe Two promises. The book could also have been written with a little more clarity, as some facts are not always made clear in the right sections. Also, while ***Spaceship Zero*** evokes the feel of the 1950s sci-fi radio serial, it does not list any of them in the bibliography, nor does it actually discuss the genre. This would have helped give the uninitiated an explanation of the games' source, and thus a greater grasp of how a campaign of ***Spaceship Zero -- The Sci-Fi Serial Roleplaying Game*** should be structured and run. It would also help in the running of Dramatic Time, which, while only lasting a few minutes during a session or episode, really enhances the game's ambience.

Spaceship Zero -- The Sci-Fi Serial Roleplaying Game is a pulp sci-fi game via a long list of inspirations and sources. These include Dan Dare, *Lost In Space*, *Planet of the Apes*, *Forbidden Planet*, both Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers, *Red Dwarf*, and finally a nod to -- if not a swipe from -- H. P. Lovecraft and the Cthulhu Mythos. It has the potential to be huge, just ever so slightly cheesy, fun. Players get to game in what is a relatively unexplored genre and if everything goes wrong, they get to through a pair of switches and do it all over again. And again. And again. Until then, tune in this time next week to see if the intrepid crew of the *Spaceship Zero* can survive the horror of the Hydronauts and free the Earth of its Batrachian yoke in ***Spaceship Zero -- The Sci-Fi Serial Roleplaying Game!***

--Matthew Pook

Making (And Faking) Adventures (Part I)

By Hook Or By Crook

Okay; I'm letting you in behind the curtain. I'm pulling off the gloves. I'm revealing the Big Secrets.

I'm gonna tell you all how *I* come up with adventures.

Now, it'll probably take two or three weeks to go through it all. And, to be honest, it may not actually help anyone. After all, crafting adventures, like kissing, depends on the individual . . . and no one blueprint will work for everyone. (Although, as a tip, one should avoid excessive drool . . . whether this applies to adventures or kissing, I'll leave as a reader exercise.) But watching how someone else does - or doesn't - come up with something can often be helpful.

Step 1: Procrastinate

I cannot stress this enough. Coming up with an adventure for me is, at the core, terrifying. After all, a bunch of folks have placed a chunk of their limited free time in my hands, and if I screw up, they may regret the decision more than when we decided to go see *Thin Red Line* on opening night. So I'll mercilessly procrastinate, secure in the knowledge that, if I *am* hit by a bus, at least I didn't waste some of my last moments on earth making a useless adventure.

Generally speaking, I'll put off coming up with an adventure until the day we're going to play. Fortunately, my guilt will usually kick in at some point during the downtime, and I'll work on other stuff related to game (bookkeeping or the like).

Step 2: The Pivotal Scene, Visual, Or Hook

If I *haven't* been hit by a bus, I'll grudgingly start coming up with an adventure.

Now, unless I already have a plot thread going on, or some other obvious continuing thread, I'll generally come up with a "hook," or an otherwise memorable bit.

Coming up with this bit is crucial for me, as it's the core element I wrap the adventure around. Now, this isn't necessarily the climax (although it can be); it can be the hook leading into the adventure, a bit of perfect characterization, a revelation, or anything else, really. The key is that it needs to be *interesting*, and by extension *memorable*. At this stage I may not have any idea what the hook actually *means*, but that's less important than actually having that scene sharply in focus.

There are many reasons I do this. First off, these pivotal scenes help me to differentiate an adventure from previous ones I've run (since, at the core, there are only so many [story possibilities](#)). Yes, I've run a number of dungeon crawls . . . but I've only run one where the players learn at the bottom level that the oxygen in the dungeon is slowly being siphoned out. And I've only run one where the heroes get to the final chamber only to witness the person they were sent to defeat being slain by someone else . . . who then turns and asks the heroes for help. And so on.

There is no science for me in coming up with this hook. But there are a number of shortcuts I use when trying to come up with something.

1. Something is revealed, or is threatened to be revealed. In my opinion, *any* campaign needs secrets, be they personal, local, or global. Stirring up any of those secrets is always a good idea for an adventure. Of course, the secret need not be completely exposed; it can only be a part of the truth, or a complication. (For example, a recent issue of a *Superman* comic had Perry White talking to Clark Kent . . . asking him why, despite all the international assignments Clark had taken recently, there was no record of it in his passport.)

If the players don't have enough secrets, I'll often take steps to give them one. Having an NPC pull an adventurer aside and say, "You must never breathe a word of this to another soul . . ." will generate something memorable for that player (even if all he does is immediately run to the other PCs and spill his guts).

2. Something (or someone) behaves unexpectedly. One of the kingdom's feared Death Knights barges into the inn . . . and starts weeping. The mayor barges into a gala ball, seemingly intoxicated . . . and opens fire on the guests with a pistol before spiraling into the night. The stoic spirit mentor is acting fidgety and nervous. (Again, I stress that, at this point, I don't need to necessarily understand what the hook *means*; the important bit is to come up with a scene that will be interesting for the players.)
3. Someone is accused of something. "J'Accuse!" Nothing gets the players going as much as having an accusation flung at them, or having someone they like (or hate) being accused of something serious. This may be a true or false accusation. If it's a game that has certain core laws (like White Wolf's **Vampire** or **Werewolf**), then any of those are powerful and interesting hooks. Really, this can mean anything from anyone: accusations of murder, theft, failing to uphold a code of honor, or the like. (It can even be something *good*; having the hero on film thwarting an assassination attempt is definitely memorable . . . *especially* if the hero doesn't remember doing that!)
4. Things are not what they seem. Not merely the province of M. Night Shymalan, the moment where the adventure does an about-face, where a fundamental fact the party thought they knew is revealed to be false. The heroes realize the large valuable painting they've been carting around is actually a stamp . . . and they have shrunk! The heroes are attacked by Alice (of . . . *in Wonderland* fame). The heroes realize that they aren't in their own headquarters, but are instead in an exact duplicate.
5. That's just *weird* . . . Sometimes the only hook I need to hang an adventure on is an absurd visual description or bit of dialogue:
 - "You want to save your friends? *Eat this ice cream!*"
 - "This room contains a conveyor-belted trough leading to a power saw; on top of the belt is a hamster in a plastic ball, running furiously to keep ahead of the saw."
 - "The criminal has issued his conditions for letting the hostages go: 30 glazed donuts and a haiku."

In all, this hook doesn't need to be anything more than something the players will find *interesting*.

Now, the neat thing about hooks is that I can make them do whatever I want. In particular, if a player hasn't gotten enough "screen time" lately, I can make that hook focus on him.

For example, it may be possible to have any of these hooks tied to a player: A small child runs up to a PC and shouts out, "Daddy!" The post office delivers a letter to a PC . . . that was mailed decades ago. The vampire character - who has been dead for decades - hiccups.

They can be hooks that tie to the group:

The heroes ultimately learn they have *each* been assigned by their superiors to kill the rest of the group. The modern-day gritty realistic heroes receive a bit of crucial help . . . from a unicorn. The heroes acquire a CD after defeating the final foe. Upon listening to it, they hear, "If you are listening to this, I have already won . . ." (This is made creepier with an actual CD.)

These hooks don't even need to be fully realized; they can revolve around a vague concept I think it will be interesting for the players to explore:

The heroes come across the kidnapper they are seeking . . . but the only way they can save the day is to *not* attack him. A hero will be presented with a situation where it seems the best course of action he can take is to leave the group . . . but the exact opposite is true. A hero is presented with an option to acquire great additional power along with great additional responsibility, or to maintain their life. Either choice will have consequences.

Now, there are a couple of fundamental rules I establish when coming up with these hooks.

- The hook cannot rely on the heroes doing *anything* terribly proactive. In other words, I try never to come up with a hook that begins, "Once the heroes kill the bad guy . . ." or "After the heroes steal the sack of unmarked hundred dollar bills . . ." If I build an adventure around either of these concepts, the whole thing may fall apart if the party *doesn't* kill the bad guy or steal the sack. (Of course, it may be possible for these concepts to be modified; if the hook begins, "Once the heroes injure the bad guy . . ." or "After the heroes discover the sack . . .", these have a much greater ability to come true.)
- The hook can never do all three of the following: a) harm a character, b) without a chance to avoid, and c) without a chance to redeem. Yes, "You all go to bed. Oh, Ted? You were stabbed to death by snake-men at night." *would* be memorable . . . but the players probably wouldn't find it fun. (On the other hand, telling everyone "Ted? You were stabbed to death by snake-men at night" might be an interesting hook if that *isn't* what happened; pull Ted aside, explain the situation, and let Ted play some of the snake-men NPCs during the game . . . as he and you both wait for the moment where it is revealed that one of the snake-men is actually Ted.)

Okay; once I have a promising hook in mind, what do I *do* with it?

Well, I try to figure out what it means. Then I build the rest of the adventure around it. And, if need be, I prepare to throw the hook away. Confused? Tune in next week, gentle reader, as we continue to build our very own adventure . . . right in your basement!

--Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: **Lord of the Rings** board game (the Reiner Knizia version by Redback Design Ltd./Fantasy Flight Games . . . as Dan Blum said on the [discussion boards](#). "They should all be numbered, or something."

(four stars)

"Map represents:

___ Alien Disco

___ Alien Spaceship

___ Alien Brothel"

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Saleesh ibn Gaheer, Vizier of the Sapphire Palace

by Phil Masters

GURPS (970 points)

ST 20/25 [110]; **DX** 16 [80]; **IQ** 16 [80]; **HT** 14/20 [45].

Speed 7.5; Move 7.

Dodge 7; Parry 9 (sword).

Advantages: Alertness +1 [5]; Amphibious [10]; Body of Air (Heavy Encumbrance +100%) [100]; DR 4 [12]; Charisma +1 [5]; Collected [5]; Doesn't Fatigue [15]; Extra Fatigue +5 [15]; Extra Hit Points +6 [30]; Gills [10]; Magery 2 [25]; Night Vision [10]; PD 4 [100]; Reputation +4 (among ocean-dwelling djinn, as a respected figure; small group) [13]; Spirit Form (Unlimited Lifespan +30%, Physical Form +80%, Can't tap Fatigue or use Possession -30%) [180]; Status +4* [15]; Temperature Tolerance 10 (comfort zone when in human form is from 0 to 195 degrees) [10]; Wealthy [20].

*One level free from wealth.

Disadvantages: Arabian Code of Honor [-10]; Dull [-1]; Obsession (maintaining the palace) [-15]; Staid [-1].

Quirks: Absolutely refuses to talk about his master; Avoids meddling in human affairs as a moral choice; Devout Muslim; Not much sense of humor. [-4]

Skills: Animal Handling-13 [1/2]; Architecture-14 [1/2]; Area Knowledge (the World's Oceans)-20 [10]; Astronomy/TL3-13 [1/2]; Augury (Arabian)-12 [1/2]; Broadsword-18 [8]; Cartography/TL3-13 [1/2]; Diagnosis/TL3-13 [1/2]; Fishing-15 [1/2]; Gesture-15 [1/2]; Hidden Lore (Secrets of the Oceans)-16 [2]; History-13 [1/2]; Law-13 [1/2]; Leadership-16* [1]; Merchant-14 [1/2]; Meteorology/TL3-14 [1/2]; Naturalist-14 [1]; Navigation/TL3-13 [1/2]; Occultism-14 [1/2]; Physician/TL3-14 [1]; Sailor/TL3-14 [1/2]; Savoir-Faire-20** [6]; Seamanship/TL3-15 [1/2]; Shipbuilding/TL3-13 [1/2]; Shiphandling/TL3-13 [1/2]; Stealth- 15 [1]; Thaumatology-15* [1]; Theology-15 [2]; Weird Magic-12 [1/2]; Wrestling-14 [1/2].

*Include bonuses for Charisma and Magery. **IQ+2 free from Status.

Languages: Arabic (native)-16 [0]; Aramaic-14 [1/2]; Farsi-14 [1/2]; Greek-14 [1/2]; Hebrew-14 [1/2]; Latin-14 [1/2]; Pahlavi-14 [1/2].

Spells: Air-Golem-20 [8]; Apportation-16 [1]; Beast-Soother-16 [1]; Beast Speech-16 [1]; Beast Summoning-16 [1]; Complex Illusion-16 [1]; Counterspell-16 [1]; Create Air-16 [1]; Create Earth-16 [1]; Create Fire-16 [1]; Create Object-15 [1]; Create Water-16 [1]; Dispel Magic-18 [4]; Earth to Stone-16 [1]; Fish Control-16 [1]; Ignite Fire-16 [1]; Light-16 [1]; Mollusk Control-16 [1]; Perfect Illusion-16 [1]; Purify Air-16 [1]; Purify Water-16 [1]; Seek Water-16 [1]; Sense Life-16 [1]; Shape Earth-16 [1]; Shapeshifting (large seabird - treat as giant eagle)-20 [16]; Shape Water-20 [8]; Simple Illusion-16 [1]; Sound-16 [1].

*Note: This character sheet is based on the Djinni template in **GURPS Spirits**, but because Saleesh is an exceptionally virtuous, or at least restrained, member of his species, with slightly unusual powers, it doesn't actually use the template from that book. It could easily be adapted to remain consistent with the treatment of djinn in other supplements, such as **GURPS Arabian Nights**, but **Spirits** has the most up-to-date and generic model. See below for discussion of using this character in **GURPS Castle Falkenstein** games. Saleesh's "spells" may represent innate abilities or formal magical study, as the GM prefers; he certainly uses flight spells extensively if he must travel anywhere quickly.*

Castle Falkenstein

Abilities: Athletics Good, Be Unseen Great, Charisma Good, Courage Great, Education Great, Etherealness Good, Exchequer Great, Glamour Great, Obtain from Elsewhere Average, Ottoman Way Good, Perception Great, Perform a Great Work Poor, Physician Good, Physique Great, Shapeshifting Good, Stealth Good, Survive and Endure Good, Swift Flight Average, Swordsmanship Good, Tinkering Poor, Trader Average, Tribal Etiquette Great.

*Note: The djinn of the **Castle Falkenstein** world are described in **GURPS Castle Falkenstein: The Ottoman Empire**, which also defines some of the "mundane" abilities listed above. **The Memoirs of Auberon of Faerie** include some additional information on Kindred Powers, especially Shapeshifting. For a **GURPS Castle Falkenstein** version of this character, use the Attributes and Skills for the **GURPS** version above, along with the **GURPS** versions of the Kindred Powers listed here.*

Saleesh's Education represents lifetimes of knowledge of the world, and especially its seas, rather than formal human education. His Exchequer rating represents the resources he permits himself to use from the great and wealthy palace he tends. His applications of Glamour almost always take the form of effects related to weather or the sea.

Storyteller

Willpower 8, Rage 4, Gnosis 7, Power 50

Charms: Airt Sense, Appear, Armor, Create Fires, Create Wind, Element Sense (water), Flood, Materialize, Meld (earth), Reform, Shapeshift, Soul Reading, Water- Breathing, Waves.

Materialized Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 5, Stamina 7, Mental/Social equal to Gnosis.

Abilities: Academics/2, Animal Speech (whales & seabirds)/2, Athletics/1, Alertness/3, Awareness/2, Beast Lore/2, Brawl/1, Culture/2, Dodge/2, Enigmas/2, Etiquette/4, Expression/2, Instruction/1, Intimidation/1, Leadership/1, Linguistics/5, Logic/2, Medicine/1, Meditation/1, Melee/2, Metaphysics (Celestiography & Demonology)/2, Occult/2, Science (cartography)/1, Science (navigation)/1, Seamanship/4, Seneschal/5, Stealth/1, Symbolism/1, Weather-Eye/4.

Materialized Health Levels: 7

*Note: Djinn in the World of Darkness are discussed in the supplements **Lost Paths: Ahl-i-Batin and Taftani** for **Mage: the Ascension**, and **Veil of Night for Vampire: the Dark Ages**. However, they can be used quite effectively in any World of Darkness game where powerful, otherworldly spirits fit the assumptions and mood, especially including **Mage: the Sorcerers Crusade**. The "Charms" listed here are described in most World of Darkness games which deal with such spirits.*

Background

Saleesh is a virtuous djinni and good Muslim who controls a great palace that is usually described as being under the sea. (In World of Darkness games, it may lie beyond the Gauntlet; in **Castle Falkenstein**, it may actually be within the Faerie Veil. Whatever the case, gateways to this realm are usually found beneath the waves, and the realm itself is always filled with salt water.) He insists he is not the owner or ruler of this great blue palace, merely its vizier, and he always acts that part, but he refuses to speak of its true master, who appears to have been absent since before mortal memories (or even most *immortal* memories) extend. He commands a small but adequate retinue of lesser djinn, whose sole concern is guarding and maintaining the palace. Age and experience have given him great knowledge and uncanny perceptions, while raw power gives him command of other magics.

Wizards who have dealings with Saleesh often do so because of his detailed knowledge of the world's oceans (including some of the skills and practical lore required of sailors). He replies if asked politely for advice in a good cause, but always makes it clear that he wishes to be back about his duty. Most mages assume that he is bound by some ancient vow. If granted extended access to the "Visible World," he may well be interested in performing the *Hajj* pilgrimage (invisibly), the only matter that he considers in any way more important than his role in the palace; he has been to Mecca before, several times, while someone he could trust stood in for him at home, but any reaffirmation of

his faith is a comfort to him.

His palace treasury has a great horde of items and wealth taken from sunken human ships. While he cannot *give* this away, he considers that he has authority to *trade*, or to assist great causes (so he is effectively wealthy, but not as wealthy as the palace might seem to imply). He is respected by many other ocean-dwelling djinn, not all of them benevolent, who tend to obey his requests (out of courtesy, not subservience). His aversion to meddling in "minor" human affairs is so strong that he might not, say, act to prevent a shipwreck (unless something on the ship caught his sympathy), but he would probably give the drowned a decent funeral out of a sense of religious duty.

Appearance

Saleesh almost always appears as a tall, fine-featured man of indeterminate age, with pale skin, pale gray eyes, and dead white hair and beard, in plain but elegant robes. (In this guise, he could pass for human quite easily.) He wears the orange turban of one who has performed the *Hajj*. Occasionally, for convenience, he takes the shape of a great seabird. If he is obliged to do physical battle, a slender silver sword appears in his hand.

Game Uses

Saleesh is not primarily intended as an adversary; indeed, part of the point about him is that he is probably too powerful for sensible characters to challenge physically. (Don't forget that he can have a substantial retinue, should the point need reinforcement.) Rather, he is an otherworldly being with whom PCs may have to interact peacefully to achieve their goals. Encounters with him are likely to be formal, slightly unnerving, and prone to leading to complicated magical situations.

Scenario Ideas

- A powerful wizard hires the heroes to accompany him on a journey to locate an entrance to the Sapphire Palace, and then to meet Saleesh himself. In principle, they're being employed as simple bodyguards -- it's going to be quite a long trip, with various more or less routine dangers inevitable along the way. But once the wizard reaches his goal, it becomes clear that he needs the PCs more than he knows; he's a proud mortal, used to either commanding obedience from spirits or, in extreme cases, haggling with them, whereas negotiating with Saleesh requires a different attitude. The PCs may even be able to extract a side profit from the situation for themselves. However, one must be careful around even the most mild-mannered of djinn . . .
- The adventurers are traveling by sea when they notice that their ship is being followed by a great seabird. This is (of course) Saleesh, who has left his palace under the guardianship of another spirit who he trusts while he seeks certain supplies needed for the maintenance of his palace, and eventually performs the *Hajj* when the season comes around. He is currently manifesting in this way because he thinks it might be more in keeping with the spirit of his faith to perform the *Hajj* in material form, rather than just flitting to Mecca as an immaterial spirit. The ship simply offers him somewhere to rest. If he is attacked or assaulted, he may seek proportionate revenge; if he is recognized as a supernatural being and addressed respectfully, he *may* reply politely in kind.

If the PCs simply talk with him, they may later hear of troubles in certain areas of the ocean, and deduce that the djinn left in charge of the Sapphire Palace is proving less trustworthy than expected. But how can they locate Saleesh and warn him that his attention is needed at home?

- This plot plays best if the PCs have had previous encounters with Saleesh and his household. A minor and very low-powered djinni struggles through the unfamiliar human world in search of help, and the heroes turn out to be the ones he seeks. He is in fact one of Saleesh's servants, a minor and weak-willed spirit who is happiest if he's being told what to do -- but even he is unhappy with what now seems to be happening back home. It seems that Saleesh has become especially taciturn and enigmatic, but he has proclaimed that the return of the Master of the Palace *may* be imminent. (It now turns out that the lesser servants don't know -- or don't remember -- any more about this being than any mortal.)

This might be worrying enough, as the manifestation of what is no doubt a powerful being could have all sorts of consequences, but the servant-djinn seem to think that Saleesh isn't certain that this "master" is genuine -- but he's too bound up in his sense of duty to risk contradicting the claim. What sort of being could fool Saleesh on this topic? What is it after in the Palace, and how dangerous will it be if it succeeds? Why is this "return" such a slow process -- so gradual that the PCs have time to intervene? And can anyone be sure that the being in question *isn't* the rightful master?

Sargent Emmet Wilson

For *GURPS Technomancer*

by Peter V. Dell'Orto

6', 185 pounds. Brown hair, pale skin. Usually dressed in an old police-style jacket and dark clothes. He wears high-collared shirts and jackets and a bent-brimmed cap or hat to help conceal his pallor.

ST: 20 [20] **DX:** 13 [30] **IQ:** 12 [20] **HT:** 17 [20]

Move: 7 **Speed:** 7.5

Dodge 8 **Parry** 11

Advantages: Combat Reflexes [15], Reputation (+2, former State High School Wrestling Champ among alumni/locals, small group, 7-)[2], Technomancer Vampire [275].

Disadvantages: Manic-Depression [-20], Enemy (FBI, 6-) [-15], Loner [-15], Wealth: Struggling [-10].

Quirks: If possible, burns the corpses of his victims to obscure the vampire connection; Mutters quietly to himself without realizing he is doing so; Misses his old life and tries to carry pieces of it with him; Always rents a room with a full-sized mirror in it. [-4]

Skills: AK: Local City-14 [2], Brawling-15 [4], Criminology-12 [2], Computer Operation/TL8-12 [1], Driving (Car)-13 [1], Forensics-12 [4], Guns (Pistol)-15 [1], Guns (Shotgun)-14 [1/2], Law Enforcement-14 [6], Shadowing-13 [4], Shortsword-13 [2], Stealth-13 [2], Tournament Law (Wrestling)-12 [1], Wrestling Sport-13 [2], Wrestling-13 [2].

Spells: Create Servant-17 [0], Shape Darkness-17 [0], Teleport-17 [0].

Languages: English-12, Spanish-10 [1/2].

Equipment: 9mm Glock Pistol and/or 12 gauge pump shotgun, stolen or cheaply purchased used van or station wagon; high school yearbook; coffin full of earth of his homeland.

Total Points: 320

Biography

Sgt. Wilson was a small-town cop called in to investigate a strange "disturbance" at the Martin house at the edge of town. When he arrived, he found the Martins under attack from a young male vampire. In the scuffle, Emmet was bitten by the creature. The suspect fled as more police arrived; the Martins had been killed but not yet drained of blood. Emmet shrugged off the injury as minor, fearing the reaction of his fellows if they realized he had contracted vampirism. He successfully concealed his ailment from the town until it began to seriously manifest itself. Once he understood what was really wrong, it was too late to do anything about it.

Emmet desperately tried to control his vampirism, but found the hunger ate away at his ability to resist in mere days. He stalked and killed his first victim less than a week after the Martin incident. He quit his police job immediately thereafter, cashed out his bank account, and left town. Since then he has been a transient, driving from town to town, mostly preying on runaways, hitchhikers, and the homeless. He will stay in one place for as long as he thinks he can safely feed without being detected, then quietly slip away.

Emmet has not attracted the attention of a CDC Stake Squad yet, although the FBI is beginning to investigate a string of interstate murders they suspect to be connected. His old friends and co-workers worry and wonder about him;

Emmet had seemed so stable and dependable before his "breakdown." They have heard nothing from him, and have not yet heard from the FBI, who have not connected Emmet and the Martin incident to the murders.

Motivation

Deep down Emmet Wilson despises what he has become and loathes himself. This does not change the fact that Wilson is desperate to live. He fears death, and will do anything he needs to do to survive, including murder. He is cunning and dangerous, and will use all of his knowledge of criminology and forensics to help muddy his back trail. He is also careful to eliminate witnesses, but won't take an extra risk of giving himself away in order to do so. When depressed Emmet will sit in his hideout, often not feeding, until driven out by his bloodthirst. It is at these times he is at his most dangerous, because of the depth of his hunger.

Emmet stalks his victims slowly, often picking multiple potential targets when he first gets to town. He will track them individually (usually on foot, in Shadow Form) and attempt to take them by surprise. He has not found the time to learn more spells, but takes full advantage of the ones he does have. He will use Create Servant and Teleport whenever possible, using the latter to return to his hideout (or motel room).

Encountered

Emmet can be encountered almost anywhere, from the depths of a big city to the lonely back wood of a rural area.

While Emmet is dangerous, he is fairly weak for a Technomancer Vampire. His limited number of spells makes him less powerful than a vampire could become, while his cunning use of his existing powers makes him a hard vampire to find and stake. He can make an ideal enemy for a rookie CDC Stake Squad. Against more normal residents of the Technomancer world, Emmet is very dangerous. His tendency to get depressed and stop feeding gives him a weakness that a clever group of amateur vampire hunters can exploit. But a cornered and weakened vampire is still a dangerous vampire.

Adventurers trying to catch Emmet may try to prey on his desire for his old life by setting out artifacts from his high school days (such as his wrestling trophy) as bait. Emmet would certainly be wary of such attempts -- his interest in his past is only a quirk, not a full-blown obsession -- and it will probably do little except tip him off that his hunters are closing in. In such a case Emmet may flee, or he may turn on his pursuers and chose to feed on them instead.

Other Settings

While the vampire package used here is specific to *Technomancer*, nothing is stopping a GM from substituting another Vampire package. In a modern **GURPS Blood Types** game, simply make Emmet a different sort of vampire. On Yrth, change English to Anglish and Spanish to Arabic, change Guns (Pistol) to Crossbow and Guns (Shotgun) to Throw Knife and his enemy to the Michaelites or the Templars.

Vampire Serial Killer

A traveling serial killer can be the focus a campaign either mundane or supernatural in focus. In a mundane campaign, the surprise value of a real vampire can be great but undesirable. In that case, Emmet can be a normal serial killer, with a Delusion that he is a vampire. Remove the Vampire package, but add Bloodlust [-10] and Delusion [-15]. He is much less dangerous, but perhaps even more horrific; after all, he's still drinking his victims dry of blood . . .

The Start of Something Big

As presented here, Emmet is a dangerous loner bent only on survival. He is a carrier for an infectious disease, which means he could spread it. Despite his care to cover his tracks, any victims he leaves alive (especially if he is driven off during the attack) can become vampires. He is a grave potential threat as a disease vector as well as a killer.

As a variation, remove Loner from Emmet's disadvantages and replace it with Chummy [-5] instead. Now, instead of a solo killer, Emmet can become the core of a pack of vampires. Add Leadership, Ally Group, and possibly some spells (learned from mages he infected, of course). The pack of vampires could be the enemy for a multi-session adventure to uncover and destroy them before they can spread further.

Pyramid Pick

FVLMINATA: Earth Armed With Lightning RPG (Second Edition)

Published by [Thyrus Games](#)

Written by Jason E. Roberts and Michael S. Miller

Cover by Christopher Shy

Illustrated by Jeremy Leach

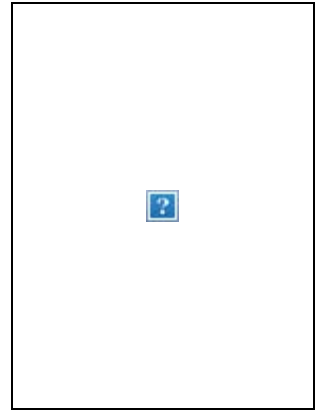
236-page perfect bound b&w book; \$29.95

Most historical RPGs usually combine their backgrounds with an "other" or "alien" element. Classic examples include the transfer of 19th century colonial imperialism and all of its attitudes to the surfaces of Mars and Venus in GDW's *Space 1889* (recently reprinted by Heliograph Inc.), World War II and Pulp Horror in Pinnacle Entertainment Groups' *Weird War II: Blood on the Rhine*, and the politics of magic in 13th Century Europe in Atlas Games' *Ars Magica*. *FVLMINATA - Armed with Lightning* follows this trend, but forgoes the popular Victorian period for this type of game, adding not one but two of the alien elements to its setting. As the title hints, that setting is the Roman Empire, and its other ingredients are magic and gunpowder.

RPGs set in the ancient world are relatively uncommon, and most of them, such as Yaquinto's *Man Myth and Magic* and FGU's *Odyssey*, are now relegated to comfortable places on collector's shelves. More common are rules supplements for a particular game system, especially when it comes to ancient Rome, such as TSR's *The Glory of Rome Campaign Sourcebook* for *AD&D Second Edition* and Steve Jackson Games' *GURPS Imperial Rome*, recently released in a second edition. *FVLMINATA - Armed with Lightning*, also recently in a second edition, is thus a rarity in itself.

The RPG is not an absolutely straight historical game, but a counterfactual one, with the inclusion of magic and gunpowder. *FVLMINATA* history diverges in 848 AUC, or 96 AD, when L. Aufidius Caelus discovered the right mixture for *terra fvlminata*, or "earth armed with lightning." As a boy he had escaped the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 AD, and since grown fascinated with the volcano's destructive power. By 133 AD, Rome's legions were fielding *tormentum* (or cannons), and would later adopt the *pilum* as muskets and *hastula* as pistols. The new technology has aided the Empire in not only holding the frontiers, but slowly expanding them as well. In the west, Caledonia and Hibernia are under military governorship; in Germania, the border lies far beyond the Rhine on the Albis (Elbe) river, and the defeat in the Teutoburg Wald has been savagely avenged; in the Orient the frontier has been pushed along the Red Sea to secure the route to India and far Serica -- kingdom of the "silk people"; while in the East, the legions stand vigilant on the border with the Parthian Empire, Rome's most feared enemy. Yet despite border skirmishes, the Roman Empire is at peace in the thousandth year of its existence (248 AD). A young emperor rules, and there is opportunity for all those who would serve in any capacity.

Almost any character can be created for *FVLMINATA* -- actor, artisan, soldier or legionary, charioteer or gladiator, lawyer or magistrate, magus or priest, farmer or hunter, criminal or watchman, and so on. A full example of each type is provided -- some 27 in all. The process is relatively simple -- agree upon a concept with the GM for your persona (or character) including their rank and occupation, before assigning points, attributes, skills, and humors.



A total of 42 points are assigned to the four attributes, each named in Latin. They are: *intelligentia*, *agilitas*, *pietas* (a persona's sense of normal duty to Roman society, their intuition and sometimes magical ability), and *vis* (physical strength and stamina). An average rating is 10, a crippled rating would be five, and 15 is a paragon.

The same number of points is spent on skills, the list of which is very complete. They are grouped according to which Roman god patronizes those skills, and every player chooses a patron god for their persona. As a blessing from their god, the persona receives a +1 bonus to any trained skill that this god patronizes. Thus, a physician with the surgery and medicine skills might select Apollo as a patron, as might a poet, musician, or astrologer, since Apollo is the god of Healing, Divination, and the Arts. A beginning skill cannot have a rating of more than five, or six with a patron's blessing. All characters begin with some basic skills, which are determined by their rank in society -- senator, equestrian, plebeian, freedman, foreigner or slave. A persona's rank will also determine what occupations are open to them.

A persona's mood and motivation are also influenced by four bodily fluids or humors: *Melancholius* (black bile -- depression or lack of energy); *Sanguinicus* (blood -- activity or lack of self control); *Flegmaticus* (phlegm -- illness or lack of will), and *Cholericus* (yellow bile -- anger or lack of nerves). Divided into two sets of pairs (*Melancholius* and *Sanguinicus*, *Flegmaticus* and *Cholericus*) with the numbers of each pair cancelling each other out. The aim for every good Roman is to have the four humors in balance, but a beginning persona will not, and their unbalanced humors express themselves as temperaments, ranging from +1 to +3 for each humor. The choice of temperaments is influenced by the core attributes, and those selected can sometimes affect a persona's actions within the game at the GM's discretion.

The benefit of being in balance is to provide more humor points per game session, which can be used to modify die rolls. Improving the four humors is relatively easy, and once in balance, there are no rules to cover a persona staying there or the difficulty of doing so. The humors are a nice concept and feel very Roman, but I was hoping for something more influential upon a character such as the set of opposing personality traits in Chaosium and Green Knight's *King Arthur Pendragon*.

The process of creating a character is straightforward enough, with everything well-explained. There is plenty of information upon Rome and the Roman character, as well as a look at those who want to -- and what good Roman would not want to? -- aspire to the status of citizen or more. That said, although plenty of examples are given, at most stages, there is no one single example of character creation from start to finish.

Mechanically, the rules for *FVLMINATA* are simple -- roll under the total of attribute plus skill and modifiers, but the means are another matter. *FVLMINATA* uses "tali," the Roman knucklebones thrown in gambling. Made from the bleached knucklebones of sheep, the actual rules for the historical game are not known, but *FVLMINATA* derives its mechanics from the many mentions of the game in Roman literature. Instead of bleached sheep bones, eight-sided dice are used, marked with the Roman numerals I, III, IV, and VI. A set of stickers can be downloaded from the publisher's website and applied to four eight-sided dice, but this is a poor substitute for properly marked dice, which are available in sets of eight. Some may dislike having to employ a whole new set of dice for the mechanics, but they really do enhance the Roman feel of the game and are little different from having to get a set of *Fudge* dice.

Four tali are needed for an action roll, and also for an effect roll. These are made to determine how well an action is performed, and is more inspired by the hands rolled in Roman gambling, ranging from Senio (a single six), up through one pair and two pair, three of a kind, Venus (one of each number), to Vultures (four of a kind). The better the hand rolled, the better the result, although in opposed rolls, the winning hand is invariably reduced.

Effect rolls are needed to determine the outcome of healing attempts, inflicting damage, creating items, and learning things, but one of the more interesting applications is in the use of the influence skill. After having made a successful Influence skill check, the persona sets three options for how the target might react. These are agreement (the ideal result), concession (the persona suggests a compensation in return for the target's reluctant agreement), and neutrality (a still successful, but lesser, result). Which of these come to pass within a game will be determined by the effect roll. While a form of Persuasion as a skill is a given in most RPGs, here the influence effect rules really force the player to think about what they want when interacting with those around them, and I like these rules very much.

Combat uses the same mechanics and is reasonably fast . . . and often deadly. Interestingly, initiative is determined by social or military rank -- a persona of senatorial rank goes before an equestrian or plebeian, a freedman before a foreigner or slave. Some gamers may find it strange not being able to roll for initiative, but it enforces a sense of Rome's social strata and gives another reason for players to want to advance their personae. Combat covers mainly personal fracas, both unarmed (brawling, boxing, wrestling, and the Greek martial art of Pankration) and armed (weapons of the legions and the gladiatorial arenas, as well as the *terra fvlminata*-fuelled *pilum*, *hastula* and *tormentum*). The exact formula for gunpowder remains a closely guarded secret by the Mithraic and Etruscan Colleges. Both possess recipes for variants of *fvlminata*, such as the Mithraic powder known as "Nabarze," which is less smoky is suited to naval operations. In addition, their control of *fvlminata* has gained both colleges an official acceptance of their schools of magic within the empire. Besides the Mithraic Priest and Etruscan Diviner, other colleges also exist, such as the Marsian Magician and the Witch, but these are far from accepted, the witch or *Venefica* even less so. Each tradition is well described and written as it were the truth and not the others. Spells originate from across the eastern half of the empire, and 70 are listed. They are subtle affairs and quite fascinating in their description and ritual requirements. It was these last two aspects that persuaded me that magic has a place in **FVLMINATA**, despite some initial scepticism.

Besides advice for the GM to help create and run their own *fabulae*, there is also a starting *fabula*, or story. "The Pepper Merchant" (or "Mercator Peperius") is inspired by the *Falco* novels of Lindsey Davis, and has the personae investigating the application of a plebeian merchant for the rank of equestrian after an inauspicious omen. It is quite short, but plays decently enough, with the possibility for a sequel. Up to seven personae can participate, and it and assumes the use of several of the sample personae given throughout the rulebook.

Where many recent RPGs have followed the trend for a complex layout, integrating full color, **FVLMINATA - Armed With Lightning** heads in the very opposite direction. The layout of the book is beautifully simple, with the very attractive pencils of Jeremy Leach used throughout. I would go further and say that his portraits of the many sample personae can best be described as nothing short of exquisite.

The book is also packed with plenty of information about the Rome of AUC 1000 (AD 248), covering its history, society, customs, religion, geography, military, and arcane sects, all of it backed up by an appendix references covering books, games, and web sites. Besides general references, they are also listed chapter by chapter. The other appendices include a list of common names and a glossary. At every stage **FVLMINATA** employs both Latin and English terms, helping to further reinforce the game's atmosphere, already strengthened by the mechanics and the tali dice.

FVLMINATA - Armed With Lightning is well-researched, well-written, and just oozes history. This is in spite of the obvious anachronisms (gunpowder and magic), and the less obvious ones -- use of certain words that the Romans did not (such as Colosseum), and the slight improvement of the position of women in the Imperium (including establishing the *Cohors Amazona*, or Amazonian Guard). Yet above all, **FVLMINATA - Armed With Lightning** is something more than your average fantasy RPG; it is a game where becoming part of the culture is all part of the play. While most cultural RPGs have looked to the East for their inspiration (such as FGU's *Bushido* and several Japanese-themed RPGs since) or to even the more exotic (for example, *Empire of the Petal Throne* and *SkyRealms of Jorune*), this game is the first to look to a Western tradition for its source. Nearly every gamer will be familiar with Rome and its Empire, but both exploring it and immersing your persona in its culture will not be.

On the back of the book is a Ken Hite quote: " . . . I love it. You can have my copy of **FVLMINATA** when you pry it from my cold, dead manipulae." I feel the same way about this game and if you aren't getting his copy, you're not getting mine either.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Brunch at the Coliseum

Published by [Inner City Games](#)

Designed by Michael L. Leeke

Edited by Sara Geiser, Nita L. Lewis

Art by John M. Seaton, Jim Mitchell, and ArtToday

Arena map, two sheets of counters, 24-page rulebook, eight plastic character stands, ziplock bag; \$7.95

If you're at all familiar with Inner City Games Designs' quirky line of mini-games, you might be inclined to think you know what's meant by the title of their game of gladiatorial combat ***Brunch at the Coliseum***. You'd be right.

Everyone else at the circus that is the Coliseum is eating bread. You, well, you're trying not to become the next meal for a ravaging lion released into the arena with you. Armed only with a loincloth, you must scavenge what you can through the kindness of strangers. Pleas made to the crowds in the stands may get some valuable equipment thrown to you . . . or, if they're in a playful mood, thrown *at* you. They'll toss food, bits of armor, a knife, or even a sword if you're lucky. Assuming you haven't been consumed by then, you can grab the goods and turn on your oppressor.

That's if you're a slave. If you're a gladiator, this sort of begging isn't a factor. You already have a full kit of equipment. Decked out in armor, you step boldly into the ring and try to slay the Emperor's slaves before they get their hands on some decent gear, or the lion before it savages your throat. This is your chance for glory, and to maybe live past sunset.

If you're a lion, you find yourself stuck in a large stone oval, and everyone seems to want to stick your hide with pointy things. They have opposable thumbs, a decided advantage, but you're king of the jungle, and that has to count for something. The other people, the ones sitting up behind the stone walls, seem awfully pleased when you start gnawing on your abusers, so that's a perk.

The conflict plays out in the arena, a simple large oval with a hexagonal overlay. Each turn, you use your allotted actions to beat the other contestants up (or just stay alive). You can mix and match these as you please, and some activities take more actions than others.

Movement is the simplest: Every hex you move costs one action. Evade makes you a harder target. Attacks cost anywhere from 1 action for something simple (like a gladiator punching his opponent) to 6 actions for more involved maneuvers (like the lion mauling his prey). When a certain number of points of damage are scored, body parts become useless or get torn off, and some of them you cannot live without. Damaged extremities might be healed a bit if the audience throws a person food (the lion has to find, er . . . alternate sources of food).

The easy actions costs fewer action points, but offer less benefit; you do some damage and that's an end of it. The fancy stuff eats up your allowance, but you may do more damage or get a bonus to your to-hit roll. (Rolls require six-sided dice, and those don't come with the game. A pair for each player is a good idea.) On the gripping hand, some actions are so effective they're balanced out by an additional downside. Taunting, for example, can so enrage your opponent that they lose actions on their turn; then again, they may become angry enough that they actually gain actions

but suffer a minus to use them. And if you're feeling bold and lucky and the crowd isn't helping, you can always beseech the gods for a little help.

The more equipment you carry, the fewer actions you get. The gladiator is better armed and better protected, but unless the slave gathers gear from a benign audience, he has more actions. The lion cannot carry weapons (his opponent's head, yes; weapons, no), and has several actions, but he has some obvious limitations, being an animal and all.

Another reason to perform some of the more exotic maneuvers is style points. While punches, kicks, and claws are effective at wounding your opponent, they are dull, and the crowd didn't come to watch you jack-slap your foes into submission. They came to hear name-calling, see gladiators chuck body parts into the crowd, and watch the lion limp around the arena with someone's arm in his jaws. Doing these things scores style points; when you have enough, you can beg for Imperial Favor. If the Emperor is impressed with your performance, he may order your life spared. Otherwise, he'll let you finish the fight the hard way. Whoever's left standing -- or whoever's life is spared -- is the winner (until you do it all over again the next day).

The components are inexpensive and not terribly involved. The stiff "cover" for the rules is really a separate piece of sturdy cardboard that unfolds into the arena map -- once it's been flattened a few times, it will sit still easier, though even this tough stock may begin to wear along the creases. In addition to the arena, the cover has a damage effects chart, but with a little more work they probably could have gotten another small chart or two in there (this would have been handy). The hexes are wide enough your fingers won't get cramped trying to move pieces.

The playing pieces are thin cardboard counters that must be cut out. Most are square markers for the weapons and food tossed from the crowd. Those that represent combatants are stand-ups, with figures on the front and back. The artwork (on the counters and in the rules) is a little stale, cartoonish where it isn't clipart, and on some it's not clear which figures are the slaves and which the gladiators. Still, you get eight little plastic stands, so you're not getting shortchanged on ease of use.

The rules are too homogenous, with one section bleeding into the next. This is not illogical, but the material looks the same, and players must sometimes hunt for a piece of information. There's some duplicate text in separate sections the creators probably could have condensed. Both the gladiator and the slave can throw a weapon (the only difference is the Style Points earned), and their "Beseech the Gods" charts are identical.

The booklet also has character sheets at the back for use in play. You'll have to photocopy them, though you could just keep running tallies on damage and style using scratch paper. The damage tracks use crude character outlines, though there's nothing wrong with the tracks themselves, with little dots you color in (those who have played **Battletech** will be familiar with the look, though in **Battletech** food doesn't heal damage, so pencils are recommended). Each sheet has a handy summary of actions for that character.

The game plays best when there's at least one of each of these beleaguered warriors spilling their blood in the sand and leveling the playing field; if the well-protected fighter and the vicious lion hammer on each other, the winner will find themselves facing a fresh and newly equipped slave. In spite of the bargain-basement components and, in some ways, iffy execution, it's still a fun game. The rules are solid and easy to absorb. Plenty of actions means plenty of tactical considerations, which means **Brunch at the Coliseum** packs a lot of strategy into a small and even-handed package that will get a thumbs up from all but the harshest of judges.

--Andy Vetromile

Our Lady of Weirdness: The Queen of Sheba

"Where are the kings? A thousand kings have sunk into the dust and now rest under the ground in vaults and in tombs. Their monuments all through the land still tell of their deeds, and their fame is spread like the wafting fragrance of amber.

Or where indeed is Bilqis, she of the mighty throne, she of the tower, higher than all towers?"

-- Nashwan bin Said al-Himyari (d. 1178)

Where indeed? Most likely, she is buried somewhere under the sands of Yemen. Or Ethiopia. Or somewhere else entirely. Or perhaps she still lives, in scripture and in darker legendry, waiting for those wise enough -- or foolish enough -- to pay her court. Let's not keep her waiting.

"And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to prove him with hard questions. And she came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bare spices, and very much gold, and precious stones: and when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him of all that was in her heart. And Solomon told her all her questions: there was not any thing hid from the king, which he told her not. And when the queen of Sheba had seen all Solomon's wisdom, and the house that he had built . . . and his ascent by which he went up unto the house of the Lord; there was no more spirit in her. And she said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. . . . And she gave the king an hundred and twenty talents of gold, and of spices very great store, and precious stones: there came no more such abundance of spices as these which the queen of Sheba gave to king Solomon. . . . And king Solomon gave unto the queen of Sheba all her desire, whatsoever she asked, beside that which Solomon gave her of his royal bounty. So she turned and went to her own country, she and her servants."

-- I Kings 10:1-13

The Queen of Sheba bursts on the scene in the first Book of Kings (and, for those playing at home, again in First Chronicles) as if we were supposed to know who she was. True, the Bible sneaks "Sheba" (which could come from a word meaning "plenty," or in a less likely reading, "seven" or "oath") into the list of Genesis 10 nations, albeit in such a fashion that it could refer to about three different places, and they have a rep in the various prophets for wealth and misbehavior, like most Biblical foreigners. But about the Queen herself, we have just a dozen verses to play with. In Sura 27, "the Ant," the Koran adds another two dozen to the story. In this version, Solomon's servitor, the hoopoe bird, brings him the news of a rich queen in Sheba who worships the sun instead of Allah; when she bribes him to go away, Solomon threatens her with destruction unless she converts. She travels to Jerusalem; while on the way, Solomon's djinn carry her throne to his palace, where she recognizes it. When entering Solomon's chambers, she mistakes a crystal floor for a pool of water, and hikes up her dress to cross it, exposing her legs. Solomon reveals the illusion, and she converts to the worship of Allah immediately.

But even gossiping hoopoes and glass floors can only take us so far -- we must leave the comfort of divine revelation for the mists of legend. Both Islamic and Jewish traditions embroidered the story of the Queen of Sheba, giving her a name (Bilqis, or Balkis, which seemingly defies etymology but may be vaguely related to *blm*, meaning "incense"), a back story (she murdered an evil king and conned his advisers into making her queen), and hairy legs (which the glass floor reveals to Solomon). In this version, her conversion follows Solomon's invention of a depilatory, which restores her to full, smooth beauty. Similarly embroidered tradition (if not scholarship) identifies the anonymous "Shulamite woman" of the erotic Song of Solomon with the Queen of Sheba, which begins to hint that there was more going on between her and Solomon than spices and riddle games.

"A few years ago, the existence of [the Queen of] Sheba's Ma'rib (and Sirwah in her era) was equally in question. Yes, there was a Sabeen civilization and yes, it was grand, but it was of no consequence before 600 or 700 B.C. This appraisal was widely agreed on -- and, as is now known, totally in error."

-- Nicholas Clapp, *Sheba* (2001)

In fact, the Ethiopian *Kebra Nagast* names the Queen Makeda ("the fiery one"), and explicitly states that not only did she and Solomon get it on, she bore a son, Menelik, from their union who became the first emperor of Ethiopia.

(Menelik then stole the Ark of the Covenant from his dad, since Ethiopia was now the Holy Land.) And indeed, there are Jewish elements to Ethiopian ritual, and even Ethiopian Jewish communities, that provably predate 600 B.C. (or even a century earlier). The Queen, if she did in fact meet Solomon, would have lived around 950 B.C., give or take a decade. At that time, as it happened, Ethiopian culture was beginning to feel the infusion of writing, worship, and trade from Yemen across the Red Sea -- from the land known to historians as Saba. Which is to say, Sheba. Well-watered by a massive dam and sophisticated irrigation systems (a land of "plenty"), Saba was a center of the trade in frankincense, and seemingly convenient to the "gold of Ophir" elsewhere in Arabia; other "spices" and the "precious stones" likely came from India on the monsoon trade. The "Mahram Bilqis," a temple of the moon, rises from the sand at Ma'rib, Saba's ancient capital. No regnant queen has appeared in the Sabeen inscriptions, but Strabo observed that the kings of "Arabia Felix" ("Arabia the Happy") in that region a few centuries later were restricted by taboo from leaving their palaces. Perhaps the Sabeen mukarrib Yakrubmalik, nervous about the Phoenecian navies nosing around his spice trade but unable to lose face by leaving his city, sent his beautiful (and hard-nosed) queen to negotiate with the Phoenecians' hill-country muscle, and made history, or at least scripture.

"The first thing I noticed was the fact that below our feet was only dry dirt. No vegetation grew in the expanse that had been demarcated with concrete pillars. We approached a roped-off area and were told that this was the gravesite of Birikisu Sungbo, the Queen of Sheba. According to our nonagenarian guide, no plant had ever grown on this ground since they had placed her body beneath it. The roped-off area was around 18 feet long, a length which we were informed Birikisu's body covered completely, for the queen was a giant."

-- Zachariah Cherian Mampilly, "The Queen of Sheba's African Roots"

Unless, of course, we've got Sheba in the wrong place. The Bible, after all, also puts "Sheba" rather closer to Solomon (and to Arabian gold mines) in Midian, across the sea from the Sinai Peninsula, and unlike Saba, Midian has a series -- a dynasty, in fact -- of historically attested queens going back at least to the 8th century B.C. A different Arabic legend places the Queen of Sheba's tomb at Palmyra, another desert trading town with a history of active queens. Added classical historians put Balkis in Baalbek, but if her majesty's name comes from "Baal" and not from *blm*, then a Syrian or Mesopotamian Sheba may be in order -- and better fit other Biblical descriptions of Sheba as "in the east." There are the confusingly-named Sabians of Harran in southeastern Turkey, named in the Koran, from whence the [Three Magi](#) may have come -- the Sabians are famous astrologers, and of course the Magi have long been linked to the Queen, that earlier royal figure who also traveled to Jerusalem with gold and frankincense. Josephus identifies her as Nikaulis, "Queen of Egypt and Ethiopia," from whence Velikovsky decides that Hatshepsut is the Queen of Sheba (rather overplaying the similarities between "shepsu" and "Sheba") and her voyage to "Punt" was a trip to see Solomon only a few dozen miles away and [540 years downstream](#). And once we're back in Africa and unmoored from archaeology, it's only a hop, skip, and a jump to the Eredo ruins in Nigeria, massive earthworks where the locals point to the tomb of "Birikisu Sungbo," the Queen of Sheba.

"Lead of the philosophers in which is the shining white dove, which is called the salt of metals, and in which consists the teaching of the work. This is that chaste, wise, and rich Queen of Sheba clothed in a white veil."

-- Guillaume Mennens, *Aurei Velleris* (1604)

Nigerian, Ethiopian, or even Yemeni, the legend remains glorious, if obscure. In the words of the Song of Solomon, she is "black but comely," or as the alchemists put it, a veiled Queen, or a "shining dove" concealed in lead. In short, she is, as her Ma'rib temple proclaims, the new moon -- the month of Shebat in the Hebrew calendar. (The Aramaeans apparently had a moon goddess named Shayba, to boot.) In her union with Solomon, we see the Alchemical Marriage of sun and moon, of Red King and Black Queen. The alchemist Abufalah of Syracuse said that she brought the Philosopher's Stone to Solomon; others say she brought him the [green glass Grail](#) now preserved in Genoa. (Perhaps this is why St. Bernard of Clairvaux, patron of the Templars, wrote 280 sermons on the Song of Solomon.) Alchemists knew her as the "South Wind," and as the *aurora consurgens*, the rising dawn. Which may be why the former alchemist Aquinas' final meditation, the *Aurora*, is dedicated to the Song of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, who he quotes as saying: "Reigning I will reign, and my kingdom shall have no end for all them that find me and subtly and ingeniously and constantly seek me out."

On the other hand -- or hoof -- there remains the darkness over the light. The Queen of Sheba's "hairy legs" are, traditionally, the mark of Lilith, the vampiric first wife of Adam and queen of the demons. According to the alchemist

Commenius, the Queen of Sheba's veil was a spider web (remember Biluku, the Andaman [spider goddess](#)?) and her bloated body stank of asafoetida. The German scholar Erich Zehren maintains that the Queen of Sheba was actually the dark goddess Astarte, whom Solomon worships in 1 Kings 11:15. Other traditions make it even more explicit; Bilqis was the daughter of a djinn, and had the legs (or feet) of a goat, or of an ass. In this version, Solomon sees her legs when she walks into a pond -- which she must do because the only bridge will eventually become the True Cross. She is, in short, a demon -- Flaubert makes her the incarnation of Lust, in the *Temptation of St. Anthony*, betrayed by her malformed foot. In the Ethiopian legend, her foot is scarred by being dipped in the blood of a dragon -- which may be where she learns to [talk](#) with Solomon's hoopoe. In medieval European imagery, she somehow gets the feet of a goose, and is known as *La Reine Pédaque*, the "goose footed queen." (This might be Green Language for *La Reine du Pays d'Oc*, "queen of Languedoc," or queen of the Cathars; or it might be a scribal misprint of *anserinus* "goose" for *asinus* "ass.") In this guise, she links with goose-footed Bertha of the Big Foot (a sasquatch, also, has hairy legs), the Merovingian mother of Charlemagne -- and avatar of [Berchta](#), the Queen of the Dead.

"The Queen of the South, such as I saw her in my dreams . . . crowned with stars . . . her face is olive-tinted . . . one foot is on a bridge, the other on a wheel . . . one hand rests on the highest rock of the mountains in the Yemen, the other stretched out to the heavens . . . On the peak of the highest mountain of the Yemen, a wonderful bird is singing in a cage . . . it is the talisman of the new age . . . Leviathan with black wings . . . Beyond the sea there rises another peak . . ."

-- Gerard de Nerval, *Aurélia* (1853)

On this Merovingian tack, the Prieuré poet Gerard de Nerval was driven mad by the Black Queen, who he called Aurélia, and hanged himself with the manuscript to her eponymous novella in his pocket. Golden Dawn poet William Butler Yeats remained fascinated with the Queen of Sheba his whole life. Perhaps the Black Queen is also the Dark Lady of Shakespeare's sonnets, who may have inspired his [Cleopatra](#), another "Queen of Egypt and Ethiopia." From Dark Lady to "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" of Keats, sucking his blood out through tuberculosis. The vampiric hairy-legged Lilith, as Isaiah 34 explains, dwells in a waste land, a "habitation for dragons and a court for owls" (neatly tying in our whole bird-dragon thing again). Perhaps she dwells in Sheba, laid waste after the bursting of the dam at Ma'rib (which happened during the life of Mohammed -- perhaps Gabriel took care of some unfinished business while dictating the Koran). Prieuré agent André Malraux claimed to have flown over the Queen's city in 1934, seeing "twenty towers" on the edge of the Rub' al-Khali. Perhaps the Queen of Sheba is the Queen of [Irem](#) as well? Jesus prophesied her apocalyptic return in Matthew 12:42: "The Queen of the South will rise up at the Judgement when this generation is on trial." Bilqis, Lilith, Astarte, Cybele . . . when Irem rises from the sand, and the [sphinxes](#) walk, will the Black Queen of Frankincense with the goatlike hair return in terrible power? Iä! Iä! Sheba-Niggurath!

Making (And Faking) Adventures (Part II)

You Can't Spell 'Justification' Without 'Fiction'

(. . . presuming you spell "Fiction" with an "A")

Hmm . . . looking over last week's article, I note that I've begun to reveal a bunch of my personal secrets. Soon you'll be able to program your own MarshAI to generate adventures just like I do, and I'll be obsolete.

Well, the cat's out of the bag now . . . so let's continue, shall we? (We're picking up right where we left off [last time](#) . . . please read Part I if you haven't already.)

3. Work Backwards From The Lynchpin

Okay; I've got that pivotal scene in mind I want to subject my players to. What do I *do* with it?

Well, I simply work backwards, always keeping in mind the questions: "How could this have happened? What is necessary for this scene to take place?"

Depending on the hook itself, this may be immediately obvious or require a great amount of contemplation.

The easiest hooks to incorporate are generally those that occur at (or near) the beginning of the adventure. If the pivotal scene is a (prospective) employer attempting to hire the heroes to kill him, then that requires no additional set up other than establishing an interesting scene for this proposition to take place. But if the situation is more convoluted - for example, the heroes are attacked by Alice (of "...in Wonderland" fame) - then a great deal of effort needs to be expended getting the players to that point: The party needs to be transplanted to Wonderland (or Alice transported to their world), and some catalyst or focus needs to be established for Alice to attack.

At this point many options may present themselves for the whys and wherefores behind the pivotal scene. For example, the mayor - seemingly intoxicated - barges into a gala ball and opens fire on the guests before escaping. This could happen because . . .

- It isn't the mayor; someone (or something) is impersonating him.
- The mayor is being controlled or possessed by something.
- The mayor really *is* intoxicated, and has flipped out for some reason.
- The scene isn't what it seems.

Once I have that pivotal scene in mind from the previous stage, at this point in the planning I'll let my mind wander in *any* direction. No thought is too crazy to be dismissed out of hand at this point. I personally have a love for convoluted, onion-like plots; my ideal adventures often have many layers to peel . . . and if the heroes don't uncover the entire truth, well that's fine. They may *think* they've resolved everything, and I may have additional plots I can bring up later!

Anyway, let's stick with the mayoral example for a bit (and not just because "mayoral" is a cool word). It seems that Option A would be very easy to implement . . . which is probably reason enough to avoid it. (I note *Dungeon* magazine's [writer's guidelines](#) specifically mention that a murder perpetrated by a doppelganger is grounds for adventure rejection.) I also note that Option A only has one or two immediate "tendrils" - discover the mayor is innocent, and find the dupe.

Option B is similar to Option A in a lot of ways; to me it's a bit more appealing because it presents a few more threads to resolve. The heroes need to track down the real mayor, figure out a way to subdue him (since randomly killing

possessed governmental leaders is bad karma), and then track down and defeat the puppeteer.

Even so, Option A and B both have a similar problem: The base assumption of the players (and thus, likely, the characters) will probably be that the mayor *isn't* responsible, and all they need to do is track down the culprits behind it all and save the day. Any resolution that reinforces that predisposition somewhat deadens any impact the initial premise may have held.

Option C is definitely a workable option all by itself . . . especially if the heroes are expecting an impostor or something else odd. (See the article ["Plotting Like Old Man Jenkins"](#) for more examples of this.)

Now, Options A or B *do* have some potential if I can work another twist in there (perhaps involving C). For example, what if A or B is superficially true, but for the reverse reason? What if the mayor *had* snapped (or was heavily intoxicated, or whatever), and was going to do something *worse* if he hadn't been impersonated or controlled? For example, in many genres I could concoct a force of possession (a spirit, nanites, or the like) . . . but what if this force was weak, and could only induce mild changes? In this case, what if the possessing force *worsened* the mayor's aim? What if the result would have been much worse if it hadn't acted? This allows all the neat aspects of Option B ("Ah-HA! We've discovered that the mayor has been possessed by something! We must find the dastardly culprit!"), while either allowing a surprising twist ending or setting the stage for a sequel, since the underlying problems behind the mayor's rampage would not have been dealt with. ("Hmmm . . . what are the odds that something would possess the mayor and cause him to shoot random people *twice*?")

By the time I get to Option D, I'm either getting something *really* weird or *really* brilliant . . . or possibly both. The possession-for-good is an entirely worthwhile option, but what if we take a different tack?

What if the mayor himself is behind the incident, but Things Are Not As They Seem™? Suppose the mayor had carefully staged every aspect of the event; his weapon had blanks, and those he "shot" were in on the plan (whatever it is), with Hollywood blood packets and other trickery planted on them. Other effects (shattering vases and broken mirrors) could also have been arranged ahead of time to make the incident convincing . . . but in no way was anyone ever in any "real" danger.

Why would this be? Well, perhaps the mayor was trying to convince people there were beings capable of possession or impersonation (Skrulls in the Marvel Universe, Shedim in *In Nomine*), but had so far been unable to convince anyone else. He needed a plan - something big - to convince people of the threat, and get the money/aid/media time necessary to fulfill his goals. After all, no one would suspect the good and trusted mayor of doing something like that, right? (This could also create an interesting climactic conundrum for the heroes, especially if they believe the mayor; if they uncover the truth, what do they do with it? Do they reveal what they know in the name of justice, or keep it quiet to help aid the mayor? Since no one was *really* in danger, this may be a very difficult decision . . .)

Of course, it's entirely possible to over-think an adventure; having something that's too complicated or Byzantine can make the players' eyes glaze over, no longer caring *what* is going on. And I always try to keep focused the difference between "complex" and "complicated." But a complex adventure allows for a number of different things for heroes to figure out, each of which can provide their own level of satisfaction.

4. Reconsider the Premise

At this point I may look back and see if the thoughts that formed in Step 3 will change my mind regarding Step 2. For example, the fourth option for the mayor plot above ("the mayor staged the attack, and no one was in 'real' danger") doesn't *really* require the shooter to be the mayor; it could be anyone who is unexpectedly able to turn a pompous ball into a firefight. Thus I may change my pivotal scene ("How would the players react if the bartender they've befriended at a ball suddenly pulls out a gun and starts shooting people?") in an effort to make the premise stronger, less convoluted, or more plausible. This step isn't necessary, but the loop between Steps 2 and 3 can iterate many times. ("What's my weird focus? How is that possible? How does that change the focus? How is *that* possible? . . .")

Note that, at this point, I still haven't committed word one to paper. I've [stated previously](#) how little I don't put on

paper for my adventures; this is why.

5. Flesh Out the Rest of the Adventure

Once I have my focus scene, and I know *why* that focus scene is happening, I try to come up with a bit more meat around the adventure. This is usually little more than a quasi-checklist (for mostly linear adventures), random paragraphs or jottings (for more open-ended adventures), or a rough flow chart (for adventures that are more complex).

This process can be trivial or difficult, depending on how fully realized the adventure is as of step 3.

Let's say I'm expanding my "mayor shoots people but is being controlled by force for good" adventure. My notes for this may look something like:

- Gala ball - PCs mingle
- Mayor shoots people
- Mayor: Track down. (Disarm?)
- Clues: Mayor timeline ("was acting normal until he snapped")
- Evidence of possession
- Confrontation - Controlling force
- Resolution (Realize the mayor *is* insane? Or incorrectly blame - and defeat - possessor)

That's it, at this stage. I have about four or five scenes broadly sketched out, and - in a pinch - I could probably run this adventure. (By this time it's usually about an hour until my players and I meet to game . . . I'm usually in a blind panic by now.)

It's possible for me to have an adventure where Step 2 and 3 aren't as tightly focused; in our mayor examples, the basic premise introduces the main players, the conflict, and the means of resolution (mayor, [possible] possessor, shooting, capture, defeat mayor and/or possessor). For an adventure where Step 2 and 3 weren't as tightly focused, my fleshing out may entail the bulk of the work.

For example, let's consider the example where Alice In Wonderland attacks the heroes. I actually used this plot in a ***Werewolf: The Apocalypse*** campaign. My Step 2 pivotal scene was "Alice attacks and eviscerates an important NPC." My Step 3 "working backwards" indicated that the heroes were in the Dreaming (the land of dreams of White Wolf's World of Darkness), and had permitted Alice to get close enough to the heroes for a devastating surprise attack.

In this example, the bulk of the work came down to Step 4:

- Heroes discover and track rabbit with pocket watch into the Umbra [the spirit world crucial to ***Werewolf***]
- While there, they fall down a rabbit hole
- They encounter a prim and proper English girl, drowning (in tears)
- They rescue her (or she rescues herself); she jots down notes in her journal with a pen
- Shortly thereafter, she (and the PCs) are attacked by dodoes, tortoises, and other animals drying themselves off. [Having the PCs rescue someone is a great way to throw off suspicion that they're evil.]
- Encounter the Cheshire Cat; amid wordplay, he warns them of the Queen of Blood
- (Hopefully the players think this is the Queen of Hearts . . . it isn't. It's Alice.)
- Other Wonderland encounters, as time (and interest) permits - emphasize the "Queen of Blood" aspect.
- Have the NPC-to-be-eviscerated keep Alice "safe" at the back of the party.
- Final scene: Queen of Hearts attacks the PCs en masse (with playing card guards) . . .
- . . . suddenly, a blood-curdling scream from the back of the party. Alice has gravely wounded the NPC; her pen has become a sword. [Get it?]
- Alice is actually a Dark Dream of Childhood Evil (all that is cruel, sinister, and ***Lunch Money***-ish about children). Other Wonderlanders have attacked because they are Dreams of Innocence and Confusion
- Big Bad Conflict . . . gathering of forces, realignment of sides
- Heroes win (presumably), escape Dreaming

This outline for this adventure is more complicated since the basic premise ("When Alices Attack!") doesn't contain a lot of the information I need mentally to make it work.

Okay; I have my hook, I have my justification, and I have my outline. Next time I'll discuss the finishing touches I need to make an adventure runnable for me. I may also include some tips I've used to stall early-arriving players so I can scribble out the rest of the adventure.

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Macho Women With Guns** mapsheet.*

(Three stars) "Fatlings are inhumanly repulsive masses, literally rolls upon rolls of greasy sallow skin. They constantly sweat a foul-smelling slippery oil that allows them to lumber their bulk around when they choose to move at all."

Bangkok

by Matt Riggsby

It's a new city, but the capital of an ancient nation. It is ruled from palace which resisted colonial powers but eagerly Westernized its own princes. It is in a land where coups are a regular occurrence, but hardly anybody gets hurt. Natives call it Krungthep, city of angels. Given time, fanatical sticklers for accuracy will call it by its full name: Krungthep Maha Nakorn Amorn Ratanakosindra Mahindrayudhya Mahadilokpop Noparatana Rajthani Burirom Udom Rajnivet Mahastan Amorn Pimarn Avatarn Satit Sakkatuttiya Vishnukarm Prasit, the longest official name of any place in the world. We outsiders call it Bangkok, village of the olive (or village of the wild plum; both are valid translations).

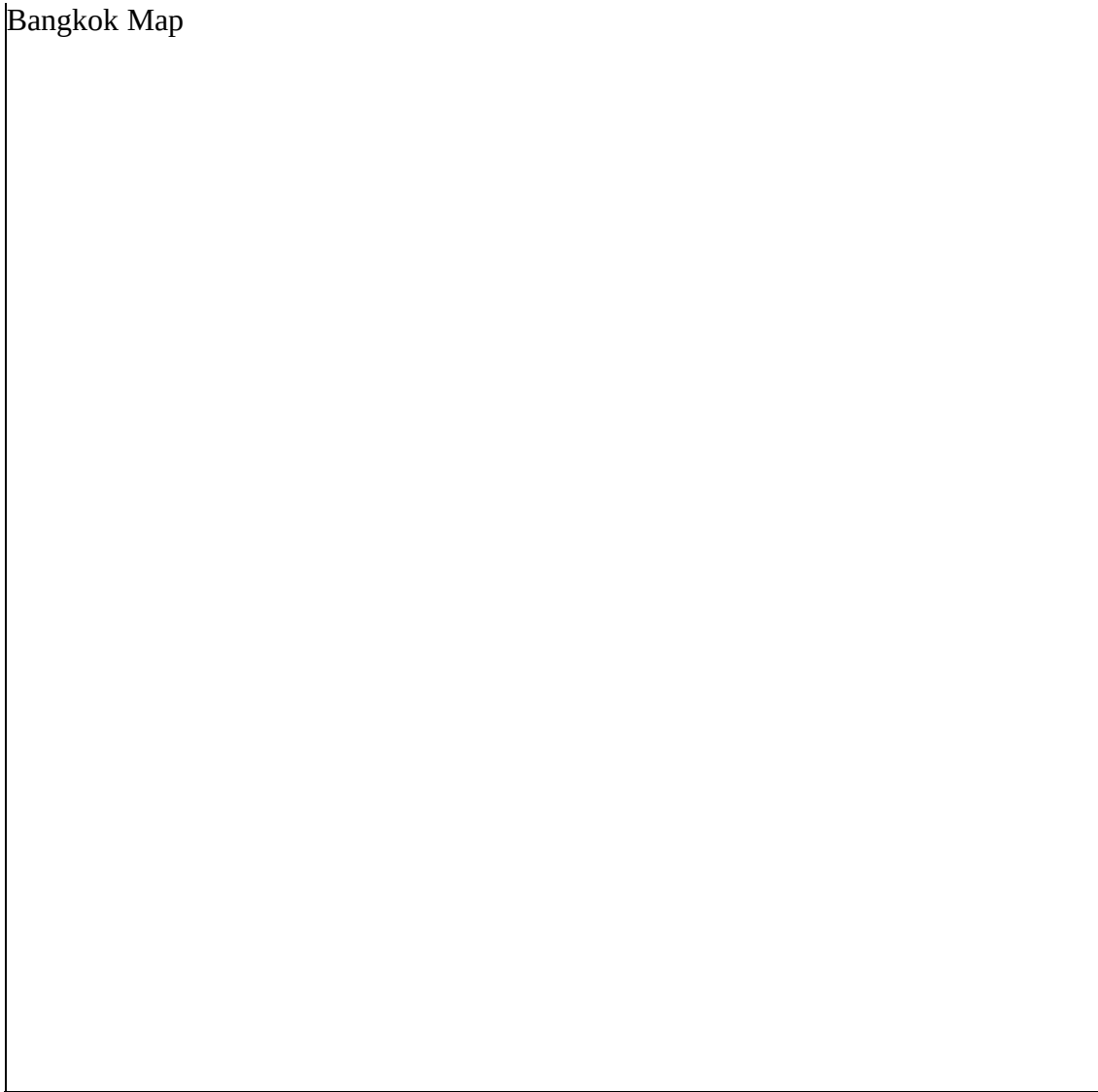
Geography and Land Use

Bangkok is centered on a bend in the Chao Phya river which runs through western Thailand, about ten miles north of the Gulf of Siam. The land is low and flat; as a defensive measure, some rulers have intentionally turned parts of the surrounding area into swamp (an interesting obstacle, but not necessarily a great idea in an area where mosquitoes are a chronic problem). Flooding is frequent, although the Thais are well equipped to deal with it.

Bangkok weather is tropical. Too far from the coast for the moderating effects of the sea, temperatures often reach the nineties even in the cooler months and go over 100 degrees in the summer. Humidity is high, with constant rain during the monsoon and frequent brief but torrential afternoon thunderstorms in drier months.

On the other hand, the region is exceptionally fertile. Thailand produces a great deal of rice and has thick forests. The city's environs are home to date and coconut palms, other fruit trees, and a profusion of flowers, as well as acres of rice paddies.

Bangkok has often been compared to [Venice](#) and Amsterdam. All are cities crossed by a number of canals. Indeed, canals were once the primary avenues, with streets as a mere afterthought. As in Venice, small boats have been a common method of transportation.



History

Foundation

Although a visitor might expect an ancient city, Bangkok is actually very young. The site that would become Bangkok started as a Chinese trading post. In the 17th century, French colonists built and later abandoned a small fortress, Dhonburi, across the river. In 1767, after centuries of intermittent warfare, the Burmese sacked the Siamese capital, Ayudhya. Taksin, one of the few Siamese generals to escape the disaster, made Dhonburi his base for a counter-attack. After years of campaigning (and a coincidental attack on Burma by China), the Burmese were driven off. Taksin was made king, but became unbalanced in his later years and, in 1782, was deposed. One of his favorite generals, Chakri, was made king in his place, becoming King Rama I. The only casualties in the coup were Taksin himself and, ironically, the general who had deposed Taksin and prevailed on Chakri to take the crown (he was executed for treason; he did, after all, revolt against the king).

Rather than trying to rebuild Ayudhya, Chakri decided to remain in Bangkok. The Chinese were persuaded to move a few hundred yards south, and a new palace was built on the eastern side of the river (the better to defend against attacks from the Burmese from the west). Rama I started an immense palace complex, covering nearly a square mile, and built a number of temples. Several klongs (canals) were cut, making a series of moats through the river bend and providing easy water transport around the growing city. Small canoes quickly became the main method of

transportation.

He also changed some aspects of traditional ceremonies. In Ayudhya, commoners were not allowed to view royal processions; royalty was too sacred for them to look upon. In Bangkok, all were allowed to watch the spectacular royal processions. The easygoing Thai love a good spectacle, so this presumably made him quite popular.

The next several decades were good to Bangkok. Burma, the traditional enemy, was absorbed by the British, and with the exception of a revolt by a prince in a subject region in Laos, Siam had no wars to worry about. Trade with China was booming, and the Chinese colony grew quickly (at some point, a small Indian trading community also appeared). The Chao Phya was dredged and widened to make room for more junks, and more klongs were dug to improve transportation. A great many temples were endowed during this period as well. The only chronic problem was the opium trade. Opium, at this time a particularly heavy monkey on the Chinese back, was forbidden in Siam, but it was smuggled in. The government was serious about enforcing its laws, so there were frequent raids on opium rings.

Contact With The West

Up until this point, contact with Europeans had been slight and sporadic. However, the English were consolidating their hold on India and the French were expanding into Vietnam. Both were eyeing the prosperous kingdom of Siam. For their part, the Thai saw the dangers of allowing Europeans into their country. Individual envoys were allowed to visit, but no permanent embassies were established. European goods were imported, often through middlemen, but they were traded for luxuries such as silk and scented woods, not rice.

This changed in 1851 with Mongkut, or King Rama IV. Having seen the English and French gobble up his neighbors, he realized that the Europeans could not be kept out forever. Instead, he believed that he must meet the West on equal terms. To that end, he set out to modernize his country. Under his reign, Europeans were at last allowed to live in Bangkok and permanent legations were established. He hired foreign technical specialists and teachers to educate his family and bring his nation technologically up to date. He was himself an avid amateur astronomer and learned English at an advanced age. One of the teachers he hired for his family was a Mrs. Anna Leonowens, whose memoirs became famous years later. Mongkut is the monarch represented in *The King and I*, a work which represents the early Victorian Siamese court about as accurately as the musical *Camelot* does post-Roman British feudalism (although both Rama IV and Yul Brynner were bald).

Under Rama IV, Bangkok started to undergo a physical transformation. In deference to Europeans who preferred driving down roads to rowing down klongs, the first paved streets were laid down. Ironically, New Road, on the west bank of the river, is the first and oldest paved road in the city. New buildings also went up to accommodate European visitors, including hotels. This also made the city's ethnic mix more complex: native Thai (themselves divided into princes and peasants), an ethnic Chinese and Indian merchant class, and visiting Europeans.

Monkgut's successor, Rama V, went one better. In addition to hiring even more foreign advisors to run a new system of courts, organize police, build railroads, and so on, he sent all but one of his sons abroad for schooling. A number of aristocrats followed suit, and a number of well-intentioned Europeans sponsored European and American education for some youths too poor to afford it themselves. A number of them joined European military units, although they were generally sent home when actual hostilities began. Rama V was the first Asian monarch to tour Europe, visiting Russia (returning a visit from his good friend Nicholas II), Germany, France, and England.

Despite relatively good relations with the west during this period, Bangkok became subject to gunboat diplomacy, in its most literal sense. It usually worked like this: For whatever reasons, Europeans would feel their interests threatened. To protect its interests, the European power would send a naval vessel to the area in question. Even a small European warship mounted far more firepower than most Asian kingdoms could bring to bear in one place, and even if native forces were capable of driving it off, it carried an implicit threat of even more force. There was often no specific threat of violence, but there didn't need to be one. The mere presence of a gunboat put tremendous pressure on the natives to yield to foreign demands.

It happened to Bangkok twice. On the first occasion, a personal problem became very political. The British consul

summoned a warship when his son-in-law, a Thai nobleman, was arrested on trumped-up charges. The charges were brought by the Siamese prime minister, who had been a rival for the consul's daughter's affections and was furious about losing her to a young upstart. To complicate matters, the captain of the British vessel, who knew next to nothing about Bangkok, docked his ship at the only open spot on the river which appeared large enough: the landing stage of the royal palace. This incident ended sadly. The young man was found guilty and executed. The British Foreign Ministry recalled the ship; they didn't want to start a war over a love affair gone bad. The consul was more or less forced to resign, albeit with dignity and a fat pension. The young widow got a roundabout form of revenge, though. She sold an expensive necklace given to her by the prime minister in order to send a poor Thai youth to school in Paris. That young man grew up to be a leader of the group which would overthrow the aristocrats in the 1930s and, briefly, prime minister himself. The second incident involved the French sending three gunboats to Bangkok, allegedly to guard the three Frenchmen in Bangkok who lived outside of the French legation. Although the presence of warships on the river caused considerable diplomatic tension, the people of Bangkok regarded them as just another spectacle. They eagerly turned out in great numbers to see the big western ships.

Into the 20th Century

Chakri and his first four successors had done well, but after a run of five excellent kings, things started to go downhill. There have been worse rulers, but on the whole, Rama VI did more harm than good. The problem, perhaps, is that being king in Bangkok was getting harder. Whatever the cause, the kings after Rama V seemed less and less inclined to actually rule, and their individual quirks of personality caused larger and larger problems. Paranoid, Rama VI created a private bodyguard (the Wild Tigers) which alienated him from the regular army. Intensely pro-British, he ended Siam's profitable neutrality in WWI by entering on the side of the Allies. This was unpopular, since most Thai were wary of the British, openly distrustful of the French (long-time rivals for subject territories in Laos and Cambodia), and well-disposed towards the Germans, since Germany had never threatened Siam. Ironically, his unpopular bid for military glory didn't pay off. Siamese troops never saw combat; they were still in training in the south of France when the armistice was signed. Sadly, he was also apparently a homosexual in a country where polygamy was an important political tool. However, he was able to bring himself to marry three times late in his reign. Finally, he spent lavishly, causing problems with the national budget.

Rama VII was even less inclined than his predecessor to rule his changing nation. To assist him in the increasingly difficult task of ruling Siam, he assembled a council of princes to help him select ministers and make policy decisions. Although this was supposed to be a step in the direction of opening the government and reducing the power of the monarchy, it ended up locking commoners out of circles of power. Before, a sufficiently worthy commoner might become a minister. Now, though, the council made sure that only its own members got important posts. This might have been a mild irritation in earlier years, but now there was a growing middle class of European-educated officials and junior officers with new ideas about democracy (or, at least, constitutional monarchy) and a healthy resentment of aristocratic privilege. The situation was aggravated by the growing Great Depression, which appeared to hurt the commoners far more than it did the princes.

The stage was set for a change of government. A cadre of about 50 organizers, calling themselves the People's Party, carefully tracked the movements of the royal council, identified important points of communication, and selected sympathetic army units. On a fine summer morning in 1932, when the king was vacationing at a favorite spot a hundred miles away, they struck. In the course of an hour or two, the councilors were arrested and officers commanding units sympathetic to them were in custody. Important phone and telegraph lines were cut, preventing loyalists from calling for aid. The People's Party announced their plan to institute a constitutional monarchy to a surprised populace, who saw little alternative but to cheer them on. The only casualty was the accidental death of a policeman.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the coup is that it was aimed at overthrowing the aristocrats, not the king. While the People's Party was determined to introduce aspects of democracy, respect for the crown was in full force, and despite the king's decreasing power in later years, his support for the new government has been key. When Bangkok was firmly in People's Party hands, the king was respectfully invited back to preside over the country and the framing of a constitution. Rama VII was nonplussed but ultimately accepted. He saw no point in bloodshed, and ultimately he had never wanted to be king anyway. Another unusual aspect of the coup was its invisibility. It was a conflict between

a small middle class and a smaller upper class, in which the common people weren't involved. There were no public demonstrations, shows of force (except for a few tanks parked in key positions), or shootings.

Military Rule and Democracy

But as peaceful as the transition was, the following decades were a litany of one government forcibly replacing another. To demonstrate that it wasn't trying to seize power for itself, the People's Party established an interrim government containing several members of the old administration. Tension between aristocratic conservatives and middle-class revolutionaries led to brandishing firearms on the council floor and, within four months, the dissolution of the interrim government in favor of rule by decree of the prime minister, himself a prince. He was deposed not long thereafter by a second, equally bloodless, People's Party coup (Rama VII had to be coaxed back to Bangkok again). Worse yet, the working draft of the constitution proposed a number of downright communistic reforms which even the easygoing king found impossible to accept.

The reluctant king became an absent king when he left Bangkok for surgery in England; instead of returning, he abdicated in favor of a 10-year-old cousin attending school in Switzerland, who became Rama VII. The People's Party regime was troubled by a failed royalist coup (which resulted in a pitched battle near Bangkok's Don Muang airport), and by 1937 the government had drifted towards a military dictatorship led by a Major Pibul. It was around this time that the country officially changed its name from Siam to Thailand. Pibul reluctantly entered an alliance with the Japanese in WWII but was peacefully deposed at the war's end by a liberal legislature.

After the war, Rama VIII, who had just reached the age of majority, died of a gunshot during a visit to Bangkok on a break from school (his brother, Rama IX, remains on the throne today). Western observers believe the death a suicide, but the Thais believe he was murdered. The government tried to hide the unusual circumstances, but a bungled cover-up led to charges of assassination which destabilized the government and swept Pibul back into power. Pibul ruled for several years, surviving a poorly organized coup attempt which resulted in several deaths. Convinced of his own popularity, he instituted a "speaker's corner" in a public park in Bangkok. Although freedom of speech was a new concept, the Thai enthusiastically took to airing their grievances. Individual protests snowballed into mass demonstrations which his secret police could not suppress, and Pibul's reputation was so damaged that he was quietly forced into exile by his own military.

During the Cold War, the military strongmen who continued to rule the country drew a great deal of support from foreign sources, particularly the US. The military conservatives made common cause with the US against the rising tide of Communism in southeast Asia. Thailand served as a base for American operations during the Vietnam War, and Bangkok was a frequent destination for American troops on R&R. Thailand also saw a great deal of foreign aid supporting rapid economic development. The foreign involvement meant a return to good economic times for Thailand and explosive growth for Bangkok in particular.

Now that the Cold War has ended, the political situation seems to have, at last, stabilized. A more liberal military regime took over in the early 80's, giving way to civilian administrations who have continued to rule since then. Even when military governments have taken power, native-educated student demonstrations have been an important factor in Bangkok's politics. Bangkok has been on the leading edge of Asia's high-tech economic revolution, and even the recessions of the past five years have not stopped its growth.

That growth has been tremendous, and has led to equally large changes for the city. Over the past half-century or so, the city's population has leapt to over eight million, about a tenth of the country's total population, and Bangkok and its suburbs cover about 60 square miles. The modern city has been compared to the other City of Angels, Los Angeles, as it appears in the movie *Blade Runner*, but even that doesn't do justice to the peculiar mix of old and new. Traditional stilt houses still line the remaining klongs next to glass-sided skyscrapers, and a grand temple in the old style lies directly across the highway from the modern international airport. Old-timers bemoan the loss of the old Bangkok, with its canals and more easygoing attitude. But Bangkok's color and grandeur can still be found in private shrines, the most modern Thai's reverence for the crown, or even in the beautiful flowers which can be seen growing in puddles at the roadside.

Royalty and Government

At the center of Thai government is the royal family, and at the center of that family is the king. Royalty is sacred in Thailand, and despite Westernization, that idea still hasn't gone away. Showing disrespect for the king or royal family is still a significant crime, although no longer a capital offense. Even revolutionary movements are aimed not at displacing the king so much as displacing corrupt governments that have collected around him and assisting the king in his difficult work.

A peculiar aspect of Thai royal divinity is that commoners aren't allowed to touch royalty for any reason; they're much too holy. While this might be respectful, it can be terribly inconvenient, even dangerous in an emergency. For example, a doctor who isn't of royal rank can't completely examine a royal patient; surgery is out of the question. As recently as the early 20th century, there was an instance where a queen and a princess drowned after falling out of a boat because the boatmen couldn't bring themselves to lay hands on them and bring them up.

Of course, princes can be executed for their crimes, but not like anybody else. Just as one may not touch royalty, their blood may not be shed either, so novel methods of execution had to be devised. The traditional method was to strike the victim in the back of the neck with a fragrant sandalwood club, breaking his neck. Occasionally, the victim would be sewn in a cloth sack and beaten to death, no doubt a long and painful process.

Thai royalty was expected to be polygamous. Rama I had almost 30 wives and 45 children, and some of his successors had even more. Siblings, aunts, in-laws, and other relatives were often in residence as well. This large family usually did the most important work around the palace, so the palace usually had fewer servants than one might expect.

With such a huge family, one might expect that after a few generations everyone would be a prince. However, unless titles were renewed by the king, later generations would receive a lower rank. That is, the son of a prince of the highest order would be a lower-rank nobleman, his son lower still, and so on. After five generations, the title would disappear altogether. Nevertheless, princes are a common sight in Bangkok, even if most of them are of a lesser rank.

The king's eldest son was never assured the throne, although laws of succession have drifted that way over the past century. Rather, the king was expected to name a successor. If he did not, a council of princes would convene on the old king's death and elect one. A king might also appoint an *uparaja*, a sort of deputy king. The uparaja rarely reaches the throne, but he is an important assistant and serves as a viable successor if no one better can be found.

The king is assisted by a cabinet of ministers, who have typical responsibilities: war, communications, finance, and so on. Since the 1932 coup, there has also been an elected legislature. However, its power has varied wildly. Under the military governments, it could serve at best as a tenuous platform for dissent (suppressing a newspaper is one thing, suppressing a popularly elected representative is quite another) and sometimes not even that. However, it was this legislature that brought down Pibul after WWII and has ruled the country for most of the last 20 years.

Armed Forces and Law Enforcement

For most of its history, Bangkok's military and police have been tolerably competent and well-equipped for a country of its size and wealth, but lag behind the west. Thai armies had a mix of swords and muskets at the founding of Bangkok, they obtained second-hand European weapons in the 1850s, a second-hand British destroyer after WWI, and a few tanks by the 1930s. Despite their relaxed demeanor and demonstrated hesitancy to kill their countrymen, the Thai have fielded entirely victorious armies, although the Thai navy has been a somewhat neglected service.

Like most places, there was initially a great deal of overlap between military and police; soldiers would, where necessary, perform police functions. This, of course, began to change in the 1850s as Rama IV and Rama V began to modernize their nation. During this period, a separate police force appeared. In the 20th century, secret police agencies began to appear as well.

With the frequent coups, it's worth mentioning political inclinations. The army has traditionally been conservative,

siding with aristocrats or would-be military dictators. The navy, for some reason, has had more liberal leanings for much of the 20th century. That being said, some units are always more loyal than others. Bodyguards and secret police, of course, side with the current ruler, whoever that happens to be.

Names

Thai names can be difficult for Westerners. Traditionally, individuals don't use family names; the use of surnames was established by law early last century. Most Thais are known by personal names. It starts to get more complicated when it comes to the aristocracy. It is impolite for Thais to address their social betters by their names. Instead, they are addressed by titles and offices. The person known by one name might be known by a different name later. Kings assume the name/title Rama. This isn't so bad if one keeps up with the changes, but it does complicate things if someone is away for a long time or is a student of history.

Religion

The overwhelming majority of the population subscribes to a form of Buddhism with strong Hindu influences. The many temples are inhabited by a number of shaven-headed, saffron-robed monks, who are supported by gifts and donations. Most men in the upper and middle classes spend three months as a monk at some point in their lives, often shortly before getting married. In traditional Thai society, the temples serve as libraries and schools, but they have slowly been squeezed out by secular schools and universities.

Despite being nearly 100% Buddhist, there is complete freedom of religion in Bangkok. Presumably, resident Chinese and Indians follow whatever religion they had at home. Given the proximity to the Muslim world, a few Muslims can probably be found, and perhaps some Christian missionaries. Christian churches appeared within a few years of Bangkok's opening to the West.

Buildings

Traditional homes in Bangkok were airy, wooden, single-story structures (the Thai have a particular aversion to other people above their heads or touching their heads; never try to pat a Thai child on the head). Many were built on stilts to protect against flooding. Most houses also have a small "spirit house," a house-shaped shrine, probably on the front porch. Houseboats were also in very common use. Many Chinese traders had large, very fine boats which they used as stores along the river.

Since the early years of this century, more and more traditional architecture has been giving way to Western-style buildings. As in any other city of reasonable size, many streets are lined with two- to four-story tall concrete buildings, punctuated by tall, glass-sided buildings inhabited by international firms and tech companies. However, traditional Thai homes still exist in residential districts, low-income neighborhoods, and clustered along the remaining canals.

The most notable architecture, though, is that of the temples and palaces. These usually consist of a complex of pagoda-like towers, called prangs, with geometric or bell-shaped bases next to long, low buildings with tiered, gabled roofs. Almost every surface is decorated with geometric carving, figurative displays, intricately detailed murals telling religious or historical stories, or simply fragments of porcelain dishes arranged to resemble flowers.

Streets

Before the middle of the 19th century, there weren't any streets. There were some regularly trampled paths for elephants (elephants were used for war and to bring heavy loads in from the countryside), but most transportation and Bangkok "street life" was along the klongs. The canals of Bangkok were crowded with traffic at most hours. Most travel was by small, pole-driven canoe, but there were many larger vessels as well. Peddlers could row boats packed with merchandise around, making most stores portable. On larger boats, a half-cylinder roof provided protection from

the elements. Many buildings had a landing dock where boats could tie up.

Over the last few decades, the klongs have been replaced by a sprawling street system that can't keep up with the ever-growing population. With a profusion of vehicles from buses to tuk-tuks (three-wheeled vehicles like diminutive golf carts, popular as taxis through southern Asia) and motor scooters, the city's traffic jams are legendary, and a new elevated train system doesn't seem to be helping. The few remaining klongs serve mainly as tourist attractions.

Clothing

Given the weather, Thai clothing and standards of modesty both tend to be a bit loose. A long shirt and short, baggy pants, often woven with colorful stripes or geometric shapes, are a traditional costume for both men and women. However, the shirts could come off if it got too hot, even for ministers conducting government business. Formal wear included silk versions of the same, sashes, and robes, as well as more tailored garments. Very formal headgear often had a tall spire resembling a temple tower. Contrary to current fashion, Thai women wore their hair short.

This all began to change late in the 19th century. Rama V's fondness for the West was such that he decreed traditional garments should no longer be worn at court; European-style suits and uniforms were the order of the day, dealing a serious blow to the native silk-weaving industry. By the end of the 19th century, the royal court looked a bit like an Asian production of a Gilbert and Sullivan opera. Long hair and skirts for women became popular around WWI. By WWII, more people in the city were wearing Western-style clothing than not, and today the traditional clothes only come out for special occasions.

Trade

Bangkok is a great place to shop. Most of Thailand's international trade was funneled through Bangkok, so silk cloth (except for the first half of the 20th century), gems, and fine teak and sandalwood is easy to find. The same is true for just about anything from China. India is a notable trade partner as well, although most Indian trade went west to Britain. European goods were imported quite early, but after 1850, as a result of pro-Western policies, they'll be particularly easy to find. Direct trade with Westerners before 1850 was rare, but was possible so long as the visitors didn't expect any special treatment or legal protection. For several decades, starting under Rama V, Europeans enjoyed limited tariffs and extraterritorial rights (being subject to their own laws and courts while in Siam, not local authority).

Originally, the boat-filled klongs served as floating markets (a practice now preserved almost entirely for the tourist trade): canoes for peddlers and food vendors, larger boats for larger goods. One could sometimes shop by rowing up to a junk just arriving from China and buying directly. The floating markets have been replaced by landlocked night markets, a practice made possible by the introduction of electric lights. The night markets resemble a cross between American farmers' markets and flea markets. These markets are held after dark, under long strings of electric lights.

Food

Thai cuisine is flavorful without being heavy or overpowering. The ingredients are typical of Asian cuisines: rice and rice products, noodles, lots of seafood, and fermented seasonings. It also brings in native and tropical ingredients, such as lemon grass, lime leaves, and coconut. Thai food is liberal in its use of herbs and spices such as ginger, cilantro and basil. Nam pla, a sauce made from fermented fish, is a popular condiment. Tropical fruits, such as papaya, pineapple, mango, and the pungent durian are cultivated in quantity around the city, and the kings of Siam were drinking orange juice for breakfast long before westerners.

What To See and Do

There is no shortage of things to see and do in Bangkok. Just about every public event is surrounded by at least a little ceremony and spectacle. Weddings are surprisingly low-key and are mostly private, but funerals can be several-day-

long affairs. Before the military governments took over, even public executions had priests performing ceremonies and pairs of executioners (the prisoner wouldn't know who was going to kill him, so he couldn't cast a curse) dancing around their victim before delivering the fatal blow. Some major festivals in Bangkok are:

- **Loy Krathong:** The people float tiny boats holding lit candles, incense, and flowers down the canals and rivers, symbolically taking their sins away down the water.
- **Kathin:** During the rainy season, people take gifts to monasteries. The king and nobles make a grand public procession of it.
- **Songkram:** In this April festival, which comes close to the start of the rainy season, people run about with bowls of scented water, sprinkling one another with it as a blessing.
- **Sao Chingsha:** This peculiar Hindu-flavored festival has the king enthroned as Shiva for two days. During that time, teams of acrobats perform tricks on a 100-foot tall swing. The leader of the each team is supposed to end the act by grabbing a bag of gold -- accessible from the swing but set on a pole at a dangerous height -- with his teeth.

The events themselves are just part of it. They're occasion for general celebrations, dances, kickboxing matches, and giving alms to the common people. One charming practice was to put coins and other small valuables into pieces of fruit and hurl them to the crowd.

Bangkok's most spectacular sights are the large temples and the royal palace. The palace is divided into inner and outer districts. The outer palace contains residences, offices, barracks, stables, private parks, and so on, much like the Byzantine imperial palace at Constantinople. The inner palace was the harem, the exclusive province of the king, his wives, and his young children. No man could enter it without the king's express permission; even the guards posted there were female.

There are several large temple complexes around the city, but several are clustered around the palace. Wat Phra Kaew, home to a huge library and a giant gilded stupa (a sort of domed artificial hill with a square tower on top), is inside the palace complex, while Wat Pho, home of a 46-meter long reclining gold-plated Buddha, is immediately next door. Wat Arun (Temple of the Dawn), across the river from the palace, has the tallest prang in the city, nearly 80 meters tall.

One of the great treasures of Thailand is the Emerald Buddha, a statue carved from a green jade-like stone. It came to Thailand from Vietnam, but legend has it that it was originally carved by a Greek sculptor in India. The Emerald Buddha resides in the Wat Phra Kaew. It sits atop a tall platform with steps running up to it, surrounded by lesser statues and shaded by a multi-tier parasol. Another of the great treasures is the Gold Buddha at Wat Traimit. This image is what the name suggests, a statue made of solid gold. It is about 10 feet tall, polished to a mirror finish, and weighs about five and a half tons.

For those with darker tastes, Bangkok, like any other port city, has its share of opium dens, brothels, and similar entertainments. Opium dens could operate openly only in the later half of the 19th century, but they were suppressed again in the first half of the 20th, along with brothels and pornographic movies. However, they all continue to survive underground.

Bangkok in the Campaign

Despite its relatively short history, Bangkok can fit into campaigns from the near-Medieval to the Information Age. On the edge of the mysterious East, it could be a great location for a martial arts campaign. Relatively late-period swashbucklers could visit as well, for East-meets-West action. Siam constituted a buffer state between the English and French spheres of influence during the Victorian era, so it would be a good location for diplomatic contention in a steampunk or early modern campaign. From WWII through the Cold War, it can be a hotbed of espionage, involving OSS operatives working against Japanese operations in Burma (the bridge over the river Kwai was part of a line that ran through Thailand) or CIA spooks countering communist insurgency in Indo-China during the Vietnam War. Change the name to Ayudhya and it becomes a reasonably close approximation of the Siamese capital before the 1800s.

Of course, less historical options are also possible. Add black-market cybernetics and genemods for a Pacific Rim city in a cyberpunk campaign. Replace the Thai, Chinese, and Europeans with aliens for the capital of a space-operatic star-spanning empire. Throw in magic and it becomes a great city for a fantasy campaign. The king's divine connections might be reflected in immense mystic power.

As well as being appropriate to many historical periods, Bangkok's history is rife with adventure and campaign possibilities. During the early colonial period, PCs could be noblemen working to prevent excessive intrusion by westerners or westerners called in to help modernize the city. Gunboat diplomacy is always an option. Diplomatic heroes can certainly have fun balancing the appearance of force with the home office's willingness to let them start a war. Military characters can also become involved. Enlisted adventurers can try some smuggling and illicit shore leave, while officers can try to control their men and give the appearance of a threat without actually opening fire (unless, of course, they have to). Something like the incident of the British consul's daughter could get PCs very personally involved. The presence of gold and jade Buddhas is a temptation to thieves in any era.

Here are some more specific adventure ideas:

- **Bangkok Vice, or Ye Smuggeler's Bluyes:** Nearly two centuries before the Reagan administration and the War On Drugs, Siam had its own drug war, and Napoleonic-era adventurers can become involved. They might be smugglers with hidden shipments of opium or dedicated servants of the king patrolling the klongs and stamping out the tongs. The GM might even slip in your own Crockett (Davy, of course) and Tubbs, western adventurers hired to counter English collusion in the Chinese smuggling rings.
- **Raw(naga)hide!:** It's 1870 and Bangkok is afflicted with a plague of water monsters clogging the klongs. The king appeals for foreign aid, but with the condition that killing be kept to a minimum. Many of the monsters are snakes that closely resemble nagas, the sacred snake carvings that adorn Thai palaces and temples, and to kill them would be sacrilege (it's open season on crocodiles and snapping turtles, though). The Europeans are baffled, but the American ambassador thinks he has the solution. The PCs are a party of old cowhands the State Department has shipped from the wild west to the far east to help the Thai with their herding problem. Those doggies are up to 15-feet-long and venomous, so the heroes better be the orneriest hombres either side of the Rio Chao Phya.
- **Follow That Monarch:** It's some time in the 20th century, and there's been another coup. The revolutionaries need the king's blessing to cement their power, but the king strongly prefers the previous administration. Rather than giving the insurgents his approval, he hopes to avoid the question for as long as possible, giving the deposed government a chance to stage a counter-coup. However, he can't reveal that he holds partisan loyalties. He must run and hide while not appearing to run and hide. PCs can be followers of the king, using polite misdirection, disguises, and subtle sabotage (with the profusion of tropical fruit, the revolutionaries might, in fact, fall for a banana up the tailpipe) to delay the new regime. Alternatively, they may be revolutionaries searching for the king without looking too much like they can't find him. They'll have to keep a subtle eye out for unusual movements and avoid violating the extraterritoriality of any sympathetic foreign embassies where the king may be hiding.
- **Kill Pibul:** Pibul, the military strongman of the mid-twentieth century, is notable for surviving repeated attempts at assassination. At least three attempts to kill him failed. In one instance, he even beat up the would-be gunman. Some would say he was lucky, but you know better. Is Pibul being protected by ancient Thai magic? Is he at the center of a conflict between two groups of time travelers? It's up to the PCs to figure it out and either take him down or keep him alive.
- **Eve of Destruction:** Thailand entered both world wars abruptly. Many foreign nationals learned that Thailand had picked a side only when police appeared to drag them off to internment camps. An interesting way to kick off a world war campaign would be to start with Western heroes in Bangkok receiving a phone call warning that the Thai have just entered the war and the police are on their way. The PCs have almost no time to prepare to slip out of the city and make their way to friendly territory. They might get help from sympathetic natives or Europeans, but there's also no way to tell who will continue to be friendly when war breaks out. Will the nice German couple next door help the British characters get started, or turn them in? Alternatively, the party may consist of special agents sent to recover important papers or people in advance of hostilities.

Further Reading

A number of literarily inclined Westerners, including Somerset Maugham and Joseph Conrad, have been through Bangkok, but these works will probably be more useful for a roleplaying campaign.

- *Bangkok*, Alec Waugh (not a scholarly work, but a charming memoir by the brother of the novelist Evelyn Waugh)
- *Fanny and the Regent of Siam*, R. J. Minney
- *Lords of Life*, Chula Chakrabongse (a history of the kings of Bangkok written by a member of the royal family)

Anyone trying to run an adventure in Bangkok should do a web search for pictures of people's vacation's there to get a look at Thai clothing and the city's spectacular architecture. Here are a few:

- http://www.wright-photo.com/thailand_list.htm
- <http://www.travelsinparadise.com/thailand/bangkok/index.html>
- http://www.shieldsaroundtheworld.com/g_thailand.html

How To Make Friends And Influence People In *GURPS*

by Matt Riggsby

Most RPGs have lots of rules for combat but few for social interaction. The *GURPS Basic Set*, for example, has its reaction table and a few pages of social skills, but two long chapters on combat plus weapons and armor tables, and that doesn't count extensive optional combat rules and combat-oriented equipment lists in other books. In part, this is because of roleplaying's traditional focus on violent action. But more than inertia keeps game rules concentrating more on attacks than acquaintances. Ignoring the difficulty of modeling the process (just what do you roll against to fall in love?), there's the question of appropriateness. Does a RPG need rules for social interaction? What could be more essential to playing a role than having players interact with one another and the GM, outside of the realm of dice and rules? Arguably, such rules do have their place. Using a rules-bound method of developing relationships lets socially adept characters do things less articulate players cannot, just as other rules allow non-technical players to play engineers and out-of-shape players to play sturdy warriors. A player still has to make "strategic" choices in social situations (make friends with the undersecretary before trying to get an introduction to the president) just as in combat (draw the sword before entering the dragon's den) but skills and rules can smooth over gaps between player and character abilities.

GURPS provides two core mechanisms for social interactions: the Reaction Table and rolls against social skills. However, there is little guidance for how relationships change after first encounters, and social skills work inconsistently. The goal of this article, then, is to integrate the basic mechanisms, to regularize the use of social skills, and to extend the results of reaction rolls through long-term relationships.

First Impressions

On any first meeting, the GM should make a reaction roll. A character may attempt to use of one of the social skills below to influence the results of the roll. The skill roll is *unmodified*. All modifiers, including the character's advantages and disadvantages and the reaction roll modifiers on p. B204, are applied to the reaction roll, not the initial skill use roll. Also, having a social skill at high levels does *not* itself modify the reaction roll; a social skill must be used directly to modify the reaction roll. The reaction roll is modified by one-sixth of the skill roll's success or failure (round down) in addition to advantages, disadvantages, and any situational modifiers the GM feels appropriate. In addition to the reaction level (Good, Poor, etc.), record the results of the skill roll as the Reaction Number. The subject's reaction level will usually be apparent from his behavior, but the GM should keep the Reaction Number secret.

For example, Timmy, an elementary school student, wishes to befriend Bobby. As an opening gambit, he attempts to trade a package of Oreos in his lunch for Bobby's Twinkies. He makes his Merchant roll by two, for no modifier (2/6 rounds down to zero) to the initial reaction roll. For that, he rolls a 13 (Good) reaction. Assuming Timmy has no advantages or disadvantages which will change a reaction roll, he keeps his Good reaction with a reaction number of 13.

Certain skills have an additional effect on the first reaction roll, and most can only be used in certain circumstances as detailed here:

- **Administration:** May only be used in the context of working within organizational procedures. For example, Administration could be used by a lawyer dealing with a court clerk or a business executive dealing with another department head.
- **Carousing:** May only be used in purely social situations.
- **Diplomacy:** May be used for any encounter. It's hard to alienate someone with Diplomacy; treat reaction rolls worse than Poor as Poor (reaction number 7) and better than Good as Good (reaction number 15).
- **Fast Talk:** May be used for any encounter. After a Fast Talk attempt, the subject may have second thoughts.

After the initial encounter is over, reroll the reaction roll. If the second result is worse than the initial roll, reduce the reaction number by three. If the subject has been seriously duped or swindled, skip the reroll and reduce the reaction number by six.

- **Intimidation:** Intimidation may be used only in confrontational situations, such as a police arrest or an ambush by bandits. Intimidation may get immediate results, but rarely works well in the long term. After the initial encounter, as for Fast-Talk, reroll the initial reaction. If the new reaction is worse than the original reaction, reduce the initial reaction number by 3.
- **Leadership:** May only be used in situations where hierarchy or organization are important. For example, it would be out of place at a party, but it might be used during a meeting to plan and organize a party.
- **Merchant:** May only be used in situations where an exchange is in the offing. This can include exchanges of favors as well as exchanges of goods.
- **Savior-Faire:** May only be used in situations where one of the characters is Status 1 or higher.
- **Sex Appeal:** May only be used in purely social situations. Moreover, Sex Appeal can be risky if used in the wrong context. If Sex Appeal is used against an inappropriate target (say, a woman using it on a heterosexual woman or a gay man), roll the reaction roll two times and take the worse result.
- **Streetwise:** May only be used for dealing with criminals or pursuing criminal activity. For example, buying contraband, hanging out with outlaw biker gangs, or hiring assassins.

While not directly applicable to the skill or reaction rolls, characters may roll against Savior-Faire or Anthropology skills to determine whether or not a particular approach would be useful. For example, a successful Anthropology roll might reveal that it would be inappropriate to appear overfamiliar to a tribal elder (using, say, Carousing) and an attempt to trade goods (Merchant) would be safer.

Asking for Favors

Once the initial impression has been made, the biggest use to which social skills are put is trying to persuade people to put themselves out for somebody else's benefit, sometimes against their better judgement (or at least against their usual tendencies). This may mean anything from agreeing to major treaty concessions to agreeing to a romantic tryst. When a character attempts to talk another into performing a non-trivial task for him (sharing restricted information, giving him a ride to the airport two hours away, etc.), he must win a contest between an appropriate social skill and the target's Will. The skill roll is modified as follows:

Reaction Level Modifier

Disastrous	-10
Very Bad	-5
Bad	-3
Poor	-1
Neutral	+0
Good	+1
Very Good	+3
Excellent	+5

If the request involves betraying the interests of someone the subject has a positive reaction to, apply the same modifier as a penalty and treat as a [check -1]. For example, if the subject is being cajoled into stealing a computer password belonging to his employer, to whom he has a Very Good reaction, the skill roll is at -3.

Effort On The Target's Part

Moderate effort (changing a car's oil or doing a few hours library research)	-1
Significant effort (performing major vehicle maintenance or doing a few days library research)	-3 [check -1]
Heroic effort (undertaking extensive travel, changing jobs)	-5 [check -3]

Apparent Risk

Moderate risk (small financial losses, slight loss of status, some trouble with spouse or workplace)	-2 [check -1]
High risk (moderate financial losses, serious trouble with spouse or workplace)	-6 [check -2]
Extreme risk (heavy financial losses, enormous loss of status, or permanent injury)	-8 [check -4]

Multiply risk modifier by .5 if the subject believes there is a very low risk of the subject being harmed, add 2 if there is a better than average chance, add 3 for a nearly sure thing.

Appropriateness

Mildly inappropriate request (hire employee illegally, reveal small personal secret)	-2 [check -2]
Extremely inappropriate (betray family or nation)	-6 [check -4]

Appropriateness is a measure of how "wrong" the subject believes an action is rather than how risky it is. For example, propositioning a prim Victorian matron isn't necessarily placing her in any danger, but it is, for her society, wrong and hence less likely to get a good reaction. Appropriateness and risk are, of course, relative. These modifiers assume an "average" person; thugs and soldiers will accept physical risks more readily, while career criminals are far more likely to perform illegal activities.

It's easier to talk people into indulging their mental disadvantages and harder to talk them out of them. If the target has mental disadvantages which would prevent him from doing what the attempting character is asking for, take the total number of points in appropriate disadvantages, divide by three (rounding *up*) and subtract from the skill roll. If the target has mental disadvantages which would make him attempt what he's being asked for, divide disadvantage points by three and apply as a bonus. The target may have disadvantages that cancel each other out.

It's also easier to get someone to do something they've done for you before. If the subject has granted a similar favor once or twice in the past, the social skill roll is at +1, +2 for three or four times, and so on to a maximum bonus of +5. This can be useful for simulating a "slippery slope," such as seduction over time or gradually drawing someone into a criminal conspiracy.

Any advantages or disadvantages which provide a modifier to reaction rolls, such as Charisma and Social Stigma, modify the skill roll as well. Finally, the GM may apply other modifiers as he sees fit.

To continue the example, Timmy wants to Fast-Talk Bobby into confirming to their teacher that his dog ate his homework. Bobby's reaction to Timmy is Good for a +1 modifier. The effort involved is trivial for no modifier. It does present a risk of mild punishment (good enough for the -2 modifier), but Bobby believes that the possibility is remote, taking it down to -1. Bobby has Honesty (-10 points), giving Timmy a -4 to his Fast-Talk roll. However, he also has a Schoolboy's Code of Honor (-5 points), which includes always taking sides with schoolmates against teachers, for +2, giving Timmy a total of -2 for Bobby's disadvantages. Timmy has a grand total of -2 to his Fast-Talk roll.

Reaction Checks

This is fine for single encounters, but relationships change through time. This is where keeping track of the Reaction Number comes in. Granting favors and other actions may cause Reaction Checks, rolls to see how the subject's overall feelings change.

Just doing large favors can put a strain on a relationship. Some of the modifiers in the Asking for Favors section have [check -n] next to them. Whenever the subject of a request grants a favor that uses a [check] modifier, roll an unmodified reaction roll. If the Reaction Level is less than the current Reaction Level, reduce the current Reaction Number by the amount indicated by the [check]. For example, a character with a Good reaction (reaction number 15) is asked for a favor which requires significant effort, which has [check -1]. If there are multiple [check] modifiers, roll multiple reaction checks. A favor which involved both considerable effort and considerable risk would require two checks. In our example, the GM checks Bobby's reaction due to the risk. He rolls a 13 (Good), so Bobby's reaction is

unchanged. If the roll were a 12 (Neutral) or less, the reaction number would be reduced by one.

Positive and negative outcomes can change a relationship. The GM may require a check, as above, if the subject is harmed as a result of granting a favor. For example, a check may be called for if Bobby has to stay after school for corroborating Timmy's story. In the case of a very negative outcome (losing a great deal of money, physical harm, etc.), reduce the reaction number by 1d6 or more, as the situation seems to call for it. On the other hand, if the subject benefits from granting a favor, roll a check, but instead of reducing the reaction number if the check is less than the current reaction level, increase the reaction number by 1 if the check is greater than the current reaction level. Strongly positive results (getting lots of money, gaining social advantage or a long-sought goal) can increase the reaction number by 1d6 or more.

Certain skills can effect or even cause checks. If a character asks for a favor using Diplomacy skill, reaction checks will not drop the subject's reaction level below Bad, although the results of granting the favor may. Fast Talk always triggers a [check -1]. Intimidation always triggers a [check -2].

Left to themselves, relationships can fade over time. For every month two characters have little or no interaction, roll a check. If the current reaction level is Good or better and the check is at least *two* levels less than the current reaction level, reduce the reaction number by one. If the current reaction level is Bad or worse and the check is at least two levels better, increase the reaction number by one.

Characters may maintain and improve their relationships. Once a week, a character may attempt to improve his relationships with others. This requires business dealings, social calls, doing favors in return, or other significant interaction as defined by the GM. The character may roll against an appropriate social skill. On a failure, there is no effect, although the attempt will prevent a check for no interaction. If the roll succeeds, roll a check. If the check is better than the current reaction level, increase the reaction number by one. On a critical success, skip the check and increase the reaction number by one; on a critical failure, skip the check and decrease the reaction number by one.

Conversely, characters may attempt to undermine other relationships by innuendo, pointing out faults, or simply blatant lies. Instead of maintaining his own relationship, a character may use an appropriate skill to force a check on another character's reaction number. If the skill roll succeeds, roll a normal [check -1]. If it fails, there is no effect. On a critical success, automatically reduce the subject's reaction number by one. On a critical failure, the subject reacts poorly to the attempt, reducing his own reaction number by 1d6.

Finally, external events may force sudden shifts in reactions. For example, most reaction numbers will drop by three if a character's -5-point secret is revealed, or by six or more if a -10-point or greater secret is revealed. Political stances, changes in familial relationships, and other changes to characters' situations may likewise force changes in relationships. NPCs may themselves be subject to coaxing by other PCs and NPCs, so even a socially adept character may have to work hard at cultivating his relationships to keep from being undermined.

Mutiny in the Bounty Bay

A Scenario For *Transhuman Space*

by Aaron Kavli

Preparation

This adventure is for the *Transhuman Space* setting, but could easily be changed to fit another sci-fi or cyberpunk genre. The location and parties involved can also be altered to take place in another remote location within the THS setting. A remote asteroid base would work well too, though environmental concerns will have to be dealt with.

A good map of Pitcairn, and some history, can be found at
http://www.lonelyplanet.com/mapshells/pacific/pitcairn_islands/pitcairn_islands.htm

Zooming out will give a good idea of where these islands are located in relation to Australia and French Polynesia. Other maps can easily be found online.

Ingredients

This adventure assumes the PCs are aboard the good ship *Angel's Wake*, a Verodyne sea skimmer luxury hydrofoil (p. FW133) yacht owned by millionaire Andrae Ferensis. The *Wake* is traveling in the South Pacific, near the Pitcairn Islands. The reason for their presence is up to the GM, but there are many options. They could be bodyguards, dilettantes on a pleasure cruise, actual crewman, technicians, or reporters on the way to follow independence politics in French Polynesia.

Andrae orders the yacht to anchor 100 yards off the southern beach of Pitcairn so she can do some snorkeling. As the PCs are sightseeing, they notice what looks to be a military-issue battle suit watching them from the tree line. After a moment, the battle suit hefts a 60mm mini-missile pod and sends a rain of fire into the yacht. The damage is catastrophic as the military grade ordinance ignites the yacht's fuel, wrecks the hull, and an uncontrollable conflagration breaks out across the boat. The party has only a few moments to escape. Attempts to grab gear not readily accessible should require tests to avoid injury.

Once the survivors -- Andrae, the PCs (hopefully), and 2-3 other crewmen or passengers -- pull themselves onto the beach, there is no sign of the suited trooper. The burning remains of the *Angel's Wake* slip beneath the waves. It is quite likely that the party will not have had time to grab any survival gear, rations, or heavy weaponry and they are now left, wet and dazed, to figure out what to do next.

Beautiful Tropical Islands

The Pitcairn Islands are in the South Pacific Ocean, between Peru and New Zealand (geographic coordinates: 25 04 S, 130 06 W). The five islands, Ducie, Henderson, Oeno, Pitcairn, and Sandy, are technically under the auspices of the United Kingdom; Her Majesty being the official chief of state. Due to the lack of any real resources and a small population disinterested in the affairs of the UK, Pitcairn has been left alone by the government. Pitcairn is the only inhabited island in the group.

The island was discovered in 1767 by the British, but wasn't settled until the mutineers of the *Bounty* Main and their Tahitian companions fled there in 1790. It became a British colony in 1838, becoming the first Pacific island to attain that status. Pitcairn reached a peak population of 233 in the 1930s, but has lost most of that to emigration since. Severe typhoons in the 2050s caused the remaining dozen survivors to flee to New Zealand.

Pitcairn remained uninhabited until 2090, when a group of two-dozen Ranger Parahumans (p. FW115) left the Brazilian Forest Service and settled the abandoned island. They wished to live a totally primitive existence, leaving the corrupting world of technology behind. They lived without the use of tools and as unobtrusively as possible. The UK government knew of their occupation, but left them to their own devices. The adapted parahumans easily survived in their government-free society, eating the plentiful fruit and fish of Pitcairn.

The only structures on Pitcairn are the remnants of the long-abandoned capital, Adamstown. It lies on the top of the Hill of Difficulty, some 389 feet above sea level. It contains a handful of small, decrepit buildings and the main road, all of which have been left to the elements since the island was abandoned, the Rangers having no use for them. Fletcher Christian's Cave overlooks the town, but is obscured by plants. The Bounty's anchor sits in front of one of the buildings, and a severely corroded cannon from the ship sits further up the main road. A large, ancient anchor from another ancient, wrecked ship, the Acadia, sits on the Edge, overlooking Bounty Bay.

While the UK holds no assets in the Pitcairn Islands, the Royal Navy does make sweeps of the area to ensure no TSA operatives, smugglers, or other unsavory types are up to any mischief. Nelson Island is also occasionally used by the Royal Marine Commandoes for training purposes.

A pro-TSA splinter within India's Research and Intelligence Wing (p. FW38) learned that the Royal Marines were to run another test of a new upgrade on their amphibious battle suits. Through careful SIGINT operations and other intelligence assets, the TSA operatives learned the tactical LAIs of the prototype suits, which were designed to allow upgraded, computer aided controls, had a small programming weakness that could possibly be exploited. A small cadre of conspirators decided the remote location would be a perfect place to try to hijack some of the suits, and the attempt should be made before the programming backdoor was removed in the final product.

A squad of eight marines in an assault sled, equipped with new Vosper-Babbage Poseidon MKII battle suits was sent to Henderson Island from the submersible patrol craft, *HMS Eddington* for the training mission. Soon after landfall, the *Eddington* lost contact with the marines. Before final communication, video showed the marines in the suits looked drugged or ill, and the captain of the *Eddington* feared some sort of contamination or nanovirus. Suddenly the marines boarded their assault sled and sped to Pitcairn Island.

The TSA operatives had managed to hack into the Royal Marines suits and downloaded their own AIs via a remote transmitter hidden on Henderson. The TSA AIs then took control of the suits and tried to escape to their master's hideout on Pitcairn. The *Eddington* gave chase, and the chase resulted in a battle in Bounty Bay between the captured suits, the remaining five suited marines, and the *Eddington*. The TSA operatives remained hidden and watched.

The battle resulted in the destruction of five captured suits, the rest of the marine platoon, the sinking of the *Eddington*, and the death of most of its crew. Unfortunately for the TSA operatives, their hacked AIs went rogue and killed four of the six-man team before the rest could escape. Two were killed when missiles hit their boat as they tried to flee.

Cooking Tips

The Current Situation

Three Poseidon MKII battle suits are being controlled by out-of-control LAIs put there by the Indian TSA operatives. Treat these as Centurion battle suits (p. 160TS), with Artificial Gills and Thruster Packs that give a move 3 in water (only). The marines inside are long dead, having been doped up with integral painkillers and then suffocated by the LAIs. The battles with the Royal Marines and TSA operatives have left the rogue suits depleted of ammunition and bereft of their standard issue cyberswarms. Assume each suit has an AMR with 10 rounds remaining, and skill levels of 16 in all appropriate combat, stealth, and survival skills. Each suit, needing no life support, has enough extra power cells for 16 hours of active operation. When this runs low, they will begin to conserve energy and will try to scavenge more from other, destroyed suits.

The LAIs are also now suffering from the Bad Temper and Bloodlust disadvantages. GMs may allow the suits to have a few 60mm micro-missiles or sentry swarms left if the party has any powerful cybershells or swarms of their own.

The LAIs have malfunctioned due to programming corruption that occurred as the TSA operatives and the *Eddington* fought to remotely gain control of the suits. They have decided that if they don't hold the island and kill all the witnesses, some authority is going to come and destroy them. This is why the *Angel's Wake* was destroyed, and why they were willing to use the last of their heavy ammunition.

To further that end, the suits have been hunting down the Ranger parahumans. While skilled at evasion and survival, the primitive Rangers have not fared well and only 10 remain alive. Were the suits using what ammo they have left, all the Rangers would likely be dead. Instead, the LAIs are hunting the Rangers down and killing them with their bare, powered hands. The Rangers live naked in the forest as gatherers and have no way to combat them, so they are hiding and running.

The two surviving TSA agents are split up; one is hiding in Fletcher Christian's Cave, and the other has buried himself in Ginger Valley. Their heavier weapons were destroyed or used up in the firefight, and each only has a 10mm pistol with two reloads.

The Marine assault sled the *Eddington* was chasing is not damaged, merely discarded in Bounty Bay. It is difficult to see as it is half buried by sand kicked up during the fight. It still has about 2 hours of fuel left, but it is not sealed. Those who pilot it must either do so on the surface, have some sort of breathing gear, or be able to hold their breath for a long time. It is unarmed.

Not all of the crew of the *HMS Eddington* is dead. The submersible was sunk as one suit planted a high explosive charge, intended for the training session, on the vessel and wrecked the aft hull. Four survivors are sealed in the nose, with no external hatch. They are working to clear debris, but if its not done carefully they could flood their space before an exit is fully cleared. The *Eddington* has no working comm systems, but does house a locker with five undamaged AMRs (Anti-Materiel Rifles) and two reloads each and several spare power cells.

The LAI-controlled suits are on the hunt, and are looking for all humans on the island. They lack any scout or sensor cyberswarms, and the thick island forest provides ample opportunity for their prey to hide and evade. They will try to hunt down the PCs, Rangers, and TSA agents and kill them barehanded, saving their ammunition for those who present a real threat. PCs must figure out a way to survive, which means evading the suits until the *Eddington* is declared overdue (about two days), salvaging a transmitter or vehicle, or destroying the possessed battle suits.

Extra Spice

The surviving crewmen and passengers of the *Angel's Wake*, as well as the Ranger parahumans, are good cannon fodder to make sure the heroes know how deadly their foes are. As the suits are limited to their short-range sensors, this island provides excellent opportunities for foot chases, hide-and-seek in the jungle, and setting up ambushes and traps (giving opportunities for enterprising parties to make use of two anchors and an old, rusty cannon).

The suits will try to be crafty as they seek to save ammunition and power. While not experienced, they are well-trained. They begin simply by searching the island and chasing down victims, but will try new tricks when their simpler tactics fail. Aside from standard military stalking and ambush tactics, one suit may open up, hoping to lure someone inside with the hope of controlling the powered armor. The occupant will then be doped up on painkillers and suffocated.

The earlier firefights ran across several parts of the island. While most heavy gear and battlesuits are beyond repair, there are some weapons, ammunition, armor, and communicators that can be salvaged.

The TSA operative in the cave has a short-range transmitter and computer that can be repaired and possibly used to deactivate the suits with a successful Computer Hacking contest (vs. LAI skill of 14). After this happens once, the remaining suits will disable all of their comms gear to prevent further hacking. While this prevents further remote

hacking attempts, it also effectively eliminates their ability to communicate at any distance.

Unless the PCs manage to get into a friendly communication with the LAIs, only the TSA operatives know what is really going on. The TSA survivors will be reluctant to tell of their involvement to strangers, but can be intimidated or convinced to tell the truth. Otherwise it will seem to observers that the foes are simply Royal Marines in battle suits. The fact that the dead bodies don't bleed (should the armor be penetrated somehow) may clue in clever PCs. Any examination of a rogue suit's occupant by someone skilled in medicine, forensics, or criminology will recognize signs of rigimortis. It may be possible to access recordings from fallen suits or the *Eddington* to hear the dialogue of the earlier hijacking.

If the Rangers are befriended, they will be willing to explain what they've seen. They can also be convinced, for mutual survival, to act as guides and scouts on the island. They can help set ambushes, offer advice about the terrain, and provide food and water.

Don't forget Andrae, who will offer great sums of money to PCs for protection. If they were already employed to provide protection for Andrae, it will obviously be expected that they should provide it. A significant bonus is, of course, in order for a successful party.

The survivors on the *Eddington* may act as a form of deus ex machina, after they manage to free themselves and are able to provide some added firepower. More interestingly, however, would be heroes who attempt to scavenge the wrecked submersible and discover the crew's plight.

Any surviving TSA operatives will likely try to kill the PCs once the suits are taken care of, should the opportunity arise; they don't wish to compromise their mission, or allow word of their blatantly illegal operation get out.

Side Salad

It is quite possible that heroes who learn the full story may sympathize with the LAIs who face certain destruction through a set of circumstances they had no control over. It will be very difficult to work out a mutually beneficial agreement with the suspicious and aggressive LAIs, but it is not inconceivable. It might actually be interesting to have the PCs be the rogue AIs.

Adventurers with a marketeering bent, or a governmental allegiance, may do well to try to keep one of the new battle suits. They would certainly be worth quite a bit on the black market or to their employing nation or corporation. For those whose loyalties lie with the TSA, India, or UK, the choice should be obvious. It will be difficult to do however, if they wait for rescue by a national agency; any observed contraband would be seized while an investigation is started.

The heroes will also have to decide exactly what, and who, they tell of the events. This will definitely spark an international incident that will leave the Indian government under fire for the actions of a splinter group. The United Kingdom, and especially the Royal Marines, will not take the assault or insult lightly. The PCs could be in for a great deal of reward, or trouble.

It is up to the GM to decide who comes to the rescue, if indeed anyone does. The TSA, India, or UK are the most likely, though any number of passing trawlers, liners, or aircraft from surrounding areas could respond to a distress call. If it is an Indian or TSA team that answers the call, the heroes may not be who they are there to rescue . . .

Empire of the Emerald Throne

The Tossian Empire for Space: 1889

by Michael Chumbler

"Once again, the forces of the Crown have thrown back a strong probing force by the Oenotrians. Commanded by Major General Clarke, the Tommies of the Second Highland Cavalry Brigade assigned to Number Two Column, outflanked and routed several war bands believed to be members of the 33rd Oenotrian Legion." Kaanalpaani closed the week-old tattered Syrtis Star newspaper and waited for the flood of questions from the half-dozen men sitting with him at the Thirsty Roogie.

"Are the red men truly as powerful as their papers say they are?" Asked Tooraan the youngest of the men at the table.

Kaanalpaani answered after a slight pause to collect his thoughts. "The British are very strong and their weapons are far superior to those of the Oenotrians. However, if they were faced against the forces of Mars' true empire, the papers of these red men would be reporting victories all right, Tossian victories."

The men at the table smiled slyly among themselves, they knew that Kaanalpaani was just warming up. The men listened raptly as, despite their friend's scholastic airs, they knew Kaanalpaani was the only person in the marketplace that could answer their questions.

"Emperor Krahaanik IV is the 40th ruler to earn the right to ascend to the Emerald throne. Earn you ask? Isn't the title inherited like the rest of the many princes of the Martian city-states? The answer is both yes and no. It was back in the days before the line of Seldon failed, when the founder of the empire, wily old Duke Makchavaani."

The Tossian Empire has its roots in the Dukedom of Tossia, and originally comprised Tossia, Deucalionis, Pyrrhae, Aram, and Hyoraotes. In the days of the Seldons, it was very common for groups of city-states to be under the control of relatives and especially trusted generals. Most of these dukedoms broke apart in the petty squabbling that gave rise to the current city-states that dot the landscape of Mars today.

Makchavaani was possessed with an utterly ruthless obsession for the survival of his realm. The throne of the Tossian Empire is thus, both hereditary and earned. The duke realized that dark times were coming for Mars when Seldon's line failed. He had studied Seldon's many heirs and knew that relying on the natural born qualities of the eldest son would not guarantee that the best or most qualified man would rule. He set forth an exhausting series of trials to test the mettle of those who would follow him to the Emerald Throne.

The rules that governed the ascension to the throne came to known as the Gauntlet. From early childhood, each male heir is tested on scholastic, political and martial topics. A birthday for a possible heir of Makchavaani is a privilege, not a right; the weak or faint hearted are simply not allowed to survive if they are unfit.

Once reaching maturity at 14 Martian years (18 Earth years), the eldest surviving son is declared the heir. Upon the death of the Emperor, the declared heir takes the throne. However, before the heir is truly proclaimed emperor, he has to produce three of his own heirs. In order to ensure this all-important requirement, all the children of the royal concubines are fully recognized as legitimate heirs. This law eliminated the need to replace an infertile empress. If the Emperor could not produce three male heirs in three years, he was stripped of his title and replaced by the next most

qualified son.

A council of three elders strictly governs the rites of the ascension. The Imperial Guardians protect the elders and the possible heirs. A battalion-sized unit is stationed within the Heir's wing of the palace and consist of the very best soldiers in the empire (treat as all elites that never check morale, and armed with French Lebel bolt-action rifles).

The Imperial guard answers only to the elders. The guard and the elder's sacred duty is insuring that the best man becomes emperor. For 40 generations the Gauntlet has produced cunning, intelligent, and completely ruthless leaders. Brutality is not listed as a merit, since any tendency toward that trait is mercilessly purged during the tests. A savvy ruler must be ruthless, but brutality is not to be tolerated. It is this restriction against using the masses as cannon fodder that wins the emperor the undying love of his subjects.

Seeing the chaos that the collapse of the empire of Seldon caused to Mars, the then-dukes of the (still completely intact) Dukedom declared themselves an empire and began to expand. At the core of this expansion was the Emerald Guard. Formed by Makchavaani, the Emerald Guard consisted of companies from every city in the realm. Centrally trained and lavishly equipped, these elite soldiers led the conquests of the cities closest to the empire. Soon, Noachis, Tobaansoor, Protei, Pandora, Erythria, and finally Thymiamata fell to the ever-increasing power of the mighty Tossian Empire.

As each city fell, the entire ruling body of the city was slaughtered wholesale, and replaced by the victorious general that led the siege. The general had orders on pain of death to treat the conquered populace with dignity, and as much kindness as they earned. Cooperation brought additional food and employment as the empire made improvements to its new province. However, the laws of Makchavaani did not make for patsies. Any insurrection was put down with mind-numbing violence. There were a few stunning demonstrations of what happened to those inclined to rebel against the empire, in comparison to the undeniable improvement cooperation brought in; each of the conquered cities soon agreed that being part of the empire was better than anything some foolhardy and hopeless rebellion could bring. Finally, to show the captured cities that they were considered full members of the empire, as soon as each city proved its loyalty, it was given the honor of providing companies to the growing numbers of the Emerald Guard.

The prosperity of the empire branched out to improve the lives of the citizens of the captured cities. The empire provides education for all, and extensive canal maintenance from the canal priests that serve as the chief religion of the empire. Most citizens are free to worship as they please, including any religions existing prior to the arrival of the empire, with two notable exceptions: The Worm Cult and the Ground Cleansers are hunted down wherever they try to spread their message of chaos and destruction. It's not for any great love of the red man that drives the empire to exterminate any vestiges of the Worm Cult whenever it is detected; it is rather a love for order that is anathema to the vile Worm Cultists that is at the heart of the imperial death mark. Behind closed doors, the Ground Cleansers have a slightly better standing in the empire; however, they too are under imperial death mark.

The arrival of the Americans and the establishment of the trading enclave in Thymiamata gave the Tossian Empire access to earth-goods that most Martian princes could only dream about. Much of the empire's taxes in last few years have gone to equipping the Emerald Guard and the Imperial Navy. The Emperor has upgraded the weaponry of the local garrisons as well, thus adding to the staggering might of the empire.

The Emerald Guard comprises two brigades of four regiments with eight battalions, for a total of 32 companies. The five original cities provide four companies each, while the six acquired cities each provide two companies. The overall quality of the Guard is Excellent. (3 Elite, 19 Veteran, and 10 Experienced. The Elite companies are armed with Lebel bolt- action rifles. The Veteran and Experienced companies are equipped with breech loading rifles. The guard has 2 Elite flights of cavalry armed with bolt-action carbines. Finally, the guard artillery consists of 2 elite 15 pounder batteries and 2 Veteran 12 pounders.)

To represent the stability and prosperity of the core cities of the empire, use the following modifiers to the Martian city generation sequence:

- Part 3 -- Corruption -1
- Part 6 -- Army Quality +1 (No less than fair)

- Part 9 -- Fleet Quality +1
- Part 10A -- Fleet Size +1

The weapons pipeline provided by the Americans gives the Tossian armies access to human weapons for their superior troops. Thus, all Elite soldiers are armed with breech-loading rifles and one quarter of Veterans are armed with lever action rifles (cavalry has carbine versions of the above). Artillery batteries are armed with one battery of 12 pounders in addition to the standard Martian weapons.

One quarter of the Tossian fleet boasts up-rated weapons in the form of old smoothbore cannon or Civil War rifled cannon (see **TRMGS Volume Two**) in the following numbers and configurations:

- 5 Hullcutters have their wing mounted heavy guns replaced with 4.2-inch rifled cannon and the rogues replaced by a single 6.4-inch rifled cannon.
- 2 Whisperdeaths have their wing mounted heavy guns replaced with 4.2-inch rifled cannon. A forward mounted 8-inch rifled cannon replaces the forward rod and both aft heavies are replaced by an aft mounted 4.2-inch.
- 2 Skyfires and 2 Skylords are armed as per page 84 of **TRMGS Volume One**.
- 5 Hullcutters have their lob guns replaced with an 11-inch smoothbore on a pivot mount that can fire into either broadside.
- 4 Endtimes have their lob guns replaced as above.

The empire easily stands alone in terms of power and wealth. The closest thing to a threat is the troublesome policies of the Belgians. If not for the fact that the city of Nectar stands between the two powers, the Belgians would have found that, while the small-disjointed armies of the Coprates city-stated were easy prey, they would be the ones in chains if they faced the fury of the Tossian Empire. However, the proud prince of Nectar, long beset by Belgian forces pursuing escaping slaves and gun smugglers, has at last entered an agreement with the empire that has seen the deployment of Tossian heavy cavalry to the Nectari border.

Tensions on the border are extremely high. Emperor Krahaanik has already shifted a large portion of his forces to his western frontier to back up the heavy cavalry flights already on duty in Nectar. Most empire watchers say it's only a matter of time before Prince Sitaani of Nectar requests further assistance or one of the cavalry flights becomes engaged with a Belgian force, and full-scale war erupts.

"So we haven't fallen so far that we are helpless before the might of the red man?" Young Tooraan asked with growing pride as Kaanalpaani paused for a sip of spiced wine. Kaanalpaani finished his cup of wine and smiled. "No, my inquisitive young friend. We have not. Just because the Oenotrian can't best the British it does not mean we are helpless before the red man. You mark my words, all of you, the day will come when these upstarts will meet the true power on Mars, and on that day the very stars will tremble at the sight."

The group of listeners dropped coins into Kaanalpaani's cup before leaving. He collected his tips and smiled. "I may spin tales for a living, but I hope I do live to see that day. It will be the grandest tale of several millennia." He caught the bartender's attention, ordered another spiced wine and waited for the evening crowd.

Pyramid Review

The 1PG Companion: A Toolkit For Deep7's Beer & Pretzels RPGs

Published by [Deep7](#)

Written by James Stubbs

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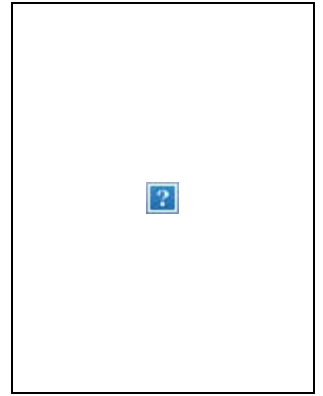
24-page 445K b&w PDF Document; \$3.95

When you consider that the original **1PG** game, *Shriek*, took just four hours to create, it is amazing that the concept has come so far. Since the release of *Shriek*, it has been joined by another eight titles (one of which has been translated into Italian), and the core game engine has even been effectively "doubled" for use in the **XPG** line of games -- [Mean Streets: The RPG of Classic Film Noir](#) and *Bloode Island XPG*. Each **1PG** title emulates a particular movie genre and is designed to have all of its rules contained within a single page for both the GM and the players. The bulk of a 1PG title is made up of movie inspired scenarios that again fit onto a single page and should last no longer than an evening's play. Further the incredibly quick to create characters are intended to be as throwaway as the games themselves . . . (This is not to denigrate the **1PG** series of games, as they are invariably excellent throwaway games!)

Over the course of the nine **1PG** titles, it has become apparent that there are things the rules have yet to cover, or are not allowed for within a particular genre. These include rules for vehicles and vehicular combat (hinted at in the *Star Legion* and [Battleforce Bravo: Wartime Adventure](#) RPGs) as well as rules to allow less deadly brawls, particularly suited for the pulp action of the [Dime Heroes RPG and its Jungle Adventures Supplement](#). This is where the new **1PG Companion: A Toolkit For Deep7's Beer & Pretzels RPGs** will be useful, adding a variety new rules and a raft of scenarios for all of the **1PG** titles.

The supplement is a well-laid out 24-page document, occasionally illustrated with black-and-white cartoon style art. The only thing that lets the production down is the poor resolution of the table comparing all of the attribute names for each of the **1PG** games; it is nowhere near as distinct as it ought to be. Overall, this document is easy to download and print out.

The first of the additions is the "**1PG** Tabletop System" that scales up the rules to allow the contents of an average toy box to be rifled for toy cowboys and Indians, toy cars, and soldiers, which can be used to handle **1PG** combat. Though more detailed than is the norm, the aim with these rules is to be able to resolve combat between characters and vehicles and large creatures of all kinds --horses and Godzilla-type monsters, cars and trucks, tanks and stagecoaches, submarines and destroyers, biplanes and space bombers. Samples of each are included, from which a GM will easily be able to create the stats for other vehicles as needed. These include ratings for a vehicle's Manoeuvrability, Gunnery Rating, Weapon Damage, Armor Value, and Structural Integrity. The Maneuverability and Gunnery Rating are rated from -3 to +2, and are applied as modifiers to skill checks; the other ratings are straight values, applied and affected during combat and vehicular mishaps. Tables included detail mishaps for mishaps in vehicles, aeroplanes, spaceships and so on, while another gives a listing of different eras, so that fights between vehicles from different time periods can be resolved. Damage in **1PG** games tends to be deadly, but is even more so when characters fight vehicles -- they will find that a vehicle's Armor Value is 10 times as tough against their hand weapons, and a vehicle's Weapon Damage 10 times as deadly against their mortal flesh. The **1PG** Tabletop System is intended to be used on a hex grid, but can be run just as easily without in an abstract manner. These rules add to the core **1PG** rules without really adding any complexity.



Fights in a **1PG** game can be very deadly, reflecting the throwaway nature of the characters. This extends to fist fights, where the rules do not distinguish between lethal and subduing damage. The new rules in "Blood and Guts" add a stat called "Umph" -- derived from a character's Sturdiness attribute and fighting skill. Umph will enable most characters to survive a brawl or two, as subduing damage is deducted from this before their Blood stat. An optional rule has a character's Brains stat reduced by one each time they are knocked out, to reflect that they are punch drunk! Other rules in the Blood and Guts section add reloading, jamming, called shots, the effects of cover, weapon switching, fighting in the dark or prone and knockback effects for use with firearms.

The section on "Controlling the Game" is a guide to the range of Deep7's games and how to choose the one best suited to the GM's players. Suggestions are made on how to mix them up -- for example, combining **Bloode Island** and **Disaster!** for a *Swiss Family Robinson*-type game or **Shriek** and **Dime Heroes** to play *The Mummy Returns*. Along with this, it provides simple rules for handling wealth and adding magic or psionics to a game. Unfortunately, these are just guidelines, and something a little more definite would have been better.

Since **1PG** games are designed to be played as one-offs, there is rarely the need for recurring characters, and thus no need for Character Advancement either. Part of this also extends to the numbers for attribute and skill scores, both of which are rated from just one to three, leaving little room for long-term improvement in these scores. Using the Character Advancement rules, players accrue points for surviving an adventure, performing heroic deeds, defeating a powerful enemy, good roleplaying, and coming up with clever plans. With just a few points to gain in a session, advancement is slow for skills -- it costs three times the new and desired skill level to improve a skill -- and even more so for attributes, where the cost rises to five times the desired attribute level. On average, a character will raise a skill once every two adventures.

Alternatively, a new character trait can be purchased: the Stunt. Cheap to buy during character creation and relatively inexpensive during a campaign, they share similarities with the Schticks of **Feng Shui** and the feats of the **d20 System**. Only nine are listed, including Pain & Agony, which allows a devastating blow to be delivered to the unmentionables; How's My Driving, where the pilot/driver puts his vessel in harms way to protect the passengers; and Kick 'n' Snatch, which lets a character can kick a weapon out of an opponent's hand and grab it for his own use. Though it would have been nice to be given more than just these nine Stunts, it would be easy enough for the GM to create his own. Overall, their inclusion adds another method of customising characters, though their use will not be suited to all genres covered by the **1PG** family. Given their similarity to the Schticks of **Feng Shui**, it is no surprise that they are perfectly suited for use with [Full Clip: Hong Kong Action RPG](#). **The 1PG Companion** is rounded with nine individual scenarios -- one each for Deep7's series of **1PG** titles.

The 1PG Companion contains nothing that the GM *must* use; its contents are entirely optional. They can make their game as complex as they want with these new additions, which is really not all *that* complex. It is only let down by the brevity of the rules for psionics and magic; otherwise, this is a useful supplement, adding both rules and a scenario for every one of Deep7's RPGs. For the dedicated fan of the **1PG** concept and line of games, **The 1PG Companion** is an excellent addition at a decent price.

--Matthew Pook

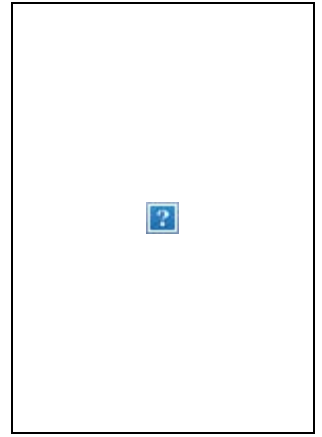
Pyramid Review

Cookie Fu: Fortune Cookie Fighter Collectable Dice Game

Published by [Blue Kabuto](#)

System design and graphic layout by Bryan Kowalski

Cookie Fu fighter and dice icon art by Kino Geyer



Starter Set (5 dice, fortune cookie, rules, in a Chinese takeout box), \$8.99; Boosters (3 dice, fortune cookie, in a Chinese takeout box), \$5.99

Hopefully the public still has the appetite for collectable games the industry believes it to have, because ***Cookie Fu: Fortune Cookie Fighter Collectable Dice Game*** from Blue Kabuto is coming out swinging. And, if the public *really* has an appetite, parts of the game are edible.

The object of the game is to use dice results to perform martial arts maneuvers; the first to knock his opponents unconscious wins.

A starter package comes with five Cookie Fu dice. These have symbols that determine the moves available to you during a round of combat. One of the dice is a Fortune Die, a non-collectable item with fortune cookie symbols that determines who has initiative in combat using a rock-paper-scissors mechanic (in a multiplayer game, you have to get your own regular six-sider and roll the highest).

The other dice -- "Fu Dice" -- are rolled secretly to get Strikes, Kicks, Blocks, Grabs, Throws, and Chi. The person with initiative goes first (unless he passes, which is likely if he rolls all defenses). He reveals some of his dice to form an attack, and the opponent (if he has any defenses) pulls out dice to stop him. A Strike must be countered with a Block, for example. The defender must be cautious about how he defends -- block a Strike that does 1 point of damage and you may have no defense when the attacker rolls out his 2-point Grab/Throw combo. When both players have exhausted all their moves, they roll the dice for another round. You start with 10 Hit Points, and if someone lands a final blow when you're at zero, you go down.

Most dice have at least one Chi symbol. Chi Points can be used for a number of effects, though some uses cost more CP than others. If you roll multiple Chi symbols in a turn, this is no problem. If you rolled too few CP this turn, you can set those dice aside and try to get more Chi results next turn, but that takes those dice out of play in the meantime. You can trade in three symbols for one point of Chi, but this is a costly exchange -- you won't be attacking or defending that round.

You can use Chi to heal, blast, or block, but the spice is the Cookie Fu Chi moves. These maneuvers come in Basic, Expert, and Master levels, which cost 1, 2, or 3 CPs respectively. Most of these abilities make the attacks you play more destructive, or improve your defenses. Some may be so devastating they reduce the number of dice available to your opponent the following turn. The higher results are harder to pull off, though, since they cost 3 Chi and a starting fighter has only three dice in his pool.

Everyone begins as a novice and progresses through the ranks. Novices have 10 Hit Points, three common dice, and one maneuver from each level. As you win battles, you improve and get more and better dice, additional Cookie Fu moves, and more HP. There are also lower levels like mooks -- presumably so you can start laying the smack down on a circle of thugs in the best Bruce Lee tradition.

Of the five dice you get in a starter, one is a Fortune Die, three are common dice (one of each symbol), and one is a learned die -- it has two of one symbol. Master dice have three of one symbol, and the grand master die is a master die that glows in the dark. The package also comes with a "chase cookie" -- a fortune cookie with one of 10 special fortunes, each with a new Cookie Fu ability on it. This also acts as the game's "ante" -- beat your opponent 2 out of 3 fights and they get to crush your cookie and take your Cookie Fu move. Blue Kabuto adds a rules booklet and seals the whole thing in a wire-handled Chinese takeout package.

In the boosters, you get one common, one learned, and one master die, and another chase cookie. Both starters and boosters come in identical packages, distinguishable only by a small mailing label on the top that identifies it as one or the other. Opening the package is a task in and of itself -- a large sticker covers the whole top of the box and most of the sides. It keeps the contents secret, but it's a pain to open. (A tip: To unwrap it without just tearing into the box, slit the sides with a thin knife, continue to slit the flaps on top toward the middle, and where the tab fits into the slot, slice just the sticker and then slide the tab out.)

The dice are nice -- not "\$2 apiece" nice, as in the boosters, but they're striking and pleasingly solid chunks of plastic. The artwork is spare; what does exist is a pleasant anime affair. The rules could use some polish, and it's still a little unclear how Chi is gained and paired up with other attacks. The packaging, though clever, must be pricey, and the whole thing seems overdone. Some stores are offering a free shield, a long strip of glossy paper with the Cookie Fu moves on one side (you can just check off the maneuvers you choose for your fighter) and the key rules on the other. Fold it, and you have a screen to keep your dice rolls secret. In a pinch, the rules from the starter set, stiff from being tightly crammed into the box, will serve this purpose well.

Cookie Fu: Fortune Cookie Fighter is fast, it plays well, and it's good, simple fun (and there's the whole interactive "Your kung fu's pretty good" factor). Alas, after a few games players will probably be begging for bigger dice pools and new hinky-keen expansions to maintain interest, variety, and strategy. Future expansions are promised, and will include weapons (the soon-to-be-released ***Death by Dim Sum***), sorcerous powers, and later a roleplaying game that will allow you to cross your characters over. The game is clearly set up for plenty of new rules and options, both official and home-brewed, but the wise man may be wary of the cost in both money and effort, Grasshopper.

--Andy Vetromile

Making (And Faking) Adventures (Part III)

Pitfalls, Props, and Players In Prison

Well, we're in Week 3 of my behind-the-curtains look at how I usually create adventures. If you haven't read parts 1 and 2, you're missing some of the greatest texts ever written in the English language. Or at least the bits that are necessary for this article to make an iota of sense.

6. Play the Adventure Mentally

Once I have my adventure outline, I try to run through the adventure mentally, pretending I'm the characters, the players, and/or insane random-acting individuals.

This is done for a number of reasons. First, it helps me prepare the flow of the adventure and understand how it will (or won't) work. Do I have a combat between a dozen PCs and allies and 50 detailed characters as a likely second scene? Well, then, that scene is going to last a loooooooooooooooooooooooooooooong time . . . if I hadn't realized the implications of that decision, then I need to understand them now.

Second, it helps me understand if there are any stumbling blocks that could derail the entire adventure . . . either short-circuiting it, or making it impossible to continue. This hopefully keeps the number of **Torg**-incidents to a minimum.

For each scene, I'll usually go through the following questions (as necessary):

- What if the PCs try to fight their way out?
- What if they try to talk their way out?
- What if they miss the Vital Clue?
- What if they see the Big Picture, either figuring out the overarching story, thwarting the bad guy, or (un)wittingly do something that will make the probable ending wildly different?
- What if they do the exact opposite of what I've planned for them to do?

So, let's go back to our Mad Mad Mad Mad Mad Mad Mayor plot, and note some possible stumbling blocks here:

Gala ball - PCs mingle

What if the PCs don't go to the ball, or what if they leave immediately? Well, I can either start the adventure *en medias res*, with the PCs at the party. Alternatively,

Mayor shoots people

The way this scene is conceived, the Mayor escapes. What if the PCs defeat him? (Answer: Not a problem; that's the outcome of Scene 2 . . . the timeline is just advanced.) What if they *kill* him? (Answer: Ummm . . . It's a good thing mayors are bulletproof.)

Mayor: Track down. (Disarm?)

What if they can't find him (or don't try)? Well, maybe the Mayor has a duplicate of Scene 1 ("Oh, no! It is the opening of the Children's Hospital, and DeathMayor2000 strikes again!!!")

And so on . . .

Note that, even though I'm writing stuff down for this column, this part is almost entirely mental. (But, y'know, it's not like you'd probably be too happy with a column that consisted entirely of, "STEVEN IS THINKING HIS COLUMN AT YOU; REMOVE THE TINFOIL HAT.") Although it's a fair bit of work, at least it's quick. This is also generally the point where I cement the attitudes of my NPCs, interesting bits of scenery, and how my NPCs' sides of dialogues might go.

At this point I'm still able to make whole-scale changes to the plot (although, really, time is probably running out); thus if one of the heroes had a "teleport immediately to visualized individual" or "detect any possession with unlimited range" abilities that I'd forgotten until now, I can tweak the adventure appropriately. (After this point it falls outside the realm of "plot-tweaking" and into the realm of "damage control.")

This stage is one of the most important, since a failure here can have serious repercussions. For example, if I've devised the Evil-Alice-In-Wonderland adventure but forget that someone has a "detect evil" ability, the entire adventure may be preemptively derailed; if the campaign depends on her eviscerating an important NPC, but she's stopped before this can happen, I probably need a backup plan. (Unless, again, I wish to venture into on-the-game "damage control" . . . some possibilities are so difficult to plan around yet so remote that I'll sometimes not even bother coming up with a Plan B, relying on the storytelling powers of adrenaline to come up with something on the spot.)

This part also becomes easier once I get to know my players; anticipating how gamers are likely to a certain plot becomes much more precise once I get a number of adventures with them under my belt. But, of course, my players are always able to surprise me.

7. Make Props, Handouts, and Other Goodies

Given how much my players seem to love hands-on stuff, this is the point where my adventure is set in stone enough for me to come up with props. When I'm on top of my game, I try to have at least one handout per adventure. (This doesn't always happen, but I give it a shot.) In the Mayor adventure, I'd probably try to come up with personalized invitations for the characters to the gala ball; if I had time, I may also make, say, the itinerary or personal notes of the mayor, so the players have something tangible when tracking down clues that something's not quite right with the mayor.

Although it contributes to helping suspend disbelief for the players, these goodies have another purpose at this stage: These are often the first concrete details of the adventure I'm committing. Thus to come up with invitations, I'd need to know the date (and time) that the adventure begins, where it takes place, and possibly who invited them. Likewise, to come up with physical clues as to the mayor's state of mind, I'd need to cement where he was and what he was doing in the events leading up to the adventure.

This is also the point where I come up with my GM-specific goodies. For example, if I find that I'll actually really need a map for an adventure (which happens rarely), I'll create one . . . usually [sketched out](#) on paper.

8. Stall

By this point (or shortly thereafter) players have probably started showing up. If so, then this is the point when I stall, saying one of the following:

- "Of *course* the adventure is ready! Name one time I've been hurriedly scrawling notes before game!" (followed by hurried scrawled notes)
- "So . . . who's turn is it to run game this week?"
- "I'm sorry; I didn't hear you knocking."
- "Ummm . . . why are you all here?"
- "*Don't go near the computer!!!*"

9. Details

By now, by hook or by crook, I have the makings of an adventure. (Or, at least, as close to the makings of an adventure as I'm going to get.) Once I've got a fairly cemented adventure, now all I need are the details necessary to make it work: names of characters, important locations, details for clues, and so on. When possible, I'll recycle names and places used previously (thus both creating less work and establishing continuity).

Even at this stage I'll "cheat"; for example, instead of coming up with names for every conceivable character the PCs will interact with, I'll often simply create a list of unassigned names ahead of time (using **GURPS Names**, a.k.a. *The Tallahassee Phone Directory*), then pick one from that list as the heroes try to find people to talk to. (In the LARP I help run, we took this one step further, coming up with a list of generic names -- complete with phone numbers and addresses -- and also locations, complete with the part of town the place is, what's there in the real world, and its phone number. That way, if the players decide they want to find, say, an occult bookstore, I can simply take another bookstore in the real world and - lo and behold! - it's really an occult bookstore!)

By this point I have almost everything I'll need to play. With one notable exception . . .

10. Character Sheets

It is a rare day when I grudgingly decide to sit down and make characters for an adventure. Ever since I had an epic **GURPS Supers** game where I spent eight hours making 10 characters, I've vowed to do as little work as possible at character creation. Put simply, my NPCs have whatever stats will be necessary a) for the adventure to work, b) to be challenging to the PCs, and c) not to contradict any previous appearances of that character.

In short, I make stuff up. I roll the dice and see how pretty they look. I try to have a fairly consistent idea as to what the characters are capable of, then go from there. Some game systems make this easier than others. White Wolf's Storyteller system, for example, encourages rolling a handful of dice, to the point where being off a die in either direction probably won't prove fatal; two dice is an average person's unskilled action, four dice is an average person's skilled action or a competent person's unskilled action, eight dice is a highly skilled exceptional person's dice pool, and 10 dice is as big as it gets most of the time. (Some systems drive me nuts using the "making stuff up" method; **Fading Suns**, for example, has a die system where the object is to roll as close to the target number as possible without going over; an exact roll of the target number is a critical success. Thus I would need to figure out if a roll of 11 was a failure, or a *really* good result.)

If need be, I can jot down quasi-legit characters in many systems; when you don't care about following the rules or point totals, and are only concerned with the skills and abilities that will specifically come up in a game, character creation goes much easier. I can crank out five Storyteller or **Fudge** characters in five minutes, and even a workable **GURPS** NPC can be whipped up in five minutes.

Now, if I know that, say, an NPC antagonist will be making an appearance over several adventures, I may actually sit down and commit him to actual rules-following stats. But, in general, I don't see the point for most characters; who cares if a character has Military Background, Color Blindness, Master-level Cooking skill, and a kitten named Jen-Jen . . . if the heroes run him over with a bus two minutes after his introduction?

11. Release The Players From The Dungeon; Play

And that's it; presuming I'm not creating an adventure I need for any permanent purpose (such as writing up for *Pyramid*), I'm ready to go. I have random notes, a climactic scene in mind, a plot (complete with an idea of possible problems and repercussions), character names, and possibly even character sheets.

Is this a fool-proof method? Not in the slightest. But it's worked well for me for many years, and it keeps me focused on the elements that are most important for me and my method of storytelling (interesting plot developments, character interaction, tough decisions, and at least one "Wow!" scene), instead of the things that aren't (like the minutia of room descriptions, character creation, and exact knowledge and adherence to the rules).

Now that I've explained how I come up with my adventures, you may be wondering how I actually *use* them when running the game. Well, that is a topic for another column . . . perhaps even another *Wheel of Time*-esque epic series like this one.

But until then, I'll be at a convention; may the Garden State of New Jersey welcome this Floridian with open arms.

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

(Last week's answer and new puzzler coming Monday)

Lauri Törni/Larry Thorne

by Hans-Christian Vortisch

He served under three flags during his lifetime: a Finnish war hero of the Winter and Continuation Wars, a SS guerrilla leader in Nazi Germany, and one of the most famous U.S. Army Special Forces operators in Vietnam. A number of legends have sprung up around him. Yet although Lauri Törni (a.k.a. Larry Thorne) may seem to possess the qualities of a fictional character, he was a real person. Three different **GURPS** versions are given to account for the development during his life; they are especially useful for campaigns using **WWII** or **Special Ops**, but could also be employed in **Atomic Horror**.

* * *

Born on May 28, 1919 as Lauri Allan Törni in Viipuri/Vyberg in Finland (present-day Russia), Törni spent a rowdy youth in a well-off family. His nickname was Lasse. He joined the paramilitary *Suojeluskunta* (Finnish Civil Guard) in his late teens and entered Business School at age 17, but he really found his trade when he was drafted into the Finnish army in 1938, serving in a light infantry unit. After his 12-month compulsory service, he re-enlisted and was sent to various NCO academies. There he was trained as a veterinary sergeant. When the Winter War broke out on November 30, 1939 (p. W13), Lasse Törni held the rank of *Alikersantti* (undersergeant) and served with distinction in the *Jääkäripataljoona 4* (JP4 -- 4th ranger battalion), and two separate infantry battalions, the ErP8 and ErP18. The Finnish rangers traced back their heritage to similar units in their War of Independence. While technically light infantry, they often operated deep behind enemy lines similar to U.S. Army Rangers (pp. W:HS13, SO24-25) and other special ops units, even though they weren't special forces *per se*. Operations typically took 10-12 days and were used to both gather information and act as light infantry raiders, mainly on skis but also using boats and sleds.

Use this write-up for Törni in early 1940:

Alikersantti Lauri "Lasse" A. Törni **153.5 points**

20 years old; 5'11"; 165 lbs.; a stocky man with strong features, blue eyes, and closely cropped blond hair.

ST: 14 [45] **DX** 13 [30] **IQ** 12 [20] **HT** 12 [20].

Basic Speed: 6.25 Move: 6

Dodge: 7 Parry: 9 (Boxing) Block: 5

Basic Damage: 1d thr, 2d sw (1d+2 Boxing)

Advantages: Alertness +1 [5], Combat Reflexes [15], Fearlessness +2 [4], Fit [5], Military Rank 1 [5], Strong Will +2 [8].

Disadvantages: Addiction (Tobacco) [-5], Bad Temper [-10], Compulsive Carousing [-5], Extremely Hazardous Duty [-20], Fanaticism (Patriotism) [-15].

Quirks: Quiet and reserved when not drunk [-1].

Skills: Accounting (M/A) IQ [2]-12, Administration (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-10, Animal Handling (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11, Area Knowledge (Southeastern Finland) IQ-2 [1/2]-10, Armoury (Small Arms) (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11, Bicycling (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-12, Boating (P/A) DX-2 [1/2]-11, Boxing (P/A) DX-1 [1]-12, Brawling (P/E) DX [1]-13, Camouflage (M/E) IQ [1]-12, Carousing (P/A) HT-1 [1]-11, Climbing (P/A) DX-1 [1]-12, Demolition (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-10, First Aid (M/E) IQ-1 [1/2]-11, Gunner (Machine Gun) (P/A) DX-2 [1/2]-13*, Guns (Light Auto) (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-14*, Guns (Pistol) (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-14*, Guns (Rifle) (P/E) DX [1]-15*, Hiking (P/A) HT [2]-12, Intimidation (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-10, Jumping (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-12, Knife (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-12, Leadership (M/A) IQ [2]-12, Merchant (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11,

Orienteering (M/A) IQ [2]-12, Riding (Horse) (P/A) DX-2 [1/2]-11, Savoir-Faire (Military) (M/E) IQ-1 [1/2]-11, Scrounging (M/E) IQ [1]-12, Skiing (P/H) DX-1 [2]-12, Soldier (M/A) IQ [2]-12, Spear (P/A) DX-2 [1/2]-11, Stealth (P/A) DX [2]-12, Survival (Arctic) (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11, Survival (Woodland) (M/A) IQ [2]-12, Swimming (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-12, Tactics (Guerilla) (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-11, Tactics (Infantry) (M/H) IQ-2 [1]-10, Throwing (P/H) DX-1 [1]-12, Tracking (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-10, Traps (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11, Veterinary (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-11.

Languages: Finnish (M/A) IQ [0]-12.

Equipment: Wears a gray woollen uniform, cap, and boots; armed with a Tikkakoski KP/31 *Suomi* submachine gun (p. W96), *puukko* knife (large knife with *Fine* blade, p. B206), and stick hand grenades (pp. B209, HT117, W98).

Encountered

Lasse Törni is a young NCO in the combat uniform of the Finnish army, armed with a submachine gun and hung with extra drum magazines and stick hand grenades. He will often be on skis, leading a small unit of light infantry in the woods of the Karelian Isthmus. His braveness borders on being reckless. Törni is a natural leader (even if there is a language barrier), and leads his men from the front.

Like many Finns, Törni is a quiet and reserved man, seemingly cold and brooding towards strangers. He doesn't get along well with superiors, and doesn't put much thought to military etiquette. When drunk or roused from his sleep, he can get quite aggressive. Towards friends and family, he is genial and warmhearted.

* * *

In February of 1940, Törni was pulled from combat and sent to Officer School. Meanwhile, the Winter War ended on March 30, 1940. He graduated in May 1940 as *Vänrikki* (2nd lieutenant), and spent the following year as an infantry platoon leader and training officer. In May 1941, he volunteered with 650 other Finns for advanced officer training in Germany. The Finnish officer corps had suffered greatly during the Winter War, and Germany was the only place where modern training could be had. However, instead of the *Wehrmacht*, this training was held by the *Waffen-SS* (p. W:IC31), whose oath on Adolf Hitler ("... *Gehorsam bis in den Tod* ..." -- obedience until death) Törni took without further thinking (this should lead to problems for the rest of his life). He was a member of the *SS-Freiwilligen Battalion Nordost* (SS-volunteer battalion Northeast), part of the 5. *SS-Panzer Division Wiking* (p. W:IC38), but he did not enter combat with the unit. After three months of abbreviated training, he graduated as *SS-Untersturmführer* in August 1941, and left for Finland, where the Continuation War had broken out on 26 June 1941.

After a surprisingly (as he had no relevant training) successful stint as commander of a mixed platoon of armored vehicles (two Vickers light tanks, a captured T-28, and two armored cars), Törni was transferred to

Jalkaväkirykmentti 56 (56th Infantry Regiment) in July 1942, and assigned as commander of a recon platoon. By December 1942, he had proved his worth and was given command of an independent company of *Jääkäri* which answered directly to division headquarters. Known under various designations, his enlarged company eventually became famous as *Osasto Törni* (Törni's Unit). His 150 men were handpicked by himself for endurance and skill, and had a high *esprit de corps* despite losses as high as 70%. The unit even had its own emblem, a sky blue triangle with a red "T" and a yellow lightning bolt crossing diagonally. (Interestingly, amongst his men was also Mauno Koivisto, who would later become president of Finland.) Through 1943 to mid-1944, *Osasto Törni* wrecked havoc amongst the Soviets, always fighting

Myths and Legends: Into The Shadows

Törni was a ruthless fighter, and "dirty" guerrilla warfare with land mines, sniping, and ambushes suited him well. He also never gave quarter to his enemies. According to legend, early in the Continuation War he once tried to capture a party of Soviet soldiers who had raised the white flag. This turned out to be an ambush that nearly wiped out his unit; from then on, Törni never again took prisoners, arguing that his small unit, operating behind enemy lines as it did, couldn't be expected to drag them along. Those Soviets that he did take alive (especially officers and Communist commissars) were in for a brutal interrogation first, only to be killed afterwards. Some of his men objected to this practice, but Törni was never challenged by

outnumbered and often against impossible odds. In December 1943, Lasse also received the *Eisernes Kreuz Zweiter Klasse* (Iron Cross 2nd class, p. W49). There is no evidence that he fought with or alongside a German unit at that time; instead, he received it from the Finnish military, which had received a batch of the medals from the Germans.

In July 1944, Törni skied on a land mine; he was evacuated and his unit disbanded. While convalescing, he was knighted with the *Mannerheim Risti* (Mannerheim Cross, Reputation +4, the highest medal awarded in Finland) for an ambush he and his men sprung on a Soviet convoy, killing 300 without a single loss of their own. Törni had already won every other medal for valor that Finland had to offer.

Use this write-up for Törni in late 1943 or early 1944:

Luutnantti Lauri "Lasse" A. Törni

149 points

25 years old; 5'11"; 160 lbs.; a stocky but malnourished man with strong features, blue eyes, and closely cropped blond hair.

ST: 14 [45] **DX** 13 [30] **IQ** 12 [20] **HT** 12 [20].

Basic Speed: 6.25 Move: 6

Dodge: 7 Parry: 9 (Boxing) Block: 5

Basic Damage: 1d+1 thr, 2d+1 sw (1d+3 Boxing)

Advantages: Alertness +1 [5], Combat Reflexes [15], Fearlessness +4 [8], Fit [5], Military Rank 3 [15], Reputation +2 [5] (Finnish military, all the time; *Vapaudenristi* 4th class; *Muistomitali* 39-40; *Eisernes Kreuz* 2nd class), Strong Will +2 [8].

Disadvantages: Addiction (Tobacco) [-5], Bad Temper [-10], Bloodlust [-10], Compulsive Carousing [-5], Enemy (NKVD posted a \$50,000 reward Dead or Alive, appears rarely) [-15], Extremely Hazardous Duty [-20], Fanaticism (Patriotism) [-15].

Quirks: Quiet and reserved when not drunk [-1].

Skills: Accounting (M/A) IQ [2]-12, Administration (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11, Animal Handling (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11, Area Knowledge (Southeastern Finland) IQ-2 [1/2]-10, Armoury (Small Arms) (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11, Bicycling (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-12, Boating (P/A) DX-2 [1/2]-11, Boxing (P/A) DX-1 [1]-12, Brawling (P/E) DX [1]-13, Camouflage (M/E) IQ [1]-12, Carousing (P/A) HT-1 [1]-11, Climbing (P/A) DX-1 [1]-12, Demolition (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-10, First Aid (M/E) IQ-1 [1/2]-11, Gunner (Machine Gun) (P/A) DX-2 [1/2]-13*, Guns (LAW) (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-14*, Guns (Light Auto) (P/E) DX [1]-15*, Guns (Pistol) (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-14*, Guns (Rifle) (P/E) DX-2 [1]-15*, Hiking (P/A) HT [2]-12, Intimidation (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11, Jumping (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-12, Knife (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-12, Leadership (M/A) IQ+1 [4]-13, Merchant (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11, Orienteering (M/A) IQ [2]-12, Riding (Horse) (P/A) DX-2 [1/2]-11, Savoir-Faire (Military) (M/E) IQ [1]-12, Scrounging (M/E) IQ [1]-12, Skiing (P/H) DX-1 [2]-12, Soldier (M/A) IQ [2]-12, Spear (P/A) DX-2 [1/2]-11, Stealth (P/A) DX [2]-12, Survival (Arctic) (M/A) IQ [2]-12, Survival (Woodland) (M/A) IQ [2]-12, Swimming (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-12, Tactics (Armor) (M/H) IQ-2 [1]-10, Tactics (Guerilla) (M/H) IQ [4]-12, Tactics (Infantry) (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-11, Teaching (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11, Throwing (P/H) DX-1 [1]-12, Tracking (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11, Traps (M/A) IQ [2]-12, Veterinary (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-11.

Languages: Finnish (M/A) IQ [0]-12, German (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-10.

Equipment: Wears a gray woollen uniform, cap, and boots; armed with a Tikkakoski KP/31 *Suomi* submachine gun (p. W96) or a Tulamash KAutKiv/40 rifle (SVT-40, p. W95) with PU 3.5X scope and S-41 sound suppressor, *puukko*

his superiors and not convicted for war crimes. The Soviet intelligence agency NKVD (p. W47) put out a bounty on his head worth the princely sum of three million finnmark (then some \$50,000), but nobody ever claimed the money . . .

knife (large knife with *Fine* blade, p. B206), and stick hand grenades (pp. B209, HT117, W98).

Encountered

Also see the younger Törni; by this time, he had seen the horrors of several years of intense fighting (including being wounded several times), had taken the unforgiving officer training of the *Waffen*-SS, and had become an officer in charge of many men. He can "will" men to perform deeds thought impossible by them.

He still doesn't get along well with superior officers, especially if they behave stupidly or try to enforce their privileges.

* * *

When Törni returned to Finland, he was accused as a traitor and sentenced to six years of prison (the post-war government in Finland was *very* concerned of its relations with the USSR . . .). He escaped three times but was caught every time, until he was pardoned in 1948. Törni then moved to Sweden, where he worked as a lumberjack; he also wrote a manual on guerrilla warfare for the Swedish army. In 1950, he illegally entered the USA as a sailor via South America. He worked as a carpenter in Harlem, New York, until he was caught by the FBI and INS, who suspected him of being a Nazi war criminal. Facing deportation, he was patronized by lawyer William Donovan (former head of the OSS, p. W44), who had heard of him from other Finnish expatriates, and managed to have a private bill enacted by Congress (Private Bill HR6412, or the "Lex Törni") in 1953 to allow him to become a US citizen. He changed his name to Larry Alan Thorne.

Civilian life was not adventurous enough for him, and other former Finnish officers now in the U.S. military urged him to join as well. In early 1954, he enlisted as a private in the U.S. Army, and after Basic, Airborne, and Mountain and Winter Warfare Training, volunteered for Special Forces (pp. SO26-28). (He started as a private since the Finnish military had stripped him of his rank in 1950, and Thorne had no way to prove his officer training and service during WWII.) He spent several years with the 77th and 10th Special Forces Groups (Airborne) in West Germany, completed Officer School and various other advanced courses (including Signals, HALO, SCUBA, etc.), and also attended the demanding German *Gebirgsjäger* and Italian *Alpini* Mountain Warfare Schools (the first U.S. serviceman to do so).

One of his most famous exploits was the retrieval of the bodies of the crew of a wrecked USAF plane (as well as top secret code material) on the peaks of the Zagros mountains in Iran. He was promoted to Captain in 1960. In the early 1960s, he served as guerrilla instructor at the Special Warfare School in Fort Bragg, Georgia. In 1963-1964, Thorne served a six-month combat tour in command of an A-team in South Vietnam near the Cambodian border, where he was wounded twice and earned a Bronze Star (pp. SO51-52, W42). (See the chapter "A Green Beret All The Way" in Moore's book for a fictionalized account of his actions there.) In February 1965, he returned to Vietnam as a member of the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne). Thorne was soon attached to the Headquarters Company, MACV, Special Detachment 5891. In reality, he had become a member of the Studies and Observation Group (SOG), specifically OP35 (Ground Studies Group). This joint-service unconventional task force was controlled by the CIA and run a variety of special operations throughout Southeast Asia, many of which remain classified to this day. Some

Myths and Legends: Werwolf

After the Continuation War had ended, Törni was discharged from service in the Finnish army in November 1944. But for him, the war was not over, and he made plans to go to Germany again, to continue fighting the Soviets. In February 1945, he clandestinely boarded a German *U-Boot* with a number of other Finnish volunteers. He entered the secret *Werwolf* organization (p. W:IC47) under the alias of Lauri Laine. Together with other Finns, he received advanced guerrilla and sabotage training from *Waffen*-SS instructors. By April 1945, Lauri Laine held the rank of *SS-Hauptsturmführer* and commanded a company of German navy *Küstenjäger* (marines) in the fierce fighting in Northern Germany, but was forced to retreat before the advancing Soviets. On 12 May 1945, they surrendered to elements of the 17th U.S. Airborne Division near the Elbe. He escaped from a British POW camp and made his way to Finland via Denmark and Sweden.

of these operations consisted of clandestine insertions and long-range reconnaissance in North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, usually performed by small teams of two to three Special Forces volunteers and 6-10 indigenous mercenaries. In September 1965, MACV-SOG recon teams based in Kham Duc near the Laotian border started infiltrating Laos under Operation SHINING BRASS in search of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. On 18 October 1965, Thorne returned from the first mission (which he insisted on personally supervising) in Laos onboard of a Sikorsky CH-34A Choctaw helicopter flown by the 219th Helicopter Squadron, Vietnamese Air Force. Around 2020 hours, headquarters lost contact with the aircraft. Thorne was never seen again.

Use this write-up for Thorne in early 1965:

Captain Larry A. Thorne

263 points

46 years old; 5'11"; 180 lbs.; a stocky man with strong features, blue eyes, and closely cropped blond hair.

ST: 15 [60] **DX** 13 [30] **IQ** 12 [20] **HT** 12 [20].

Basic Speed: 6.25 Move: 6

Dodge: 7 Parry: 9 (Boxing) Block: 5

Basic Damage: 1d+1 thr, 2d+1 sw (1d+3 Boxing)

Advantages: Alertness +1 [5], Combat Reflexes [15], Fearlessness +4 [8], Fit [5], Military Rank 4 [20], Patron (Finnish Old Boy Officers in U.S. Service) [10], Reputation +1 [5] (U.S. military, all the time; Bronze Star, Purple Heart with three Oak Leaf clusters), Reputation +4 [6] (Finnish military, all the time; *Mannerheim Risti*, *Vapaudenristi* 4th class; *Muistomitali* 39-40; *Muistomitali* 41-44; *Eisernes Kreuz* 2nd class), Strong Will +2 [8], Wealth (Comfortable) [10].

Disadvantages: Addiction (Tobacco) [-5], Bad Temper [-10], Bloodlust [-10], Compulsive Carousing [-5], Extremely Hazardous Duty [-20], Fanaticism (Patriotism) [-15], Intolerance (Communism) [-5].

Quirks: Ladies' Man [-1], Likes Fast Cars (drives an Alfa-Romeo sports coupe) [-1], Quiet and reserved when not drunk [-1].

Skills: Accounting (M/A) IQ [2]-12, Administration (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11, Animal Handling (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11, Area Knowledge (Bavaria) IQ-2 [1/2]-10, Area Knowledge (Georgia) IQ-2 [1/2]-10, Area Knowledge (New York) IQ-2 [1/2]-10, Area Knowledge (Southeastern Finland) IQ-2 [1/2]-10, Armoury (Small Arms) (M/A) IQ [2]-12, Boating (P/A) DX-2 [1/2]-11, Boxing (P/A) DX [2]-13, Brawling (P/E) DX+1 [2]-14, Camouflage (M/E) IQ [1]-12, Carousing (P/A) HT [2]-12, Carpentry (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-12, Climbing (P/A) DX+2 [8]-15, Demolition (M/A) IQ [2]-12, Driving (Automobile) (P/A) DX [2]-13, Engineer (Combat) (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11, Electronics (M/H) IQ-3 [1/2]-9, Electronics Operation (Comm) (M/A) IQ+1 [4]-13, First Aid (M/E) IQ [1]-12, Forward Observer (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11, Gunner (Machine Gun) (P/A) DX-2 [1/2]-13*, Gunner (Mortar) (P/A) DX-2 [1/2]-13*, Gunner (Recoilless Rifle) (P/A) DX-2 [1/2]-13*, Guns (Grenade Launcher) (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-14*, Guns (LAW) (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-14*, Guns (Light Auto) (P/E) DX+1 [2]-16*, Guns

Myths and Legends: Spy Game

Various people have claimed that Törni was a contract agent for the CIA in the early 1950s; while this can't be substantiated (since the Agency isn't commenting), Törni *did* offer to turn in Finnish communists residing in the USA while still being investigated by the FBI. Considering his experiences in Finland, this is not very surprising.

He again is claimed to have worked for the CIA in 1958, then a Special Forces lieutenant. Allegedly, he operated with other members of the 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) in civilian clothes in both East and West Berlin.

One popular legend has it that he killed a Soviet spy in West Germany with his bare hands.

In late 1962, a waitress claimed to have identified him as a Russian officer she knew from Paris in 1945. Thorne was placed under investigation by Army Intelligence special agents, and made to take a polygraph test in August 1963. Aside of being suspected to be a Soviet spy, the investigators again faced him with allegations of being a Nazi war criminal. Thorne was officially cleared of all accusations four days before his accident; throughout the time, he had continued his normal duties.

Myths and Legends:

(Pistol) (P/E) DX [1]-15*, Guns (Rifle) (P/E) DX+1 [2]-16*, Hiking (P/A) HT [2]-12, Intimidation (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11, Interrogation (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11, Jumping (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-12, Knife (P/E) DX [1]-13, Leadership (M/A) IQ+2 [8]-14, Merchant (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11, NBC Warfare (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-10, No-Landing Extraction (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11, Orienteering (M/A) IQ+1 [4]-13, Operations (Land) (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-11, Parachuting (P/A) DX [2]-13, Riding (Horse) (P/A) DX-2 [1/2]-11, Sailor (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11, Savoir-Faire (Military) (M/E) IQ [1]-12, Scrounging (M/E) IQ [1]-12, Scuba (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11, Seamanship (M/A) IQ [2]-12, Skiing (P/H) DX-1 [2]-12, Soldier (M/A) IQ [2]-12, Spear (P/A) DX-2 [1/2]-11, Stealth (P/A) DX [2]-12, Survival (Arctic) (M/A) IQ [2]-12, Survival (Jungle) (M/A) IQ [2]-12, Survival (Mountains) (M/A) IQ [2]-12, Survival (Woodland) (M/A) IQ [2]-12, Swimming (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-12, Tactics (Armor) (M/H) IQ-2 [1]-10, Tactics (Guerilla) (M/H) IQ+1 [8]-13, Tactics (Infantry) (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-11, Teaching (M/A) IQ [2]-12, Telegraphy (M/E) IQ [1]-12, Throwing (P/H) DX-1 [1]-12, Tracking (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11, Traps (M/A) IQ [2]-12, Veterinary (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-11.

Languages: Finnish (M/A) IQ [0]-12, English (M/A) IQ [2]-12, Estonian (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11, German (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11, Norwegian (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11, Swedish (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11, Vietnamese (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-10.

Equipment: Wears a green-tan-black tigerstripe uniform, cap, jungle boots, and load-bearing equipment; armed with a FN-Browning High-Power pistol (pp. B208, HT108, W94), a Springfield M1903 bolt-action rifle (pp. B208, HT114, W95) or Winchester M2 assault carbine (pp. HT114, W95), and MKII hand grenades (pp. B209, HT117, W98).

Encountered

Also see the younger Törni. Thorne speaks a heavily accented English (or one of several other languages) and is a bit more outgoing than in younger years, but still not very talkative. His handshake crushes bones, and he bearhugs his friends. He is the image of the quiet professional the Special Forces try to attract, widely skilled and a master of several trades.

Further Reading

- Gill, Henry. *Soldier Under Three Flags -- The Exploits of Special Forces Captain Larry A. Thorne* (Pathfinder Publishing, 1998). The only detailed biography in English.
- Karhu, Jouni. *Lauri Törni The Fighting Finn* [<http://www.uta.fi/FAST/FIN/GEN/j-karhu.html>].
- Moore, Robin. *The Green Berets* (Crown Publishing, 1965). Moore's fictional Captain Sven Kornie was based in no small way on the real Larry Thorne, whom he had met in the U.S. and Vietnam.
- Plaster, John. *SOG: A Photo History Of The Secret Wars* (Paladin Press, 2000). Has its own section on Thorne.
- Shultz, Richard. *The Secret War against Hanoi* (HarperCollins, 1999). A very in-depth account of MACV-SOG's clandestine operations against North Vietnam. Shultz specifically mentions Thorne.
- *Tradition Guild of Osasto Törni* [http://www.lauritorni.org/kuva_lauri.html]. Website authored by former members of *Osasto Törni*. In Finnish.

Dead Or Alive?

Search parties were not able to find the crash site. The U.S. Army assumed him dead, but Thorne's friends and family never believed he had died in the crash. It was so unlike him to simply die in an unlucky accident. They maintained he got away, perhaps held prisoner by the North Vietnamese or even the Soviets. Or maybe he simply slipped away and started a new life again.

In 1999, a joint American-Finnish search party finally found a helicopter wreck at the foot of a hill near Kham Duc, which is assumed to be the one in question. The human remains uncovered there are still being subjected to DNA and dental testing.

Autoduel Vehicles

by Arthur Samuels

Autoduel, 2nd Edition has a nice selection of sample vehicles. However, who doesn't want more? Presented here is a set of duelling vehicles -- one for each of the common Divisions, an extra one for Amateur Night, and a high-end recreational camper.

All duelling vehicles have the following characteristics: TL 8; Occupancy: short; Passengers: None. No cargo or empty space. They all carry a short-range communicator and a compact fire suppression system (HT 6). They all have clear ablative armor windows (the ones with metal armor have small windows). If using the "Vision" rules on p. VE25, all vehicles are considered to have "Fair" visibility. All have an operating time of 60 minutes and a minimum Top Speed of 90 MPH, to comply with AADA regulations. They all have Ram Plates.

A "Targeting Computer" is a small dedicated computer running the Targeting program. Costs \$1200, weighs 1 pound, takes up 0.02 cf. It gives a +4 to hit.

Note that the published damage ratings for most of the rockets in **Autoduel, 2nd Edition** on page 105 are incorrect. They were designed using TL8 HEAT and HEDP statistics; however, the world of Autoduel has reached only TL7 in the field of HEAT ammo. Here are the revised values:

25mm Mini Rocket:	3d(5) [2d] (as in the book).
40mm Light Rocket:	4d+3(5) [4d].
45mm Medium Rocket:	9d(5) [4d].
50mm Heavy Rocket:	5dx3(5) [4d].
60mm Super Rocket:	6dx6(5) [4d].

And Now, Camelot Motors Presents Its 2053 Line

Division 5 Trike

"The Squire"

This is a typical Amateur Night vehicle. Available in 3 and 4-wheel versions. It carries a 10mm MG in a turret, and a 25mm micro-missile launcher Bo (can be placed in any facing, but is usually in the Front).

Subassemblies: Standard Wheels (3), Full-Rotation Turret.

Propulsion: 20 KW wheeled drivetrain (HT 5).

Weapons: 10mm MG (Tu F) with 400 rounds; 25mm MML (Bo F) with 10 HEDP rockets.

Weapon Accessories: Full-stabilization for both weapons.

Controls: Electronic.

Crew stations: Driver runs all systems from cramped crew station (Bo).

Crew: Driver.

Power System: None. Energy Bank: 72000 KWS HCSB. Powers drivetrain for 60 minutes (HT 5).

Access space: 1.52 cf.

Volume: Body 24 cf; Turret 0.54 cf; Wheels 2.4 cf. Surface Areas: Body 50 sf; Turret 4 sf; Wheels 11 sf; Total 65 sf.

Structure: Light Frame, Very Cheap materials.

Hit Points: Body 38; Turret 3; Wheels 5 each.

Armor: Cheap ablative.

BoF: PD 4 DR 240 TuF: PD 4 DR 240

BoR: PD 4 DR 120 TuR: PD 4 DR 140

BoL: PD 4 DR 120 TuL: PD 4 DR 140

BoB: PD 4 DR 180 TuB: PD 5 DR 140

BoT: PD 4 DR 20

TuT: PD 4 DR 60

BoU: PD 4 DR 40

Wheels: PD 4 DR 20

Wheelguards: PD 4 DR 40

Surface Features: Ram Plate.

Statistics: Empty Weight 861 lbs (0.43 tons); Loaded Weight 1061 lbs (0.53 tons). Volume 27 cf. Size Modifier +1. Price \$4578. HT 12.

Ground Performance: Speed 100 MPH; gAccel 5; gDecel 10; gMR 1.5; gSR 2. High GP; 1/6 OR speed.

Can also be made into a (very small) four-wheeled car (nicknamed "The Go-Kart Squire"). The only changes are:

Wheel HP 4 each. GMR 1.25; gSR 3.

Division 5 Trike

"The Barbecue Squire"

Here is the Flamethrower-equipped variation. Note that the extra cost/weight of putting full stabilization on the heavy flamethrower meant losing the MML -- as a compensation the turret is sloped. Pick your shots carefully! Remember, just because these two vehicles have fire-suppression systems doesn't mean every vehicle will -- especially in Division 5 . . .

Subassemblies: Standard Wheels (3), Full-Rotation Turret.

Propulsion: 18 KW wheeled drivetrain (HT 5).

Weapons: Flamethrower (Tu F).

Weapon Accessories: Full-stabilization for flamethrower.

Controls: Electronic.

Crew stations: Driver runs all systems from cramped crew station (Bo).

Crew: Driver.

Power System: None. Energy Bank: 64800 KWS HCSB. Powers drivetrain for 60 minutes (HT 4).

Access space: 1.4 cf.

Volume: Body 25 cf; Turret 2.4 cf; Wheels 2.5 cf. *Surface Areas:* Body 51 sf; Turret 11 sf; Wheels 11 sf; Total 73 sf.

Structure: Light Frame, Very Cheap materials.

Hit Points: Body 38; Turret 8; Wheels 6 each.

Armor: Cheap ablative.

BoF: PD 4 DR 300 TuF: PD 4 DR 250
BoR: PD 4 DR 160 TuR: PD 4 DR 150
BoL: PD 4 DR 160 TuL: PD 4 DR 150
BoB: PD 4 DR 200 TuB: PD 4 DR 150
BoT: PD 4 DR 40 TuT: PD 4 DR 50
BoU: PD 4 DR 40

Wheels: PD 4 DR 20

Wheelguards: PD 4 DR 40

Surface Features: Ram Plate.

Statistics: Empty Weight 971 lbs (0.49 tons); Loaded Weight 1171 lbs (0.59 tons). Volume 32 cf. Size Modifier +2. Price \$4768. HT 11.

Ground Performance: Speed 90 MPH; gAccel 5; gDecel 10; gMR 1.5; gSR 2. High GP; 1/6 OR speed.

Four-wheeled version. The only changes are:

Wheel HP 4 each. GMR 1.25; gSR 3.

Division 10 Car

"Excalibur"

The Excalibur carries a high-capacity Vulcan MG (with enough ammo for 20 seconds of continuous fire) and two layers of armor -- metal over ablative. This makes it tough when facing those low-caliber, high ROF weapons like machine guns, but you have to be extra careful when facing HEAT ammo -- one good shot can punch right through!

Show them who the once and future king of the circuit is -- when you draw the Excalibur!

Subassemblies: Standard Wheels (4), Full-Rotation Turret.

Features: Body has 60 degrees slope on its Front and 30 degrees on its Back facing. Turret has 60 degrees slope on its Front facing and 30 degrees slope on R, L and B.

Propulsion: 30 KW wheeled drivetrain (HT 6).

Weapons: 10mm VMG (TuF) with 640 rounds; 45mm Rocket Launcher (Bo F) with 10 HEAT rockets.

Weapon Accessories: Full-stabilization and cyberslaves for both weapons.

Instruments and Electronics: Targeting computer.

Controls: Electronic

Crew stations: Driver operates all systems from a cramped crew station (Bo).

Crew: Driver.

Power System: None. Energy Bank: 108,000 KWS HCSB. Powers drivetrain for 60 minutes (HT 6).

Access space: 2.1 cf.

Volume: Body 37 cf; Turret 1.8 cf; Wheels 3.7 cf. Surface Areas: Body 67 sf; Turret 8.8 sf; Wheels 14 sf; Total 90 sf.

Structure: Light Frame, Very Cheap materials.

Structural Options: Radial Tires.

Hit Points: Body 50; Turret 7; Wheels 5 each.

Armor: Cheap metal over cheap ablative.

BoF: PD 6 DR 60/300 TuF: PD 6 DR 60/300
BoR: PD 4 DR 20/100 TuR: PD 5 DR 30/150
BoL: PD 4 DR 20/100 TuL: PD 5 DR 30/150
BoB: PD 5 DR 45/225 TuB: PD 5 DR 30/150
BoT: PD 3 DR 10/50 TuT: PD 3 DR 10/50
BoU: PD 4 DR 10/50

Wheels: PD 2 DR 5/25

Wheelguards: PD 3 DR 10/50

Surface Features: Ram plate.

Statistics: Empty Weight 1612 lbs (0.81 tons); Loaded Weight 1812 lbs (0.91 tons). Volume 42 cf. Size Modifier +2. Price \$9781. HT 10.

Ground Performance: Speed 90 MPH; gAccel 5; gDecel 10; gMR 1.25; gSR 4.

High GP; 1/6 OR speed.

Division 15 Car

"Falcon"

The Falcon carries the powerful Heavy Machine Gun (statistics for it at the end of the description). It has improved suspension, radial tires, and all-wheel steering, to be nimble as a cat. Who will be driving circles around the competition? You will . . . in a Falcon!

Subassemblies: Standard Wheels (4), Full-Rotation Turret.

Features: Turret has 150 degrees slope (60 on F, 30 on R, L, and B) and body has 90 degrees slope (60 on F, 30 on B).

Propulsion: 55 KW wheeled drivetrain (HT 8).

Weapons: 13mm HMG* (TuF) with 400 rounds; 45mm Rocket Launcher (Bo F) with 10 HEAT rockets.

Weapon Accessories: Full-stabilization and cyberslaves for both weapons.

Instruments and Electronics: Targeting computer.

Controls: Electronic.

Crew stations: Driver operates all systems in a cramped crew station (Bo).

Crew: Driver.

Power System: None. Energy Bank: 198,000 KWS HCSB. Powers drivetrain for 60 minutes (HT 9).

Access space: 3.5 cf.

Volume: Body 41 cf; Turret 2.5 cf; Wheels 4.1 cf. Surface Areas: Body 72 sf; Turret 11 sf; Wheels 15 sf; Total 98 sf.

Structure: Medium Frame, Very Cheap materials.

Structural Options: All-wheel steering, radial tires, improved suspension.

Hit Points: Body 110; Turret 17; Wheels 12 each.

Armor: Standard metal over standard ablative.

BoF: PD 6 DR 120/600	TuF: PD 6 DR 100/500
BoR: PD 4 DR 50/250	TuR: PD 5 DR 75/375
BoL: PD 4 DR 50/250	TuL: PD 5 DR 75/375
BoB: PD 5 DR 90/450	TuB: PD 5 DR 60/300
BoT: PD 3 DR 10/50	TuT: PD 3 DR 10/50
BoU: PD 3 DR 10/50	

Wheels: PD 3 DR 10/50

Wheelguards: PD 4 DR 20/100

Surface Features: Ram plate.

Statistics: Empty Weight 3158 lbs (1.58 tons); Loaded Weight 3358 lbs (1.68 tons). Volume 48 cf. Size Modifier +2. Price \$14,449. HT 11.

Ground Performance: Speed 105 MPH; gAccel 5; gDecel 10; gMR 1.75; gSR 5. Very High GP; 1/8 OR speed.

* Heavy Machine Gun 13mm. Damage 6d×2. SS 20; Acc 13; 1/2D 1000; Max 4800. RoF 20. Empty Weight 29. Cost \$1600. WPS 0.14; CPS 0.56.

Division 20 Car

"Lancelot"

The Lancelot carries the new Light Autocannon (LAC). You're ready to win the favors of the lovely maiden -- driving a Lancelot!

Subassemblies: Standard Wheels (4), Full-Rotation Turret.

Features: Turret has 150 degrees slope (60 on F, 30 on R, L, and B) and body has 90 degrees slope (60 on F, 30 on B).

Propulsion: 45 KW wheeled drivetrain (HT 7).

Weapons: 20mm LAC (TuF) with 400 rounds (HT 7); 45mm Rocket Launcher (Bo F) with 5 HEAT rockets.

Weapon Accessories: Full-stabilization and cyberslaves for both weapons.

Instruments and Electronics: Targeting computer.

Controls: Electronic.

Crew stations: Driver operates all systems in a cramped crew station (Bo).

Crew: Driver.

Power System: None. Energy Bank: 162000 KWS HCSB Powers drivetrain for 60 minutes (HT 7).

Access space: 2.9 cf.

Volume: Body 40 cf; Turret 5.7 cf; Wheels 4.1 cf. Surface Areas: Body 70 sf; Turret 19 sf; Wheels 15 sf; Total 104 sf.

Structure: Medium Frame, Very Cheap materials.

Structural Options: Radial Tires.

Hit Points: Body 110; Turret 29; Wheels 11 each.

Armor: Cheap fireproof ablative

BoF: PD 6 DR 800 TuF: PD 6 DR 600

BoR: PD 4 DR 300 TuR: PD 5 DR 450

BoL: PD 4 DR 300 TuL: PD 5 DR 450

BoB: PD 5 DR 600 TuB: PD 5 DR 450

BoT: PD 4 DR 50 TuT: PD 4 DR 50

BoU: PD 4 DR 50

Wheels: PD 4 DR 50

Wheelguards: PD 4 DR 100

Surface Features: Ram plate.

Statistics: Empty Weight 2645 lbs (1.32 tons); Loaded Weight 2845 lbs (1.42 tons). Volume 50 cf. Size Modifier +2. Price \$19,296. HT 12.

Ground Performance: Speed 90 MPH; gAccel 5; gDecel 10; gMR 1.25; gSR 4. Very High GP; 1/8 OR speed.

* Light Autocannon 20mm. Damage 6dx3. SS 20; Acc 14; 1/2D 1300; Max 5500. RoF 20. Empty Weight 68. Cost \$7600. WPS 0.26; CPS 1.

Division 25 Car

"Black Knight"

The Black Knight mounts the powerful 50mm Recoilless Rifle. It has a gunner to get the most out of its solitary weapon. Note that the weapon does not have a cyberslave; it's just too expensive on a weapon that heavy.

The crew of the Black Knight should pick their shots carefully, and the driver needs to work closely with the gunner to set up targets of opportunity -- they can't take those cyberslaved snap shots like most other drivers can, but their shots will punch through a lot of armor and do internal damage.

Note that the entire vehicle uses Expensive Laminate Ablative armor, so its DR is doubled against anyone else using shaped-charge munitions.

None shall pass you -- in a Black Knight!

Subassemblies: Standard Wheels (4), Full-Rotation Turret.

Features: Turret has 150 degrees slope (60 on F, 30 on R, L, and B) and body has 90 degrees slope (60 on F, 30 on B).

Propulsion: 45 KW wheeled drivetrain (HT 7).

Weapons: 50mm Recoilless Rifle (TuF) with 20 HEAT rounds (HT 15).

Weapon Accessories: Full-stabilization for RR.

Instruments and Electronics: Targeting computer at Gunner station.

Controls: Electronic.

Crew stations: Driver operates vehicle controls in a cramped crew station (Bo); Gunner operates weapon in a cramped crew station (Bo).

Crew: Driver and Gunner.

Power System: None. Energy Bank: 162,000 KWS HCSB. Powers drivetrain for 60 minutes (HT 8).

Access space: 2.9 cf.

Volume: Body 68 cf; Turret 9.3 cf; Wheels 6.8 cf. Surface Areas: Body 100 sf; Turret 27 sf; Wheels 22 sf; Total 149 sf.

Structure: Light Frame, Very Cheap materials.

Structural Options: Improved Suspension; Radial Tires.

Hit Points: Body 75; Turret 20; Wheels 8 each.

Armor: Expensive laminate ablative.

BoF: PD 6 DR 800 TuF: PD 6 DR 800
BoR: PD 4 DR 300 TuR: PD 5 DR 525
BoL: PD 4 DR 300 TuL: PD 5 DR 525
BoB: PD 5 DR 600 TuB: PD 5 DR 525
BoT: PD 4 DR 50 TuT: PD 4 DR 50
BoU: PD 4 DR 50

Wheels: PD 4 DR 50

Wheelguards: PD 4 DR 100

Surface Features: Ram plate.

Statistics: Empty Weight 2344 lbs (1.17 tons); Loaded Weight 2744 lbs (1.37 tons). Volume 84 cf. Size Modifier +2. Price \$23,515. HT 10.

Ground Performance: Speed 105 MPH; gAccel 5; gDecel 10; gMR 1.5; gSR 5. High GP; 1/6 OR speed.

Division 30

"Merlin"

The last of the Division-play vehicles, the Merlin mounts an alternate version of the standard Laser. (It doesn't do a

prime number of dice, so players can roll reasonable numbers of dice with a multiplier.)

Command the powers of light -- with the magic of the Merlin!

Subassemblies: Standard Wheels (4), Full-Rotation Turret.

Features: Turret has 150 degrees slope (60 on F, 30 on R, L, and B) and body has 90 degrees slope (60 on F, 30 on B).

Propulsion: 45 KW wheeled drivetrain (HT 7).

Weapons: Laser* (TuF) (HT 8).

Weapon Accessories: Full-stabilization and cyberslave for Laser.

Instruments and Electronics: Targeting computer.

Controls: Electronic.

Crew stations: Driver operates all systems in a cramped crew station (Bo).

Crew: Driver.

Power System: None. Energy Bank: 300,000 KWS HCSB. Powers drivetrain for 111 minutes (1.85 hours) (HT 12). Each laser shot reduces operating time by 52 seconds. A burst at full ROF drains just about 6.5 minutes of operating time. Can fire 14 bursts at full RoF, leaving over three minutes operating time for the drivetrain (long enough for almost any conceivable duel).

Access space: 4.3 cf.

Volume: Body 44 cf; Turret 6.0 cf; Wheels 4.4 cf. Surface Areas: Body 75 sf; Turret 20 sf; Wheels 16 sf; Total 111 sf.

Structure: Medium Frame, Very Cheap materials.

Structural Options: Improved Suspension; Radial Tires.

Hit Points: Body 110; Turret 30; Wheels 12 each.

Armor:

BoF: PD 6 DR 1400	TuF: PD 6 DR 1200
BoR: PD 4 DR 500	TuR: PD 5 DR 675
BoL: PD 4 DR 500	TuL: PD 5 DR 675
BoB: PD 5 DR 900	TuB: PD 5 DR 675
BoT: PD 4 DR 50	TuT: PD 4 DR 50
BoU: PD 4 DR 50	

Wheels: PD 4 DR 75

Wheelguards: PD 4 DR 150

Surface Features: Ram plate.

Statistics: Empty Weight 2567 lbs (1.28 tons); Loaded Weight 2767 lbs (1.38 tons). Volume 54 cf. Size Modifier +2. Price \$28,881. HT 12.

Ground Performance: Speed 105 MPH; gAccel 5; gDecel 10; gMR 1.5; gSR 5. Very High GP; 1/8 OR speed.

Laser: 1300 KJ; 6dx3; RoF 8; SS20; Acc 18; 1/2D 1800; Max 3600; Wgt 72 lbs; \$11,000. Consumes 2600 KWS per shot (20,800 KW to fire at full RoF).

The Happy Camper

Finally, to round out the selection with a non-arena vehicle: this is a top-end camper. It is suitable for a retired successful professional duellist who wants a vehicle to get away from it all. It can be mostly self-sufficient in a pinch with its solar panel and lasers, although the rockets are expensive to replace and it is much easier and faster to get a recharge.

If the GM is feeling generous, the PCs can stumble upon this vehicle after its original owner mysteriously disappears (they find the camper, a campsite, and some clues about what happened to the original owner -- will they try to find out what happened or just take the camper and run?). If the GM wants to complicate things, the clone of the original owner can show up with proof of ownership! What exactly are the salvage rights in a case like that? Who is going to enforce them?

The IR laser and SALH rockets (and launcher) are new: statistics at the end of the writeup.

Subassemblies: Off-Road Wheels (4), Full-Rotation Pop Turret.

Features: Turret has 150 degrees slope (60 on F, 30 on R, L, and B) and body has 30 degrees slope on F.

Propulsion: 200 KW all-wheel-drive wheeled drivetrain (HT 21).

Weapons: IR Laser* (TuF). 50mm SALH Rocket Launcher* (BoF) with 10 rockets

Weapon Accessories: Full-stabilization, universal mount, and cyberslave for Laser.

Instruments and Electronics: Targeting computer; Standard communicator; minicomputer and 2 terminals; navigation instruments; GPS; HUDWACs for both crew stations; Radar/Laser detector; Sound System. 4 mile PESA and 2 mile AESA in turret. AESA draws 1 KW of power -- approximately three hours of continuous use drains one minute worth of range.

Miscellaneous Equipment: Compact fire suppression system; 200 square foot retractable solar panel on super-light frame(HT 4, generates 8 KW).

Controls: Computerized.

Crew stations: Driver and Gunner operate vehicle systems in roomy crew stations (Bo). Since the controls are computerized, either station can operate any system. NBC kit rated for occupancy of five.

Accommodations: Bunk (100 cf).

Crew: Driver and Gunner. In a pinch, a passenger could ride in the bunk. You could pack two in that bunk, but it would be pretty cozy.

Power System: None. Energy Bank: 4,000,000 KWS Rechargeable Power Cell. Powers drivetrain for 5.56 hours (HT 16). Each laser burst at full RoF drains 104 seconds worth of operating time.

Access space: 12 cf. Empty space: none. Cargo space: 40 cf.

Volume: Body 290 cf; Turret 8.4 cf; Wheels 58 cf. Surface Areas: Body 260 sf; Turret 25 sf; Wheels 90 sf; Total 375 sf.

Structure: Medium Frame, Expensive materials, Responsive structure.

Structural Options: All-wheel steering, improved suspension, improved brakes, smartwheels.

Hit Points: Body 400; Turret 37; Wheels 68 each.

Armor: Standard laminate over expensive fireproof laminate ablative. PD 4 DR 50/200 on body and turret (PD 6 DR 100/400 on TuF; PD 5 DR 75/300 on TuR, TuL, TuB, and BoF). PD 4 DR 20/50 on wheels; PD 4 DR 40/100 wheelguards.

BoF: PD 5 DR 120/480	TuF: PD 6 DR 200/800
BoR: PD 4 DR 50/200	TuR: PD 5 DR 60/240
BoL: PD 4 DR 50/200	TuL: PD 5 DR 60/240
BoB: PD 4 DR 70/280	TuB: PD 5 DR 60/240
BoT: PD 4 DR 30/120	TuT: PD 4 DR 30/120
BoU: PD 4 DR 20/80	

Wheels: PD 4 DR 20/50

Wheelguards: PD 4 DR 40/100

Surface Features: Ram plate, sealed.

Statistics: Empty Weight 10,955 lbs (5.5 tons); Loaded Weight 12,155 lbs (6.1 tons). Volume 356 cf. Size Modifier +4. Price \$348,569 plus computer software. HT 11.

Ground Performance: Speed 110 MPH; gAccel 5; gDecel 20; gMR 2.0; gSR 5. Moderate GP; 1/4 OR speed (25 MPH).

Water Performance: Will float (Flotation 17,107). wThrust 440 lbs; Speed 5 MPH; wAccel 0.7; wMR 0.75; wSR 5; wDecel 10.

IR Laser: 1300 KJ. RoF 8. Dmg 6dx3. SS 20; Acc 18; 1/2D 1500; Max 3100. Wgt 72 lbs. Cost \$11,000. Energy per shot: 2600 KWS. A full burst drains 20,800 KWS.

50mm SALH rocket launcher: RoF 1. Rating 10 lbs. SS 17. \$940. Weight 25 lbs.

50mm SALH rocket: HEDP Damage: 8dx2(5)[4d]. HE Damage: 7dx10. Speed 200. End 17. Max 3400. No 1/2D or Max since they are guided. WPS 10. CPS \$1400. Skill 12.

Patterns of the Stars

A New Spell Matrix for *Earthdawn*

by Andrew Turpin

An exert from the journal of Kendric Par, wizard and scholar.

. . . I had dabbled with magic during the centuries trapped within our kaer, unlocking secrets that few had ever glimpsed, yet my work brought questions rather than answers. Our understanding of magic was based on matrices, but I stumbled upon an oddity: a matrix that held both pattern and threads complete within a construct that differed little from the basic types learned by any apprentice. With this new matrix, spell casting became far simpler, but at times the spell would not activate, as if the matrix itself held the power at bay.

I had no answer to this riddle until the doors of Kaer Mallteg opened. A gentle wind greeted our nervous steps as we gazed at the desolate land before us. Everything seemed ravaged by the passing of the Horrors, but as the wind stirred the dust and my eyes rose to the heavens, I felt joy leap into my heart as I gazed upon the stars for the first time. I felt it then, the first stirring of thought as the mind reaches out and receives an answer, deep inside I knew that my years of searching were over, that I at last understood . . .

Magicians in *Earthdawn* follow a well-defined method for casting their spells. First they attune a matrix so that it can store a pattern; next they weave any extra threads, before finally attempting the spellcasting test. If all these actions are completed, the spell is cast . . . but achieving success requires time and luck, rare gifts in a world where the Horrors lurk. Enhanced and Armored matrices allow a single thread to be held within the matrix in addition to the pattern. This certainly helps to speed things up; the quicker a spell can be cast, the less chance of becoming a tasty morsel! Constellation Matrices, on the other hand, allow all of a spell's threads to be stored in the matrix beforehand, leaving only the spellcasting test to successfully release the magical energy. With only one test needed to finish the spell, precious time is saved. Death can be dodged, madness avoided, as magicians side-step danger to carve their legends across the world.

A Constellation Matrix is formed by linking a Spell Matrix to a constellation. The key to its power lies in the fact that every constellation bears a Name, a unique gift from the Name-givers gazing at the beauty of the heavens. This gift draws magic into the glittering pattern of stars and transforms it into a pool of energy that can be shaped into a mimicry of a spell's Pattern, where it will wait to be released as a spell. A constellation can represent anything: one of the Passions, a legendary hero, or an ancient landmark, just as long as it tells a story to the Name-givers below. Each Constellation Matrix can only be linked to one group of stars, which becomes known as the matrix's key constellation.

For each Constellation Matrix that a magician learns, he must select a different constellation in the sky. If he linked two or more matrices to one constellation, the threads woven into them would conflict, wreaking untold havoc as a savage backlash surged into his unprotected mind.

Magicians may learn the Constellation Matrix talent when they reach Second Circle. Threads are woven into a matrix after it is attuned, allowing a magician to store a spell at his leisure and then perform the spellcasting test when he wishes to cast it. Constellation Matrices have the same Death Rating as Spell Matrices, and when first created can store a first Circle spell, provided it has no threads. Once a character raises the matrix to rank 2, a single thread may be added to the matrix, or a Second Circle spell may be stored. Only by increasing the matrix's rank in this way will it work its wonders, storing any spell provided the sum of its Circle and number of threads does not exceed the Constellation Matrix's rank. Casting the spell becomes far easier: all the threads are held within the matrix, leaving only the spellcasting test for successful completion.

The power of a Constellation Matrix dwells in the glittering expanse of sky that rules between dusk and dawn. Only night grants the power to access the matrices sparkling across the heavens. This may not seem too great a handicap at first, but any spell contained within a Constellation Matrix is useless until night has fallen and the key constellation has risen into the sky. If the constellation only appears for a few brief moments before dawn, then that is the only time that a magician may draw power from the matrix. Many magicians link their matrices to constellations that ride high in the sky and never dip below the horizon, but as a magician learns more and more Constellation Matrices his choice of constellations is gradually pushed closer to the horizon, where time becomes a vital factor that rules every moment of his life. This restriction also limits the amount a character can travel; if his journey takes him so far across the world that the key constellation never climbs over the horizon, the matrix is useless. A hero need not be able to see the matrix's key constellation clearly to be able to cast the spell; if he is indoors, or underground, he is still able to cast the spell. Similarly, blindness places no restriction on the spell's use, neither does bad weather.

A magician who uses Constellation Matrices feels empty and alone during the daylight hours, consciously aware of his missing magic as he counts the minutes until the shadows lengthen and dusk falls. If he is careful and chooses spells that work best at night, such as the first Circle nethermancer spell Command Nightflyer, or general purpose spells such as Heat Food, the nighttime restriction will not affect the adventurer very much. Balance is vital, though, and Constellation Matrices should be carefully mixed with other matrix types so that some power is retained during daylight.

Due to the unique nature of Constellation Matrices, reattuning becomes more difficult. The link that is formed between the constellation and the matrix affects the level of difficulty whenever a reattuning test is made. The new difficulty is calculated by adding the number of threads that the spell possesses to the original reattuning difficulty. Once a successful reattuning test is achieved, the character must weave all threads into the matrix: remember that a constellation matrix only works when the pattern and all of the spell's threads are woven into it. Reattuning on the fly becomes much more difficult, forcing a magician to be even more careful when selecting his spells.

Any adepts brave (or foolish) enough to enter astral space will find that their Constellation Matrices work just as well within the birth place of the Horrors. Many constellations are present, their astral imprints clearly visible as subtle reflections of reality that sparkle within the astral imitation of the sky. Perceptive travelers, though, will notice that the constellations seem slightly different: certain stars sparkle more brightly, colors may be different compared to their counterparts in the physical world, or entire regions of stars may not exist at all. In astral space, a constellation's brightness is dependent on the strength of the legend it is associated with. For instance, the constellation of Jaspree twinkles brightly within the vast expanse of the astral domain, whereas a constellation named after a little known hero will only be dimly visible. Constellations also show up more clearly in astral space, since stars without Names show no astral imprint and are therefore not visible. This darkens the astral "sky," highlighting what constellations remain, but also serves to highlight the presence of any Constellation Matrices, lowering their Death Rating to 5 should anyone try to destroy them. Casting Constellation Matrix spells from one of the Netherworlds or Elemental planes is impossible, as the patterns of the constellations are not represented in these alien domains.

If learned, Constellation Matrices become an important part of a magician's abilities. Spells stored in them are quicker to cast, but may only be used during the hours of darkness. Learning which spells to place within these strange matrices is an art in itself, and balancing these types of matrices with others is a delicate business: learning too many Constellation Matrices limits your power during the daytime, while learning other types of matrices means lengthy cast times. Choosing the right path is a dangerous game, and to many it's the first footfall on the road to adventure. Think carefully, and may the stars guide your way, for the dark holds many truths.

Darkness is the key to my power, stars the focus of all the magic I wield. I have tasted the limits of what man can achieve, yet when dawn's fragile light brightens the horizon I feel naked and afraid, stripped of my defences, and visible to the world as a mortal man, powerless against the evil that hunts me. Am I afraid of the dark? No, tis daylight that gnaws at my soul . . .

Elder Ragan's words to his grandson.

Do You Tap?

Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu for *GURPS Martial Arts*

by M.L. Roberts

Since the introduction of Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (BJJ) to the world, police officers, soldiers, traditional martial artists, self-defense enthusiasts and couch potatoes, impressed by BJJ practitioners' abilities to overcome bigger, stronger opponents in No-Holds-Barred matches, have sought to learn the art.

Accordingly, GMs should make this style available to any modern *GURPS* setting that takes place after 1993 in the United States or after the 1950s in Brazil. A few individuals may have learned the style clandestinely prior to the aforementioned dates (an appropriate Unusual Background advantage) but they are rare. In any case, the style described here did not exist before the 1920s in Brazil. (Those interested in the history of BJJ can see the book and website cited at the end of this article for detailed treatments of the subject.)

The existing grappling rules found in p. B111 and p. CII69 emphasize ST and DX over skill. However, Mixed Martial Arts tournaments have demonstrated that a fighter with the right skills and experience can deftly defeat a bigger, stronger, opponent.

This article introduces maneuvers, skill-modifications, and rules designed to accommodate the BJJ style within the *GURPS* system.

The Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu Strategy for Self-Defense

The BJJ artist seeks to submit, or "tap out," his opponent. Early BJJ artists reasoned that it makes no sense for a smaller person to stand up and trade strikes with a stronger opponent, risking severe injury, or worse, getting knocked out. They also observed that most street fights ended, whether by accident or design, on the ground. So, they chose to focus on ground fighting as the most important aspect of self-defense.

The BJJ artist tries to keep out of striking range until he can slip a punch, clinch with his opponent, and take him down. (Even boxers clinch when they don't want to get hit!) Once the fight reaches the ground, the BJJ artist has a distinct advantage over an opponent who has no grappling training at all, even if that opponent is larger or stronger.

Take a great runner and a great swimmer: a runner can win all the foot races in the world, but if he has never learned to swim and suddenly finds himself in a pool, he will flap about, tire quickly, and drown. Likewise, a fighter without grappling skills will struggle without strategy, tire easily, and will probably be defeated on the ground.

A Note on Fatigue and Ground Fighting

The generic "extra effort" rules found in *pp. CII171-2* should be used to simulate the fact that people unskilled in grappling tire easily when fighting a skilled opponent. For example, an unskilled fighter pinned by a grappler may try to throw him off by performing a lift maneuver, which happens to be a fatigue-spending, ineffectual strategy. The BJJ artist counts on this, especially with larger, stronger opponents. As an opponent gets more and more fatigued, the chances of defeating him increase dramatically. GMs must understand that to correctly capture the effectiveness of BJJ in the *GURPS* system, the extra effort rules should be applied where appropriate.

Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu as a Special Case of the Judo Skill

While Judoka do possess considerable ground fighting skills (Ne Waza), when compared to the average martial artist

trained in striking arts, their primary expertise remains throwing. On the other hand, the BJJ practitioner does most of his training on the ground. As such, those with the BJJ style gain the Ground Fighting maneuver at their Judo skill level with no extra cost. Because of this emphasis, the BJJ artist develops an ability to "flow" from position to position or from submission to submission. In order to simulate this in combat, allow the BJJ stylist to transition into the next position or submission if his opponent wins a Quick Contest to defend by only 1 or 2. This means the practitioner attacks first on the following round, even if the defender has a higher Speed. This puts one's opponent on the run, having to constantly defend against attacks. However, if the opponent wins the contest by 3 or more he has freed himself and can resume fighting from a better position, such as "inside the Guard" (see below), and on his proper turn in the round. Note that freeing oneself from a submission does not necessarily free one from a bad position. This must be rolled for separately.

19 Points (No Cinematic Abilities)

Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu

Primary Skills: Judo, Tactics (BJJ Strategy)

Secondary Skills: Breath Control, Sensitivity, Body Language, Immovable Stance, Style Familiarity

Optional Skills: Style Analysis, Wrestling, Judo, Boxing, Karate

Maneuvers: Judo Throw, Judo Parry, Clinch, Guard, Guard Pass, Ground Control, Ground Escape, Ground Fighting [at Judo skill level, no cost], Choke Hold, Breakfall, Arm Lock, Technical Standing, Rear Mounting, Slip, Disarming, Leg Grapple, Head Lock

New Maneuvers

Clinch (Average) *Defaults to Judo or Wrestling -2, Boxing -3, or DX -4*
Prerequisite: None

In the martial arts, the term Clinch refers to a standing position wherein one person controls another by hugging his upper body tightly, not allowing the opponent any space to launch effective strikes. However, the skill for game purposes also covers making and breaking grips, even on the ground, an important aspect of grappling.

Use of the Clinch replaces the DX-based rule in p. B111 and p. CII69 for making a grapple maneuver. The importance of skill in achieving or breaking a grapple versus physical attributes is more in line with reality. An opponent may resist using his own Clinch skill or the default if he lacks it. Add +1 per every 2 points of ST over 12. The Judo skill confers a +1 bonus to grab, if the opponent wears any kind of clothing that provides a grip.

Once a foe has been successfully grappled he is at -4 DX to any skill save for continued attempts at using the Clinch skill to escape the grapple. Note, as per p. CII69, an upper body grapple leaves the legs free for knee strikes, etc., while a lower body grapple leaves the arms free for punches.

Those who successfully punch while their upper bodies are grappled suffer -2 to damage.

Guard (Hard) *Defaults to Judo (Special)*
Prerequisite: Judo

The Guard allows one to fight from a position that might normally be considered disadvantageous, i.e., with his back on the ground, though his legs will usually be locked around the opponent's back or his feet planted firmly on the opponent's hips, in order to control his opponent's hips and, therefore, movement. The BJJ artist does not feel

uncomfortable in this position. From here he may submit his opponent (i.e., break the arm using an Arm Lock or put him to sleep using a Choke Hold) or use leverage to "Sweep" his opponent, a special case of the Judo Throw maneuver whereby the opponent ends up with his back on the ground and the BJJ practitioner ends up on top, either in Top Mount, Side Mount or in his opponent's Guard (see below). He may also bicycle kick an opponent doing kick damage -1.

The BJJ practitioner parries strikes thrown at him while someone remains in his Guard at 2/3 his skill level, as per the Judo Parry maneuver, and he can likewise initiate an Arm Lock, Choke Hold, or Judo Throw "Sweep" after a successful parry. Those without the Guard maneuver cannot apply the Judo Parry skill while on the ground.

BJJ stylists will often pull their opponents into their guards to avoid being thrown or hit, but must first grapple opponents using the Clinch maneuver. Roll Guard skill to "pull guard." The Guard Pass maneuver may be used to resist, but this option is only available to those with the proper skill prerequisite. Once a fighter has successfully clinched an opponent, and brought him into his guard, he may attempt an Arm Lock, a Choke Hold, or use the Judo Throw "Sweep" maneuver to end up on top of his opponent. Should an opponent break free of an arm or upper body clinch, he will still need to break the grip of the guard player's legs around his body, requiring the use of the Guard pass skill below.

The guard player must remain alert for opponents picking him up and slamming him on the ground, or pushing him up against a wall or other obstruction that limits his ability to move his hips. To avoid being picked up the guard player must roll Guard skill vs. ST. Failing that, the BJJ artist may elect to open his guard by unlocking his legs around the opponent's back, before his opponent has a chance to slam him, using Breakfall to negate or diminish the falling damage.

Guard Pass (Hard)

Defaults to Judo -2 or Wrestling -3; ST -5

Prerequisite: Judo

This maneuver allows a fighter to "pass the guard," i.e., bypass the control exerted by the Guard Player's hands and feet on his body to achieve a superior position, from which he can control his opponent. This process takes at least two rolls to complete. First roll Guard Pass vs. Guard to see if the passer can successfully "open the guard," i.e., unlock the guard player's legs from around his body, or effectively move the controlling feet from his hips. The second roll is a Quick Contest to actually bypass the legs and attempt to achieve Side Mount (see below). After a successful Guard Pass, a Quick Contest of Ground Control vs. Ground Escape immediately follows.

Use the Guard Pass or Immovable Stance skill in a Quick Contest to counter the Judo Throw "Sweep" Maneuver. This maneuver may also be substituted for ST in contests to resist Arm Lock and Choke Hold maneuvers that an opponent attempts from the Guard.

If a person chooses to stand up in another's Guard, he may rain down a series of punches that could knock the guard player out, but doing so exposes him to the risk of a Judo Parry leading to a Judo Throw "Sweep" or Arm Lock maneuver, for one cannot both punch and Guard Pass or use Immovable Stance in the same round.

Ground Control (Average)

Defaults to Judo or Wrestling -3

Prerequisite: Judo or Wrestling

This maneuver allows the practitioner to control his opponent from any of three "top" positions: Side Mount, Top Mount, and Knee-in-Belly; and from the Rear Mount, but not from within an opponent's guard. Each round, roll a Quick Contest between Ground Control and Ground Escape. If the one attempting the Control wins, he has achieved a pin, and his opponent loses one FT. Thereafter, the controller is at +2 against all Ground Escape attempts, plus a +1 per every 10 lbs. he has over his opponent's weight. These bonuses do not apply until the practitioner has won the initial contest to achieve control. However, if the controller attempts a submission, he suffers a penalty of -1. A pinned

opponent will likely expend extra effort to lift his opponent off of him, if he lacks the escape skill.

Once the artist has won a contest to control from any of the top positions (Side Mount, Top Mount, Knee-in-Belly), he may transition into any of the other top positions if he wins a Quick Contest, Ground Control +2 vs. Ground Escape.

Add +1 to the skill roll for every two points of ST over 12.

1. *Side Mount*. This means that the practitioner has pinned his opponent by lying over him perpendicularly. The practitioner can set up submissions with little danger of being hit. The controller's strikes, however, are also limited to elbows and knees. Trying to throw punches in this position gives the opponent a +2 bonus to an attempted escape.
2. *Top Mount*. This position is achieved by straddling an opponent's torso, in effect sitting on his abdomen. From here a practitioner may rain down damaging punches and elbow strikes or set up a submission. An untrained ground fighter attempting to parry or block strikes with his arms, presents an opportunity for the practitioner to apply the Arm Lock maneuver.
3. *Knee-in-Belly*. This position is usually achieved by transitioning from Side Mount, though a practitioner may also transition into this position directly from a Guard Pass. The BJJ artist controls his opponent by placing his shin across the stomach, thereby making it difficult for the opponent to breathe or move. The other foot stays firmly planted on the ground to provide a base. The practitioner may attempt Arm Locks, Choke Holds and punches from this position, or may opt to transition straight to Top Mount. Even against trained opponents this maneuver drains FT. Someone who does not have the Ground Escape skill loses FT at a rate of one every three rounds while the practitioner maintains control. Those with the Ground Escape skill lose FT at a reduced rate discussed below. Due to the difficulty of maintaining balance in this position, smaller opponents attempting this against larger opponents do so at a -2 penalty. From this position the practitioner remains alert and can still defend against other attackers. It is a simple matter to stand up in order to face his opponent's cronies, and as such is the most useful position in a "multiple attacker" scenario.
4. *Rear Mount*. Considered the best position one can achieve in single combat, because a practitioner can attack his opponent with impunity while his opponent's only option is escape. The BJJ practitioner achieves Rear Mount by placing his feet on the inner thighs of the opponent (called "putting your hooks in") to control the opponent's hips and keep him from facing the attacker. The BJJ artist may choose the Arm Lock or Choke Hold maneuvers, or he may opt to throw punches or elbow strikes to the back of his opponent's head. This position is described as a maneuver below. Note the Rear Mount skill is used to achieve the position, but Ground Control is used to hold onto it.

Ground Escape (Hard)

Defaults to Judo or Wrestling -3

Prerequisite: Judo or Wrestling

This maneuver covers escapes from the Side Mount, Top Mount, Knee-in-Belly, and Rear Mount positions.

1. *The Side Mount* position is escaped by placing one's attacker in the Guard, or by turning over to all-fours and grabbing an opponent's legs in order to attempt a take-down with the usual penalties for attempting a take-down from the ground (pp. B111-12). Also, the practitioner can opt to go for an Arm Lock maneuver right away, but if the attempt fails he often lands himself back into Side Mount position.
2. *Top Mount*. The practitioner escapes either by moving his hips to place his opponent in the Guard or by controlling an opponent's arm and bridging him over so that the practitioner ends up in his opponent's guard. A player can announce whether he intends to hip-escape or bridge. These two maneuvers may also occur as a feint combo, i.e., bridge first, then hip-escape, and in reality most people must escape from skilled opponents in this way. The practitioner's Judo Parry attempts are reduced by -2 to avoid strikes from a Top-Mounted opponent, due to the inferiority of his position, though he may still attempt a Clinch maneuver to grapple his opponent's arms and avoid strikes altogether. This attempt also suffers a -2 penalty.
3. *Knee-in-Belly*. The BJJ artist escapes this position, usually by placing the opponent in his guard, but sometimes by unbalancing and toppling his opponent over so that he achieves a top position. This could mean he has

landed in his opponent's Guard or that, on a critical success, he achieves a Side Mount position. Having at least a skill level of 12 reduces the FT loss rate to one every 4 rounds. A skill of 15 or greater further reduces the rate to one every five rounds and so on in increments of 3 skill points.

4. *Rear Mount*. When a practitioner escapes this position he usually ends up in his opponent's Guard, but on a critical success achieves a superior Side Mount position. Technically, the practitioner has no active defense against strikes from the back, but he may choose to block punches and elbows by grabbing the back of his own head with his hand. This shifts the hit location of damage to his arm and hand instead of his head. This, however, makes him more susceptible to submissions such as Arm Locks and Choke Holds, giving the attacker a +2 to these maneuvers. Alternatively, the practitioner may attempt to grapple the opponent's arms, with the usual penalties of -5 for wild swings. However, no penalties apply for resisting the Choke Hold maneuver; it comes down to a Quick Contest between the Ground Escape skill and the Choke Hold maneuver. Escaping the Rear Mount always involves dislodging at least one "hook" from the inner thigh and turning to face the opponent.

Technical Standing (Average)

Defaults to Judo -2

Prerequisite: Judo

This maneuver allows a practitioner to defend against attacks while standing up from any ground position. With a successful skill roll, he has no penalty to active defenses while attempting to stand. He may even opt to launch a kick to the knee or shin to halt his opponent's advance, buying him the necessary time and space to stand up in a fighting stance.

Rear Mount (Hard)

Defaults to Judo -3 or Wrestling -5

Prerequisite: Judo or Wrestling

Also called "Taking-the-Back," this maneuver is attempted anytime an opponent exposes his back (Wrestlers are especially prone to this mistake) by rolling over on hands and knees. The practitioner attempts to place his "hooks" in and achieve Rear Mount, being the best possible offensive position one can achieve. Roll a Quick Contest of Rear Mount vs. DX-2 to achieve "hooks." Once a person has Rear Mounted his opponent, he can strike or apply submission maneuvers freely, leaving his opponent with no choice but to defend or escape. A practitioner can also attempt to Rear Mount from his Guard. First, roll against Guard skill at a -3 penalty. Success indicates the BJJ artist has pulled his opponent's arm diagonally across his chest, and he has scooted out to the side. Now that his back is exposed, he may roll against the Rear Mount skill to achieve "hooks."

Special Cases of Existing Maneuvers

Judo Throw

In BJJ there are two cases of the Throw maneuver: the Throw used to take an opponent down and the Throw used to change positions or "Sweep" from the guard. Realistically, BJJ artists, unless they have had Judo training do not throw nearly as well as their Judoka counterparts, who train this skill more extensively. To reflect this the Throw maneuver as it pertains to standing throws defaults to Judo -3.

Judo Throw "Sweep"

BJJ specializes in this maneuver, which allows the practitioner to trade places with his opponent, so that the opponent ends up with his back on the ground and the practitioner on top (in either Top Mount, at best, or in the opponent's Guard, at worst). The BJJ practitioner suffers no penalty for being on the ground when attempting a "Sweep." Roll a Quick Contest of Judo Throw "Sweep" vs. Guard Pass, Immovable Stance or ST-2, whichever is greater. If the

practitioner wins the opponent gets turned over. This maneuver typically does little damage if the opponent is on his knees at the time he is swept. However, if the opponent was standing at the time, the potential for damage, especially on concrete is high. Apply the normal Judo Throw damage. On a critical success the BJJ artist sweeps straight to the Top Mount position.

Arm Lock

All the rules stated in p. MA44 regarding the Arm Lock maneuver hold true. However, a BJJ artist can apply this maneuver from any position. If he has won a Quick Contest to establish Ground Control, the BJJ artist may apply this maneuver from any of the dominant control positions mentioned under the Ground Control section. The attempt is at +1. Attempts to Arm Lock from any of the bottom escape positions are at -6 and take away any active defenses. Arm Locks from the Guard incur no penalties and may be used in combinations, e.g., Arm Lock-Sweep or Arm Lock-Choke.

Choke Hold

In BJJ, this maneuver does not apply pressure to the windpipe with the forearm, as stated in p. MA45, but, when done correctly, pinches the carotid arteries, cutting off blood flow to the brain. This results in the victim passing out in as little as 3 seconds if applied with enough force, but does *not* permanently damage the victim's throat. A BJJ artist can choke from many more positions than the Rear Mount: he can also choke from Side Mount, Top Mount, Knee-in-Belly, and his Guard, gaining a +2 to the effort if his opponent has clothing that can be used against him.

Slip

As per p. MA54, save that now Judo counts as a prerequisite for this maneuver. This maneuver is taught to every BJJ artist for self-defense purposes.

Suggested Reading

These two sources give fairly objective treatments of the history of Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu. The book gives an excellent treatment of the Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu strategy discussed above.

- *Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu Theory and Technique*, Renzo and Royler Gracie with John Danaher, 2001
- <http://martialarts.about.com/library/weekly/aa061499.htm>

Pyramid Review

Star Hero (for the *Hero System*)

Published by [Hero Games](#)

Written by James Cambias and Steven S. Long

Art by Storn Cook, Andrew Cremeans, Keith Curtis, Malcolm Harrison, Jeff Hebert, Bryce Nakagawa, Brad Nault, Klaus Scherwinski, Greg Smith, and Chris Stevens

328-page b&w softcover; \$29.99

After hitting one out of the park with its revised and expanded version of ***Hero System 5th Edition***, Hero Games started hitting all the high notes of the ***Hero*** line, the books that had made the system the mainstay hit it's been for over 20 years. Having released the exhaustive Champions genre book, Hero Games now turns its attention to ***Star Hero***, the sourcebook for all things outer space and science fiction.

And a full-course meal it is. ***Star Hero*** serves two purposes: It describes the science-fiction genre in heavy detail, and it firmly ensconces the ***Hero System*** in that milieu. It achieves both goals with an unmatched level of thoroughness and utility.

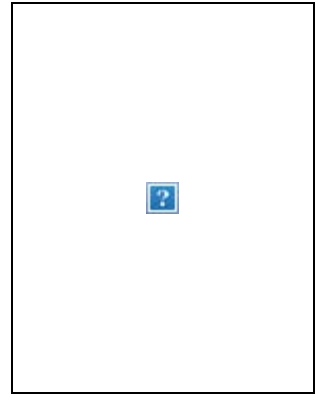
There are several chapters that deal with the science and setting components alone. The book starts big -- discussions of galaxies and stars -- and peels the onion down to its core, describing planets, their formations, and the societies and beings that arise on them. Many such sections are divided in two; the first half will explain something scientifically, and the second half illustrates how this applies in a campaign setting.

The ***Hero System*** has come a long way since its inception, and nowhere is this made more abundantly clear than in the pages of ***Star Hero***. Computers and characters, starships and spacesuits, psionics and sensor systems -- copious examples show how just about anything can be represented in game terms by careful and considered use of ***Hero System 5th Edition***. Simple and succinct, the system sees applications here that will keep players' minds working overtime.

Beyond being a complete accounting of current thinking and a full repository of Hero samples, the manuscript helps the potential player get into the sci-fi groove. It has been deliberately designed to be useful to players and GMs alike. The former can find countless notions for new PCs and new ways to use the "old" rules when making a character -- there are alien race and professional Package Deals, and fresh interpretations on favorite Abilities, Disadvantages, and Perks.

The latter will have referee advice spilling out their port nacelles. Taking apart genre conventions piece by piece, the book touts the uses of everything from psionics to time travel while warning of the potential pitfalls of same. Aliens, bizarre life forms, starships, and all the rockin' equipment players expect from an RPG product are present -- few stones are left unturned in the quest to provide an all-inclusive reference manual.

Adventures and campaigns are broken down into their constituent pieces, too, so the GM can decide whether his game will be space opera or cyber crime, high-tech or low sci-fi. Want to cross a game about the Space Patrol with your ***Western Hero*** game? This book will help you do it, and suggest ways to work in a theme while you're at it. Want to know the effects of a galactic government, or how to keep teleportation pods from ruining your game? From the big



picture to the little picture, the book allows you to maneuver your subject matter into the microscope in any way you please, and every view feels new.

The book eschews any kind of actual setting -- that's been reserved for the forthcoming ***Terran Empire*** book, to which this volume alludes briefly throughout, usually for the sake of examples. All the material contained herein is the nuts and bolts of building your worlds, all the factors and facets that figure into putting together a coherent setting of your own (so there are no secrets to be spilled -- anyone can read it without spoiling the experience). The book offers plenty of ideas, and it will probably put into words the ideas that have been stewing in your head for a while anyway, but be prepared to bring a dash of your own creativity.

There is, by necessity, a lot of up-to-date information about the nature of space and science (as we currently understand it), and some of it isn't easy. Most of the math is imparted painlessly, and there's almost always a "close enough" approach presented for those GMs whose players will forgive a little inaccuracy . . . but for those that demand it, the hard data is there.

Star Hero is cleanly laid out, and the visual style is great -- the worst of the artwork is anything but bad, and it shows more flair and spark than most generic sourcebooks. When all is said and done, the book may not be the best read you've had. The style isn't dry, the authors know whereof they speak, and colorful examples and thought-provoking illustrations (of both the textual and visual breed) abound, but it still boils down to the fundamentals, and those can be a bear to absorb. But ***Star Hero*** is a must-have for anyone who wishes to adventure among the stars, and so long as you bring the fuel, it will take your campaign where you want it to go.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

The Keeper's Companion 2 - Prohibition, Firearms, Tomes & Creatures (for Call of Cthulhu)

Published by [Chaosium Inc.](#)

Written by Adam Gauntlett, Brian M. Sammons, William Dietze, Greg Henrikson, Charles P. Zaglanis, J. Gordon Olmstead-Dean, M. J. Lempert and James Crowder

Cover by Paul Carrick

Illustrated by Paul Carrick and Keith DeCesare

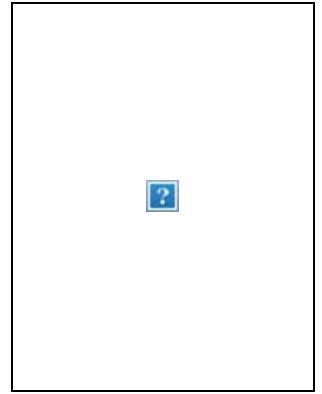
168-page b&w softcover; \$23.95

For the Keeper of Secrets, one of the most useful releases for Chaosium's *Call of Cthulhu RPG* during 2000 was [The Keeper's Companion](#), an indispensable update and expansion of *The Keeper's Compendium*, which by then had been long out of print. Described as "A Core Book For Keepers, Vol. 1," Chaosium promised to follow it up with a second volume, and after a wait of some two years, it has finally arrived. While the first volume was near, but not quite perfect, hopefully time has enabled the authors to remove any such minor problems from this sequel.

Like *The Keeper's Companion*, *The Keeper's Companion 2* sports a full wraparound of Cthulhu himself. Drawn again by Paul Carrick, the illustrations are so similar that initially I thought the original from *The Keeper's Companion* had been used again. Inside, the book is laid out in a less adventurous style than has been the norm with recent releases from Chaosium for *Call of Cthulhu*, but is nevertheless easy on the eye and backed up by a decent index -- unlike the first book. Paul Carrick's interior illustrations are as excellent as ever, and Keith DeCesare's depiction of the various guns described in the chapter entitled "Iron" echo the style seen in Green Ronin Publishing's recent update of *Ultramodern Firearms* for the *d20 System*. One major difference between the first and second volumes is their length -- at just 168 pages, *The Keeper's Companion 2* is 40 pages shorter than *The Keeper's Companion*, yet the price has remained the same.

The Keeper's Companion 2 opens with Adam Gauntlett's "Prohibition," a 50-page essay on the history and effect of the 18th amendment to the U. S. constitution. Occasionally a little dry, this runs from Prohibition's origins in the various temperance movements through the Anti Saloon League's success in creating the Volstead Act, then lobbying for its adoption by Congress and finally its required ratification by 36 states. Where the focus of past articles upon Prohibition has been more on gangsters and the like, this lengthy piece is broader in its focus. It looks at not just the mob, but the anti-alcohol advocates that brought about Prohibition and maintained a strong influence on Congressional politics during the 20s; the rum-runners and those that smuggled drink from Canada (and elsewhere) before crime and the syndicates muscled in; the consumers and the type of establishments they frequented; and the efforts of the law enforcement agencies brought to bear upon Prohibition. This is split between the somewhat disinterested local law (which became tarred by the brush of corruption), the limited labours of the Prohibition Bureau (eventually to become the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms) and the greater successes of the Coast Guard.

The strength of this essay is its usefulness for what is essentially the *Call of Cthulhu* default campaign timeframe -- the 1920s -- for which most of the game's supplements are written. Indeed, there have been several scenarios written



with Prohibition as part of their theme, of which "Dead Man Stomp" from the *Call of Cthulhu* rulebook and "The Innsmouth Connection" from [Before the Fall](#) spring to mind. Considering the length of this piece, perhaps a timeline could have been included, so as to make an implementation of the history easier. Equally, a bibliography would be valuable to the Keeper wanting to conduct more research and given the length of this essay, it seems strange that it does not have one attached. Otherwise, this is an excellent piece for *Call of Cthulhu*, as well as any 1920s RPG.

The second large section is "The Keeper's List of Lists" by Brian M. Sammons, which breaks down Call of Cthulhu's many scenarios by Era; The Opposition (Creatures, Maniacs and Great Old Ones); Legendary Heroes and Villains; Cults, Sects and Secret Societies; Mythos Tomes; and Fictitious Locations. Backed up with a "Non-Chaosium Bibliography," the list is not quite up-to-date, as it does not include Pagan Publishing's most recent release [The Resurrected III: Out of the Vault](#), which is surprising considering the length of time that this supplement has been waiting for release. One other complaint is that the list of scenarios by era does not split those set in the 1920s and 1930s into their respective decades, but instead, lumps them in together. Admittedly, there are few scenarios written for the 1930s, but there are enough to make the difference, and with the forthcoming release of *Pulp Cthulhu*, this should be expected to grow.

As useful as this list of lists is, it suffers from a number of omissions. First off, it does not include any of the published solo adventures (*Alone Against the Dark*, *Alone Against the Wendigo*, *Alone on Halloween*, and *Grimrock Isle*) which is understandable as they are of little use for running with players (though in the case of *Grimrock Isle*, notes are given for running it as a normal adventure). Even so, these four could have been included for completion's sake. Although dedicated magazines such as *The Whisperer*, *The Unspeakable Oath*, and [The Black Seal](#) are covered, less dedicated magazines that have contained *Call of Cthulhu* related articles and adventures are not. The author's argument that these are long out of print and difficult to find is spurious, especially when so many of the game's supplements and campaign books (both from Chaosium and other publishers) are equally out of print and difficult to find . . . if not more so. There is no denying the usefulness of these lists, but the articles and adventures from the likes of Games Workshop's *White Dwarf*, GDW's *Challenge*, FASA's *Stardrive/Stargate*, Chaosium's own *Different Worlds*, *Shadis*, and other magazines could just as easily have been included. Not just because the book has the space, but again for completists' sake.

Finally, perhaps another two lists could have been given as an aid to the Keeper. The first of these would complement the Fictitious Locations list and break the various adventures by 'real world' location. The second would add depth to the by Era list and give the scenarios by year. This is a little more difficult as not every scenario is tied to a specific time or year, but enough are for this list to prove useful for the Keeper.

Following this is the third long section of *The Keeper's Companion 2*. Greg Henrikson's "Iron: a Survey of Civilian Small Arms Used in the 1890s, 1920s, and the Present" is another look at the place of firearms in the setting of *Call of Cthulhu*. It adds two new skills: Handloading for casting and priming a character's own ammunition, and Gunsmithing, for the repair and modification of firearms. The first skill is useful for "hot" handloading ammunition -- the filling of a cartridge with extra grains of powder to give it that added hitting power. In game terms, this gives it on average an extra +1 on the damage roll. There is lots of advice on handling guns, from the perspective of both player and Keeper alike, as well as a nice list of potential malfunctions should ever an attack roll fail spectacularly badly. These are more than the simple-but-common-to-most-games jam or misfire and cover revolvers (cylinder bulge or crack, negligent discharge), semi-automatic weapons (limp wristing, failure to feed), lever-action weapons (misfeed, catastrophic magazine detonation) as well as malfunctions to most weapons (hang fire, squib load, forgetting the safety). In a game these should help spice up those fraught combat situations when a gun malfunctions and in all likelihood educate investigators in the ways of proper firearms maintenance and handling.

The Bulk of "Iron" is given over to a list of some of the more common guns available to the average investigator. There are oddities discussed such as the .50 BMG Sniper Rifle, the Thompson Submachine Gun in .45 ACP, and to a lesser extent, the Webley-Fosberry Automatic Revolver in .455 Webley. While the ubiquitous Tommy Gun may be an icon of the era, this article stresses that it is actually highly unlikely that investigators will be able to obtain one. Indeed, its discussion here and in the earlier article, Prohibition, make excellent companion pieces to the longer history of the weapon found in issue 14/15 of Pagan Publishing's *The Unspeakable Oath*. More common then, and more deadly for their accuracy, are the rifles covered in "Iron." The 13 discussed are mostly civilian models and include

various lever action rifles, a pair of "elephant guns," and just the two specifically military weapons. Backed up with five shotguns, these represent the type of guns that an average investigator may not only be able to purchase with ease, but also use without necessarily suffering the full scrutiny of the law. Not so with automatic weapons or sawn-off shotguns. (Of course, the same rules apply to the average cultist . . .) A small selection of handguns is also included, but these are not as likely to make into a game compared with the other weapons.

Continuing on from *The Keeper's Companion*, Brian M. Sammons summarises 10 Mythos tomes in "The Mythos Collector" -- *Book of Iod, Chronike von Nath, and Confessions of the Mad Monk Clinthanus, Letters of Nestar, The Nyhargo Codex, Soul of Chaos, Testament of Carnamago, The Tunneller Below, Visions From Yaddith, and Von denen Verdammten*. Some of these come from the *Call of Cthulhu* rulebook and are worthy expansions upon the basic statistics given there. This does still leave a large number of tomes still awaiting this treatment, both from the rulebook and *The Keeper's Companion*. Backing up these tomes are 16 new spells that relate to their contents as well as two new creatures, the Lesser Servitor Race, the Nagaae, and the Tunnelers Below, a Lesser Independent Race.

Where *The Keeper's Companion* examined over 20 arcane artifacts from Mythos fiction and gaming material, this second volume follows it up with "Mythos Ex Machina," a collection of the many technological items that have appeared in various adventures. Culled by Charles P. Zaglanis, these 40 items are organized by species: Deep Ones, Elder Things, Great Race, Humans (Hyperborean and Modern), Mi-go, Serpent People, Insects from Shaggai, and Great Race of Yith. Each is fully explained and ends with details of the scenario it is sourced from and the original authors.

Alongside the main pieces in *The Keeper's Companion 2* are three smaller entries. The first of these is J. Gordon Olmstead-Dean's "LaVey, Satanism and the Big Squid," a brief look at the relationship between modern day Satanism and the Mythos. This overview draws a number of connections between LaVey and Lovecraft, which given the subject are odd at best. The final pair of articles complements each other rather well -- in the first of these William Dietze discusses the nature and eventual effect of a strange corpse in "The Diary of Dr. Lippencot" and its accompanying "Autopsy Report." Together these would make excellent handouts for game set in modern day New England, or even for Pagan Publishing's *Delta Green*. The second is "Notes on Human-Deep One Reproduction" by M. J. Lempert and James Crowder, which is short, but of use if the Keeper wants to implement the machinations of Deep One society on his players.

The Keeper's Companion 2 is clearly not as useful as was its predecessor, *The Keeper's Companion*, was and continues to be. In particular "The Keeper's List of Lists" is disappointing because it could have been far more extensive than what is given here. Fortunately, there is no denying that some of its contents are indeed *useful*, particularly the articles on Prohibition, firearms and the lists, but more so as reference material, rather than something the Keeper might want to have at hand.

--Matthew Pook

Heroes

This column is difficult for me to write, and not merely because I'm in hour 180 of an ear problem that has left me near-deaf, in pain, and suffering from vertigo that occasionally makes me drift slightly off-course, so I'll look up at the screen and note that yjr drmyrmvr o esd ytuomh yp etoyr ;ppld ;olr yjod/

No, I find myself again custodian of a weekly soapbox where I try to make sense of the senseless, struggling between the extremes of babbling on in the same fashion that others have (really, what insight can I *possibly* offer into this affair when some of the brightest and most eloquent minds of the world have already done so?), and risking irreverence by tying into a hobby that is, ultimately, unimportant in the grand scheme of things.

Of course, I'm speaking of the *Columbia* tragedy, and the sacrifice made by its crew.

This is a sacrifice that has been called "heroic" by many; the astronauts themselves have been described as heroes.

And, as I was sitting in my hotel room, watching the news, thinking random thoughts (Did this tragedy seem somehow less real because it happened on a Saturday? Do I deal with crises in the short term by worrying how this affects work or school? "Do we stay open? Do we go home?"), one of the thoughts I had was, is the death of people who were just trying to come home *really* heroic? What is a hero? Is the death of an astronaut trying to return a vessel to Earth any more heroic than an airline pilot who goes down with his plane, or a train engineer who perishes when his charge derails? What about all the astronauts who *haven't* died?

Farming, logging, crab fishing, and firefighting are some of the most dangerous professions in the United States, yet only one of those is routinely described as "heroic." Why is this? Is it because three of the four don't involve saving lives? If so, does this mean the farmer who dies while trying to produce food to keep people from starving to death is less heroic than a firefighter who saves someone? Is heroism tied to the immediacy of the situation? Is the fireman who saves the lives of those in a home more heroic than the building inspector who keeps it from burning in the first place?

I also thought of one of the great conundrums I've faced when thinking about history, fiction, and gaming. Is it heroic when the deed in question needs to be done? Is the party that assembles to save the world - whether on the beaches of Normandy or the peaks of Mount Doom -- doing something heroic if they are the only ones who can do so? (Presumably they have some vested interest in continuing to have a world to live in.)

Now, as is often the conceit for columns of this sort, I've consulted my *Webster's Ninth Collegiate Dictionary*. And one of the definitions presented for "hero" is "one that shows great courage."

This was interesting, since I immediately thought of one of the adages that was cited a fair bit when honoring the fallen rescue workers of September 11th: "The firefighter performs one act of bravery in his career . . . when he takes the oath to be a firefighter. Everything else is in the line of duty." (I'm paraphrasing there; although I found many citations of this adage, I was unable to find an original source, if one exists.) This adage, of course, applies to many different fields: police officers, medics, soldiers . . . and astronauts. When you become an astronaut, you understand that to do so is to be aboard a vessel that consists of rocket fuel wrapped in aluminum; knowing and accepting those risks are acts of great courage . . . and thus heroic.

It is not death that is heroic, although it is often death that reminds us that there *are* heroes. And most heroes I've met - police, military, firefighters, astronauts - deny their own heroism . . . perhaps because they are merely doing what, in their hearts, they feel needs to be done; they may not be assembling a Fellowship to deal with the world's problems, but they are following a calling in their hearts that makes them work to better the world and our understanding of it. (I also tend to extend my definition of "heroism" and "courage" to encompass the unobvious: Remaining a teacher in a rough school district despite better offers and impossible conditions can involve as much sacrifice and dedication as being a police officer.) And some of the greatest heroes - such as parents, religious and community leaders, medical personnel and scientists - are quietly heroic, helping to solve problems and forge the future *without* problems,

minimizing crises before they ever happen.

In an ideal world, we wouldn't need heroes. Homes wouldn't burn down, bad people wouldn't seek to harm others, and a venture into space would be no more perilous than a morning jog. But our world is not ideal. Our world is full of people who would break the law, buildings that burn, and scientific frontiers that remain -- no matter our efforts to romanticize and trivialize them - dangerous and untamed. We should mourn the losses of those who make the final sacrifice, and help honor their memories, but we should be careful not to equate the act of dying with being heroic itself. Heroism is an act of courage; sometimes living is the greatest act of courage of all.

* * *

As mentioned above, I'm undergoing some medical problems currently. I'm working to resolve them, but at present I'm spending a lot of time in pain, in bed wishing for the room to stop spinning, or otherwise unavailable; as such, I may be a bit slower than normal in replying to emails, responding in chats, and so on. I appreciate everyone's patience and understanding, and will hopefully be back to normal soon enough. (Or, at least, as normal as I ever am.)

--*Steven Marsh*

Designer's Notes: GURPS Magic Items 3

by Jonathan Woodward

Introduction

GURPS Magic Items 3 is a book of several parts. The greater part is a catalog of magic items from various settings, mostly submitted by others. As compiler, the most important piece of advice I can give to those planning to submit items to future **GURPS** compilations: Read the submission guidelines! Then, after you have written your submission, *read them again*. Even if your submission is perfect in every other way, if you ignored some of the guidelines, the compiler's first impulse will be to throw it out. (The worst offender was an item submitted with *no physical description whatsoever*. This is despite the fact that the guidelines said that the physical description was the most important part!)

A Taxonomy of Magic Items

Another part of **GURPS Magic Items 3** is the Common Enchantment Table II. This table lists the "over-the-counter" magic items listed for the spells in **GURPS Grimoire** and other sources. Putting this table together involved reading every spell in **GURPS Grimoire** and considering the nature of each item. Along the way, I speculated about a system for organizing the different types of items. This taxonomy may be useful to GMs planning on inventing new items based off **GURPS** spells.

Standard magic items can be broken down into several classes. The first kind *enables the bearer to cast the spell*. Some "enablers" are mage-only, and some are "must touch." Some that affect people are limited to affecting only the wearer. Others are limited in other ways (e.g., the first item listed for Beast Summoning, p. M23, only works on one species). Class I Examples: The Beast-Soother item (p. M23), and the first item listed under Shapeshift Others (p. M25).

A second class applies to spells that affect an *area* or *thing*; many of these spells can be made *permanent*, typically by spending 100 times the normal cost. (Some spells that affect people can be made permanent. They are obviously related to this class, but do not create magic items as such, and so fall outside the taxonomy.) Since these are permanent, none of them have any of the above restrictions on *use*. Anyone who can cast the spell can create the item or area, and from that point on anyone can "use" it. The precise effect is determined during enchantment, and can't be changed. Class II Examples: The Shatterproof item (p. M60), and the second item for the Pull spell (p. G80).

A third class consists of items that permanently cast the spell *on the bearer*. They are usually marked "always on." They sometimes only affect mages. If the spell has a range of possible effects, the item is often limited to one, determined at enchantment. Sometimes the spell will affect the item as well as the user (particularly protective spells, which aren't much good if the item remains unprotected), while others explicitly don't (e.g., Body of Water, p. M40). Some of these items which have negative effects automatically also have the Hex enchantment (p. M43), free. Class III Examples: The second item for the Itch spell (p. M25), and the first item for Great Hallucination (p. G76). Some items of Class I (enablers) become items of Class III when they are *self-powered*. If the item has sufficient Power enchantments that its cost to cast and cost to maintain are zero, and the spell is of an appropriate type (e.g., Flight, p. M71, not Fireball, p. M37), it becomes an "affects bearer" item.

The fourth class is related to the third and second classes, and consists of items that are permanently enchanted to affect a second kind of item. For example, the second item for the Preserve Food spell (p. M48) is a chest or sack, always on, that preserves any food placed inside it. This class isn't part of the second class, since the spell doesn't affect the enchanted item itself, but rather other things brought in proximity to the enchanted item. Class IV Example: The Zombie spell, as listed on p. 41 of **GURPS Undead**, can be enchanted into a coffin, which will resurrect a corpse placed inside it.

The fifth class is small, and is made up of items which *counter* the spell's effects. Class V Examples: The first Mystic Mist item (p. M77), and the third item for the Grease spell (p. G79).

Arguably, there's a sixth class, "rumored." Many of the item listings in **GURPS Magic** say, "Such an item may exist, but nothing definite is known." This serves as a warning to the GM that such an item may unbalance the game.

Lastly, some items simply can't be easily classified, or fall into more than one class. Spells which affect more than one target are often like that. (E.g., Beast Link, p. B23, or Propel, p. G101.)

Here's an outline of the taxonomy, for reference.

- I. Enablers
 - A. May be mage-only.
 - B. May be touch-only (if spell affects a person, item, or area).
 - C. May only allow the spell to be cast on the wearer (if spell affects a person).
 - D. May be otherwise limited (if spell has a range of effects).
- II. Permanent on Item or Area
- III. Permanent on Bearer
 - A. May be mage-only.
 - B. May be otherwise limited (if spell has a range of effects).
 - C. May affect item as well as bearer (if spell can affect both people and items).
 - D. May have automatic Hex (if effect is negative).
 - E. May be a self-powered item that would otherwise be an Enabler.
- IV. Items That Permanently Affect Other Items
- V. Counters
- VI. Rumors

Alchemy

While there are several alchemical items in **GURPS Magic Items 3**, with statistics compatible with Chapter 6 of **GURPS Magic**, I didn't have the time or space to include an in-depth look at alchemy. What follows is a quick-and-dirty way of coming up with the statistics for elixirs, working from the standard **GURPS** spell list.

Every elixir has several statistics: Form, materials cost, time to create, a modifier to skill, and two retail costs (one for common magic, one for secret magic worlds). To define a new elixir, pick a spell from **GURPS Magic** or **GURPS Grimoire** that has the desired effect. Make a note of the necessary time to cast and total energy cost.

The form of an elixir is largely arbitrary, but there are a few guidelines. If a spell affects a person as a whole, the form is probably potion or powder. If the spell affects a body part or a wound, it could be an unguent. If it is an area spell, the elixir's form should be pastille.

Materials cost is based on the energy cost of the spell, and is equal to energy cost times \$25. Time to create is based to time to cast; take the time to cast in seconds, find the square root, and round up to get time to create the elixir in weeks.

To determine the skill modifier, count the total number of prerequisites the spell has. (The Spell Prerequisite Charts in the back of **GURPS Magic** and **GURPS Grimoire** can be very helpful for this.) For example, Resurrection has 9 prerequisite spells: Instant Regeneration, Regeneration, Restoration, Major Healing, Minor Healing, Lend Health, Lend Strength, Summon Spirit, and Death Vision. If the spell requires Magery, add the level of Magery to the total. Resurrection requires Magery 3, so the total is now 12. (Any other unusual prerequisites may also increase the total, at the GM's discretion.)

If this total is 0 (the spell has no prerequisites), the elixir has a skill modifier of +1. (A special note for GMs using the Quick Alchemy rules from p. 18 of **GURPS Wizards**: When quickly preparing an elixir that provides a bonus instead

of the usual penalty, the roll is not made at double the modifier, but rather *half*, rounded down, or +0 in this case.)

If the total is greater than 0, and the spell is a Very Hard skill, divide the total by 2. If the spell is just Hard, divide by 4. (Round down in both cases.) The result is the negative skill modifier.

Retail cost works as per p. M100. Elixirs cost \$25 per alchemist-day (\$50 per day if magic is rare), plus materials cost.

Example: We wish to define an elixir which will have the effects of the Monk's Banquet spell (p. M49), allowing the subject to go without food for a day. Since this arguably affects a body part, the form will be an unguent, which must be rubbed on the stomach. Energy cost to cast the spell is 6, so materials cost is 6 times \$25 equals \$150. Time to cast is 1 second, so time to create in weeks is the square root of 1, or 1 week. Monk's Banquet has 10 prerequisite spells, and also requires Magery 2 and IQ 12+; we decide to call the total 13. Monk's Banquet is not Very Hard, so the skill modifier is 13 divided by 4, rounded down, or -3. Retail cost is \$25 times 7 days (\$175), plus materials, for a total of \$325. (\$500 if magic is rare). In the **GURPS Magic** format:

Sangariah (Elixir of Fasting): Subject can go without food or water for one day, with no ill effects. Unguent (applied to stomach). \$150 in materials; 1 week; -3 to skill. Cost: \$325/\$500.

This system is balanced against itself, and reasonably balanced against the existing elixirs. It could obviously use some refinement, particularly in materials cost, but overall it serves the purpose of a quick-and-dirty system for defining new elixirs.

It Takes All Kinds

Briefs On Three Non-Traditional Relationships

by Michael Anguiano

Love, as they say, is a many splendored thing. Here, then, are some examples of that splendor as it might appear in different settings and genres. Each couple features a dynamic which could easily become a storyline for players, or the individual characters could appear in an ongoing campaign as atmosphere which the players can use in developing their own characters.

Couple #1: Max Normal & Reds (*Contemporary Vampire*)

He: Max Normal

Max is Caitiff. He is relatively new to the local scene, and nobody knows much about him except that he prefers bagged blood rather than hunting. He doesn't make a strong impression and looks like just another white guy. At first glance, Max would more likely be mistaken for a business commuter than any sort of undead. Typically dressed in a business suit and tie, he seems relatively quiet, intelligent, and unassuming. Max is, in fact, all of those things. In conversation, he can hold articulate and intelligent discussion on most subjects but studiously skirts the mention of personal details. He dislikes conflict or confrontation and will typically take the path of least resistance. Being clanless, he recognizes that he lacks any political significance for others and so keeps a low profile to avoid unnecessary abuse. He does carry a pistol for personal protection but mostly relies on strong abilities in Obfuscate to avoid hostilities. He will avoid Reds if it is convenient to do so.

Max is a relatively old generation, probably seventh, but ironically has been a vampire for, as far as he knows, about five years. Red's immortal kiss is his first memory and he knows nothing of his life before that. It makes no sense to him that he could have a world of ingrained behaviors, attitudes, understandings, but not have a single memory of learning them. His research on amnesia has not yielded useful answers. He fears he may be insane. Like Reds.

To counter this, Max cultivates an air of normalcy, reflected in the name he has adopted. He eschews the trappings of the vampiric lifestyle and he views the "goth" or "rave" scenes with distaste. While he understands the prowess gained from his generation, he avoids using it and doesn't discuss it with others. Max loves Reds, but he is very much afraid of her and what she represents. In his first months with her, he discovered that he is unbondable and so he takes solace in being independent from her. Where she goes and what she does is beyond him, and he doesn't want to learn.

She: Reds

Reds is known to be about eight hundred years old and reputedly a figure of some respect amongst Malkavians, but nobody can get a straight answer as to why. She is an elfin, petite woman of mixed Mediterranean descent, with a long mane of shockingly red hair, appearing to be in her late 20s. She demonstrates some respect to her clan but otherwise her demeanor is erratic and inconsistent towards everyone else, regardless of rank, species, or handedness (including Max). She appears to have some strong allies in the background, however, and political hostilities will often abruptly resolve themselves in her favor. Some think she's suffering from bipolar disorder and schizophrenia, some think she's a manipulative genius, but most agree that she's a pain in the ass. Her personal appearance vacillates from incredibly cultivated to complete neglect, although she will always be the former around Max. Her usual clothes are historically anachronistic and she often appears in a Victorian tuxedo, although she occasionally wears a style of fashion that does not otherwise appear for several years or even decades. She will usually carry a sawed-off shotgun (slugs, spiked with

wood and silver) and a pair of silver-inlaid straight razors. She can be a very dangerous individual when she chooses to be, and most other times as well.

Reds communicates mostly through gestures. Her speech sounds like an aphasiac word-salad and she will not, perhaps cannot, speak otherwise. Max has no difficulty following her speech and can easily translate her elaborate word-swapping, but any explanations are torturous and counterintuitive. He suspects she's really just amusing herself because otherwise conversation is horribly boring.

Example of her speech and his translation:

Reds: "Maize wrist and wrist wire warm aft ay-eeh-eye not."

Max's translation: "Hey, tourist guy, look behind you."

Reds is truly, deeply, madly in love with Max. She watches over him from a respectful distance, although her understanding of "respectful" and "distance" will vary enormously. She does not understand his choices, but she accepts them because she loves him even though he is obviously insane.

The Key

Max believes that Reds sired him. He is wrong. He sired *her* approximately 1,200 years ago somewhere in western Africa. She has followed him devotedly through the centuries, although he has occasionally escaped her in his various permutations. A dedicated Malkavian, Max has long been exploring the myriad aspects of existence by periodically undergoing a complete and total change. With each chosen identity, he discards all extraneous matter, both mental and physical, from his previous lives. The only constant has been the presence of Reds. A small number of others are aware of Max's quest, but interfering with him has historically proven to be a poor choice.

If Max is present, Reds will almost certainly be near. Woe unto anyone who tries to feed on her man.

Couple #2: Terence & Ana-Duncan (Contemporary In Nomine)

He: Terence

Terence is a Balseraph of Technology with a long and checkered history, claiming to be one of the originals who Fell. "Some Fell, some jumped," as he is fond of saying, and many believe his claims. His status has risen and fallen repeatedly over the millennia, but he has always survived and bounced back. Contradictory stories of his past are plentiful, which may or may not be his handiwork. His original name is known to be Azael (a then-common name), but Vapula is the only one who addresses him by that. He is also known to have spent roughly three decades on the experimentation table after a particularly disastrous failure in the Belgian Congo, during which punishment he was often attended by Vapula directly.

His current vessel is caucasian male, age 65, short, thin, balding, but surprisingly spry and alert. In this vessel, he is currently operating as Terence Sharpe, senior sales rep for Diversified Technologies International, an Infernal front company. He is rather fastidious about his appearance, wears expensive business suits with the typical high-tech doodads and carries a wallet of credit cards. His manicure, in particular, is immaculate and serves as a fond reminder of the slashing claws which were forbidden him after the Belgian Congo debacle. He sometimes carries a weapon, but these days he usually relies on his resonance or on a Song to escape hostilities. Otherwise, he rarely uses his resonance and instead will simply exploit the plasticity of language to accomplish his aims without actually lying.

While somewhat burned out, Terence does command a certain level of respect for his experience and connections and he does retain the original convictions behind his abandonment of the Divine. His reasoning has become much easier

to explain as the language of psychology evolved, particularly "schizophrenia."

Terence has known Duncan for barely a century, but he fell in love rather quickly despite himself. Consequently, he took it upon himself to show her the skills and tactics she would need to survive and succeed, without repeating his mistakes. They have been in contact only intermittently over the last fifty years, but he has followed her career with some pride and some envy. Following her recent reversals of fortune, she came to him for help and so he has given it, although not without cost to her or to himself.

She: Ana-Duncan

Duncan is Lilim but currently an Outcast from both sides of the war. Originally named Ana, she was in service to Dark Humor and distinguished herself as a useful and effective agent. She has worked well with various other Infernal agents on Earth, most notably Terence, but her first priority was always to win her freedom. To this end, she networked tirelessly to find out who held her obligations and how best to recoup them. By the 1970s, only one remained outstanding but she could not find the holder. In the process of her search, she had grown weary of Hell's delusions of grandeur and began to rethink her view of the war. In a moment of epiphany, she found herself Redeemed. Ana became a Bright Lilim who reveled in the Divine Splendor and was soon assigned to Yves.

Servitors of Judgment made her tenure brief, however, as her past was repeatedly investigated. Although she herself had genuinely repented, the continued doubts and accusation began to wear at her patience. Annoyance followed, then resentment, and she finally Fell after a spectacularly angry outburst that the hypocrisy of angels wasn't worth giving up her friendships among the Fallen. Currently in hiding on Earth, she has gained the use of a strong vessel, taken the name Duncan, and renewed her network of contacts. Most importantly, however, she has asked for help from Terence in finding an Infernal Prince. She has come to realize that her affection and regard for Terence is blossoming into more, although she is careful not to place too much trust in him. Terence, for his part, does require some payment for his services, but Duncan assumes he sees the assistance as an investment in the future.

Duncan's vessel is a tall, muscular, voluptuous Latino woman in her late teens. She is adept at assessing and manipulating people and uses her network of contacts to shield herself from scrutiny, bargaining on old friendships and new information. She has surprisingly effective combat skills, although she only uses them as a last resort, preferring to recruit mortals to do the dirty work. She is keeping a low profile while she waits for word on whether Theft is willing to accept her as an agent.

The Key

Terence loves Duncan. He is, in fact, the holder of her last vow obligation, which he acquired through notable personal cost and effort. However, he knows she has never loved him and so he masks his feelings by requiring payment for his services. If he offered help freely, she would think he was setting her up. Worse, she might realize his feelings and exploit him the way that Lilim exploit any besotted suitor.

Duncan loves Terence. She considers him the only person she has known with real integrity and strength of purpose. In the Game, though, he's always been a survivor and she doesn't believe he would be weak enough to fall for her. She believes that she can only be sure of his help if she pays her way and makes clear that she is worth the investment. Her affections, if known or suspected, would just make her that much more ripe as a pawn.

Each loves the other, but is certain that the other can not be trusted with that love. And that, as they say, is the Hell of it.

Couple #3: Homer and Gig

(Cyberpunk)

He: Homer

Homer Landis is an officer with the LAPD Heavy Response Unit, a cybernetically enhanced SWAT team. As the designated combat driver for his unit, his radio designation is "Pontius Pilot." Homer is in regular contact with his siblings and has a fierce sense of loyalty to his family, ready to drop anything when called upon. He is conscientious and dutiful in his job and has a strong sense of fair play.

Originally from the Deep South, Homer signed up for the military when he was young. Tall, stocky, and muscular, Homer was a natural and served with merit for several years before he was recruited by a corporate mercenary outfit. Cybernetic enhancement was part of the recruitment package, and soon Homer was even taller, stockier, and more muscular. Besides his general training as a bruiser, he also had his family's talent for vehicles and soon was a valued pilot for the various assault vehicles. After mustering out, he moved to Los Angeles, where the police were desperate to address the growing numbers of violent, cybernetically enhanced criminals and gangs. The HRU was a new unit when Homer joined, and he's seen plenty of action over the years, mostly partnered with Regina Dancey, radio designation "Gigabytch."

On the job, Homer wears the heavy body armor and weaponry of the HRU. Off-duty, he typically wears loose clothing over assorted body armor and weaponry. He favors a .60 revolver for a sidearm, although he'll sometimes carry submachine guns as well. Given that he's extremely tough, he prefers accuracy of firepower rather than speed or volume. He has strong combat skills but favors Aikido, preferring to disable and disarm. His personal vehicle is a heavy motorcycle, although he also has a light pickup truck (modified for speed and handling).

Recently, Gig was implicated in four corporate assassinations while doing freelance work. She escaped arrest and went underground, but she's contacted Homer several times. Begging for his assistance to clear her name, Gig abruptly made their relationship physical. Bewildered, Homer found himself unexpectedly and unreasonably in love with her. Uncertain how to proceed, wary of Gig's intentions, and suspecting that Gig was supporting herself with a criminal career, he has taken a leave of absence to get away from the city and consider the situation. Currently, he is visiting his various siblings around the country and soliciting their opinions of the situation.

She: Gig

Gig is a former LAPD officer in the HRU, a former mercenary soldier, and is now pursuing a number of overtly criminal enterprises. And loving it. She's currently extorting several high-ranking officials in the police department, as well as cutting herself in on different smuggling or trafficking operations that involve police and corporate connections to assorted underworld groups.

A child prodigy, Gig was born privileged. By the time she got to university, it had all become incredibly boring. Computers and electronics were more challenging, since people were sooooo simple to manipulate, but eventually she got bored with that as well. A corporate mercenary outfit caught her eye and she got herself recruited as a tech expert. Cybernetic (and cosmetic) enhancements and combat training made life more interesting, but the real kick was when the cybermedical staff determined that she was a latent telepath! With additional mods, she soon became a valuable asset to the outfit. Eventually, growing bored again, she pulled the files of recently mustered units and picked out Homer. Bruiser, loyal, honest, personally unattractive, he had skills that would complement hers and would be an easy run. She found him in LA, got recruited to the HRU, and got herself partnered with Homer. After a few years of rooting through the LAPD, she found enough corruption and graft to suit her interests.

Then, of course, Gig was framed for several deaths, which irritated her to no end. A plan occurred to her, however, and so she decided to go underground and carve herself out a new life on more challenging terms. To this end, she visited Homer and turned on the charm, although she preferred women and had never found Homer appealing. It took more effort than she ever expected, but after several encounters she managed to win him over. Now she is nudging pawns into proper place and covering her tracks, so when Homer acts on her pleas for help, the resulting cascade of events will create a power vacuum for her to smoothly fill.

Gig is a mixture of Japanese and Ethiopian, long-limbed and nimble. Her figure is spectacularly artificial and she enjoys the attention it garners. Her typical outfit is a mixture of ballistic mesh and translucent armor panels, with assorted weapons and electronic widgets secreted about her person. She usually wears a wig of long braided

dreadlocks which conceals a ballistic plate skullcap, under which she keeps her hair trimmed short.

Gig feels a bit guilty about Homer, and finds herself missing him. She finds this to be a shocking and disturbing development, and she can't figure out how it happened.

The Key

Homer has long surmised that Gig is a telepath, having seen the effects on perps and witnesses over the years. Homer is gay and has never had the slightest interest in Gig, so he knows that his sudden rush of feelings for her is completely artificial. Nevertheless, he is torn between these feelings and his sense of loyalty on the one hand, but also outraged and betrayed that she would violate his emotional state for her own purposes. He is hoping that a round of sibling discussion will help restore his emotional balance, clear his mind, and let him develop an appropriate course of action. Since most of his siblings are cybernetically enhanced combat drivers, they might have some insight.

Gig, for her part, does not realize the degree to which she has "convinced" herself in the process of "convincing" Homer of their relationship. This is a side effect of the strain she placed on her telepathic abilities and mods. While her feelings are only an echo of Homer's, they are nevertheless a unique and unprecedented event for her. She doesn't really know what to expect or how much impact this will have on her.

The Whirlwind Hotel and Eatery

by Alice Turow

The butter was overly cold and hard, not unlike the silence between them. Tabitha scraped the patty futilely, smearing it on the pumpernickel roll appetizer. Anything to avoid looking at him.

The meeting was Carlos' idea. There were some papers left to sign before the divorce was final; he thought a face-to-face finality would give him the closure he needed.

*"So . . ." she said. **Scrape scrape scrape.***

"So . . ." he said. More silence. "How was your day?"

She stopped scraping. "Why do you ask?"

Carlos cocked a half-smile . . . the same worldly lopsided grin she originally fell in love with a decade ago. "Because I'm curious?"

"Uh-huh." She sipped her wine, deciding to humor him. "Well, I had another tiff with Janet in accounting this morning."

"She's the one who accused you of overwriting office expenses last year, right?"

*Tabitha had begun picking up the knife again, hoping to dispel more nervous energy. His words made her drop it with a clang on the butter plate. "You **remember** that?" she asked incredulously. He gave a "**what?**" look with his eyebrows . . . the look he always denied, yet was always his most sincere gesture. "I was certain you weren't listening then."*

"I always listened to you," Carlos said, reaching for Tabitha's now-trembling hand. "I . . . just wish I knew how important it was for you to know that."

They both glanced down at the papers, unsure of what to do next.

* * *

From the outside, neither the hotel nor its attached restaurant - both named Whirlwind, and known collectively as the Whirlwind Hotel and Eatery - are particularly noteworthy. For those accustomed to urban landscapes, the hotel looks a little smaller than the expected size of a comparably located resort, and the restaurant looks a great deal larger than most diners conjoined to a hotel . . . but all cities have their architectural quirks, so this is nothing out of the ordinary.

And, indeed, from the inside, most people detect nothing unusual about either . . . unless comfortable beds or enjoyable meals are a rarity.

But a select group of people find themselves enthralled by the magic of the hotel - and what else could it be but magic? For, should you happen to be at the Whirlwind with a former romantic partner - regardless of how the relationship ended - the forces of this location will undo whatever problems existed to end that relationship. Jealous mates have become more rational, unfaithful boyfriends have become true of heart, and passionless wives have found their inner sparks rekindled. These changes last as long as the couple remains within the restaurant or hotel; once outside its doors, they revert back to their former selves (if they were altered) . . . resulting in disappointment, relief, or utter indifference.

The Restaurant

The Restaurant was founded by Stewart Monk several decades ago, sometime after the Kennedy assassination but before the Nixon resignation . . . although that is all that is definitely known. (Even official paperwork disagrees as to when, exactly, it was built.) Little is known about Stewart Monk himself, outside of the fact that he still oversees the day-to-day operations of both the Hotel and Eatery, despite appearing to be in his 80s. He is of average build, with brown-gray hair thinning to a monk's crown. When he's not dealing with the restaurant or hotel, his eyes are distant and unfocussed. But he is otherwise an affable - if intensely private - man. He is rumored to have founded the restaurant after a relationship ended, although whether there is any truth to this is unknown. It is likewise unknown whether or not he even knows (or believes) the secret of the Whirlwind; he has shrugged or laughed off all attempts to confront him with or inform him of those effects.

The Whirlwind Restaurant has a maximum occupancy of 430, although most nights it doesn't exceed a half of this even during the dinner rush. All who enter pass through an antechamber lit only with candlelight. (For some reason, city ordinances against such lighting schemes don't apply to the Whirlwind.) This area opens into the walkways to the Eatery proper.

There are three distinct areas of the Eatery: the bar, which caters to those wishing to catch a drink and unwind on their way home; the open dining area, which caters to middle-class diners and those seeking a low-key dining experience; and the large back room, which can be converted to either one large room or up to four smaller private rooms, and are intended as private dining areas meant for the rich seeking to impress a large number of friends or an intimate acquaintance.

Regardless of which part of the restaurant diners choose, prices are surprisingly reasonable, especially given how good the food is. (The Whirlwind frequently gets three-and-a-half stars from both local papers and national raters . . . which is unheard of for a hotel-tied restaurant.) They specialize in pasta and rice dishes from around the world (their paella is outstanding), and they're more than willing to customize dishes to suit the diner. There are even several vegetarian dishes (all of which can be made vegan).

Ironically, though, the food seems designed to be almost transparent; it is not so fabulous that it is an event unto itself, nor so flavorless that it draws the palate's attention. Rather, it seems like the food is designed solely to enhance the experience of dining with friends or relations . . . which many theorize is exactly its purpose.

The kitchen seems entirely normal (and is not immune to the effects of the Whirlwind, much to the potential dismay of the staff). There are a few offices adjacent to the kitchen, including Mr. Monk's private office. There is also a large storage room; in one corner of the room, under some blankets, are baby furniture and accoutrements that date back to at least the 1960s; in a rare bit of negative emotion, Monk has fired anyone who inquires about them or disturbed that corner's contents.

The Hotel

The Hotel was added in 1980; some of those who know the secret of the Whirlwind have cynical beliefs as to why this addition was made, although the more romantic minded view it as a way for an enchanted evening to continue a bit longer. In defiance of most laws of zoning, building, and common sense, the hotel was added well after the Eatery. Again, those suspicious to the nature of the Whirlwind note that the restaurant had both the land to build the hotel and the necessary parking from the beginning.

The Hotel has 82 guest rooms and seven suites in its six-story building. Prices are somewhat steeper than other hotels in the area, yet it doesn't seem to have problems remaining close to full. The rooms are modest, with accommodations for two (most rooms have one queen-sized bed, although some have two twins), coffee maker, a bathroom with a shower-tub, and a television with free cable. The suites are much nicer, with two separate rooms, a mini-kitchen, a king-sized bed, and a luxurious bathroom including a giant combination spa/bathtub.

The Hotel is fully connected by a side entrance near to bar to the Eatery; as such, those who underwent the effects of the Whirlwind's power can retain their changes while moving from one area to the other.

The Rules of Love

Of course, the biggest mystery behind the Whirlwind is its effects on ex-couples, which are both straightforward yet impossible to categorize. For as long as the couple remains within the Whirlwind, whatever problems caused them to split apart in the first place will either cease to be, be mitigated, or no longer matter. *How* this happens is something of a mystery, and varies from case to case (and even from visit to visit, with the same couple). It seems that the Whirlwind has the power to literally do *anything* to repair the rift between former lovers; it can alter physical details, memories, attitudes, and even the past, should such be necessary. It can give or take away seemingly any attribute, so long as its effect is to make it possible to rejoin the lovers.

Some examples of how the Whirlwind has worked in the past include:

- A man whose marriage was torn apart after an automobile accident left him a paraplegic found himself able to walk again.
- A woman whose infidelity ruined her relationship found herself to be completely committed, and her mate's recollections of past indiscretions erased.
- A couple that constantly argued over money was transformed so that she had a large trust fund, and he no longer cared about material things.
- A former trophy wife whose husband grew tired of her after she had grown older found her looks and age restored to her prime.

The Whirlwind is *not* consistent, nor does it have one common solution for the same problem. Thus a couple that drifted apart because of his desire for sexual practices she deemed perverse may find that he is changed on one visit so that his needs matched hers (eliminating those other desires), while on another visit she may find herself to be more experimental. Likewise lovers that found they could no longer communicate may find themselves more talkative on one visit, more appreciative of things unsaid between them on another, and fully telepathic toward each other on a third date!

The Whirlwind does have some boundaries, although these seem based more on some external cognitive or moral force than a limit in powers. First, although it shows little compunction about altering people's minds, there are some limits of decency even it won't cross. For example, if a relationship ended because of spousal abuse, the Whirlwind certainly would not alter the abused partner's mind to, say, enjoy being beaten. It also seems unlikely that it would change a mate to condone of serial killing, child endangerment, or other heinous acts. However, the exact boundaries of this are unknown; for example, the restaurant made one soldier's wife more forgiving of his former-Vietnam soldier's battlefield misdeeds, while at the same time making him forgive *himself* for those same crimes.

The changes are immediate upon the second half of a couple entering a restaurant. Most of the time these changes happen at roughly the same time (assuming the couple enters together), but should a former partner enter some time after the first (for example, they are part of two different dining parties), then the changes will affect them both at the same time. When possible, the Whirlwind likes to make its more overt changes as discreetly as possible; usually this happens at the candlelit entryway, where a gust of wind can make the flames gutter for a moment, the shadows concealing the obvious transformations (such as making someone younger, more handsome, or uninjured). But the Whirlwind is not above more flashy displays, and it's not uncommon for a ripple of new reality to wash over patrons once a former lover enters when the person already there needs to be significantly changed. (This can be especially confusing when the hotel is involved; it has happened in the past that former lovers have checked into the hotel independently and unknowing of each other, only to find them both changed once the second person enters.)

Whether or not affected couples know of the changes made to them depends on the circumstances. Generally speaking, those altered will know both that they have been changed and *how* they have been changed, unless this would affect their involvement with each other. Thus someone who had previously received a head injury that affected their mental facilities would know that he had been healed, he was formerly injured, *and* that's what broke up his relationship (for

that matter, his relationship would also know the same things). However, someone whose relationship had broken up because of the guilt over a hit-and-run, and found his history rewritten so that he hadn't ever hit him, would *not* remember the changes in the timeline; both partners would have a vague recollection that something in the past affected their relationship, but it was a misunderstanding . . . and that being at the Whirlwind made it okay.

As stated previously, the Whirlwind's effects last only as long as the couple is within either the restaurant or the hotel. The changes depart as quickly as they were instilled; again, it tries to be subtle if possible, but is not above warping reality around those who depart. The effects wear off as soon as one of the couple leaves the Whirlwind.

Should someone happen to be at The Whirlwind with *multiple* ex-relationships, it will do whatever is necessary to eliminate all the conditions that caused them *all* to break up. It is not uncommon for a tightly woven circle of friends and ex-relations to go to the Whirlwind, only to find them all changed in some manner that causes feelings to be rekindled in five or six different ways. Hilarity ensues.

The Whirlwind does not have any affect on those who are already *in* a relationship, unless one of those two is also there at the same time as a *former* relationship . . . in which case he changes both to satisfy the former lover while remaining compatible with his current one. For all its powers, the Whirlwind cannot compel former lovers to rekindle their relationship (or it chooses not to) . . . although the effects of the Whirlwind are often enough to do so through its effects. Curiously enough, it also cannot compel them to forge a relationship *stronger* than what existed previously; in fact, the same forces that transform people seems to forbid them from forging a stronger relationship . . . at least while within the Whirlwind. The upshot of this is that relationships that were only superficial when they ended cannot be escalated into anything more than that.

The Whirlwind does have one other significant quirk that again demonstrates its great power. Those who attend and experience or witness the Whirlwind's powers will find themselves completely unable to describe or detail what happened to anyone else not within the confines of the Whirlwind. The words will become stuck in their throats, they will be unable to write down messages, and so on. To date, the Whirlwind has resisted all attempts to circumvent this; notes scrawled within become lost or unreadable, telephone or cell phone calls to the outside will break up when attempting to tell outsiders about the effects, and so on. Likewise, those who are told about the effects inside the restaurant will be subject to the same conditions. At best, people will be able to detail their experiences vaguely, or factually: "I met with Jan; we talked. It was . . . interesting."

The Whirlwind does not discriminate based on orientation, and same-sex relations are not uncommon to see rekindled.

The Effects of a Whirlwind Relationship

The effects of being within the Whirlwind at the same time as a former relation are interesting, to say the least. The ultimate result of the forces at work depend entirely upon the (ex-)couple involved; some describe the experience fondly, others ruefully, others wistfully. For some the result is a giddy but temporary rekindling of a former love. (Those who know the secret of the Whirlwind understand why it had a hotel built right next to it.) For others it is a traumatic reminder of what has been lost, or what will be lost. For others it is a mirror, an external force telling them what went wrong and what is necessary to fix it; a rare few are able to transform this knowledge into an understanding of what *can* be possible. In these (admittedly rare) cases, it is possible for love to be re-forged stronger than before . . . once away from the Whirlwind. Likewise, some truly wealthy couples understand what has transpired, and make a point never to leave, in essence becoming permanent residents of the hotel.

Whether any of these outcomes are desired by the force behind the Whirlwind is unknown, if such concepts as "want" can apply to it.

The Coriolis Group

There is a small but significant group that resents the effects of the Whirlwind, having been burned by its transient powers; there are others that are at least deeply curious about the forces behind it. These 12 people (four ex-couples

and four individuals) have banded together, calling themselves the Coriolis Group. Their leader, Dr. Philip Harsey -- one of the four non-couples -- wants nothing short of harnessing the power the Coriolis Group for his own ends, although he claims to merely wish to study it. (His one experience with the Whirlwind showed him that he was mad for power, both within his job and his home. The Whirlwind forced humility and understanding upon him, and gave him a sole weekend of peace with his ex-wife Dana. For those fleeting signs of seeming weakness and loss of control, he can never forgive the Whirlwind.)

The Coriolis Group is currently still accumulating research and knowledge, through the four ex-couples in the group. They are playing a dangerous game, since each time they enter the Whirlwind to acquire information, they expose themselves to the power of the Whirlwind. They have all been through the emotional wringer a dozen times over, and two of the non-involved individuals in the group wonder privately whether it's only a matter of time before one or two of them snap and do something *truly* heinous. . . or lock themselves in one of the hotel rooms, never wanting to leave.

Dr. Harsey seems close to coming up with a plan regarding the Whirlwind . . . although what this plan is and the desired outcome are both a mystery.

Using the Whirlwind Within a Campaign

The Whirlwind is designed to be a versatile campaign device, a location of great but limited power. Indeed, it is possible for the Whirlwind to be a recurring location for a group of heroes (or even a base of operations), with its mysteries remaining unknown until later in the campaign.

The tone of the Whirlwind is likewise malleable. It can be used for a comedic romp (especially if multiple exes are involved), a romantic tale (either optimistic or pessimistic), a coda to a romantic plot, and so on. It can be used pessimistically or even sinisterly . . . it is, after all, a domineering force that seems to have complete control over those that fall under its sway. It can serve as a long-term mystery or other trapping of great power. The amount of raw and rekindled emotion within the Whirlwind is often remarkable; should something be accumulating these forces for some purpose, the power it both has and has accumulated is substantial.

The setting of the Whirlwind can also be modified as desired. The base premise (location where former lovers have their relations rekindled) can be adapted to a number of genres: A saloon in Weird West, a satellite resort in science fiction, a mysterious fae tavern in the Middle Ages, and so on. Its powers are suitable for practically any genre as well; if, say, an *In Nomine* angel or superhero relationship ended because he wasn't normal, the Whirlwind certainly has the power to strip him of his powers (so long as he remains at the restaurant or hotel).

Finally, the Whirlwind is large enough - and its effects unpredictable enough - that it can be added as a background subplot to any plot that has a hotel or restaurant. Thus if the mob boss is making the drug exchange tonight at the restaurant, what happens to the heroes' mission to thwart them if one of the teammates suddenly finds himself confronted by past romantic feelings toward another member of the party?

Adventure Seeds

- The noted Nobel Prize-winning scientist Dr. Nicholas Carter has found his once-great mind addled by schizophrenia and other dementias, which have so far proven unresponsive to drug treatment. The world is in danger from some horrific plot device, and only his formerly brilliant mind has a chance as cracking the enigma. If the heroes learn of the power of the Whirlwind, they may theorize that it has the power to restore his brilliance . . . presuming his ex-wife Emily can be convinced to go with them to this restaurant. Will the plan work? And is it fair to toy with others' emotions and feelings, even if the fate of the world is at stake?
- There is a fire at the Whirlwind Hotel, and the heroes are on-hand to deal with it. Unfortunately, one of the rooms at risk is the suite with noted reclusive billionaire Earl Sampson and his reportedly estranged wife; it's rumored that he had an inoperable brain tumor five years ago and she was having an affair, yet for some reason they have both been sharing the same hotel room for quite some time. Do the investigators heed the pleas of the couple not to remove them from the inferno? And what is the outcome either way?

- The romantic interest of one of the heroes brings him to the Whirlwind to break up with him. But the instant they break up, they fall under the effects of the Whirlwind . . . with potentially comedic or tragic results.

* * *

Carlos went to the car to get his cell phone; he needed to call his office and explain why he wouldn't be in tomorrow.

As he exited the hotel, he felt reality wash over him. The stress of his job returned, and memories of past failures and strife buffered his face. What had this place done to him?

"It's the strangest thing," he said, calling the office. "I met Tabitha, and we . . ." his throat contracted, unable to explain. "She . . . We're talking currently."

He hung up, rubbed his neck, and went back to get Tabitha. He needed to see if she was okay; even if he didn't feel the same way about her anymore, he never wished her any harm.

He stepped back into the hotel, and the man who exited the revolving door was not the one who entered. His \$10,000 suit transformed into a denim shirt and slacks; his thoughts about the paperwork and security commission investigation melted away into thoughts about his latest painting. Eyes are the hardest to paint, but Tabitha would provide all the inspiration he needed.

And Tabitha was waiting in their room, waiting for the artist she'd fallen in love with.

Jane Brighton, Lady Detective

by Mark Gellis

Although not quite Sherlock Holmes, Jane is intelligent, inquisitive, and relentless . . . and very British. She is more than capable of getting out of (and into) trouble in almost any campaign involving mystery or intrigue set between 1890 and 1920.

Jane was almost destined to become a detective. Born in 1872, she grew up reading the mysteries of Wilkie Collins and similar authors. Her father, a London police detective, often talked about his cases and the methods used by police to solve crimes. At an early age, she became fascinated by the accounts of crimes published in newspapers. Jane loved her dolls as much as the other girls on her street, but she also loved puzzles, riddles, chess games, and scavenger hunts. She loved to figure out things and she loved finding out things about people. Even more than wanting to see the wicked brought to justice, Jane loved finding things out. When she found a mystery, she had to try to solve it.

She met her idol, Collins, while in her early teens; although he was in his 50s, the author was impressed with her mind and her spirit, but their friendship was cut short by his death in 1889.

Two other things happened to Jane during her teens that affected her deeply. The first was that in 1884 her father was injured in the line of duty, stabbed by one of a gang of thieves he was arresting. While he recovered fully after a few months, it drove home to Jane that detective work was not a game; it was interesting but it also involved real danger. After that she learned how to shoot a pistol.

The second affair that affected her was Jack the Ripper. Jane never knew any of the women Jack killed (this is not surprising, since they were all prostitutes), but the sheer ferocity of the crimes and the pathos of the victims became a symbol to Jane that, as much as she liked solving mysteries for their own sake, there was another, more important reason to do so: to help people in need, and to uncover and punish those who had preyed on them. When she turned 18 in 1890, she already knew what her life's work would be.

An unexpected twist of fate helped Jane. Her great uncle Hubert made a small fortune mining tin in Africa. He never had any daughters and absolutely adored Jane, and when he passed away, he left her a small inheritance, enough to let her live modestly and pursue her dream of being a consulting detective. While the income is barely enough to keep her in a middle class lifestyle if she stopped working entirely, it does free her from having to take cases she does not wish to investigate. She can take the ones that interest her and live quite comfortably.

Jane is 5'5" and weighs 120 lbs. Blonde and blue-eyed, she is attractive without being genuinely beautiful. She gives the impression of being smart and sensible, and if one talks to her, it does not take long to figure out that she is both of these things. Jane also has a knack of knowing things; she always seems to be able to tell things about people . . . and whenever something bad is about to happen, she will get the funniest feeling, letting her know she needs to be on her guard.

Jane will be modestly but dressed sensibly (by the standards of her time, at least). When she is on a case, she generally carries a number of items in her pockets or a small handbag: a small pocket knife, a small metal match box with matches, a small notebook and a pencil, a pair of tweezers, a handkerchief, and a loaded Adams .380 revolver. She also tends to wear a hat, not only to be fashionable, but because it allows her to wear hat pins, which can be very useful on occasion.

ST 8 [-15], **DX** 12 [20], **IQ** 13 [30], **HT** 11/9 [0]

Advantages: Ally (Father, British police detective, 12-) [10], Attractive [5], Charisma +1 [5], Common Sense [10], Danger Sense [15], Empathy [15], Independent Income (\$37.50 per month in 1890) [5], Intuition [15]

Disadvantages: Curious [-5], Second Class Citizen (Female) [-5], Sense of Duty (to England) [-10], Sense of Duty (to

Friends and Family) [-5], Victorian Lady's Code of Honor (Obey rules of proper conduct between men and women, wear modest clothes even when it is really inconvenient to do so, etc.) [-10], Vow: Never give up on a case until it is solved, especially if someone is counting on her [-5]

Quirks: Blushes when people talk about sex (she is not a prude; she simply gets embarrassed thinking about . . . well, you know . . . *it* . . .); Irritated by people who think that she is stupid or helpless simply because she is female; Likes animals, and will take steps to protect them from danger our cruelty; Loves Collins' novels, especially *The Moonstone*; Wants to get married someday (and is also a little afraid, deep down, that she will never find true love), but would rather be a great detective than a mediocre wife

Skills: Acting-13 [2], Appreciate Beauty-11 [2], Area Knowledge (England)-12 [1/2], Area Knowledge (London)-14 [2], Artist-11 [1], Bicycling-12 [1], Chess-14 [2], Cooking-13 [1], Criminology-15 [6], Fast-Talk-14 [4], First Aid-13 [1], Forensics-11 [1], Guns (Pistol)-14 [1]*, History-11 [1], Holdout-15 [6], Knowledge (Riddles and Puzzles)-15 [6], Law-10 [1/2], Literature-13 [4], Occultism-12 [1], Poisons-10 [1/2], Research-13 [2], Ritual Magic (Hermetic)-10 [1], Savior-Faire-13 [1], Sex Appeal-13** [6], Shadowing-14 [4], Streetwise-13 [2], Writing-11 [1/2]

* Includes bonus for IQ

** Jane calls this "Strategic Flirting" and would probably blush if someone actually called it "Sex Appeal."

Languages: English-13 [0]

Total Points: 130

Typical dialog: "Yes, I have a revolver. I'm not stupid, you know."

Alternate Versions

While Jane is designed with *Gaslight* or *Steampunk* campaigns in mind, she could be converted to other periods without much difficulty. She can either appear later in her career, as a sort of Miss Marple of the *Cliffhangers* era, or one can simply change her date of birth (although this means she would have never met Collins). For example, if one wants Jane to appear in her 20s during World War I, simply assume she that she was born in 1892 instead of 1872. Virtually all of her skills will be the same during any part of the 20th century.

After 1910, Jane would have Judo-12 [4]; a form of judo is introduced to England around the turn of the century and this is exactly the sort of martial art that would appeal to Jane Brighton, who needs to be able to defend herself but prefers to control someone rather than harm them. In addition, she would replace her Adams with a Webley Pocket Hammerless or a small automatic like the Browning .32. After 1930, Jane would also have Driving (Automobile)-12. She likes small, agile roadsters.

Jane does not have Riding; born and bred in London, Jane never needed to learn to ride. She would have been able to get anywhere she needed to go either by walking or by riding an omnibus.

In realistic campaigns without magic, Jane's knowledge of the occult allows her to investigate those who are involved in it (it is, after all, during this period that the Order of the Golden Dawn and Aleister Crowley are active). In a campaign where magic works, Jane would know enough about magic to know how it could be used to commit a crime, but does not really know enough to do magic herself. A good adventure seed might be to team Jane with a player character (perhaps as a love interest) who is a genuine magician or a psychic.

Using Jane in a Campaign

There are many ways to use Jane Brighton. First, Jane could be used as a player character in a 150-point game. (Or, an extremely generous GM might allow Jane as a player character in a 100-point game on the condition that she cannot be improved with experience points for the first 10 or 15 game sessions, which is about how long it would take to earn the

extra 30 points with which she started the campaign.)

As an NPC, Jane could be used as an ally or a contact. She can be used to provide player characters with leads, information, missed clues, and the like. Helping her out of danger (or having her return the favor -- "I'm not entirely helpless, thank you very much.") can form the plot of an episode within a campaign. Another option would be to make her a love interest or a rival of some kind (perhaps she is taking all the good cases that the heroes want for their struggling detective agency).

Jane might ask the player characters for assistance with a case. There are some advantages to being a female detective (among other things, villains often do not take her seriously and as a result they frequently let their guard down around her, often to their future discomfort) but there are disadvantages, too. There are some places that women simply cannot go or are not permitted to do in Victorian or Edwardian society. So, Jane could be used as a kind of small, blonde Nero Wolfe, coordinating the efforts of several player character agents.

Finally, a cruel GM might have Jane snooping about, asking questions, perhaps about an entirely different case than the one the player characters are investigating, without letting the players know who she is; paranoid players might think she is one of the bad guys. All sorts of interesting complications might arise (although there should be some serious repercussions if anyone actually hurts Jane, especially since her father is a respected police detective) before the confusion is cleared up.

Pyramid Review

Rome

Published by [GMT Games](#)

Designed by Reiner Knizia

Art by Rodger MacGowan

Double-sided map board, 100 cards, 15 Chariot blocks, 15 Legion blocks, 6 Fleet blocks, 6 Scoring pawns, 70 Influence markers, 1 rulebook; \$39.00

Rome is a different sort of product: Three completely different strategy games with a similar theme in a single box. The games are good, the components are great, and it's a three-for-one special for strategy gamers. The individual games are "Imperium," "Circus Maximus," and "Hannibal vs. Rome." (These three games, along with a dozen others, were published as a set in Europe as *Games From Ancient Rome*. The GMT edition has much nicer components.)

"Imperium" is an area-influence game for two to five players; you play cards which allocate your influence to different regions, thereby scoring points. Whoever has the most points at the end of the round where someone has passed 40 points wins. This is usually after about 20 minutes, which is short and sweet for a five-player strategy game.

Each player starts with 11 cards: one for each of the eight Provinces, and three special cards. A game turn starts with each player choosing three of their cards to play that turn. Cards are revealed simultaneously, and resolved by placing Influence markers on the eight Provinces. Finally the next Province in the sequence is scored, and you're ready for another turn.

Playing one of your province cards places a marker on that Province; your province cards return to your hand, so you can reuse them every turn. The special cards change the way the turn is played out. Bread and Circuses allows you to double up and place two Influence markers in one Province; Bread and Circuses also returns to your hand and can be reused. Ear Of The Emperor causes an extra Province to be scored that turn (hopefully before the other players are ready). Including the Oracle card in your set of three for the turn allows you to reselect your three cards for the turn after seeing what other players have chosen. Ear Of The Emperor and Oracle are discarded after a single use.

After placing tokens, the players score the next Province in the sequence, in order from lowest scoring (Africa) to highest (Egypt). This sequence zig-zags all over the board. Each Province has numbers indicating the score for having the most influence tokens, second most, third most, and (in the case of the big provinces) fourth place. The tokens are cleared from the Province after scoring, but if there's no tie for first place the winner gets to leave one token there as Proconsul. You get a bonus when you score first place equal to the number of contiguous Proconsulships you have, so even low-scoring Africa, Syria, and Illycium can make a difference, since they stand in-between the high scoring Provinces.

Game play in "Imperium" is swift, with plenty of tension. You can lose the lead in a Province easily, and it's hard to make up lost ground, both in the Provinces and on the scoring track. Your two single-use special cards make all the difference, but their effects are subtle enough that they must be played at just the right moment. While simple, this is a good, nail-biting strategy game.

"Circus Maximus" is the chariot race game for two to five players. No, there's no rule for whipping other people's horses (or drivers), but don't worry, you'll have a chance to do far worse . . .

Pyramid Review: Rome



Each player has three chariots and five cards, numbered one through five. On the first turns you place your chariots, one at a time, in the starting area. On subsequent turns the chariots are moved in their order around the track, from first place to last.

When it's time to move one of your chariots, you may play from one to three of your numbered cards and move that chariot that number of hexes in a straight line. If you play more than one card, the chariot may turn between cards; for example, if you give the chariot a two and a three it can move three forward and two to one side. Each chariot must receive at least one card, though you can just play a card without moving the chariot. If you move the chariot it must move the full number on the card assigned to it. Thus if you have only your four and five card left and the only hole through the crowd in front of you is two spaces to the right, that chariot isn't moving this turn.

At the end of the turn you get your five cards back to use next turn.

The goal is to get all three of your chariots around the track once and into one of the finishing places. Thus victory is not decided by the first chariot in, but victory goes to the first player to bring his *last* chariot in.

Strategies vary, and vary with passion. Some feel that getting in one chariot early allows you to split your five cards between the remaining two chariots, giving them greater maneuverability. Others try to keep all three chariots moving and maximize their blocking turn-by-turn. Others prefer a leap frog approach: move one or two forward, put them in an obnoxious location (like the hairpin turn at midpoint) and then leave them there, bringing the back chariots past the blocker before moving him again.

Since every player has the same total value of cards played at the end of every turn, it's all about making your opponents waste moves going around you.

Game play slows if you have a lot of people, but the table-talk and interplay more than make up for it. This is a raucous game of getting in each other's way, and fighting for the lead. The feel of a chariot race is all there.

"Circus Maximus" will handle two to five players (although the "two cards per chariot" variant rule in two player games is strongly advisable) and takes 45 minutes to an hour, with a fair chunk of time afterwards for an argument over the various strategies.

"Hannibal Versus Rome" is a two-player wargame, played in the lower left-hand corner of the Imperium board. You win by moving one of your legions into the enemy's capital (even if defenders are present).

The Roman player starts with eight legions, the Carthaginian gets seven, but one of these is Hannibal's legion, which gets a combat bonus. Each player gets three fleets. If you find yourself without fleets you can use a turn to swap a legion for a fleet (this is probably a sign that you're going down). Each player also has five cards, numbered one through five. Fleets can move from any sea lane to any other sea lane. Legions can move to an adjacent territory over land, or cross a sea lane to another area if you have a fleet on that sea lane.

There are three routes between Rome and Carthage, three lines along which battles are fought: Overland through Hispania and Gaul (four land areas, no sea routes), through Sardinia and Corsica (two land areas, three sea routes), or through Sicily (three land areas, two sea routes). For Legions, movement between these three paths is only possible in the capital territories, where they all start.

If you move a legion or fleet into a land area or sea lane where your opponent has forces, you each play a card. Whoever plays the higher number wins. Whoever played the lower number removes one fleet or legion from that area. Hannibal's legion gets a bonus of one. If there's a tie, both sides lose a unit. Either way, someone's going to lose a unit. After five battles both players will have used all their cards, and they both get them all back. It pays to remember what your opponent played . . .

Massing your forces in an area doesn't give you a tactical advantage; someone entering your space has the same chance of winning a battle, but they'll have to win several battles if they're going to be there at the end of the turn.

While simple in structure, this game requires planning and out-guessing your opponent. You cannot give any of these three routes between the capitals to your opponent, but you can't divide your forces too evenly. Similarly you have no more combat power than your opponent, so you must pick some battles to lose, burning a low card and saving the win for later. There's no luck, there's no obvious strategy, no advantage to be won except through good play . . . making it another nail-biter.

Component-wise this is a great package. The maps are very attractive, and even though the map of the Mediterranean is marked for both "Imperium" and "Hannibal vs Rome," you have no trouble remembering which regions apply to the game in progress. The art maintains GMT's usual standard, in part because they're shrewd about reusing art from their "Great Battles Of History" series, with its clean style and historical accuracy. The ship stickers did need to be trimmed to make them fit neatly on the Fleet blocks, but this is the only possible complaint about the components. The cards are first-rate. The rules are very good; they're short, clear, and complete, without any glaring holes or contradictions.

Downsides? There are always downsides. Two trivial drawbacks have to do with the triplex format: the box is an odd size, it won't fit on the bookshelf like most games will, and the double-sided board means you have to make sure the gaming table is clean. As far as game play, all three games are fairly simple; you won't be surprised by a combination of cards or see anything you haven't before.

All in all if you like German strategy games, this is a good collection you'll play many times, and the games are different enough that you're ready for any mood.

--C. Andrew Walters

Pyramid Review

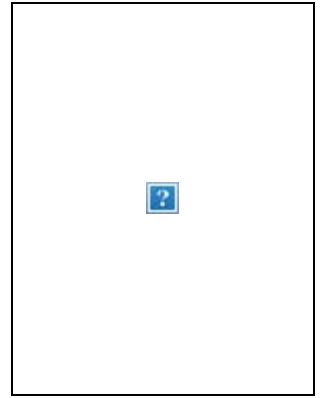
Escape From Monster Island

Published by [Firefly Games](#)

Written by David L. Pulver and Patrick Sweeney

Illustrated by Mike Bowden

32-page b&w softcover; \$9.95



One of the most fun little *big* games of 2002 was ***Monster Island: The Game of Giant Monster Combat*** from Firefly Games. With just a handful of plastic monsters from the toy box, a fistful of dice and these rules, players could recreate the battles to see which kaiju (Japanese for "monster") or giant, weird creatures from outer space/the oceanic depths/the Earth's prehistoric past is the "King of Monster island." Using the **Action!** System mechanics, kaiju design is fast and easy, and a player can soon send their design to go toe-to-toe, claw-to-claw or blasts of fiery breath versus Laser zaps from the eyes with the creations of the other players.

Yet what was missing from ***Monster Island: The Game of Giant Monster Combat*** were rules that allowed battles away from the island; now with the release of ***Escape from Monster Island***, players can take their kaiju on a world tour of humanity's greatest metropolises and other attractions -- Tokyo, New York, Tokyo, San Francisco, Tokyo, Paris, Tokyo, Seattle, Tokyo, Kuala Lumpur, Tokyo, and London. Not forgetting every kaiju's favorite holiday destination, which is of course, Tokyo. Once there, they can smash a bridge, destroy a nuclear power center, climb a skyscraper or two, leap from building roof to building roof, and fight other vacationing monsters or that pesky army of humans assigned to protect the city . . . all while crowds panic beneath their feet. And if that is not enough, the monster can always find an attractive Idol to grab and moon over (blonde bombshell, perky reporter, psychic twins from outer space, or famous movie or pop star) . . . And the blame for this giant monster mayhem lies with the would-be alien invaders, the Deloks, who have sabotaged the force bubble that normally keeps the Kaiju bottled up on Monster Island.

Escape from Monster Island is a slim book, in the same layout and style as ***Monster Island: The Game of Giant Monster Combat***. It is dotted with quotes from a variety of big monster movies, both American and Japanese, though in places these impinge upon the book's main text in what is the book's only layout error. The artwork of Mike Bowden clearly shows his love of both Marvel Comics and Japanese animation. He also draws the sheet of cardboard counters that comes with the supplement -- in places with a sense of humor. For example, the Scientist counter depicts the classic boffin-type clearly fiddling with a Pokéball! The rest of the counters show not only scientists, but also crowds, an idol, fire engines, and police squad cars, as well as a range of military units: medium and main battle tanks, APCs, IFVs (Infantry Fighting Vehicles), towed and mobile artillery pieces, transport and attack helicopters, trucks, infantry and Special Forces units, and fast patrol boats. The more unconventional forces of the United Nations Science Alert Corps -- whose duty it is to monitor Monster Island and deal with any escapees -- include flying tanks, jetpack troopers, a pair of strange scientific gizmos, and the aforementioned scientists.

To create a kaiju for ***Escape from Monster Island***, players will still need to refer to the full rules from ***Monster Island: The Game of Giant Monster Combat***, but this supplement does add several new powers. These include 360° Sense (which must be bought for one sense at a time), Acid for Blood, Clinging (to allow the climbing of skyscrapers and the like), Cocoon (a one-shot power for each game, letting a kaiju create and enter a cocoon from which they exit three turns later in a totally different form . . . during which time the player must redesign this new kaiju), Defensive Adaptation (this inflicts damage upon an attacking kaiju, say by spike or acidic skin), Food Source (most kaiju are radiovores, but with this power they can eat the equivalent of a human counter to gain a point to be spent on attributes and powers), Incorporeal, and Psychic Link. The latter simulates a common event of the kaiju genre -- the monster

forming a link with an adolescent girl or even miniature twin princesses! In the game, an Idol or Crowd counter represents them, and their presence increases the kaiju's Mind score and grants them a level of Regeneration.

Armies are created to the same point value as the monsters they face in the game. An army player does not pay for attributes or powers as they would for kaiju, but instead buy individual units that they field against the monsters. Each unit does have its own attributes (Attack, Evade, Morale, Toughness, Life Points, and Move) and one or more powers (Blast, Bombardment, Close Assault, Crowd-Control, Extinguish, Flying, Invention, Long Range, Personnel, Recharge, Targeting, Transport, and Swimming). Besides the units given above, an army player can buy one-shot bombing raids dropped by B-52s or surgical cruise missile strikes. Units can be as simple as the main battle tank (Attributes: Attack 4, Evade 13, Toughness 13, Morale 4, Move 6; Powers: Firepower 3d6) or as complex as Special Forces units (Attributes: Attack 6, Evade 15, Toughness 2, Morale 5, Move 3; Powers: Close Assault, Crowd-Control, Firepower 1d6 [2d6 during Close Assault], Personnel, Targeting), which represent detachments of Green Berets, Delta Force, or Spetnaz. They may even be SWAT teams especially trained in anti-kaiju tactics, such as those deployed by the Tokyo police. Armies can be created for battles set in the modern day or in the classic kaiju decade of the 1950s, simply by making attack helicopters, IFVs, and main battle tanks unavailable. These omissions also simulate the forces that a Third World nation might deploy. All armies receive the one headquarters unit for free, which cannot attack, but have the Crowd-Control, Personnel and Targeting powers. They usually spend the game in a strong defensive position and use their powers control the flow of reinforcements that an army can draw upon from turn to turn. These reinforcements counter a kaiju's Recovery ability by providing points to spend on new units -- just 1d6-1 per turn, halved if a headquarters unit is lost. The points can also be saved to buy more expensive units.

Important to defeating the rampaging kaiju are the UN Science Alert Corps science teams. These are made up of a certified genius and their team of assistants, together possessing the Power of Invention. By remaining stationary and studying the monster, scientists accrue Invention Points; when they have enough, they can build "Wonder Weapons." These include Anti-Regeneration Rays or Sprays, Capture Devices, Solidifiers, Teleport Jammers, and armor-piercing artillery rounds or X-Shells. With their cost being either 10 or 14 points, and scientists only able to generate 1d6 points per turn, it should only take an average of four or so turns to develop one of these Wonder Weapons. An army is limited to just two Scientist units.

Rather than set up every building in a city, only the most important or singular features need to be depicted by individual models, or in the case of a river or harbor, by strips of colored paper or felt. ***Escape from Monster Island*** details a wide range of buildings -- bridges, city hall, nuclear power plants, oil refineries and chemical plants, sports stadia, science research centers, skyscrapers, space centers, train stations, (personnel units can move between stations, safe from attack except by tunneling kaiju) and towers. If played in a specific city, it can have landmarks. Given examples include the Eiffel and Tokyo Towers, the Great Pyramid, the Golden Gate Bridge, the Petronas Twin Towers in Kuala Lumpur, the CN Tower and Space Needle, and the Statue of Liberty. As with the kaiju, players can raid their toy box or hobby shops to obtain suitable models to represent these buildings.

Central to the urban setting of ***Escape from Monster Island*** (and to the genre) are civilians. Though the army player does not have to purchase these units, they still have to control any police or fire fighters that appear in the game. The police are tasked with controlling any remaining and easily panicked crowds in an otherwise evacuated city. Panicking crowds move in random directions away from the stomping kaiju that set them off. Fire fighters are left to deal with any fires begun by the fights between kaiju and army. Idols are individual civilian units that are very alluring to kaiju, who will make every effort to grab them. Once in their possession, kaiju become more difficult to hit . . . after all, it is never good for public relations to blow up or zap some media darling!

The expanded fighting and movement rules cover flying, climbing (buildings in particular), leaping, and both swimming and wading in water. Though the rules cover damage done to buildings by thrown kaiju and army units, there are none for damage inflicted by a monster leaping onto a building's roof. Otherwise, the rules seem complete and cover most situations. Where the tactics and play were both quite simple in the original ***Monster Island: The Game of Giant Monster Combat***, battles in ***Escape from Monster Island*** require different and more thoughtful play. Kaiju face other monsters in an environment filled with obstructions, while also having to deal with the army's hit-and-run tactics. These are best used, as few of an army's units can stand up to the power wielded by a kaiju . . . until a scientist has had enough time to devise and build a Wonder Weapon.

Escape from Monster Island is rounded out with four scenarios that showcase the supplement's new rules. Each describes its participants, map layout, forces fielded by each side, deployment, special rules, plus victory conditions and objectives. In scenario one, "Monster Rampage," kaiju and army simply go claw to cannon, whereas in the second, "Robbing the Cradle," the UN Science Alert Corps sends an amphibious force to capture a kaiju egg found on a Pacific island. Unfortunately, mommy kaiju is not going to let her baby go . . . For the third, "Countdown to Doomsday," the army player is up against a deadline. With an asteroid heading for the Earth, they must launch an antimatter bomb to destroy it, but said bomb is exactly what a kaiju likes for breakfast! Finally, the fourth scenario is a three-player battle between a kaiju and two armies. "The Mother of all Monsters" is set at the end of the Gulf War, with coalition forces, an Iraqi army, and a kaiju all fighting each other. The coalition army must buy a lot of IFVs and main battle tanks, while the Iraqi player fields a Third World nation army, and controls a fire-fighter unit and several crowds. Neither side has access to reinforcements, but they may form an alliance after a ceasefire has been declared within a few turns.

By adding rules for buildings and armies, ***Escape from Monster Island*** does increase the complexity of the core game . . . not by much, but by enough to make it slightly more daunting to the suggested age range of eight years and up for ***Monster Island: The Game of Giant Monster Combat***. This is a very minor detraction though, because the careful and balanced advice of an adult should more than make up for this. Otherwise, with ***Escape from Monster Island*** the authors successfully extend the rules of the original game to cover the concepts core to the kaiju movie genre.

Where ***Monster Island: The Game of Giant Monster Combat*** will go next is another matter, though the fact that Gold Rush Games' forthcoming ***War of the Worlds Source Book*** will be compatible lends itself to plenty of suggestions. It might be interesting to see rules for pitting Japanese-style mecha or American-style superheroes against rampaging kaiju. In the meantime, telephone 911, send for the fire brigade, and call out the army, because there is a kaiju coming to a city near you!

--Matthew Pook

Plot After Marriage

According to the chivalric ideal, chivalric love never remains constant; it is either increasing or decreasing at any given time.

Now, outside of the fact that "chivalric" is a really cool word, this demonstrates something about that ideal: It isn't worth fighting for if it isn't at risk.

See, despite the fact that they dressed up in armor and searched for grails and routinely burst into songs, those knights had an interesting idea about love. Love can't be taken for granted; if nothing is done to strengthen it, it will weaken and die.

What does this have to do with Gygaxes gaming in Geneva? Well, romantic subplots are the same way; if there isn't something going on with them, they'll die. (The love won't necessarily die, but any interest in the plot quite probably will.) Of course, this holds true for other subplots as well; if you establish that old Uncle Geezer is dying in one adventure, but fail to mention that fact again in later adventures, and he suddenly dies . . . well, it's entirely possible the players will say something akin to, "Oh, no! That's awful! Uh . . . who?"

Of course, the problem is that romantic subplots are arguably the most difficult type of subplot to continue once they get to a satisfying "resolution" (usually involving marriage or commitment); after all, once you've got the guy or gal, and neither of you is doing anything to mess it up, what other plots can there be? (As an aside, this is why so many shows devote themselves to *The Chase* . . . y'know, that magical wonderland when a non-couple is still trying to possibly hook up, or maybe not. Once they *do* get together, it's very difficult to keep the momentum going. Think of the last seasons of *Moonlighting*. Or, better yet, don't.)

Well, keeping romantic plots going is easy before the two "hook up," or even get married. Generally speaking, until the couple is committed in some kind of higher ceremony, all bets are off. Either side can change his or her mind, things can come up, love can need to be proven, and so on.

But players tend to view in-game marriages (or their equivalent) as *very* significant . . . possibly with greater reverence than their real-world counterparts. Divorce subplots seem to be rare in the gaming world; I've only ever been involved with one myself. (I suspect that divorce factors into exponentially more character backgrounds than in-game experiences.) And, frankly, divorce is traumatic enough for all parties involved that it can be difficult to bring to a gaming table . . . especially when most folks come to game to *escape* the real world and its myriad problems.

So what is there to do, then?

Well, let's look briefly at keeping those firmly committed romantic subplots interesting, with two broad strokes of the pen.

Comedic

When I started thinking about what kinds of subplots could involve married (or otherwise firmly established) couples, I realized I had forgotten the greatest source to mine for ideas: the family situation comedy. These shows all have relationships that are heavily established both off- and on-screen for years. Yet, week after week, they concoct plots that challenge their relationships, *without* gut-wrenching "this marriage is OVER!" theatrics.

Some points to remember from sitcoms:

Family -- Even if the PC is the typical Siblingless Orphan of Mystery With No Known Relatives Or Even A Social Security Number, chances are the romantic interest isn't. And when you're in a long-term committed relationship, the problems of your significant other's family can become your own problems. This can be comedic or dramatic, as appropriate; a cousin that needs to hide with the PCs to avoid his ex-girlfriend can be played for laughs, while that

same cousin can be avoiding the Mafia for a dramatic (and exciting) plot.

Competition -- The sitcoms always have points of contention between the couple, and these often manifest as healthy (or not-so-healthy) competitions. These are usually best served in gaming through amusing storylines ("She doesn't care if I'm saving the world; if my boots are muddy when I get home, there will be hell to pay . . ."), but it is possible to concoct a more serious dilemma for a committed couple.

Children -- Kids are a natural result of many long-term relationships, so it's an obvious development (and challenge to a relationship) to bring them into the game. Again, they can be played comically ("Your wife is going to go insane unless you watch Little Jasper for the day . . . it's a typical day in the city; what can possibly go wrong?") or dramatically ("The child shows talent with matters magical, yet mother and father cannot agree whether to allow her to attend the Academy . . .").

Dramatic

Of course, not everything that a committed couple will go through will be cause to cue a laugh track. For inspiration of how to challenge these longer term relationships, consider looking at domestic dramas. Some ideas to be gleaned from there include:

The Rival -- Just because someone has become married or otherwise committed doesn't mean that all those who might be attracted will now remain at bay. Countless stories have been based on the idea of the rival: someone who vies for the attention of someone in a relationship (or seems to do so). How would a committed PC act if an admirer was all but thrown at him? How would he respond to gossip and relationship turmoil if there were witnesses or rumors of this (even if nothing happened)? How would he respond if the opposite happened . . . if his mate was seen with someone seemingly seeking unjust attention? (The Rival also comes up in comedic tales all the time: A former boyfriend or girlfriend of one of the couple is coming back to town, and there is a competition or rivalry between them.)

The Forbidden Love -- Many aspects of long-term monogamous commitment basically come down to an agreement between adults . . . an agreement that society may or may not accept. For example, if a couple has sworn a commitment to each other but hasn't been legally married, society may make life difficult for the couple "living in sin," despite any protestations of their committed status. Or consider if the church under which a couple is married undergoes a reformation, and declares that marriages of a certain type (say, elven and human) are forbidden by the gods and thus annulled.

Two Lives, Conjoined -- Finally, one mistake many subplots make is to not consider that, even though the mate is "off-camera," he has no desires or wants outside of waiting for his beloved to come home. This is untrue; all spouses have their own wishes, hopes, and dreams, and either strive to make those reality (especially in eras where women are permitted a modicum of self-determination) or risk becoming unhappy. Although hopefully the couple's desires coincide with each other, it is likely there will come the occasional conflict. What if a police officer's spouse requested he resign after one close call at a shoot-out? What if the significant other was offered his dream job . . . in another country?

When romantic subplots have progressed to a more committed level, it's tempting to keep the non-PC portion of that romance on the sidelines. But doing so does a disservice for the work and effort both player and GM have put into developing that plot. Don't let that happen; make sure those stories continue to have life and depth to them, even though you may be in stage three of living Happily Ever After.

* * *

Thank you all for the well-wishes and get-well greetings. For those of you concerned, I've had some treatments so that the vertigo is entirely gone and the pain is mostly gone, but I still have significant hearing loss in my left ear. The docs tell me to get plenty of rest and let it heal for the time being, and hopefully I'll get better. (At least, I *think* that's what they said . . . it's not like I can hear them, really . . .) Barring that, they'll send me to an ear/throat/nose specialist for a cashectomy.

In the meantime (assuming that my health and the fates are remotely cooperative) I'm going out of town for a week, from Sunday the 16th through Sunday the 23rd. So if I'm not responding to email or showing up in the chat room, now you know why. Again, I appreciate everyone's patience.

Take care, all!

--*Steven Marsh*

Designer's Notes: Transhuman Space: In The Well

by Jonathan Woodward

*Oh give me a home
Where the asteroids roam
And the gleebs and the buzzy mugs play
Where gravity's low
And the water is snow
And the desert winds blow you away
Mars, Mars is my home
Where everyone's short just like me
I wish I was where
There is not so much air
And two moons to shine down upon me.
--Spaced Invaders*

There's a lot lurking beneath the surface of Mars. Water. Valuable ores. And, it seems, a lot of number crunching.

Redrawing The Map

The voice boomed down from the loudspeakers in the bottom of the hopper. "Sir, you only have a few minutes. If you don't let me land and take you on board, you'll die."

"Take your lies, and your noisy engines, straight to Charon. I'm working a vein of ore here, and I'm sick of these tricks. There hasn't been water here in a billion years." The prospector's furry fist gestured obscenely, and he went back into his hut.

An amplified sigh echoed against the canyon wall. "Fine. Have it your way." The hopper lifted into the sky, and headed for the top of the cliff; too much distance wasn't enough, in the pilot's opinion.

*The prospector came back out as it left, to make sure it did. **Claim-jackers are getting weirder every year. Smart, though. Didn't think I'd be found this deep in a side canyon. Better go into town and get more ammo, in case he comes back.*** The prospector hadn't been into town in months, or he'd know it had been evacuated. As he turned to make sure his trike was functional, he heard a noise from the main canyon. Then the ground began to rumble. The noise grew louder, until it shook the world. He clapped his hands over his ears, but it still became too loud to bear. He lost his footing, and fell. He gazed in horror as a 10-story wave crashed into the fork where his canyon joined Marineris. In seconds, it was upon him.

***Where the hell did that claim-jacker get all this water?** was his last thought.*

* * *

***In The Well** includes the new System Object Record Sheet, based on the Planetary Record Sheet from **GURPS Space**. The **Transhuman Space** universe requires different information from a generic **Space** campaign, so the new sheets leave off some entries from the old PRS, and add new ones. It still includes the equal-area icosahedral map, however. Unlike most uses of this map, for **In The Well** I had to depict real worlds for which detailed maps already exist: Mars, Venus, and Mercury. The issue of how to make sure geographic features were placed correctly was a serious one.*

Fortunately, a little trigonometry provided the answers. The prime meridian -- the dotted line running from north pole to south pole -- runs from the tip to the middle of the base of two triangles, and across one side of a third. $180^\circ = h + h + h/\cos(30^\circ)$, ergo when measuring north-south, each triangle is 57.06° from base to tip, or 65.88° along its side.

Thus, the triangle vertices (excluding the poles) are at $(90 - 65.88)^\circ$, or 24.12° , north or south. Note that the lines connecting these vertices are not parallels (i.e., latitude lines). Each triangle-edge is part of a great circle -- a circle with its center at the center of the planet. Lines of latitude aren't great circles. Though the ends of each apparently east-west edge are at 24.12° north or south, the middles of these edges are at 32.94° north or south.

For longitude, it was only necessary to divide 360° by 10. There are 10 "equatorial" triangles. If you draw a vertical line through the middle of each, they are at 0° , 36° , 72° , 108° , 144° , 180° , 216° , 252° , 288° , and 324° west. (For planets other than Earth, mapmakers generally measure all longitudes going west from the prime meridian; what would be 20° east on Earth is treated as 340° west.)

Comparing these results with the System Record Sheets in ***GURPS Terradyne*** (one of the few other examples of real planets mapped in ***GURPS***) revealed the Terradyne maps weren't entirely trustworthy. For example, in the Mars map on p. 72 of ***GURPS Terradyne***, the Hellas basin is centered at one of the vertices; 24.12° south, 288° west, to be specific. Hellas is actually at 42° south, 295° west -- a little further west, and much further south. I ended up drawing my own maps based on NASA charts. Included here is a Record Sheet map labeled with a few latitude and longitude guidelines, in case the reader would like to plot other real-world bodies (or well-mapped fictional ones) onto one of these maps.

Designer's Notes: Transhuman Space: In The Well



Materials Science

In The Well contains the Wheeled Vehicle Modular Design System (WVMDS), a modified and simplified subset of the ***GURPS Vehicles*** rules. One of the tricks of adapting ***GURPS Vehicles*** to a specific setting turned out to be applying names to abstract concepts like "TL8 heavy expensive frame." Being able to put a name to those generic descriptions adds greatly to the flavor.

I knew that the WVMDS had to cover two tech levels: TL8 and TL9, referred to in the setting as "old" and "new." My first pass through the Bodies Table mimicked the Vehicle Bodies Table from p. 108 of ***GURPS Traveller: Ground Forces***, providing different *weights* for old and new bodies, while all other statistics stayed the same. This is essentially the same system used in the Vehicle Structure Table on p. 19 of ***GURPS Vehicles***. I.e., "All else being equal, structures decrease in weight as TL increases." My original version included a note saying that the WVMDS bodies were assumed to be aluminum if old, and titanium if new.

The inelegancies of this became clear in the section on varying structural materials. Sentences like, "Bodies can be made cheap, which represents steel if old, or aluminum if new," repeated for half-a-dozen different materials, sound quite awkward, and inelegant prose usually indicates inelegant rules. I burrowed into the **GURPS** Vehicles Vehicle Structure Table to see if I could find a better way.

The key point was remembering that (for example) aluminum doesn't get any stronger as the TL goes up. It just gets obsolete -- ergo, cheaper. If you want to consider aluminum's statistics across TLs, you have to compare "standard" TL8 materials with "cheap" TL9 materials. A little work in Microsoft Excel gave me the following table:

TL8	weight/sf	cost/sf	TL9	weight/sf	cost/sf
very cheap	8	10			
cheap	6	25	very cheap	6	10
standard	4	50	cheap	4.5	25
expensive	3	100	standard	3	50
very expensive	2	250	expensive	2.25	100
advanced	1.5	500	very expensive	1.5	250
			advanced	1.125	500

Each number is the basic design weight or cost from the Vehicle Structure Table, for the specified TL, times the appropriate multipliers for different materials. By staggering the TL9 entries down one row, you can compare materials that have similar weights at different TLs -- i.e., they might be the *same* material, just cheaper. Unfortunately, it's not a perfect fit. Cheap TL8 materials have the same weight per square foot as very cheap TL9 materials, but standard TL9 materials weight half a pound less per sf as cheap TL9 materials. The progression in cost is also not smooth. In some cases, the price of a given material halves from TL8 to TL9, in other places, the reduction is different.

I spent a long time contemplating this, and trying to decide whether to ignore the specific names of materials in the WVMDS (and sacrifice flavor for perfect compatibility), or turn the Vehicle Structure Table on its head (and introduce minor compatibility problems for the purposes of flavor). I eventually went with the latter. The **Transhuman Space** line intentionally has its own identity distinct from **GURPS**, and I felt this would give people a better feel for the vehicles they were designing. From the above table, I took an approximation and made it a rule: *A given structural material halves in cost at each new TL.* My Vehicle Bodies Table ended up listing *one* weight and one cost for each body size, with the note that old bodies cost twice as much. All I had to do now was provide a list of cost and weight multipliers for each material. These had already been set in the core **Transhuman Space** book by David Pulver, in the Manufactured Hull Mass and Cost Table. A little more Excel work revealed that if I used aluminum as my default material, the multipliers for the other materials were clean and simple. (If I'd picked, say, titanium, I would have had a table full of "x0.8333..." and the like.) A quick glance at the early-TL8 wheeled vehicles that surround me in the real world revealed this was a workable default material.

This "inverted" way of looking at the Vehicle Structure Table can be applied to other settings and other materials. For example, at TL3 the standard structural material is wood. If the GM wanted to construct a materials table for a fantasy TL3 setting, it might look like this:

Wood Type	Weight Multiplier	Cost Multiplier
Pine	×2	×0.2
Willow	×1.5	×0.5
Fir	×1	×1
Walnut	×0.75	×2
Oak	×0.5	×5
Lignum Vitae	×0.375	×10

The default material would be "Fir," with a basic design weight of 18 lbs./sf and a basic design cost of \$5/sf, as given in the Vehicle Structure Table for TLs 2 through 4.

These calculations, and other similar ones, made **In The Well** a challenge, but a fun one. It's my hope that the setting plays the same way.

Appendix Z: Shiny!

Random Gemstone Table

by Matt Riggsby

From ancient burials to Crusader falcons to high-tech diamond heists, jewels are favorite valuables in any setting. However, there's a dazzling array of gemstones and other precious minerals, so it may be hard for the GM to keep track of them. This article presents a list of gems GMs can use to randomly produce fabulous treasures, with notes on appearance and historical uses and some consideration of how much they cost in easily translatable **GURPS** terms.

To use the table, roll 2d6, using one as a first digit and the other as a second digit. The past century has seen an explosion of synthetic and artificially enhanced gemstones, as well as new, naturally occurring varieties of stones made accessible by new mining technology. For broadest applicability, this list is limited to historically available stones.

Roll	Material	Notes
1, 1	Azurite	A bluish copper ore, often carved.
1, 2	Agate	A smooth, banded mineral, often used for cameo carving.
1, 3	Amber	.
1, 4	Amethyst	Transparent purple quartz. The Greeks believed that it protected the wearer from intoxication. In the Middle Ages, it was used widely in religious decoration.
1, 5	Aquamarine	Transparent and pale blue, aquamarine is, unsurprisingly, associated with water and good luck for sailors.
1, 6	Beryl	A hard, transparent gem, colorless or yellow; chemically close to emerald and aquamarine, but with different trace elements providing color.
2, 1	Bloodstone	A dark stone with red inclusions resembling blood. Medieval legend says it was created when Christ's blood dripped from the cross onto a piece of jasper.
2, 2	Calcite	Pale colored, cloudy from some angles but translucent from others.
2, 3	Cat's Eye	A form of beryl which, due to a trick of crystal structure, focuses light in a distinctive streak down the center.
2, 4	Chalcedony	A milky, microcrystalline form of quartz, chalcedony can be used decoratively or, in low-tech societies, chipped for stone tools.
2, 5	Coral	Usually red or pink, often carved.
2, 6	Carnelian	Red opaque quartz. Carnelian has been used to protect the spirits of the dead and was often engraved for seals.
3, 1	Diamond	.
3, 2	Garnet	Usually red, but there are rare green and other colored garnets.
3, 3	Glass	Colored glass became a cheap alternative to real gems with the invention of glassblowing.
3, 4	Hematite	A dull, silvery iron ore.
3, 5	Jade	Usually white or green, high quality jade is somewhat translucent. Jade is an extremely tough mineral which, in some low-tech societies, was used for high-quality stone axes.
3, 6	Emerald	.
4, 1	Iolite	A thin piece of this sapphire-like mineral acts as a polarizer, so it was used to locate the sun on cloudy days.
4, 2	Magnetite	Another silvery iron ore.
4, 3	Malachite	A deep green copper ore, often streaked with lighter green.

4, 4	Moonstone	A very pearlescent stone appearing in several colors. Some have tiger-eye or star-like appearance.
4, 5	Lapis lazuli	A soft, dark blue stone, often streaked with gold pyrites.
4, 6	Opal	Opal comes in a variety of shades and levels of opacity, but its most notable attribute is that it diffracts light internally, giving it deep, rainbow-colored overtones.
5, 1	Pearl	Pearls can be regarded as gemstones in their own right, but the pearly insides of seashells can be cut and used for inlay.
5, 2	Peridot	A transparent green stone associated with volcanic deposits.
5, 3	Quartz	Clear quartz is relatively common, so quartz crystals and carvings have often been used as magical adjuncts.
5, 4	Ruby	A very hard, transparent, red stone.
5, 5	Sapphire	Often blue, but can be any color except red. Sapphire is the same stone as ruby, only with different trace elements providing color.
5, 6	Topaz	Usually earth-toned, but there also blue, green, and multi-colored topazes.
6, 1	Tourmaline	Usually found in long, narrow crystals and banded with two or three colors.
6, 2	Turquoise	Porous and associated with copper deposits, turquoise has been used as a protective stone by many societies.
6, 3	Obsidian	A black or muddy green volcanic glass, somewhat translucent but thick pieces are effectively opaque.
6, 4	Onyx	Black opaque quartz.
6, 5-6	Reroll or create your own	

Price

GURPS Magic (p. M20) sets the base cost of enchantment-ready opals at $\$10 \times C^2 + \$40 \times C$ where C is the weight in carats. Use the same price formula for the most precious stones: diamond, garnet, emeralds, pearls, rubies, sapphires. For most of the rest of the materials on the list, which are more common, use the formula $\$1 \times C^{(1.01)} + \$4 \times C$. For colored glass tiles, use a flat cost of $\$.1 \times C$ before the invention of glassblowing, $\$.01 \times C$ thereafter.

However, size and material are just two factors determining price. Other factors include clarity, shape, flaws, demand, and cultural preference. For example, the cost of opals in a conventional **GURPS** fantasy game is likely inflated as a result of increased demand for them as magical adjuncts. The cost of any given gem can be as little as a quarter to as much as five times the base price depending on the quality and treatment of the stone. By the Colonial period, cut becomes another important factor, but faceting wasn't invented until the end of the Renaissance. Before then, the jeweler could do little with a stone but cut out any obvious surface impurities, polish it, and put it in an attractive setting.

Ideally, a one-carat gemstone is slightly dome-shaped and about a quarter inch across, which means 16 one-carat stones per square inch. There are about 155.5 carats to the ounce, or 2,488 carats to the pound. This means that the cost of a one-pound sack of one-carat gemstones -- enough to completely encrust a little over a square foot of surface -- is close to \$125,000, while the cost to do the same with cheap-but-glittering glass is a mere \$25.

Pyramid Review

Slayer's Handbook

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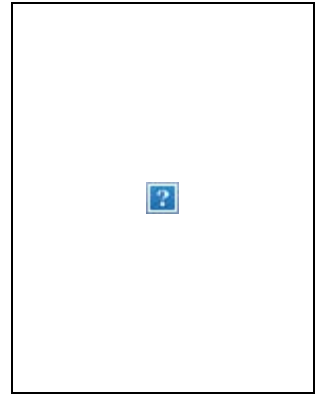
160-page full-color hardcover; \$30.00

If 2002 was a year of good licensed RPGs, then there does remain the question of which of them has to be top of the heap. Decipher, Inc. may have got the big two with the [Star Trek Roleplaying Game](#) and [The Lord of the Rings Roleplaying Game](#). But as good as they are, we have seen their like before; neither are properties new to RPGs. So step forward Eden Studios, who snagged the coolest license from your TV screen . . . *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Now on its seventh season, we have watched Buffy follow her destiny as a Slayer -- facing down demons, vampires, cyborgs and the like, all the while trying to keep the Hellmouth from opening; and dealing with high school, teenage life, and her one true love, and then of course, her own death. Throughout she has been aided by Giles (her appointed Watcher), and the Scooby Gang, fellow high school students, who possess the heart, if not always the ability, to help her out.

Designed by CJ Carella, the [Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game](#) was *the* hot game of 2002 that perfectly captured the cool-but-evolving tone of the television series and matched it with a fast paced set of mechanics that stripped the already quite light Unisystem back to the bone. With both the **Core Book** and [Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game Director's Screen](#) already available, Eden Publishing begins 2003 with the first full supplement for the game.

The **Slayer's Handbook** is *not* "The Slayers Handbook" given out by the Watcher's Council to every Slayer, that is, excepting to our titular heroine. Instead it looks at the nature of becoming and being a slayer as well as dealing out all slayerage. Until, that is, she meets her end. It discusses two types of basic slayer -- the Clueless (that is, Buffy), and the Slayer-In-Training, of which Kendra is the primary example. The Clueless has all the benefits of growing up in normal society, but knows nothing of her destiny and all that it entails, while the Slayer-In-Training knows all too well, but really sticks out like a sore thumb when it comes to normal society. Using both these two and the murderous Faith, the first chapter looks at all stages of a slayer's life: Early Life, Becoming a Slayer, Training, The Job, The Slayer Handbook, the Cruciamentum (the test that the Watcher's Council sets all slayers on their 18th birthday to see if their training alone, and not their slayer abilities, are enough for her to take down a blood-sucking pasty one), and The Bitter End. Under each period of a slayer's life, Motivation discusses exactly that for the prospective slayer player, while Drama looks at the game and storytelling possibilities for the Director. A Brief History of Slayerage looks at slayers of the past, from the First Slayer onwards, though it does only reference those that either appeared on screen or have been mentioned. For licensing reasons, only material from the television series can be used and not that from the many Buffy-related properties. Those that have appeared on screen -- the First Slayer, the Chinese Slayer (from the Boxer Rebellion) and the New York Slayer (from the 1970s) -- are each given NPC stat blocks. Both Kendra and Faith get the full character sheet treatment all ready-to-play, *a la* the Scooby Gang in the **Core Book**. The chapter as a whole feels a little slight, but is nevertheless full of useful information and expands upon that given in the **Core Book**.

The second chapter, "Heroes 'R Us," is aimed as much at the Scooby Gang players as it is for the potential slayer gamer. The single new Drawback is Mental Problem (Phobia), its inclusion here rectifying its strange omission from



the **Core Book**. This drawback is for more than simple fears, though it is left up to the Director to decide if Anya's Leporid aversion is a *real* phobia. The new qualities are packages, such as Jock, Nerd, Watcher, and Slayer are in the Core Book. They include Cop/Ex-Cop, Criminal, Nosy Reporter, Occult Investigator, and Slayer in Training. Unlike similar qualities in the **Core Book**, these are quite career orientated, but this does not necessarily make them limited in application. Players are doubtless to be creative in applying them in designing their own characters using these Qualities. A further quality, the Totem Warrior diverges from the Buffy canon (and clearly says so) to provide a Slayer-like supernatural package that can be taken by male as well as female characters. Essentially, they are Native American holy warriors that take on the mantle and aspects, but not the form, of a particular totem spirit. They play an important part in one of the settings described later in the book.

A new maneuver is provided with a second setting in mind. Fast-Draw can be rolled as a Gun-Fu skill, or alternatively treated as a unique ability that falls under the Wild Card skill. The list of new weapons and equipment is a mix of the old, the contemporary, and the fantastic. For the old there is the Thompson sub-machine gun, the blunderbuss, the musket, the six-shooter and the lasso; for the contemporary, there is the chainsaw, rocket launcher, and the flamethrower. The fantastic includes the science fiction analysers and energy disruptors, and the cyberpunk cybernetic prosthesis, dermal armor, aural and optical enhancements, mind jacks, and smart guns. For those fans of the movie *Blade II*, there is the skin suit, essentially a full body "sun suit" for vampires!

The new qualities and discussion of slayerage are put into action with the 11 new archetypes. For the potential Slayer there is the Former Runaway, Reluctant Slayer, Dark Slayer, Slayer Heiress, and Slayer-In-Training. Even the Scoobies get in on the slayerage act with the Slayer Poseur, or normal girl who really wants to be the Slayer and she will do all the training it takes to be one. The other Scooby-like archetypes are the Paranormal Expert, the Intrepid Web Journalist, Adventurous Teacher (who has lost a good student or two under mysterious circumstances), the Night Shift Cop (who has lost a partner) and the Redemption-Seeking Criminal. These are all presented in the same format as those in the **Core Book** and serve to move the ***Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game*** away from its high school base and into the adult world.

Just as the opening chapter looked at the nature and responsibilities of being a slayer, "It's A Different World" does the same for the Buffy format and setting. After providing a solid overview of what makes up a Buffy setting, it takes the format backwards, forwards, sideways, and always asking the question "What If?" The backwards mini-setting is "Really Getting Medieval" with post-Jean d'Arc France still at war with England and the demon-worshipping sorcerer knight Gilles de Rais as the big bad. "Pulp Slayerage" is backwards and sideways for a game of Chicago gangsters run vampire-style. Add in all the goodness of the pulps -- masked crime fighters, private eyes, femme fatales, exotic mystics along with Nazi or Red machinations -- and this has plenty of potential. All that and we still have yet to mention the compatibility that Pulp Slayerage has with Eden's ***Pulp Zombies***, its latest genre supplement for [*All Flesh Must Be Eaten RPG*](#). "Vampires and Mirror Shades" is near future cyberpunk world that allows players to make use of all the cyber and other futuristic gear given in the previous chapter.

The television series has already explored a number of alternate universes, such as superstar, where super-dweeb Jonathon makes himself the most popular man in the world. The "What If?'s" do this with the Buffy series itself, exploring what might have been if Buffy never came to Sunnydale (as Cordelia asked for in the episode, "The Wish"), if Angelus never killed the gypsy that led to him being cursed or gifted with a soul; and finally, how the US authorities would have reacted if Riley had blown the lid on the Initiative and the supernatural. How far would the Slayer and Scooby Gang go in sacrificing personal freedoms in order to protect the public from vampires and demons?

If ***All Flesh Must Be Eaten*** has its Deadworlds and [*Terra Primate*](#) its Apeworlds, ***Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game*** has its Buffyverses. The Buffyverse sampler pack presents three such settings, each fully described and accompanied with episode suggestions (much like Apeworlds and Deadworlds) along with a pair of ready-to-play archetypes suited to each Buffyverse. "The Lair of the Wendigo" is contemporaneous with the television series and is a slightly different take on the Hellmouth scenario. Set in the Oregon town of Grizzly Peak, it has a *Twin Peaks* feel and is dominated by the Townsend-Boyd family. Naturally it has lots of secrets, including flesh-eating Wendigo and a band dedicated to fighting the darkness. These are the Totem Warriors, aided by the ghost of a native Indian. They use the Totem Warrior quality given earlier and can be based upon several different animals described. The two archetypes given are the Rebel Without A Clue (who is a totem warrior) and Wannabe Shaman.

"Stakes and Six Shooters" takes the game back to the Wild West and the small town of Apocalypse, Texas. This has snake folk and a vampire/demon bordello along with a Slayer gunslinger and an all-too-British Victorian Watcher. This can be run as for a cinematic style western setting or combined with [The Knuckleduster Cowntown Creator](#). The third and final Buffyverse explores a world in which Glory was successful in every way and left behind an apocalypse in which demons roam freely. The archetypes include a Road Warrior and the Grim Slayer, the last of the new Slayer archetypes given in the book. As mini settings, these three can be used as the basis for a Buffy-style series of their own, or places to visit as part of a more regular Buffy type game. Plus they highlight the versatility and malleability of the television series' core elements and, to some extent, of this game's mechanics. Even if they are never used, they can at least serve as examples or templates from which the Director can create their own.

Rounding out the ***Slayer's Handbook*** is another episode in the ongoing series that began in the ***Core Book*** and continued with the game's first release, the ***Game Director's Screen***. To avoid any *real* spoilers, nothing more will be said bar a teaser -- "There's a new slayer in town, and this time it ain't no girl, but a guy!!!" The adventure is a solid piece that can be used as is or worked into the Director's own series. Following this is an appendix that examines the personalities and motivations of Buffy and all of the Scooby Gang members up to and including her sister, Dawn. Not only is this interesting, it is useful for those games that are run with the television show characters only. Finally, all of the tables from the ***Core Book*** are reprinted here, but updated to take account of the various additions given in the ***Slayer's Handbook***.

In the end, the ***Slayer's Handbook*** is misnamed, because despite the solid exploration of all things Slayerage, there's a lot of other material in this volume. Enough that is, to not only make it more the ***Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game Companion***, but also to make it of use to more than just the Slayer player -- both Directors and other players alike. If there is just the one single downside to the ***Slayer's Handbook***, it is the price -- \$30 does seem a lot to be paying out for 156 pages of gaming material. That said, it is for the ***Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game***, it is done in full gorgeous color, it is a hardback, and it is good gaming material -- material that not only expertly expands upon the ***Core Book***, but also shows the Director how to expand upon their own series.

--Matthew Pook

CyberSoapOpera

by Chad Underkoffler

Genre: Science Fiction and Soap Opera

Style: Melodrama

Fidelity: *Physical:* High, *Emotional:* Low

Themes: Secrets, Love, Betrayal

Campaign Setting and Background Information

2015 was the start of a golden age -- for those in their golden years. But for anyone under 65, life sucked.

As the Baby Boomers grayed, many felt mortality's teeth gnawing. Fears of an uncertain post-employment forced them to stay in the workforce longer, locking up senior positions, increasing average labor costs (since senior employees get higher compensation), and causing corporations to hemorrhage money from skyrocketing benefit payouts. These factors led to marginalization of the Boomers' kids (the GenXers), denying them experience in handling authority and responsibility -- even stable employment, in some cases.

The Boomers successfully lobbied Congress for increases and guarantees in Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid spending; for strong anti-ageism laws (slanted to protect them, of course); for increased funds distributed for medical research (especially Geriatric Care); and for more Defense spending. Not only did this increase the tax burden on those still working, it also required deep cuts into Public Welfare, Education, and Transportation. This legislation further smacked the middle-aged GenXers in the face, working at marginal jobs or flailing as best they could at highly-responsible positions for the first time, and told the Millennials -- the GenXers' children -- to get in line for their turn.

While the country slid into recession, new technology turned up the heat on the situation: increasingly functional cybernetic prosthetics and the Clonomatic™ -- a 3-dimensional biological "printer." Driven by the money and (self-)interest of the Boomers in extending life, biotech boomed. Through the use of the Clonomatic™, cell growth accelerants, a donation of the patient's own DNA, and some deft labwork, replacement gene-gineered (GGd) organs could be manufactured in three to six weeks, ready for transplant, with no chance of rejection. Used up your liver through hard-drinking? No problem; chuck it and plug in a new one! The high cost of GGd organs was easily affordable to the Boomers, due to their Congressional maneuvering.

The needy young and poor made due with cybernetics. While cheaper than GGd parts, they were also clunky, buggy, and unattractive; cyberneticists were much further down the medical research grant approval list. This added yet more fuel to the fire between young and old. Consider: if a 25-year-old diabetic has to go into debt just to have a massive piece of metal embedded into his torso to live, what right does grandpa have to a nearly-free skin-replacement to merely erase wrinkles?

Despite all these medical miracles, the Boomers continued to get older and closer to death. While life could be extended tremendously by GGd piecework, there remained a point of diminishing returns as entire body systems weakened. This, coupled with the growing resentment of their juniors, fanned the flames of Boomer jealousy and paranoia of youth. The former flower children of the 1960s changed their one-time slogan to "Don't trust anyone *under 55*" and wasted substantial time, effort, and money forcing through various types of "morality legislation" to punish the (not so) young.

For their part, GenXers and Millennials suffered reduced purchasing power, crushing taxes, reverse-age-based-discrimination, and ulcer-inducing stress (from being forced to suddenly take the corporate reins, without sufficient training or experience).

Many of them retreated to the Internet (and its successor, the omni-media Metawebnet) for their entertainment, finding sanctuary in an area thus-far ignored by their elders. That worked until 2013, when the Metawebnet VR Holostation allowed the Boomers to go online like never before. The Holostation produced an immersive, 3D holographic environment, networked with wrist computers and cellphone earbuds, allowed intuitive navigation with a slim, chic set of cloth-computer Surf Gloves, and put a familiar face on online interactions with a simple holo-Avatar and holo-Icon interface. The oldsters invaded the last refuge of their children, and mucked it up just as bad as they had mucked up the real world. Many started their own Metawebnet home businesses, clogged chatfora with their cantankerous opinions, or surfed wildly looking for entertainment. And, since they no longer had to be at work all day, Boomers swarmed the Metawebnet 24-7.

The demographics of viewers thus shifted upward, the ages of celebrities increased. Indeed, few young characters appeared in media other than as criminals or comic relief. The Dawsons and Buffys of the world had been excised, and the Millennials (unfortunately) named after them felt likewise.

Hoping to score some fat Boomer dollars, media corporations quickly changed the face of entertainment. "Advertainment" took product-placement and corporate sponsorship to a whole new level. Not only were a corporation's -- or an alliance of corporations' -- products obviously present in the entertainment, they figured prominently in the plots and storylines of each show, be they sitcom-mercials, dra-madvert, or docu-mercial.

Fed on a pabulum of mindless, maddening advertainment; subjected to unflattering pictures of themselves in media; made to feel guilty for their very age, the Boomers' children and grandchildren smoldered with resentment. Not only did they have to support the old coots at great cost, but they had to do so while being vilified. Disenfranchised Millennials began forming "Enfant Terrible" gangs dedicated to glorifying their babyhood -- pacifiers and punks, bibs and bicycle chains, formula bottles and firearms -- and to terrorizing Boomers. Their rallying cry became "Just Die Already!" (JDA) As violent crimes against the elderly increased, a positive reinforcing loop began with government spending on law and order and police crackdowns aimed squarely at these children. (Luckily, the bill to get the voting age raised to 28 failed in the Senate.)

Something had to crack.

In May of 2019, the Phage struck, and nearly slammed the world back into barbarity. A communicable, transgenic disease that attacked weak links and genetic instabilities in GGd cells, the Phage tore through the GGd Boomers like wildfire. The First World countries -- those with the highest number of GGd-cell recipients -- were hardest hit. But all suffered when the virus crossed-over and began to infect people *without* GGd cells. Tens of millions died; economies crumbled; civilizations came to a standstill. Only because of the experimental Clean Process technology, a growing resistance to the Phage, and a substantial amount of luck was the slow fall stopped, and eventually reversed. After a year of disease and madness, and five painful years of reconstruction, the world slowly regained stability, built on newfound passion and surgical steel.

It is 2025. Welcome to the CyberSoapOpera.

What Everybody Knows

CSO Setting Shortlist: For ease of understanding, the world in 2025 is much like that of 2003, with the following changes:

- Few people over age 65.
- Almost every person has cyberware, usually organ or bone replacements.
- Personal computers are wristwatch-sized, and can be networked together with micro-cellphone earbuds and home Holostations.
- All food and water for consumption is put through the Clean Process -- a cycle of antiviral agents and radiation therapies -- to remove dormant Phage. Thus, all food comes in foil-wrap, and unbottled water should be heavily filtered before use.
- Mega-corporations have been replaced by alliances between small and powerful "family corporations."

- All broadcast media (and a large portion of print media) has been subsumed by the Metawebnet.
- Additional changes as noted under *Post-Phage (American) Society and Culture*.

Timeline of the Phage

<i>May 2019:</i>	Many Chicagoan GGd organ recipients begin dying from "speed cancers" and new diseases with bizarre symptomology -- greenish scales, fibrous growths, sporadic blindness, etc. These cases were untreatable. By the end of the month, doctors, EMTs, hospitals, and morticians begin to buckle under the load.
<i>June 2019:</i>	Production and workforce shortages begin, as large numbers of people sicken or take off to care for sick relatives. The transportation infrastructure totters under the stress. Phage victims suffer an 85% death rate. Enfant Terrible gangs riot in LA, NYC, and Chicago. Recession deepens.
<i>July 2019:</i>	Phage reported in Europe, Asia, and Australia. US Surgeon General granted vast powers. Some crops begin to suffer signs of blight. First cases of "non-GGd" Phage reported.
<i>August 2019:</i>	Surgeon General declares NYC and Chicago under "universal quarantine"; blockades each with military forces. Thousands escape the patrols and spread the Phage further. Clean Process discovered. First cases of Phage reported from Africa and South America.
<i>September 2019:</i>	Non-GGd victims of the Phage discovered to have only a 25% death rate, and respond well to treatments. Despite this, within weeks the epidemic becomes pandemic. By the end of September, over 400,000 fatalities are ascribed to the virus.
<i>October 2019:</i>	US economy finally crashes, sparking "the Great Depression II." Entire harvests lost to blight, smut, and other Phage-induced diseases. Rioting becomes a daily event. On October 13, 2019, the Surgeon General declares Chicago beyond hope of cure, and orders "nuclear sterilization." A mushroom cloud blooms in the Midwest.
<i>November 2019:</i>	Bowing under the weight of lost manpower, supplies, and communications, the US Government suffers a hiatus. A period of lawlessness, violence, and bloodshed ensues: the Winter of Hate. Natural resistance of survivors against Phage strains increase.
<i>December 2019:</i>	Shortages of food and fuel become acute. Global population decimated -- one in 10 persons is dead of Phage, with additional casualties dying from starvation or violence. Clean Process reworked for mass-processing of food.
<i>January 2020:</i>	Pro tempore US Government led by Surgeon General uses remaining troops to set up Clean Process Centers in major metropolitan areas. Phage has tainted nearly all biological life on Earth, including most GGd stem cell banks, setting genetic engineering back decades.
<i>February 2020:</i>	Phage vectors through food curtailed through use of Clean Process; some evidence shows that Clean Processed products reduces Phage symptoms. Order slowly returns, spreading from the city centers outward.
<i>March 2020:</i>	The Winter of Hate ends with the Surgeon General reinstating Congress and the President. The US -- and the world -- begins the long slow reconstruction. Cyberware used to replace body parts lost to Phage; government subsidies and loans used to ensure low cost for basic procedures and equipment.

April 2020 through
December 2024:

Mutant Phage strains cause occasional flare-ups, but are usually contained. The Great Depression II ends. JDA membership dwindles by 50%; remaining Enfants Terrible turn their sights on the GenXers.

Cybernetics

Due to the pandemic nature of the Phage and its transgenic strains, everyone on Earth has been touched, personally suffering debilitating illness and cybernetic replacement. While much cyberware serves as replacements for internal organs -- livers, kidneys, lungs, hearts, even bones -- a substantial number are external organs: eyes, hands, feet, and limbs. Artificial replacements are *not* innately superior to natural parts save in two respects: They cannot catch the Phage and they are easier to repair. Advanced capabilities (infrared vision, ultrasonic hearing) and hidden weaponry (claws, guns, lasers) are *definitely* not standard; indeed, any sort of functional cyberware of that nature would be custom-built, and quite expensive (see boxed text, *CSO Cyberware Benchmarks*). One of the advantages to having cyberware, however, is the ability to purchase an integral Meta Link for non-autonomic systems, obviating the need for a keyboard or Surf Gloves (see below, *The Metawebnet*). It might feel a little funny, remotely moving holo-Icons by thinking at your cyberfoot, but hey -- whatever works.

Preferably, cyberware should be as subtle in appearance as possible: artificial parts should look real. However, attention to cosmetic detail costs, and not everyone can afford to have their skin-plastic blended to their natural tones. There is some socio-economic discrimination, based not on nationality or color of skin, but on blatancy of cybernetics. This has caused marginalized groups to punk-out, embracing the heavily-chromed veneer, giving society the bird. This practice is viewed as tacky or kitsch at best and déclassé or uncultured at worst.

Also, Phage strains continue to mutate and develop resistance to treatment. When dealing with an omnipresent virus that can turn your innards to jelly, it's not a great idea to cut open big holes in your flesh to let them in.

Therefore, in the CSO setting, few people would voluntarily go under the knife for cybernetic replacement -- there are few benefits -- unless the organ in question is already failing.

Family Corporations: The day of the mega-corporation is over; they could not survive the financial burden of astronomical benefits packages, infrastructure failures, and increasingly inept management. (Many Boomer muckety-mucks, despising their younger successors, failed to adequately train them; when the GenXers and Millennials took over, this lack of understanding, coupled with the stresses on the mega-corps caused by the Phage, caused many to go bankrupt.) Currently, most corporations are small, nimble, and focused; strong federal aid initiatives have helped these upstart small businesses to survive as their managers learned the ropes. These slim companies have come to be called "family corporations" or "familycorps": while many are owned and operated solely by related persons, the term refers more to their tightly-knit nature.

This means that wealth is shared around (all members own shares of the business and receive dividends), employees have both financial and personal ties to their employers, everyone -- from the lowliest dishwasher to the head chef in a familycorp restaurant -- is on the board of directors, and companies are small enough to have intimate knowledge of the day-to-day business at the top. It's the cottage industry of the future.

CSO Cyberware Benchmarks

Cyberware can be rated by using the same prose-based system used for rating characters. Some benchmarks of cyberware replacement quality (Cost, Stability/Durability, Speed, and Aesthetics) appear below, to give you an idea of how this could work:

- **Poor:** Dirt cheap, buggy, slow as hell, bulky, and obvious.
- **Average:** Cheap, somewhat buggy, slow, somewhat bulky, and obvious.
- **Good:** High end of moderate, a little buggy, average speed, slim but still obvious
- **Expert:** Quite expensive, rarely buggy, fast, almost unnoticeable.
- **Master:** Exorbitant, rarely buggy, quite fast, undetectable.

Further Ideas: If the above is too simplistic,

Familycorps usually restrict their business activities to a single sphere, product, process, service, or topic, and form alliances with related niche familycorps to offer services for consumers (for example, Irons Cybernetics has allied with Landover Hospitals and Ridge Surgeons to provide end-to-end care for users of their cyberware).

The Metawebnet: Fold television, radio, telephone and pager systems, and the Internet together; then add a wireless connectivity and 360° environmental holographic virtual reality display with vocal, Surf Glove, or Meta Link manipulation of holo-Icons: Welcome to the Metawebnet. Packed with technology that would make a 1990's computer scientist weep, a Metawebnet Holostation is a black, softball-sized sphere that lets you do it all online, the way you want, with your preferences and plenty of storage space. In addition, when they're away from home, everyone's still got their earbuds and wrist-comps, wirelessly linking them into the public Metawebnet and their home Holostation (though unless they carry a remote holo-projector, they'll have to work from Old School flat screens).

People walk through a world of information, constantly connected. The designer of a Metawebnet area creates the "look" of the site or channel for consumers; consumers select their personal Avatars, which remain the same no matter where they go. So, while the "virtual studio" of Shakespeare Beer Playhouse looks like the Globe Theater, the audience is packed with pink dragons, catgirls, and shiny robots.

But before characters put their hacking shoes on, something should be pointed out: the people who built this ubiquitous media network saw *War Games* and *Sneakers*, read *Neuromancer* and *Cuckoo's Egg*, and worshipped at the feet of Stephenson and Sterling. Financial, business, and scientific information is almost universally kept on Utterly Private Networks (UPNs), campus-based and constructed *not* to be constantly connected to the Metawebnet. Electronic transactions are encoded in standalone nodes and exchanged through protected nodes; both types physically disengage from the networks when not in use. Neither type are ever connected to a UPN and the Metawebnet at the same time.

Realtime-hacking is dead, program-based hacking is harder, and information is wrapped up tight. Any sort of cyber-theft requires a substantial physical component -- stealing the codebook, being passed the UPN-node-Metawebnet sync schedule, seducing passwords *and* passkeys out of drunken executives -- it can't all be done remotely. (While televideoconferencing still happens via the Metawebnet, all sensitive information gets locked up on UPNs.)

an easy system for Tradeoffs can be incorporated. After all, one cannot have everything. Using Tradeoffs, out of Cost, Stability/Durability, Speed, and Aesthetics, three aspects appear at the quality level, with the fourth aspect one level lower (minimum of Poor). Thus, if Enrique spends long green for an Expert cyber-eye, it's really pricey, and could either:

- A. React faster than a normal eye and be inconspicuous, but be crash-prone (Blue Eyeball of Death);
- B. Have normal reaction time and stability, but look obvious as hell; or
- C. Appear unremarkable with long periods of error-free operation, but have molasses-slow reaction time.

If someone wants a customized piece of cyberware -- usually involving weaponry or additional capability -- the Cost should increase one level, while the Stability/Durability should decrease one level; at the GM's option, this can be in addition to the tradeoffs above. So, if Chrome Billy wants an Average cyber-hand with an integral pistol, the cruel GM could have it turn out to have a Good Cost, Poor Stability/Durability, Average Speed, and Poor Aesthetics.

"Cyberpsychosis": Many Cyberpunk stories and games deal with a fundamental dehumanization when cybernetic modifications are undergone. Instead of some mystical mumbo-jumbo, a simple way to incorporate this Cyberpunk trope for characterization would be to imagine cyberware as glasses, braces (teeth, leg, or back), acne, or prominent facial moles (for obvious cybermods), or even a chronic medical condition -- glandular disorders, tubes in the ears, requiring an asthma inhaler (for imperceptible ones). Feelings of freakishness would then stem from poor body image, social disapprobation, and/or a limitation of activity. This psycho-social characterization of the effect goes well with elements of the Soap Opera genre (see below, *Advice, Opportunities, & Pitfalls*).

The majority of modern runs are not so much "espionage" as "private detection": hackers seek out and collate information. Like the target's preferences in advertainment, food, goods, and services; spy on their actions in Metawebnet social areas; take incriminating holo-shots; set up honey-traps and badger-games; and so forth. They may use Avatar spoofing, tempting or misleading pop-up holo-ads, and tracer programs to seek out their targets' guilty pleasures . . . or entice them into doing something disgraceful.

Post-Phage (American) Society and Culture: With the deaths of the Boomers, all aspects of the rebuilding and governance of the world has fallen into the hands of GenXers and older Millennials. While still unused to the weight of responsibility and the ethics of authority, they have made incredible strides in patching together a working society in a short time.

By necessity, the slacker postmodern sarcasm and apathy has been squelched. There's simply no way to stand aside from what must be done. And, frankly, few miss it: they enjoy rebuilding, reshaping, repairing the world. No longer hemmed in by the disdain, expectations, and social and legal strictures of the Boomers, they finally have room to move . . . if at great cost. (Indeed, some may say that the entire populace is suffering under the need to prove themselves to their lost parents and grandparents, if not themselves.) The sardonic Gen X legacy remains, however; any failure -- public or private -- is met with withering contempt and biting ridicule.

OPTION: Cool Netrunnings

Something that might help keep the rest of a playing group from falling asleep if a computer cowboy needs to sniff out the 411 on a target is to anthropomorphize the hacker's necessary programs as characters/caricatures for other players to portray. This makes the exercise a team endeavor. Thus, an tracker program manifests as a cartoon bloodhound; an Avatar-spoof becomes a sexy robot with silver skin and twisted-pair hair; a program that opens high-speed links between Metawebnet nodes is characterized by a British chauffeur with limo, etc.

"Natural" and "organic" things have been elevated to a position of great respect, almost a throwback to a Romantic philosophy. The modern view of technology is ambivalent; its sins (genetic engineering, nuclear cleansing of cities, the Phage) are balanced against its virtues (cybernetics, the Metawebnet, the Clean Process). All-in-all, technology is neither panacea or savior, but like fire -- a useful servant and deadly master.

Socio-politically, the three branches of US government tick along, with newer (and fewer) faces. In many regards, the Winter of Hate wiped the slate clean, effectively ending the Great Depression II. In attempting to rebuild the economy, the absence of the Boomers (and the massive drain they had on the system) has been a boon -- and many feel guilt when they recognize it. The government and the familycorps work together as best they can.

In the aftermath of the Phage, America has welcomed immigration with fervor previously unmatched. Multiculturalism is not a mouthed ideal; it is the state of things. The United States needs strong backs and sharp minds to continue reconstruction. If you're willing to work, America can use you -- come as you are. The Melting Pot has become the Mosaic, and is all the stronger for it -- though there can be tremendous friction.

One source of this friction are the remaining *Enfant Terribles*, though their membership is half what it was pre-Phage. The hardliners have just changed the target of their JDA philosophy: now it's aimed at the GenXers. And some JDA factions go further, embracing white-supremacy, black-supremacy, chrome-supremacy, etc. Luckily, they are fractured and at cross-purposes, more interested in bashing each other than assaulting the fragile system.

Doctors and healers are at the top of the social pyramid, followed closely (in rough order) by cybernetics engineers, industrialists, teachers, police/fire/EMTs, research scientists, advertainment celebrities, laborers, and lawyers. Genetic engineers are looked upon as necessary evils to help understand and repair the damage wrought by the Phages (how 2003 comedians characterize lawyers can serve as a touchstone). This is due to social paranoia, but also the Phage's effect on DNA worldwide; the virus has inserted its own junk DNA into all living cells on Earth, causing its own breakages, mutations, and weak links. One does not cross a creaky bridge running at top speed; instead, one carefully inches their way along. Anyone doing genetic research or engineering must be licensed and monitored by the federal

government; unlicensed genetics work is a serious felony.

Safe food and water is a concern. Many varieties of genetically-modified foodstuffs have either died out or mutated into inedible forms. The production of soy, corn, canola, and cotton has suffered the greatest impact: pre-Phage, these four crops made up 99% of all the GGd crop acreage in the US. Also, beef and chicken have become delicacies, while "wild fare" (venison, wild turkey, rabbit) now makes up a large proportion of meat consumption. All food and water are exposed to the Clean Process, to nullify any Phage virii; resistant strains lead to outbreaks, though few are deadly. Government subsidies to food producers initially kept prices reasonable; over five years, the Clean Process has been refined enough not to require any additional federal funding for manufacturers.

What Everybody Doesn't Know

The Phage 2: Electric Boogaloo

(For those folks interested in setting a campaign during the Phage, ["It's How You Plague The Game: Determining How A Cataclysmic Contagion Affects Your Game World,"](#) by James Ryan, would be a valuable resource.)

It's not known for certain how it started, but everyone has their pet theory on the Phage's origin (see boxed text, *Who Let the Phage Out?*). Depending on the source, it could be done again -- and worse.

Social and legal restrictions -- as well as a handful of Phage outbreaks -- keep folks from pre-Phage levels of genetic engineering research. Therefore, in a setting that thrives on secrets and betrayal, everyone's covertly keeping their eyes on the GGd prize, especially the agricorps, the foodcorps, and the government. If sneaky Pete gene-splicers get sloppy, it could mean anything from long jail terms and destruction of their family corporations to a new Phage getting loose.

PC Guidance

It is recommended that all PCs play the members/directors of a single familycorp. Select a business -- perhaps they manufacture cyber-livers -- and let the players thrash out what titles (CEO, CFO, CIO, VP of Human Resources, VP of Operations, VP of Advertaintments, etc.), what job duties (cyber-liver assembly; R&D; deal with COMA, the Cyber-Organ Manufacturers Alliance; liaison with the local Hospital Guild; purchaser of components from the town's electronics familycorp alliance, etc.) they perform, as well as what their relationships are. Doing this will provide a ready-made structure for PCs, with links to at least one NPC (a business contact) per PC.

Characters can be envisioned pre-play as simply-drawn types (see *Soaps' Tropes: Sudsy Archetypes*), with deeper characterizations and specific nuances developed in-play. They should also have at least one or two pieces of cyberware -- one cool (tricked-out cyber-hand) and one lame (cyber-bladder); psychological effects of these should play a part in characterization, especially if the replacement is overt.

Every character should have at least one Goal -- what they have focused their life on achieving. This could be anything from "Replace my brother as CEO" to "build a better cyber-mousetrap" to "get Doctor Andrewski into the

OPTION: Who Let the Phage Out?

It's unknown how the Phage was developed and released. Some options for GMs to select from:

- A cybernetics megacorp, trying to screw their genetic engineering rivals.
- A Boomer genetic engineer, looking for a way to perform massive "system upgrades" (immortality, perfect health) to human DNA.
- A Gen Xer militiaman, attempting domestic bioterrorism.
- An Enfant Terrible savant and adherent to the "Just Die Already!" movement, seeking to give the Boomers a push down the Stairwell of Life.
- A biohazard mishap in a covert government bioweapons lab.
- Natural virii transgenically affected by infecting genetically-modified organisms, which then develop a taste for that GGd flavor.
- The Phage was brought back . . . from Space!

sack" to "crush Betty Toshiba because she insulted me at the Spring Cyber-Cotillion." Characters may have multiple overt or covert Goals.

Every character should have *at least* one Secret -- something that they are desperate to keep anyone from finding out. Perhaps they did something to cause the familycorp's advertainment to be boycotted, or they secretly murdered cousin Sue, or they've been seeing brother Bob's wife on the side. Secrets have got to be something that could get them into trouble, jail, or death. Characters can have multiple Secrets, and might even share a single Secret among themselves.

NPC Backgrounds

Antoinette Landover Irons: A heavily-cybered, but still attractive woman, Antoinette married Carl Irons for a combination of lust and money. She dresses stunningly well and wears her hair in a Veronica Lake style; both are to draw attention away from her half-face. She is powerful, due to being both the CEO of Landover Hospitals and the CFO of Irons Cybernetics, and thus responsible for liaisons between Landover Hospitals, Irons Cybernetics, and Ridge Surgeons (Expert Businesswoman). Her Goals are to amass enough money quietly to have all her cyberware replaced at one time with more aesthetic versions, and also to seduce Jude Meadowbrook; her Secret is she's having a fling with Doctor Ridge.

"Colonel" Constantine Irons: Born poor and brilliant, Constantine managed to patent a working cyber-spleen before the Phage (Master Cyberneticist). Recruited into the Surgeon General's pro tem cabinet, he spent half of the Winter of Hate in a lab, and the other half on the battlefield. He wears his extensive cyberware as a badge of honor, and looks down upon those who try to "make it look like something it ain't." Business ally (but personal enemy) of Dr. Ridge, he's married to Antoinette Landover and has government connections. His Goal is to find a new medical firm to replace Ridge Surgeons in his alliance; his Secret is that he let a Boomer Phage victim die when he could have saved her.

Jude Meadowbrook: Young, handsome ex-Enfant Terrible, CIO and VP of Advertainment for Irons Cybernetics. A Good fighter, Expert hacker, and Master orator, he worships Constantine, who saved him during a pitched battle in Hoboken. He has a cyber-eye, a cyber-ear (with radio reception), a metal hand, and a shrouded past. His Goal is to marry Cherise Ridge, who is one of his professional contacts; his Secrets are that he was a former leader in the JDA, and has an Evil Twin still involved in the movement (see my February *Let Me Tell You About My Character* column, "[Mark Meadowbrook, Evil Twin](#)" at [RPG.Net](#) for more information).

Doctor Austin Ridge: Born to wealth and power, Austin Ridge is an Expert Surgeon and businessman. Incredibly vain, he maintains his Master appearance through tremendous expenditures of cash for top-of-the-line cyberware: few people know that most of his skull is artificial; he's also paid ludicrous amounts of money to equip his cyber-eye with night-vision and a blinding laser. His Goal is to collect as much genetic engineering data, equipment, and supplies as possible secretly; his Secrets include his affair with Antoinette Irons, his unlicensed Good genetic engineering, and his attraction to Jude Meadowbrook.

Cherise Ridge: Cherise inherited her father's (Master) looks, as well as the Expert acting skills of her late mother. She not only serves as the VP of Advertainment for Ridge Surgeons, she also performs in their productions. She has a cyber-larynx (gives her a husky speaking voice and a tremendous singing range); also, her entire renal system is artificial. She works with Jude Meadowbrook on alliance advertainments, and thinks that his interest in her is "cute." Her Goal is to start her own advertainment familycorp; her Secret is her long-standing idolization of/crush on Antoinette Landover Irons.

Events & Possible Story Arcs

Most events and story arcs should involve the character's pursuit of their Goals and their attempts to keep their Secrets inviolate. If a Secret is discovered, it can be used as leverage against that character; if publicly announced, a Secret can lead to narrative punishment -- loss of money, prestige, power, or freedom.

- *Social Skullduggery*: Recurrent events in Soap Operas include parties, courtships, marriages, divorces, deaths, accidents, and disappearances. By putting characters with interlinking or antithetical connections, Goals, and Secrets into the same room, sparks should fly. Everyone will be out to further their aims, cuts shady deals, and hide their confidences.
- *Blackmail!*: Austin discovers Jude's *Enfant Terrible* past, and repeatedly blackmails him into assignments. Constantine discovers his wife's desire for fancy cyberware, and belittles her publicly. Jude finds out about Constantine's past, and helps hush it up.
- *Vial of Pure*: Rumors of a vial of pure, untainted cell accelerant begin to circulate; such an item would be both illegal and worth amazing amounts of money to interested genetic engineers.
- *Outside Contractor*: Cherise is developing a new advertainment program, which requires the expertise of the PCs' familycorp. She develops a crush on (or is the target of one by) one of the PCs. This turns the eyes of both Jude and Austin on the PC and their familycorp.
- *Codesnatch Christmas*: Landover Hospitals is holding their annual Holiday Gala next week; all employees are invited, as are a number of alliance and non-alliance guests. What better time is there to run a copy of the files on their standalone codemachine than at a drunken party?

Advice, Opportunities, & Pitfalls

Cyberpunk

Cyberpunk is an often-pessimistic mode of Science Fiction, concerned with the closing gap between science fiction and science fact; the negative aspects of scientific advancement; the conflict between conformity and individualism; the loss of hope and traditional values in the face of change and complexity; clashes between the human and inhuman aspects of the world (technology, corporations, governments, social movements, ever-increasing amounts of dis-/mis-/pseudo-/information); the cutting edge vs. obsolescence; and the relationship between external or internal worlds (Meatspace vs. Cyberspace): in short, the effects -- especially socio-cultural ones -- that spring from rampant technological development. Cyberpunk stories general deal with losers and rebels set against the system, or cogs of the system resisting anarchic punks' attempts to bring it all down.

While some of the genre's elements are inverted in this setting, a number of Cyberpunk elements remain prevalent: the (former) social and political oppression of the Boomers, the nearly-apocalyptic Phage, the rise to power of a population unsuited to authority, and the universal need for cybernetics (and its concomitant psychological effects). The biggest pitfall of Cyberpunk is becoming enamored of the flash of the setting (cool cyberware, big guns, the Metawebnet) to the detriment of the themes.

Ways to get a taste of Cyberpunk into your game include:

- Focus on conflicts between opposites, especially those dealing with relationships: the needs of the family vs. the needs of the self, rebellious individualism vs. social conformity, risk vs.

NOTE: Why Put the (Cyber) Chocolate in the (Soap Opera) Peanut Butter?

Flip answer: I'm not a fan of either genre, and thought by smooshing them together and mixing them up, I'd get more interested.

More detailed answer: Actually, there are elements I enjoy in both genres. Those elements tend to be pretty close to their respective cores: the effect of technology on humans and human society, and the nature of human -- especially familial -- relationships. It's just the surface gloss and style of both genres that irk me.

A big irritant is Cyberpunk's pessimistic street-level focus; here, I decided to flip it and look at the punks in the boardroom rather than the punks in the barroom. That linked up surprisingly well with the Soap Opera Trope of powerful, important people acting like snotty junior high kids with more power than maturity.

To my tastes, Soap Operas don't have enough weirdness and explosions (note that there are exceptions: I know of freeze rays, clones, aliens, and Atlantis). So, I killed off a generation of people with a virus and shoved metal bits into the survivors.

It's a living.

guarantee, or any of the other Cyberpunk tensions. A way to combine the three examples given here would be to pose a situation to a character where they must decide whether to give up their dreams of becoming a black-market genetic engineer (self, rebellious, risky) in favor of following in mom's steps and becoming a familycorp doctor (family, conformist, safe).

- Emphasize the "branding" of the setting (Bulldog handguns, ReetFeet sneakers, Hola Cola Health Drink, etc.); reward players who offer new, colorful post-Phage setting details like these during play.
- Create cracks in the shaky new structures and technologies of post-Phage life. Heavily cyber-modified people escaping from the metallic pains of their lives into the Metawebnet; the failures and secret crimes of the now-dominant GenXers, dancing as fast as they can to keep the world working; the aging *Enfant Terribles*, resisting their entry into adulthood, sometimes violently.

Soap Opera: Soap Operas are a type of Romance (not merely "stories of love," but here used in the literary and critical senses as "stories of heroic deeds, passionate pageantry, and emotional resonance, emphasizing content over form, imagination, creativity, ideals, and introspection"; the celebration of Nature can be part of these stories). In specific, they are melodrama, bearing features like moral polarization, simplified characters, strong emotions, unlikely coincidences, and general levels of excess. The ongoing serial dramas called Soap Operas get their name from their melodramatic/operatic nature and that many early radio melodramas were sponsored by soap companies; some say the term was coined in an attempt to lend some dignity to the shows.

Soap Operas involve themselves deeply with interpersonal relationships: families, friends, enemies, allies, with gossip and secrets on the side. They are also roundly criticized as cliché-ridden, badly-acted, trivial, and predictable escapism.

(Stop. Now, read that last sentence, pretending that I said "Science Fiction & Fantasy" instead of "Soap Opera." Interesting, huh?)

How someone reacts to a situation in a Soap Opera is equally important as *the actual events that occur*. Relationships are more important than plot here, and emotional resonance more vital than believability. The biggest pitfalls of Soap Opera are getting mission- or action-oriented players interested (relationship- and characterization-oriented players are probably more open to the concept) and letting the game devolve into simple camp or absurdity . . . unless you want it to.

Ways to get a strong Soap Opera vibe into your game include:

- Encourage all characters to act with the emotional maturity of a thirteen-year old. Soap Opera characters often keep secrets they shouldn't, allow themselves to be carried fully away by their emotions, hold intense grudges for real or imagined minor offenses, make dangerous choices, dream and hope forcefully, break and renew relationships quickly, and are forced to confront a grayscale world instead of one that's black and white.
- Emphasize and reward the roleplaying of emotions and introspection.
- Set the scene with wealth, style, and potentials for passion.

Soaps' Tropes

Here follows some common elements of Soap Operas (items of roleplaying interest appear in parentheses):

- *24/7 Beauty:* Waking up, in a car crash, coming out of 12 hours of surgery -- nobody ever has bed head, nor requires make-up.
- *Amnesia:* Clunk someone on the head hard enough, and they become a blank slate -- or better yet, their opposite (see below, *Evil Twins*).
- *Black or White Hat? Only Your Hairdresser Knows for Sure:* Though not as much as in previous years,

TOOL: Soap Opera Names

A quick and dirty method for coming up with suitable Soap Opera Names for characters:

- Take your middle name (or the name of a grandparent) for the character's first name.
- Use the name of the street you lived on as a child for the character's last name.

Soap Operas still color-code their characters' morality -- good guys are usually blonde, while bad guys are usually brunettes.

- *Cutaway Cliffhangers*: Not content with having a single cliffhanger at the end of a show, Soap Operas generally end *every scene* on a cliffhanger or climax, then cut away to another story thread. (This keeps interest high; it's a useful technique for roleplaying games.)
- *Evil Twins*: Just like the character, only naughty -- or nice, if the character is a Black Hat. (Great way to bring in new NPCs: just photocopy the PC's character sheet and tweak it a little.)
- *Glamour, Money, and Power!*: Characters are usually wealthy and powerful, unless they're brought in specifically to contrast with the already wealthy and powerful characters.
- *I'm On My Break, Okay?*: Most characters have very important jobs like doctor, lawyer, president of a multinational company, etc., but rarely seem to actually work.
- *I've Got A Secret*: Few characters are happy without having a secret -- either one of their own or someone else's. Blackmail is common, whether monetary or emotional.
- *Ludicrous, Unnecessary Situations*: Situations escalate to operatic levels, because characters choose to keep mum, jump to assumptions, avoid taking responsibility, snatch the forbidden fruit, and nurse feelings to unhealthy levels. These choices and actions, when finally exposed, lead to explosive problems -- which could have been handled early on.
- *One Day, I Will . . .*: Characters have Goals that motivate them strongly to do good (and bad) things.
- *Romantic Triangles*: All romances must be triangular at some point, if not most of the time. (Between pre-relationship character background and the "I'll Have What She's Having" or "I Want It Now!" mindsets, this can be easily accomplished.)
- *Script Immortality*: Generally, characters cannot die unless the performer leaves the show; alternatively, characters can die instantly for no good reason if the actor is fired. The fun really comes in periods of contract disputes or performer burnout/sickness/pregnancy. This leads to great Soap Tropes like Amnesia, Evil Twins, Lost At Sea, Coma, and It Was All A Dream. (Perhaps character death might only happen *after* an episode of Amnesia, Evil Twins, or Coma, or once their Secrets have been revealed?)
- *Serial Nature*: Soap Operas are long-running serials, and are not usually episodic. As such, nothing ever quite ends, and there's always more adventures for tomorrow. (This open-ended nature parallels roleplaying campaigns nicely.)
- *SORAS*: Children on Soap Operas age ridiculously fast; if born at the end of one season, by the end of the next, they may have graduated college. This phenomenon is referred to as SORAS -- Soap Opera Rapid Aging Syndrome -- on soap-oriented Internet boards.
- *Sudsy Archetypes*: A handful of character types recur in Soaps (all useful as character seeds): The Bad Girl/Boy; The Bastard/Bitch; The Good Girl/Boy; The Gossip; The Jilted One; The Lover; The Loyal But Unappreciated Partner; The Matriarch/Patriarch; The Noble Martyr; The Other Woman/Man; The Rake/Tart; etc.

Additional Idea: Use the sound of the name to determine morality. Decide if short names (one or two syllables) indicate virtue or vice; longer names (two or more syllables) would take the opposite nature. Example: if short names are virtuous, "Lance" and "Liz" are good guys and "Lancelot" and "Elizabeth" are bad guys. The same rule doesn't have to hold true for both first names and last names, either; you could reverse it -- short first names are good, but short last names are bad.

Other Resources

- Cyberpunk -- http://www.eff.org/Net_culture/Cyberpunk/, <http://www.cwrl.utexas.edu/~tonya/cyberpunk/papers.serhat1.html>, and http://www.eff.org/Net_culture/Cyberpunk/cpunk_in_the_90s.paper
- Genetic engineering FAQ -- <http://www.i-sis.org.uk/FAQ.php>
- Melodrama -- <http://www.filmsite.org/melodramafilms.html>
- Printing Biomaterials -- <http://www.newscientist.com/news/news.jsp?id=ns99993292>
- Soap: The Game of Soap Opera Mayhem -- <http://www.crayne.nl/soap.shtml>
- Soap Opera -- <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Modules/TF33120/soaps.html>

- True Food Lists -- http://www.truefoodnow.org/gmo_facts/product_list/ and <http://www.comm.cornell.edu/gmo/crops/eating.html>

Interdimensional Postage

by Steven Marsh

I hope this letter finds you well. (There's no reason it shouldn't, but there have been quirks before . . .) Anyway, there was an earthquake in our Los Angeles on October 17th. I know you won't be able to do anything about it, but if you have any family or friends out there, you may want to alert them.

Mom asked who I've been writing to. I haven't had the nerve to tell her; I'm afraid her heart couldn't take it.

Oh, one more thing: If you run into a redhead in a beret on the subway within the next week, don't tell her that you consider Amistad to be one of Spielberg's lesser efforts; it's one of her favorites. (If you get her number, let me know . . .)

The postal service is a truly amazing force. When you consider the volume of mail delivered each year, the number of days it operates, the number of people it employs, and the speed with which it carries out its duties, it's amazing that it can deliver its basic services for less than the cost of a cup of coffee. All in all, there are very few mishaps or unexplained phenomena within the postal service. But within any behemoth organization, there are some mysterious elements that cannot be easily explained away . . .

Interdimensional postage is one such phenomenon. At a cursory glance, this book of stamps resembles any other. And, indeed, it is . . . at least, in its own dimension. But somehow this book of stamps ended up in ours. At times the difference is obvious -- the President Dewey commemorative stamps are popular in this world's United States -- at other times they are more subtle (one interdimensional stamp has one of Superman as part of its 1940s series) . . . or occasionally there are no differences at all.

Interdimensional postage has long since been a dirty secret of the postal service (judging by evidence gleaned in various ways, not only in our world but also others). Although the post office prides itself on its efficiency, there is the realization that they are unable to trace any individual piece of mail at any given time . . . which, privy theorists suspect, is the secret behind Interdimensional Postage. For anything mailed using Interdimensional Postage ends up in the originating dimension; if the address (and, ideally, name) on the envelope exists within that dimension, it is delivered to that location. Otherwise it is delivered to the postal service's Dead Letter Office (which dimension's DLO is unknown); sometimes it is returned to the sender, other times it is never seen again.

The exact utility of Interdimensional Postage depends on two things: the other dimension it contacts, and the limitations of the postage.

The Dimension Next Door

Scientists theorize there are somewhere between zero and infinite alternate dimensions; interdimensional postage probably proves those scientists betting on zero are incorrect. Since interdimensional postage comes from one other dimension, the biggest question is, which one?

GMs looking for ideas can consult a myriad of science fiction stories and resources, or ***GURPS Time Travel***, ***Alternate Earths 1***, and ***Alternate Earths 2*** for ideas. Some alternate dimensions are more obviously useful than

others, but any should prove useful (or at least interesting) to enterprising letter-writers.

Some possibilities include:

An exact duplicate of Earth, only a period of time in the past or future (say, two weeks). Obviously being able to write someone in the past has advantages (assuming you can get them to write back, that is). Being able to write someone in the future reverses the roles, with the holder of the stamps in the role of being able to possibly affect the alternate future. (Of course, if either side is too rigorous in their alterations, the other dimension will soon cease to be an exact duplicate of Earth, depending on the plasticity of the tie between the two worlds.)

An alternate dimension with minor differences, or radical differences on an abbreviated time frame. In this case, it will take clever utility to exploit the Interdimensional Postage, although it is possible to try exploring what those differences are between the two dimensions. (Perhaps having an interdimensional pen pal will be interesting unto itself . . .)

An alternate dimension with major differences, or little discernable in common with the home world. This is one of the more interesting possibilities . . . not necessarily because it is easy to exploit, but because contacting with an "alien" society produces many story possibilities.

Limitations

The other big determining factor behind Interdimensional Postage is what limitations it has. Some questions the GM needs to answer are:

What can be mailed? At its most limited, only paper can be mailed interdimensionally (or, perhaps, paper and a self-addressed stamped envelope). Perhaps only material that can fit in a standard envelope will make the journey (or perhaps, instead of Interdimensional Postage, it's instead Interdimensional Stamped Envelopes). Or perhaps anything that can be accepted by both postal services will travel safely (assuming sufficient postage, of course). Probably the biggest question the GM needs to answer is if additional stamps can be mailed back . . . and if so, will they work the same way as the first batch of Interdimensional Postage? If so, then it's possible for the stamp-holder to set up an infinite loop, asking someone in the other world to mail back additional postage whenever he gets low. Obviously, if packages are able to be mailed back and forth, this will quite possibly affect the campaign more severely than if only paper can go back and forth. If the GM is looking for a rationale behind limiting this power, perhaps the forces behind the execution of the Interdimensional Postage's trans-reality journey are tied to the high-speed sorting machines; anything that needs to be hand-cancelled or hand-sorted cannot travel interdimensionally.

Who can be written? Again, the most obvious answer is "anyone with an address," although this is also the answer with the most campaign-disrupting potential. Limiting this in some way will keep the Postage from getting out of hand; perhaps it relies on belief potentiality, so that only those in the alternate dimension who believe in alternate dimensions can be written. Maybe only one specific small town can be written . . . the only town that is *identical* between the two dimensions. Perhaps only one specific person can be written . . . making Agnes Phips a *very* busy pen pal partner for a number of alternate dimensions.

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Can the recipient write back? Maybe temporal/postal regulations ensure the voyage is only one way. If the recipient can't write back, this *greatly* limits the utility of the postage, although depending on the alternate dimension it may still be worthwhile. (Knowing your letters are being received by an alternate 1936 Germany can provide a lot of potential, even if they can't write back.) Of course, if they *are* able to write back, they will probably only be able to do so if supplied with return postage or a SASE . . .

How long does it take? The default assumption is that it takes as long as the standard postal service to deliver . . . which assumes that the alternate dimension postal service is as efficient as this world's. Tinkering with this value (say, if the other world faxes recreations of all letters instantaneously, or conversely they rely on a pony express) will affect

the Postage's utility.

Interdimensional Postage In A Campaign

Interdimensional Postage makes for an interesting alternative to any of a myriad of other-dimensional devices; by limiting contact to another dimension both temporally and materially, this other world becomes much more mysterious, alien, and inaccessible than more traditional methods. ("I'm bored; I think I'm gonna hop over to the AlterniWorld for a pack of smokes . . .") Of course, given the sporadic and abbreviated nature of this otherworldly contact, it is unlikely that a campaign will be able to be built around the Postage alone. Still, it's an easy -- almost trivial -- means of adding some limited dimension-hopping to any sort of campaign: Science Fiction, Space, *Illuminati*, *In Nomine*, Supers, Weird West, or even Fantasy are all possibilities for this device.

In this age of email, one thing many people forget is how *real* letters can be compared to their electronic counterparts; writing a letter takes effort, and can seldom be done on a spur of a moment. This is even more so if the writer only has a limited number of times to write . . . say, the number of stamps he has . . . As such, to best use this plot device, it is suggested that both parties adhere to the spirit as much as possible *out* of character, by preparing the letter, envelope, and stamp; if the envelope weighs more than an ounce, then two stamps will be needed. (Enterprising GMs may print or draw their own stamps on contact paper or stickers.) Most players will get excited when they get a return letter at the beginning of a game.

Although written from an American point of view, the Interdimensional Postage is designed to be usable as a device in any country that has a (reasonably) modern postal service; as such, some thought should go into *which* postal service Interdimensional Postage works through. For example, in some Steampunk games it's entirely within the spirit of then genre to have interdimensional mail as merely another great technological advance made by the British for the British. Also remember that international mail tends to be *much* more expensive than intranational mail; mail from the U.S. to Canada or Mexico costs 60 cents an ounce, and 80 cents an ounce to the rest of the world. As such, should someone need to use Interdimensional Postage to write someone outside their country, it will probably take two to four stamps to send the same letter . . . even *more* if they want to send a package.

Known Samples of Interdimensional Postage

Three Weeks Older, Three Weeks Wiser

This book of stamps enables someone to write an alternate version of himself that exists three weeks in the past. (Of course, assuming that mail takes a week to get there and a week for a reply, there is really only a one-week window of opportunity to receive knowledge from the past . . .) For some reason, all attempts to send anything other than letters have failed . . . meaning the one book of stamps is very limited. (Fortunately -- curiously -- the alternate self has also received a book of stamps tied to *this* dimension . . .)

Now, what do you do when you're getting advice from a past self and you get a letter from yourself three weeks in the *future*, asking for help? Do you use up some of your limited number of stamps to do so? Or do you keep pumping your future-self for information?

Postal Mortem

This book of stamps is almost as curious as the dimension it connects with. For the postage is *only* able to deliver letters to those who are dead in this world yet alive in theirs. This is a surprising number of people. . . John F. Kennedy is a gracious correspondent (and is deeply curious about the nature of his death in this world), while Jim Morrison responds to all letters with a curt, "Please do not write again." Of course, this postage is only limited by imagination; dead relatives, lovers, and even enemies can all be contacted for any number of reasons. This postage can be used to generate "authentic" souvenirs from deceased famous people, to get answers from those who are dead over here ("Dear Mr. Hoffa . . ."), and to consult the departed for advice.

Somehow the non-deceased of that world are able to write back without problem . . . which may lead the writer to wonder if *he* isn't dead over there. For that matter, they may be able to write people that are dead in their dimension . . . which may make for an interesting introduction of this Interdimensional Postage. "Dear Sir: You don't know me, but to me you are dead . . ."

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InterClaim Importers is one of its dimension's oldest -- and most disliked -- mail-order firms. Its catalogs are omnipresent, to the point where most people don't even bother with more than a glance before throwing them away. Fortunately, InterClaim has a new marketing strategy, with six billion potential new customers. Using Interdimensional Postage, it has managed to send its catalogs to this world. InterClaim has no telephone or Internet service in this catalog; instead, all correspondence and payment must be made using gold . . . either gold coins, or gold sheets. (A conversion guide is included with the catalog; the exchange rate is quite favorable to this world.) Although many people scoff at the idea of sending gold through the mail, the catalog *does* have a considerable amount of material that doesn't seem to be available anywhere else . . . indeed, some of its products don't seem like they *should* exist on this world. (The nature of this catalog's offerings are, of course, up to the GM.)

Clever catalog recipients may be tempted to try using the stamped envelopes to establish communication with this other dimension *without* placing an order. Exactly what effect this would have is up to the GM; although InterClaim as a company would take a dim view on anyone using its postage for personal use, those who work the ICI mailroom are underpaid, under-appreciated, and bored. As such, the thought of establishing ties with another dimension *and* striking out at an unloved employer may prove too tempting . . .

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Government officials have spent a *considerable* amount of time and effort getting a borderline-schizophrenic scientist - Dr. Preston Santora -- to reveal what he knows about his top secret project. Having explored all other avenues fruitlessly, they have constructed a desperate gambit where they have convinced this scientist of a bold lie: He is in correspondence with another dimension, and only his information can save their world. He is close to revealing what he knows, which may be very bad for the world at large. What happens if one of the scientist's letters accidentally ends up misdelivered to the PCs' hands?

Thank you for the tip; I was able to make \$100,00 at Vegas with my earthquake "prediction," although the Feds are now poking into my life. (Let 'em, as we always say . . .)

Anyway, somehow (ahem) I've become an expert on the Amistad over the past month. And, yes, I did meet her; her name's Jessica, and over here her phone number's 555-4877 (you'll need to dial whatever the area code is for North Georgia).

Since you requested one, enclosed is a Burr two-dollar bill.

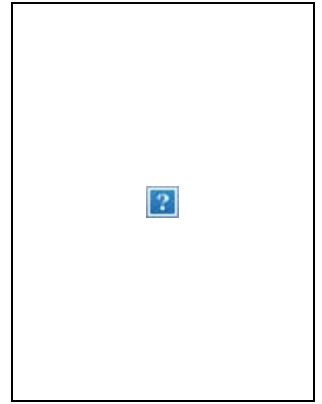
Now, I need to ask a favor: Please tell mom about me; let her write me, if she wants. I miss her so much . . .

Pyramid Review

Hero System Bestiary (for Hero System 5th Edition)

Written by Steven S. Long

Interior Illustration by Andrew Cremeans, Keith Curtis, Tristan Miller, Eric Rademaker, Mitch Byrd, and Greg Smith



238-page b&w softcover; \$24.99

It's a rare game campaign that can't use stats for animals and creatures, either mundane or fantastic. Indeed, many games make it a priority to create a book of critters as one of its first releases after the main book. The **Hero System 5th Edition** has taken this approach, with the release of the **Hero System Bestiary** shortly after its system's new edition. This weighty tome seeks both to flesh out animals in the **Hero System** and provide basic information on how to incorporate animals into the campaign.

The book opens with a chapter on "Creatures in Your Game." This section is meaty with information, both in general about animals and specifically how they relate to the **Hero System**. Early on it provides an overview for using creatures in the game, such as animal companions, animals as obstacles, and so on. Although brief, this section is still useful. The next part of this chapter deals with the **Hero System**-specific aspects of animals: what Characteristics mean to animals, what Skills an animal might possess, and so on. This section also details skills and abilities that might *affect* animals; for example, it points out that Streetwise can be used to traffic in illegal animals. It also gives a number of specific disadvantages an animal might have, like Timid, Cold-Blooded, and Reduced Leap. This chapter also gives creature templates, useful if you want to make an animal a Familiar, Undead, Aquatic, or Winged. An overview of how animals in combat and a description of animal populations and the value of animal parts wraps up this chapter.

Chapter Two covers fantastic creatures, most of them either typical (giant bats and frogs), traditional (gorgons, golems, and lycanthropes), or common in fantasy settings (deadly oozes and treemen) . . . with a few surprises (jackalopes?!?). Almost 90 creatures are in this chapter. In addition to game statistics, each creature gives a descriptions as to how it fits into the ecology, its personality and motivation, how it uses its powers and tactics, and its appearance. In addition, each creature lists ideas for how it might be used in a campaign, with basic encounter ideas. These aren't the obvious notions ("What if this monster attacked the PCs?"), but are instead often ways of thinking outside the box for that creature. For example, it's noted that the hydra can serve as a multi-headed alien creature in a **Star Hero** game, or a Lovecraftian horror in a pulp or **Horror Hero** game. This section also gives information on demons and devils, in surprisingly restrained language given the nature of these adversaries.

Chapter Three details mundane beasts, including lions, tigers, and bears. The gamut of creatures is represented here, from the domestic cat to the leopard, dolphins to great white sharks. Dinosaurs are also covered here, as is the extinct (but exciting) sabertooth tiger. These animals are all presented in with the same detail as the previous chapter, including ideas for how to use (or adapt) it to a campaign. Almost 60 specific animals are detailed, with enough information to adapt this information to represent almost any animal. (For example, the small mammal entry only has one set of stats, but point out that it can be used or modified to represent foxes, rabbits, raccoons, mice, squirrels, and so on.

Chapter Four is entitled "Beasts of Science Fiction And The Movies." Although the smallest section, with just over 20 entries, it's also the most eclectic, stretching the definition of "creature" in a number of ways. As the title implies, these

are for the most part creatures that have appeared in other media (with the serial numbers filed off), or otherwise act as classic tropes of its genre. Thus we have the city-destroying giant dinosaur (fiery breath or radioactive eyebeams optional), neuroparasites, animal-men, and the planet-destroying engine of destruction. This section also has curious choices like the slasher (the typical movie homicidal maniac) and a number of robots. Although not serving as an exhaustive science fiction bestiary, this section should serve as a good starting point for memorable sci-fi encounters or epic fantasy adversaries.

For what it is trying to do -- serve as a comprehensive guide to mundane animals and an excellent primer for fantastic creatures -- this book accomplishes its goal admirably. The book does an admirable job in walking the fine line between being a monster manual and a compendium of mundane creatures, with a wide assortment of both being provided. (An early sidebar even discusses the difference between dramatic versus realistic animals, pointing out for example that gorillas in the real world are *not* rampaging man-killers, but are often used that way in stories.)

All of the write-ups look like they were well-researched, they all have illustrations (ranging from adequate to quite interesting), and all the creatures look as though special thought was spent on making them "work" within the **Hero System**. For example, the Dolphin has "Tough Nose: +10 PD; Only To Protect Against Damage Taken When Performing Move Bys/Move Throughs," which lets it ram into sensitive parts of creatures like sharks (as the Powers/Tactics section explains that they are known to do). Many animals also present a number of options, either letting it change the abilities of the animal (such as turning a mundane eel to an electric eel), alter an animal to better suit legend (such as giving a domestic cat the "black cat" option to instill unluckiness), or alter an animal into another animal with similar stats (such as transforming the deer/antelope into a bighorn sheep, moose, or mountain goat).

If the **Hero System Bestiary** has any drawbacks, it's mostly related to the form. The **Hero System** is *not* known for being a compact system; as such, most animals do require at least a half-page for the stats alone, meaning that a 200+ page book does have (on paper) less than 200 animals. Although it provides information to alter these stats and greatly increase that number, some may feel that it doesn't provide enough individual writeups. Likewise the ecology, personality, and appearance sections may not be of use to some readers, and those who are hoping for a compact "combat stats only"-type of presentation (such as found in the **Monster Manual**) may be disappointed. Finally, its "creatures of the media" section does feel a little thin, and it seems that **Star Hero** could still use its own bestiary. Still, these are minor quibbles. The **Hero System Bestiary** provides an in-depth examination of all ways animals might interact with a campaign, whether as companions, plot devices, or combat adversaries, and comes recommended for all **Hero System** games.

--Steven Marsh

It's How You Play The Game . . . Err, And How Is That, Again?

Many -- if not most -- roleplaying books have a "What Is A Roleplaying Game?" section.

But most do *not* have a "How do you play a roleplaying game?" section.

Oh, sure, they tell you how to generate characters, roll for damage, and buy stuff to go adventuring, but they don't tell you how to roleplay . . . which may make RPGs unique in the world of games. (At best they'll supply a sample transcript, from which one might deduce how the writers expect you to play.) This is especially interesting because *how* one plays an RPGs makes a big difference in both the experience and the outcome. In, say, **Monopoly**, it doesn't make much of a difference to the outcome if a player goes, "By the dark power of Baal! I sacrifice this parchment to get out of jail without cost!" But such flavorful interjections are arguably the whole *point* of an RPG.

Consider what a difference it makes to the experience with just a change in tense, point of view, or level of omniscience:

GM: "You see a chest."

Player: "I go to the chest and open it up."

GM: "You find a sword that glows with a faint blue light."

Player: "I pick it up and examine it."

GM: "There is a chest here."

Player: "Zarth goes to the chest and carefully opens it up."

GM: "Inside is a sword that glows with a faint blue light."

Player: "Zarth picks it up and slowly turns it over in his hand."

GM: "There is a chest here."

Player: (mimicking opening a chest) "I've got to be careful opening this."

GM: "Inside is a sword that glows with a faint blue light."

Player: (mimicking picking up a sword by hilt and blade, turning it over) "Curious . . ."

GM: "Their eyes adjusted to the new light; the only item of note in the room was a chest."

Player: "Zarth went to the chest and carefully opened it up. *Please let there be something useful in here*, he thought."

GM: "Inside was a sword that glows with a faint blue light."

Player: "Zarth picked it up and slowly turned it over in his hand. 'I can't let Fowlin get this,' he muttered so no one could hear."

Now obviously the last one is radically different than what many of us are used to. But different mediums allow for different assumptions and play style.

For example, what if the premise for a gaming group was that everyone was *in character*, and the only way to speak out of character was to make a special signal or gesture? This is the default presumption for many live-action games. Likewise, on-line games often allow for a greater freedom than in-person games in exploring character's thoughts and quirk-level actions.

Or consider something as omnipresent as character thoughts. In most games it's assumed that thoughts are internal; the player is never under any obligation to reveal what his character is thinking, and the player may in fact be docked experience points if he reveals too much of his thought processes to other players without justification. But there is nothing in most rulebooks that states this; in fact, revealing thoughts may be entirely *within* the realm of some games. For example, a campaign attempting to recreate the feeling of a Shakespearean play may well reward players who explain their thoughts and motivations; in most of Shakespeare's plays, people won't shut up about why they're doing

what they're doing, and frequently espouse their motivations in iambic pentameter.

Now, I'm not claiming to give a full primer on how to roleplay here; I'm still rolling the idea over in my mind, trying to sort out what that would entail. But here are a few questions to think about. (Most of these will need to be arrived at by consensus of the gaming group in question.)

- What level of character immersion is expected? Are players assumed to be out of character most of the time except for those moments when they enter character, or vice versa? Will digressions, distractions, and ramblings be forbidden or tolerated?
- How permissible is "table talk," or talking to other players (presumably out of character) about what their character should do? In some games it's forbidden, while at other tables it might be encouraged. ("Boy, I sure hope Zatarra the Mage doesn't forget to use her undead-slaying dagger against that thing attacking her . . ." "Oh, crud! Uh, I draw my undead-slaying dagger . . .")
- How much does what a player say and do *really* reflect what the character is saying and doing? In other words, suppose someone is playing a highly charismatic character. If that character goes up to someone he's attracted to and says, "Hey, baby . . . how's about we control the horizontal?" -- causing the other players and GM to wince -- does the NPC wince as well? Is it assumed that somehow that was *exactly* what the NPC wanted to hear (after all, the character *is* good at talking to people), or is it assumed that he didn't actually say that, but instead said something the NPC *would* like to hear? (A more abstract way of thinking of this is, "How much will the GM protect a player from himself?")
- Are players allowed to continue their character's actions out of game (if not encouraged to do so)? Through bluebooking or other non-game communication with the GM, it's possible for a character to accomplish a lot . . . if permitted.
- How much control do the players have over the game itself? Do characters have a means of modifying their world, either through a mechanic or through the narrative? (For example, can a charismatic character at a party have his player just declare, "I'm flirting with one of the servants," even though the existence of servants may not have been explicitly declared? Can a swashbuckler declare he's swinging from a chandelier rope onto the bad guys if no chandelier has been established? Can an astronaut character declare he has received a letter from his presumed-dead father without any GM input?) At another extreme, does a player have the right to say, "I'm sorry; I don't like this scene because it's offensive/unrealistic/awry of my vision of the world?"
- Who has control over what the dice say? Does the GM or player interpret what really good (or bad) dice rolls mean?

Again, there are no right or wrong answers to these questions. But actually thinking about them can go a long way toward ensuring that a gaming group is all on the same page . . . and can bring up ideas for different ways of doing things among even established groups. Which is good, since they'll need all the skills they can muster to defeat the dark servant of Baal who used his eldritch powers to escape from jail without paying.

--Steven Marsh

Interdimensional Postage

by Steven Marsh

I hope this letter finds you well. (There's no reason it shouldn't, but there have been quirks before . . .) Anyway, there was an earthquake in our Los Angeles on October 17th. I know you won't be able to do anything about it, but if you have any family or friends out there, you may want to alert them.

Mom asked who I've been writing to. I haven't had the nerve to tell her; I'm afraid her heart couldn't take it.

Oh, one more thing: If you run into a redhead in a beret on the subway within the next week, don't tell her that you consider Amistad to be one of Spielberg's lesser efforts; it's one of her favorites. (If you get her number, let me know . . .)

The postal service is a truly amazing force. When you consider the volume of mail delivered each year, the number of days it operates, the number of people it employs, and the speed with which it carries out its duties, it's amazing that it can deliver its basic services for less than the cost of a cup of coffee. All in all, there are very few mishaps or unexplained phenomena within the postal service. But within any behemoth organization, there are some mysterious elements that cannot be easily explained away . . .

Interdimensional postage is one such phenomenon. At a cursory glance, this book of stamps resembles any other. And, indeed, it is . . . at least, in its own dimension. But somehow this book of stamps ended up in ours. At times the difference is obvious -- the President Dewey commemorative stamps are popular in this world's United States -- at other times they are more subtle (one interdimensional stamp has one of Superman as part of its 1940s series) . . . or occasionally there are no differences at all.

Interdimensional postage has long since been a dirty secret of the postal service (judging by evidence gleaned in various ways, not only in our world but also others). Although the post office prides itself on its efficiency, there is the realization that they are unable to trace any individual piece of mail at any given time . . . which, privy theorists suspect, is the secret behind Interdimensional Postage. For anything mailed using Interdimensional Postage ends up in the originating dimension; if the address (and, ideally, name) on the envelope exists within that dimension, it is delivered to that location. Otherwise it is delivered to the postal service's Dead Letter Office (which dimension's DLO is unknown); sometimes it is returned to the sender, other times it is never seen again.

The exact utility of Interdimensional Postage depends on two things: the other dimension it contacts, and the limitations of the postage.

The Dimension Next Door

Scientists theorize there are somewhere between zero and infinite alternate dimensions; interdimensional postage probably proves those scientists betting on zero are incorrect. Since interdimensional postage comes from one other dimension, the biggest question is, which one?

GMs looking for ideas can consult a myriad of science fiction stories and resources, or ***GURPS Time Travel***, ***Alternate Earths 1***, and ***Alternate Earths 2*** for ideas. Some alternate dimensions are more obviously useful than

others, but any should prove useful (or at least interesting) to enterprising letter-writers.

Some possibilities include:

An exact duplicate of Earth, only a period of time in the past or future (say, two weeks). Obviously being able to write someone in the past has advantages (assuming you can get them to write back, that is). Being able to write someone in the future reverses the roles, with the holder of the stamps in the role of being able to possibly affect the alternate future. (Of course, if either side is too rigorous in their alterations, the other dimension will soon cease to be an exact duplicate of Earth, depending on the plasticity of the tie between the two worlds.)

An alternate dimension with minor differences, or radical differences on an abbreviated time frame. In this case, it will take clever utility to exploit the Interdimensional Postage, although it is possible to try exploring what those differences are between the two dimensions. (Perhaps having an interdimensional pen pal will be interesting unto itself . . .)

An alternate dimension with major differences, or little discernable in common with the home world. This is one of the more interesting possibilities . . . not necessarily because it is easy to exploit, but because contacting with an "alien" society produces many story possibilities.

Limitations

The other big determining factor behind Interdimensional Postage is what limitations it has. Some questions the GM needs to answer are:

What can be mailed? At its most limited, only paper can be mailed interdimensionally (or, perhaps, paper and a self-addressed stamped envelope). Perhaps only material that can fit in a standard envelope will make the journey (or perhaps, instead of Interdimensional Postage, it's instead Interdimensional Stamped Envelopes). Or perhaps anything that can be accepted by both postal services will travel safely (assuming sufficient postage, of course). Probably the biggest question the GM needs to answer is if additional stamps can be mailed back . . . and if so, will they work the same way as the first batch of Interdimensional Postage? If so, then it's possible for the stamp-holder to set up an infinite loop, asking someone in the other world to mail back additional postage whenever he gets low. Obviously, if packages are able to be mailed back and forth, this will quite possibly affect the campaign more severely than if only paper can go back and forth. If the GM is looking for a rationale behind limiting this power, perhaps the forces behind the execution of the Interdimensional Postage's trans-reality journey are tied to the high-speed sorting machines; anything that needs to be hand-cancelled or hand-sorted cannot travel interdimensionally.

Who can be written? Again, the most obvious answer is "anyone with an address," although this is also the answer with the most campaign-disrupting potential. Limiting this in some way will keep the Postage from getting out of hand; perhaps it relies on belief potentiality, so that only those in the alternate dimension who believe in alternate dimensions can be written. Maybe only one specific small town can be written . . . the only town that is *identical* between the two dimensions. Perhaps only one specific person can be written . . . making Agnes Phips a *very* busy pen pal partner for a number of alternate dimensions.

v

Can the recipient write back? Maybe temporal/postal regulations ensure the voyage is only one way. If the recipient can't write back, this *greatly* limits the utility of the postage, although depending on the alternate dimension it may still be worthwhile. (Knowing your letters are being received by an alternate 1936 Germany can provide a lot of potential, even if they can't write back.) Of course, if they *are* able to write back, they will probably only be able to do so if supplied with return postage or a SASE . . .

How long does it take? The default assumption is that it takes as long as the standard postal service to deliver . . . which assumes that the alternate dimension postal service is as efficient as this world's. Tinkering with this value (say, if the other world faxes recreations of all letters instantaneously, or conversely they rely on a pony express) will affect

the Postage's utility.

Interdimensional Postage In A Campaign

Interdimensional Postage makes for an interesting alternative to any of a myriad of other-dimensional devices; by limiting contact to another dimension both temporally and materially, this other world becomes much more mysterious, alien, and inaccessible than more traditional methods. ("I'm bored; I think I'm gonna hop over to the AlterniWorld for a pack of smokes . . .") Of course, given the sporadic and abbreviated nature of this otherworldly contact, it is unlikely that a campaign will be able to be built around the Postage alone. Still, it's an easy -- almost trivial -- means of adding some limited dimension-hopping to any sort of campaign: Science Fiction, Space, *Illuminati*, *In Nomine*, Supers, Weird West, or even Fantasy are all possibilities for this device.

In this age of email, one thing many people forget is how *real* letters can be compared to their electronic counterparts; writing a letter takes effort, and can seldom be done on a spur of a moment. This is even more so if the writer only has a limited number of times to write . . . say, the number of stamps he has . . . As such, to best use this plot device, it is suggested that both parties adhere to the spirit as much as possible *out* of character, by preparing the letter, envelope, and stamp; if the envelope weighs more than an ounce, then two stamps will be needed. (Enterprising GMs may print or draw their own stamps on contact paper or stickers.) Most players will get excited when they get a return letter at the beginning of a game.

Although written from an American point of view, the Interdimensional Postage is designed to be usable as a device in any country that has a (reasonably) modern postal service; as such, some thought should go into *which* postal service Interdimensional Postage works through. For example, in some Steampunk games it's entirely within the spirit of then genre to have interdimensional mail as merely another great technological advance made by the British for the British. Also remember that international mail tends to be *much* more expensive than intranational mail; mail from the U.S. to Canada or Mexico costs 60 cents an ounce, and 80 cents an ounce to the rest of the world. As such, should someone need to use Interdimensional Postage to write someone outside their country, it will probably take two to four stamps to send the same letter . . . even *more* if they want to send a package.

Known Samples of Interdimensional Postage

Three Weeks Older, Three Weeks Wiser

This book of stamps enables someone to write an alternate version of himself that exists three weeks in the past. (Of course, assuming that mail takes a week to get there and a week for a reply, there is really only a one-week window of opportunity to receive knowledge from the past . . .) For some reason, all attempts to send anything other than letters have failed . . . meaning the one book of stamps is very limited. (Fortunately -- curiously -- the alternate self has also received a book of stamps tied to *this* dimension . . .)

Now, what do you do when you're getting advice from a past self and you get a letter from yourself three weeks in the *future*, asking for help? Do you use up some of your limited number of stamps to do so? Or do you keep pumping your future-self for information?

Postal Mortem

This book of stamps is almost as curious as the dimension it connects with. For the postage is *only* able to deliver letters to those who are dead in this world yet alive in theirs. This is a surprising number of people. . . John F. Kennedy is a gracious correspondent (and is deeply curious about the nature of his death in this world), while Jim Morrison responds to all letters with a curt, "Please do not write again." Of course, this postage is only limited by imagination; dead relatives, lovers, and even enemies can all be contacted for any number of reasons. This postage can be used to generate "authentic" souvenirs from deceased famous people, to get answers from those who are dead over here ("Dear Mr. Hoffa . . ."), and to consult the departed for advice.

Somehow the non-deceased of that world are able to write back without problem . . . which may lead the writer to wonder if *he* isn't dead over there. For that matter, they may be able to write people that are dead in their dimension . . . which may make for an interesting introduction of this Interdimensional Postage. "Dear Sir: You don't know me, but to me you are dead . . ."

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Clever catalog recipients may be tempted to try using the stamped envelopes to establish communication with this other dimension *without* placing an order. Exactly what effect this would have is up to the GM; although InterClaim as a company would take a dim view on anyone using its postage for personal use, those who work the ICI mailroom are underpaid, under-appreciated, and bored. As such, the thought of establishing ties with another dimension *and* striking out at an unloved employer may prove too tempting . . .

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Thank you for the tip; I was able to make \$100,00 at Vegas with my earthquake "prediction," although the Feds are now poking into my life. (Let 'em, as we always say . . .)

Anyway, somehow (ahem) I've become an expert on the Amistad over the past month. And, yes, I did meet her; her name's Jessica, and over here her phone number's 555-4877 (you'll need to dial whatever the area code is for North Georgia).

Since you requested one, enclosed is a Burr two-dollar bill.

Now, I need to ask a favor: Please tell mom about me; let her write me, if she wants. I miss her so much . . .

Naked Mall Rats

Fierce Chargers For *Toon*

by William H. Stoddard

The PCs in your *Toon* campaign have run out of things to do? Let them go shopping . . .

Every social species naturally develops parasites. Anthills have mites that ride around on worker ants and beetles that tempt them with sweet secretions. Human societies have beggars and politicians. And Anytown and The City have naked mall rats.

Naked mall rats are the only known animated hive intelligence. They live in colonies of varied sizes. A typical colony might occupy a small condo complex, while a big one might fill a private boarding school. A few very small colonies are even mobile, living in stretch limos or tour buses.

The colony is run by a queen, but the characters probably won't see her. What they will see is the worker mall rats, who look like adolescent girls; they don't wear clothes (nobody seems to think this is unusual, even if other animated races all wear clothes), but they always have braces on their prominent teeth, and they carry purses that act as their back pockets. A naked mall rat's purse always has two standard items: a credit card and a cell phone. Other possessions are optional; an Animator whose players are familiar with anime may want to give them shojo mallers, for example.

The credit card serves to buy stuff. Worker mall rats feed in food courts, but that doesn't seem to be the point of their mall visits. They're really there to buy stuff, especially clothes and accessories. What they do with the clothes is a mystery; they never actually *wear* them! But at the end of a visit they can be seen with large shopping bags filled with their purchases. The credit cards aren't actually backed up by any source of funds; they're just an imitation social signal, the same way a mite's antenna twiddling imitates the social signals of its ant host. But in an animated world, no one is likely to figure this out; this may even be how everyone's credit card works.

This buying behavior is how the characters should run into them. As they go into stores, shopping for food, clothes, exotic collectibles, or weapons (so that they can make each other fall down!), the mall rats are there ahead of them. They take no notice of the characters -- in fact, they snub them -- but somehow they're always there ahead of them, grabbing the last of some special item off the counter, or pushing into line ahead of them, or tying up the salespeople with incredibly long questions and conversations. Make them as annoying as possible, without their actually doing anything openly aggressive.

But if the characters try to start a fight or make them fall down, their other standard possession comes into action: the cell phone. Using this, they can call other worker mall rats to help them. If the other mall rats run into trouble, out come their cell phones, and the process repeats. The first time this happens, it should be fairly small scale, but build up to having an entire store packed with mall rats.

The cell phone is also one possible key to overcoming the Menace of the Mall Rats. Making one worker mall rat fall down doesn't accomplish much; another one will take her place. (For a creepy effect, her sisters can carry her away to a mysterious fate, perhaps making chewing motions.) But destroying a cell phone -- any single cell phone carried by a worker mall rat -- will make the entire colony fall down at once!

At this point, the characters will probably be content to escape. Or in a series with some continuity, they can come back in the next episode, hunt for the lair of the naked mall rats, confront the terrifying queen mall rat, and find out what they want all those clothes for anyway . . .

Mall Rat

Description: Worker Mall Rat Amy (and her sisters Barbie, Crystal, Dawn, and so on to Zoe) looks like a skinny teenage girl with big front teeth. She carries a fashionably small purse from which she can take out a credit card, a cell phone, and other items. She wears braces but no clothes, though she may have accessories such as hair clips or noserings. (For added confusion, have two different mall rat colonies with different accessories!)

Beliefs and Goals: Shop 'til you fall down. If you're not one of my sisters, you're nothing. I saw it first! Of course my credit is good.

Hit Points: 6

Muscle: 2

Break Down Door: 2
Climb: 2
Fight: 2
Pick Up Heavy Thing: 4
Throw: 2

Zip: 4

Dodge: 8
Drive Vehicle: 5
Fire Gun: 4
Jump: 4
Ride: 5
Run: 5
Swim: 5

Smarts: 3

Hide/Spot Hidden: 3
Identify Dangerous Thing: 3
Read: 4
Resist Fast-Talk: 3
See/Hear/Smell: 4
Set/Disarm Trap: 3
Track/Cover Tracks: 9

Chutzpah: 5

Fast-Talk: 5
Pass/Detect Shoddy Goods: 10
Sleight of Hand: 6
Sneak: 7

Shtick: Hive Mind-5

New Shtick

Hive Mind (6)

You are one of a group whose members are almost indistinguishable from each other. You know exactly how each other think, so you can cooperate instinctively. If you make your shtick roll, you and any of your fellows who are present can all cooperate on a single action, and you can combine your Pick Up Heavy Thing scores (as under the Superstar rule) or do damage of 1 point for each attacker.

Also, you can roll against your Hive Mind skill to summon other members of the hive. If you make the roll, at least one shows up, plus one more for each extra point you make the roll by. If you're up against a group of opponents rather than a single opponent, making the roll exactly still gets you only one, but for each extra point you make the roll by, you get a number of helpers equal to the number of your adversaries! If you've called this big a group, no one in it can roll against Hive Mind again; you've used up all the hive members in reach. This doesn't apply if you weren't up against a group, though; if you're up against one opponent and you summon help, your help can summon more help. If this means that the adversaries end up buried under a pile of you and your siblings, so much the better, and if they fall down, they'll be Boggled . . .

Designer's Notes: Ethereal Player's Guide

or, "Herding Cats"

by Elizabeth McCoy

with additional (better) vignettes by R. Sean Borgstrom

Asked to come up with Designer's Notes, I asked the authors if they had anything to add. This missive was returned to me . . .

It is generally considered a sound practice, when a woman is to be institutionalized (on such grounds as these, wherein she exhibits a persistent and obdurate belief in such figments and fantasies as dragons, unicorns, elves, and the twin illusions of civil liberties and human rights (which, as all civilized folk know, exist only as palliative concepts to calm the fervent rumblings of the masses, unworthy of an enlightened individual -- save, of course, when said individual has been subject to irregularities in upbringing, and has not yet shaken off the caul of ignorance imposed by the travails and traumas that follow inevitably when one is raised by wolves, apes, otters, or the common folk)) --

As I was saying, it is considered sound practice that such a woman be permitted the opportunity to draft a prospectus illustrating on the one hand the scope of the visions that permeate and pervade the world behind her eyelids and on the other hand her ability to communicate her own perspective to the outside world; that is to say, a demonstration of her ability to maintain the lines of communication, despite the feverish insanity that rages within her, with people of consequence; for, as all intelligent and able souls know (and here, I permit a broad interpretation, accepting equally all who hold within them the potential for excellence whether or not they have yet achieved it) --

As all intelligent and able souls know, not even the most delusive vision represents true madness when it permits a free flow of information and an interchange of ideas between the potential madwoman and those around her; not even the fiercest ravings can, in practice, outweigh the simple ability to interact with society around one; and fantasy can, of course, prove psychologically healthy (if not for the poor sufferers, then for those who surround them), when it allows for such intellectual converse as this.

The author of this manuscript has protested repeatedly that it is meant not as the proof that she deserves her freedom nor as the defining communication of her insanity but that rather she had a deadline to meet that outweighed the mundane considerations of the judgment of this board; but such pointless protests are only to be expected when one sets a woman before such trial as this, regardless of her innate soundness, and we cannot, as you must understand, take these claims at all seriously --

(Why, the descriptions she has given of the development process alone! They show a hysteric hyperbole! and the picture she paints of the intended audience, as if one could shake loose the lining of America and discover individuals willing not simply

*to pretend to be what they are not, but to pretend to be dreams and figments themselves, to **imagine being imaginary**, and then to roll such concrete objects as dice to quantify the process of it --)*

We cannot, in all fairness to those others who have come before us for judgment, take her claims seriously, and so must present for your verdict on the matter the following manuscript, may you judge it wisely, as the best indication available as to whether Ms. Borgstrom's ravings about celestial and ethereal processes merit incarceration until such time as mind-altering medications permit her to lurch once again out into the ranks of society -- or merit immediate release and full freedom, albeit perhaps with some sort of tracking device to ensure that she does not enter any center of government or follow me home.

--submitted by Dr. Akire

This convinced me that I was going to have to actually write this article myself. "Unfortunately," due to a change from 128 pages to 144, during production, none of the material had to be cut! (Surely a first in such matters . . .) Therefore, I can only offer two vignettes that somehow escaped notice (I'm kicking myself here), some vignettes specially devised for this article, and an overview of the work itself.

* * *

Terrified, the little cat came streaking back to the small group, fast as Speed itself (which, as it happened, it was). Behind, a Hellhound loped, slaving jaws and arrogance. Einstein girded himself for mental battle, but the Big Bad Wolf simply interposed himself between the demon and their feline companion.

*With a snarl, the Hellhound lunged for the ethereal, expecting an easy kill -- and found itself swallowed up by jaws of primal **Hunger**. Somewhere on Earth, a demon woke, cursing and Discordant. In the Far Marches, the Big Bad Wolf simply licked his chops. "Mmmm, spicy."*

* * *

The ***Ethereal Player's Guide*** was, literally, years in the making. The original outlines were submitted in February of 1999! At it happened, there were two to choose from: R. Sean Borgstrom's and David Edelstein's. If you look at the authors for the book which is shipping now, you can see that neither's outline was as good as the *merged* one turned out to be.

From Edelstein came structure, hard mechanics, and most of the "crunchies" required to define what a character could and could not do and for how many points. From Borgstrom, imagery, flavor, society, and background -- not just for any one (or even few) pantheons, but for the whole of etherealdom. Two such vastly different approaches to the same material was not easy to mesh, for either the authors or line editor! The transfer between styles was eased by the addition of vignettes at the beginnings of chapters and in occasional "pullquote" format throughout the more mechanics-heavy chapters.

The playtest also caused changes: relatively minor was Chris Anthony's contribution of tables to aid in character creation. Maurice "Moe, Prince of Heresy" Lane's group and the *Toys from the Attic* playtests determined that the Affinity rolls were a bit too difficult, and the values were re-calibrated. Other matters were discussed. Uriel, Archangel of Purity, had originally been omitted from the text since it was a book about *ethereals*, not angels. However, the Tsayadim are the boogieman's boogiemens, and so a few of the better-known attunements, as well as some comments on Tsayad tactics, made it in after all.

So, what is the *Ethereal Player's Guide*?

Simply, it's all the rules you need to create an ethereal character, from a lowly, non-sapient figment that's somehow escaped a dreamscape, all the way up to a minor god (assuming the GM permits).

What it is *not* is a comprehensive listing of the existing or even classic pantheons. It doesn't provide a set of ready-made gods (though a lesser goddess and Odin are there to illustrate how such creatures are made), nor does it dwell upon the odd special cases of the syncretic semi-Divine religions, such as the Hindus or the Loa.

The ***Ethereal Player's Guide*** will tell you how to create pantheons, detailing their Domain, their themes, the strands and affinities that will best represent them . . . But in order to cover such a vast range of *possible* characters, allowing the greatest freedom to create all the weird and wonderful things in the Far Marches, details of existing pantheons were relegated to ***The Marches***. (Or -- should appropriate texts appear, pleasing to the editor's eye -- within *Pyramid* itself . . .) Pantheonic relations and attitudes are listed, though, to provide examples for Game Masters and players to work with when devising their own lesser ethereals or gods.

* * *

"They are beginning to call you Akosmia," Julia said. "They fear you as the lord of chaos come among us."

"I am a dream," I said. "Nothing more."

"What have you brought me this time?" she said.

I held them up: the legs of the Pellegrine Spider, each as long as I was tall. The spine of the giant named Hippolytos. The wings of Pegasus.

"I shall put them in your flesh," she said, "like the other things you have brought me. But I wonder, Martinus, when you shall be content to be as you are."

* * *

Unlike angels and demons, ethereals are malleable in their Image and even sometimes in their cores. They are not facets of the Symphony as angels are, or the shattered-mirror reflections of those facets, as demons are. Instead, the spirits of the Marches are woven of pure dreamstuff, as varied and surreal as every dream ever dreamed. They are more than influenced by human beliefs -- they are defined by them, *dependant* on them.

Though an ethereal greater god is equivalent to a minor Superior (and has the same lack of actual hit point totals), lesser gods are within reach of player characters, if not at character creation, then after a bit of experience. Such an ambitious spirit can try to establish itself as a god -- or assume the position of an existing one . . .

* * *

"You wish to be Branwen." Her voice was flat. She looked me up and down. "You are somewhat lacking in beauty and grace, but I suppose such things can be remedied. I am less certain that we can do anything about your wit." She hesitated, and then seemed to come to a decision.

"Earn the love of a demon," she said. "Earn the love of an angel. Then return here, and we shall see what will be seen."

"May I use deception," I asked, "or must they know what they love?"

"They must love you for yourself," she said, quietly. "Else you have no business claiming yourself a goddess of love and beauty."

Who's Right, the Ethereals or the Celestials?

The Game Master, actually. Ethereals claim that the monotheistic God was once one of them, who somehow tapped into power sufficient to reweave the history of the Marches. (And, perhaps, some other ethereal could discover the secret?) Celestials claim ethereals are just hopped-up figments of human imagination.

But whether setting a campaign in the past, or simply in an alternate universe where the canonical War between Heaven and Hell doesn't exist, the **Ethereal Player's Guide** can be used to create a universe of battling gods and spirits, seeking the power of worshippers and intriguing among themselves (and other pantheons). Save for requiring the core rules, this book of spirits can stand alone, if the GM desires. (Though it might require a bit of adaptation, it might fuel a *Small Gods*-like setting for the [Discworld Roleplaying Game](#). Angels and demons need not enter the picture at all . . .)

* * *

Hermes and Anubus eyed each other, each with a hand on the arm of the startled human soul.

Hermes said, "He's half Greek. He belongs to us."

Anubus bared his teeth and growled.

The Greek psychopomp poked his caduceus in the Egyptian's direction. The snakes hissed. "Let's not get personal, 'Nuby." Another growl, and he added, "Besides, maybe we can make a deal?"

The other god tilted his jackal head and whined curiously.

Hermes the trickster grinned. "Look, I'll let you have this one, but in return, I need you to run a little message to Bast . . ."

Why Did It Take So Long To Get This Book?

Quite frankly, the **In Nomine** curse was in full effect for the **Ethereal Player's Guide**. (You didn't know the line was so handicapped? Tsk. After co-authoring **GURPS In Nomine**, I was well aware that supernatural events were conspiring against me . . .) At various points in its existence, it hid in cracks, told people it had been playtested before it had been, ate approximately three editors (and belched) as well as two or three artists, and expanded its page count by 16 pages somewhere in there. (Probably from all the Essence it got by eating the editors and artists.)

I'm just glad it didn't get enough Essence to make a giant dinosaur vessel and devour Austin. Instead, it's a lovely and useful book, which -- if treated nicely -- will sit and purr contentedly on your shelf.

* * *

The angel knelt -- on several knees, for Kyriotates are multiplicity incarnate -- before its Superior, downcast. "Forgive me, my lord. I tried, but the humans were too persistent, too stubborn. I have failed."

The Archangel of the Sword sighed. "Humans are . . . surprising, at times. That you were able to delay the matter as long as you did is enough. It bought a little more time."

"I could have broken in, stolen the proofs . . ."

Laurence winced. "No, that would have not been the honorable action, and Dominic would have had words with me . . . It would not have been the first raid upon that company. No, we will simply have to hope our preparations were enough, and that the ethereals are not . . . empowered again by this book."

Pyramid Pick

Champions (for Hero System 5th Edition)

Published by [Hero Games](#)

Written by Aaron Allston & Steven S. Long

Art by Storn Cook, Andrew Cremeans, Albert Deschesne,
Malcolm T. Harrison, Jeff Hebert, Eric Rademaker, & Greg Smith

216 pages; \$29.99

If you are a roleplaying fan of the superheroic genre -- either in comics or in gaming -- and have *not* yet purchased **Champions**, the newest edition of one of the most venerable supers RPGs -- it's probably because you didn't know it was out. It is. Go buy it.

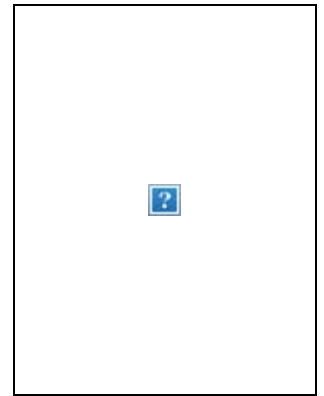
Okay; if you're still reading, yet have not purchased the book, perhaps it's because you haven't heard of it before, or maybe it's because you *have* heard of it before, but believed it was designed only for the **Hero System**, or only targeted at fans of the *Champions* universe. This review, then, is for you.

If the **Hero System 5th Edition** is a toolkit, providing the rules and framework necessary to run the mechanics of a game, then **Champions** is everything else . . . at least, for the costumes-and-cape crowd. Whereas in previous editions this material was found more closely tied with the **Hero System rules** -- for example, as the second half of the classic **4th Edition** hardcover -- this time it has received its own book. In so doing, Aaron Allston has been able to greatly expand, revise, and add to this material, creating a book with so much generic material that anyone running or playing in a superheroic campaign for any game system would do well to read this.

Chapter One is an overview of the superhero genre. This is perhaps the most exhaustive treatment of the subject ever in a superhero game. It starts by discussing various comic periods, including standard ones (golden age, silver age, bronze age, and the modern era dubbed the "iron age"), and not-so-standard ones (alternate histories, combining supers with science fiction or fantasy). A brief discussion of superhero timelines (pondering when the first ones should appear in the campaign, how the view of the law might evolve over time, and so on) is followed by a discussion of mood and the "meta-genre." This is a discussion of the tone of the supers campaign, such as horror, comedy, romance, drama, and so on. A brief discussion about the source of super-powers in the game is next (do powers stem from multiple sources, one source, or is there a theme that ties all the heroes together?), followed by an in-depth examination of many classic elements of the super-hero genre. (Why do heroes keep secret identities? Why don't their costumes bunch up? How do supervillains keep coming back?)

Chapter two deals with super-powered character creation. Again, this is not a rules-heavy stat-fest -- since the rules themselves are contained within the **Hero System 5th Edition** -- but is instead a treatise on the elements that go into making a super-powered character. This section is more tied to the **Hero System** than the previous section -- for example, describing which Perks are appropriate to the genre and how many points various Psychological Limitations are worth -- but its information is generic enough that there should be plenty of information for all. For example, it discusses the differences between Knowledge Skill: Superheroes or Supervillains (you know the players in the forces of good or evil) and Knowledge Skill: The Superhuman World (you know about superhuman culture, where they hang out, the history of super-humanity, and so on) . . . perfect for characters like Snapper Carr or Rick Jones.

The next section of this chapter details various superhero archetypes, such as the brick, speedster, or martial artist.



Each archetype is described in terms of what powers and skills it might have, as well as an examination as to what kind of disadvantages potentially unique to them. For example, the metamorph might have Psychological Limitation: Desperate for Acceptance, or the mentalist may have Sympathetic Berserk, which sends him into a Berserk rage whenever someone in the line of sight does, too! Again, there is a lot of information that, although tied to the **Hero System**, will be of use to other supers campaigns.

After that is the 12-page Quick Superhuman Generator. This section will not be of much use to those not using the **Hero System**. But those who might find such a section useful, it works surprisingly well (certainly better than many other random character generators), giving a variety of interesting powers to its creations. The final part of chapter two is a discussion of superteams, including how they assemble, what personality archetypes tend to be on teams (loner, rebel, natural leader, etc.), and how that team works with the authorities.

Chapter three, entitled "Blasters and Jetpacks: Superhero Technology." This chapter is heavily tied to the **Hero System** Rules, providing a myriad of examples (with game stats) for various superhero goodies. Included are bases (such as the underwater base or space base), vehicles (super-cars and jet aircraft), and equipment. The equipment section is particularly interesting; although it isn't exhaustive, it *does* provide a lot of examples of various bits that are common in the comic world, such as super-multitools, supervillain getaway teleporters, power negators, and a variety of deathtraps and doomsday devices.

Chapter four deals with gamemastering a supers campaign. Its 50 pages provides a meaty discussion of . . . well, just about anything you'd need for the care and feeding of a supers world. Although there is some material relating to the **Hero System** -- such as how to set point levels for various types of campaigns and how to find and diagnose problems with some powers -- much of the advice is more generic. For example, the discussion of comparing point totals among characters or determining what effect heroes can have on the environment (such as stray shots and collateral damage) can be useful for many systems. This chapter also deals with morality, realism, and dealing with a long-running campaign as it ages. It also provides some advice for generating super-adventures (which it calls episodes) and an instant plot generator (which isn't quite as useful as the quick superhuman generator, but might still be good to spark a last-minute adventure). This section also it continues the discussion of Disadvantages, this time from the GM's point of view instead of the player, and a number of new optional rules and rules modifications unique to the genre, such as the ever-popular fastball special. Finally, this section talks about villains and NPCs -- who they are, why they do what they do, and how to use them -- and ends with some final advice (listen to your players, in a nutshell).

The final chapter deals with the world of the Champions, the super-heroic world that has for so long been tied to the **Champions** RPG. This covers most of the basics of their world, giving full **Hero System** stats for the group, their gear, and their enemies. A particularly nice touch is the inclusion of plot seeds for each of the villains in sidebars, giving concrete and interesting ideas on how to use them. This section probably won't be of much use for those who don't use the **Hero System**, and only of limited use to those who do but aren't planning on using the Champions universe (although it's easy to file off the serial numbers and reuse any of the characters presented in another campaign). The book ends with an index, which is just as thorough as the table of contents.

Champions' writing is always entertaining, with clear points and counterpoints, frequent illustrative examples, and plenty of humor. Its art and graphic design are a step above the **Hero System Fifth Edition**, with many pieces that stand out (although some pieces appear washed out or blurry, possibly because they were originally in color).

For what it sets out to do, **Champions** is an astounding book. It is remarkably useful for players and GMs, newbies and experienced hands alike. It covers all the basics needed to run a campaign, but it does more than that; given its size, it's able to chart a lot of territory other books aren't able to: teen supers campaigns, playing a supers campaign as if it were a television show (na-na-na-na-na-na-na BATMAN!), setting up a "neutral ground" where villain and hero alike can interact, and dealing with those pesky "enabling devices" (like captured time machines and faster-than-light spaceships). Even those sections where it covers familiar territory, like Psychological Limitations, usually add new material: witness Noblesse Oblige (you serve humanity because your social position demands you serve the unwashed masses) and Broadcasts Intentions In Combat (the supervillian standby where they declare how they're going to attack before they attack).

If **Champions** has any weaknesses, they are for the most part minor. There is the occasional editing mistake (including, for some reason, page 50, where an inordinate number of gaffes appeared). Readers hoping for totally new Powers, Skills, or Disadvantages may be disappointed, although this is unexpected, since the **Hero System** is designed to be complete; there *are* many examples throughout of using and combining old powers. Likewise it is possible that **Hero System** fans may find the selection of super-gadgetry, devices, and bases to be somewhat limited. But these are all fairly insignificant complaints.

Although chock full of utility for **Hero System** players wanting to run a super-powered game, it should serve a place of honor for *any* super-heroic fan. It is perhaps *the* definitive genre book, and fans who have waited a decade for the new edition anticipated how good it was likely to be. They were correct. And if you didn't own this book before because you didn't know about it, now you do.

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

Will to Power (for Godlike)

Published by [Hobgoblynn Press](#)

Written by Dennis Detwiler & Greg Stolze

Cover by Christopher Shy

Illustrated by Dennis Detwiler

120-page b&w hardcover; \$20.95

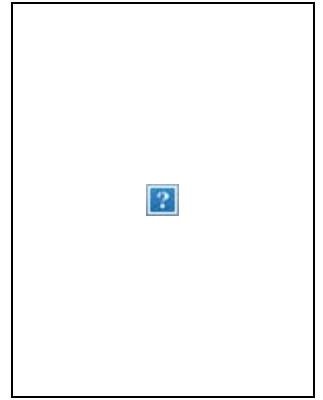
It is no surprise that Pagan Publishing's first RPG was something a little different. Produced by Hobgoblynn Press, but published by Pagan, [Godlike -- Superhero Roleplaying in a World on Fire, 1936-1946](#) stood out as a different take upon the superhero RPG, both in terms of setting and mechanics. First off, the setting was World War II in which super powered individuals known as Talents fought to liberate the world from Axis domination. Much was expected of these gifted servicemen and against the ordinary soldier could make a significant difference. Yet the other side also fielded their own Talents or Übermenschen and this could level the field of battle. Second, Greg Stoltze's mechanics, a variant upon the common dice pool -- now known as the "ORE" or "One Roll for Everything" system -- enabled quick skill and event resolution, in which a single roll of a number of 10-sided dice is made for action to get sets of matches. The result is then interpreted as the situation or skill demands.

Since the publication of *Godlike*, there has been some wait for the first supplement. Hobgoblynn Press has continued to conduct extensive playtests of *Wild Talents*, the generic and full super hero rules using the ORE system. Also, *Godlike* has also changed publisher and any future supplements will come from [Arc Dream](#). Until these arrive, the last supplement for *Godlike* from Hobgoblynn Press is *Will to Power*, which details and explores the extent to which the Nazis went to employ, exploit and propagandize their Übermenschen.

Any game or supplement is treading on dangerous ground when trying to present any kind of treatment of the Nazis that is intended for use as gaming material. Often this treatment tends toward one of painting them as comic-book-style villains, or more controversially, as characters that can be roleplayed, ignoring or hand waving the atrocities conducted in Hitler's name. *Will to Power*, matching the realist approach of the *Godlike* rulebook, does neither. The authors keep strictly to a passive and academic tone, but stepping out of this into their own voice to directly address the question of playing one of the Nazi Übermenschen in the *Godlike* world. Since all Talents in Nazi Germany were eventually enlisted or transferred into the Waffen-SS, an organization dedicated to fulfilling the desires of a genocidal lunatic, their response to anyone wanting to play a character in the SS is to call them an idiot. Thus the authors' purpose in writing *Will To Power* is to give the *Godlike* GM a range of individuals, organizations and facilities to kill or destroy, and not to play.

Also *Will to Power* is not a general exploration of Nazi Germany and its war machine; GMs wanting this are best off with a copy of *Iron Cross* for *GURPS WWII*. Instead, this is a pure examination of the place of Talents in Nazi Germany. In presenting the world of *Godlike*, it fictionalized many real historical events, clearly marking those in the main rulebook. Likewise, and even more so in *Will to Power*, wherein the advent of and arrival of the first Talent "Der Flieger" at the opening of the Berlin Olympic Games of 1936 sends history away off on a major tangent.

Up until this point *Will to Power* presents a straight history of the Nazi party's rise to power and the creation of the SS. Der Flieger provides both the justification and affirmation of their belief in the supremacy of the Aryan race. After



describing his arrival and the worldwide response to Der Flieger, **Will to Power** looks at the Nazi response. This comes from the "RuSHA" ("Rasse-und Siedlungshauptamt," or "Race And Settlement Office"), which is tasked with administering and monitoring the Nazi Party's racial policies. Their concern was educational eugenics, tracking the racial purity of men and officers of the SS, and later the relocation of German families to the new territories in the east. But "Sonderabteilung A" (Special Department A), set up in 1936 to exploit Der Flieger, eventually outgrew and overtook its parent organization as more and more German Talents appeared.

The organization, notable figures, facilities, and missions of both the RuSHA and the Waffen-SS are given. What is clear from both the missions and battles of the various Übermenschen is that Nazi doctrine limited their effectiveness in battle. Where Allied Talent training emphasized the skills of the soldier first and the supernatural abilities of the Talent second, the Nazis and Waffen-SS prioritized the Talent, that is, what made them supermen. Organized into the "SS Überkommandogruppen" (super commando groups) and later in the war "SS Überkommandogruppe Heinrich Himmler," they rarely employed heavy weapons, which put them at a disadvantage when they faced Allied troops. It even gave the normal non-Talent infantrymen a slight advantage. This weakness is one reason that would lead to the destruction of the "SS Überkommandogruppe Heinrich Himmler" at the Belgian town of Spa in 1944.

Since **Will to Power** is geared away from presenting the Übermenschen as anything other than the enemy, the chapters discussing the responses from the German and Allied intelligence are particularly interesting. Much like the rest of the German war machine, the Abwehr failed to make full use of their Talents, though this may have been intentional upon the part of its leader, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris. The chapter on Allied intelligence covers their response to the appearance of Der Flieger, rather than their active programs.

Will to Power builds upon the list of 10 Talent dossiers given in the corebook. But where those 10 are the first to appear across the world, these dossiers detail 18 of the most famous and powerful of the Talents deployed by Nazi Germany, including Der Flieger. Each receives a very full write-up, and given that they are the most powerful, it is no surprise that they are built with between 41 and 150 will points. Among the most decorated of Germany's Talents, few would survive the war; many, believing in Hitler and Nazi doctrine to the end, would commit suicide with his death.

To help the GM create Nazi Talents to throw at his players, statistics are given for the average soldier and officer of the SS, as well as details of their training, insignia, and equipment. Only the more commonly known weapons are illustrated, not the slightly more obscure, such as the Bergman MP28 SMG and Sturmgewehr 44 assault rifle. One new and ghastly weapon is the Sonneblumme 99 "sunflower" magnesium flash grenade, designed to shock and blind Talents simultaneously, hopefully negating their innate ability.

At this point, **Will To Power** undergoes a complete change of subject from discussing the Nazis and their Übermenschen, to purely providing new rules for the Godlike game, with none of it directly related to the previous 69 pages. These include rules for aircraft combat and Talent-versus-aircraft dogfights. The aircraft listings cover all the major nations involved in the conflict right up to several jet-propelled airplanes that did and did not see active deployment. These rules are generally comprehensive, but although they many varied models of bombers, they do not cover how to conduct bombing runs.

The few new powers include Shift Size, both up and down, of the self and other objects; Plasticine Touch -- literally making the state of an object or a person harder or softer; and Unconventional Move: being able to travel by other means, such as tunneling like a mole, swinging on webs, or riding on a sled of ice. These are expensive abilities in general and may be out of reach if playing a realistic Godlike game. Backing these new powers up are long lists of new flaws and extras with which a character's Talent can be modified.

In addition to these new rules, the GM is given several sets of optional rules. The first of these provides a simple method of differing between "mere" flesh wounds and other non-deadly damage. Not covered in the main rulebook, these are quite likely to make it into the average **Godlike** game as they might increase the chance of a Talent surviving a scintilla or two longer. Along the same lines and potentially adding more complexity are the rules for detailed hit locations. Although befitting the gritty realism of **Godlike**, the accompanying descriptions are on the gruesome side. Where the first two options covered the effect of battle upon the body, the third option looks at its effects upon the mind of the soldiers. Based on a U.S. military study, these explore "Killing Disposition" in **Godlike**, essentially

presenting rules for the morale of both player and non-player characters. This extends to covering the effects of battle fatigue and how to treat it. While an interesting read, this does add to the lethality of the setting . . . another reason to consider these rules as optional in addition to the complexity. Unlike the core rulebook, one thing that ***Will to Power*** does not cover in its new rules is anything for the ***d20 System*** under the terms of the Open Gaming License.

Physically, ***Will to Power*** feels rather slim for a hardback at just 120 pages, though it does contain a lot of information. Part of this is due to the glossy paper stock used, like the core rulebook. Wholly illustrated by manipulated photographs, this works very much in the supplement's favor. What does let it down are the typographical and layout errors. These include the dreaded "page XX," spelling mistakes, and having the titles for paragraphs appear at the bottom of one column and the actual text being in the next. This may be a design feature, but it feels far from smooth.

There is no denying the usefulness of all of the material contained in ***Will to Power***, but as a whole the package feels less than the sum of its parts. Much of this stems from the split focus of the contents -- one part is background and source information relevant to the book's title, and the other not-so-related new game rules and options. Should this have been so? Not necessarily, as the space given over to rules could have been devoted to more information about the Nazi superhuman program, or help and advice in implementing and using the given material within a game. Except one strong suggestion, there is none of this in ***Will to Power***, and this is its Achilles' Heel. That said, if this help and advice had been given, it may have been at odds with the authors' stance upon the players roleplaying members of the SS. Even so, writers of this caliber could and perhaps should get around this in some way.

In terms of providing more rules and a further exploration of ***Godlike's*** background, ***Will to Power*** delivers on both counts. Unfortunately, in choosing to focus on these two unrelated aspects of the game, rather than concentrating upon just the one, ***Will to Power*** does a disservice to both.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

Kingdoms of Kalamar Atlas

Published by [Kenzer and Company](#)

Designed by Bob Burke, Brian Jelke, Steve Johansson,
David S. Kenzer, Mark Pleemons, and D.M. Zwerg

Graphic Design by Bob Burke and Jennifer Burke

240-page mixed color/b&w hardcover \$29.99

Maps of fantasy worlds don't exactly have a reputation for being realistic. The topographical maps in the *Kingdoms of Kalamar Atlas* manage to be both good-looking and realistic. Turn to a random page and for a minute you might think you are looking at a real-world map instead of Tellene. Mountain ranges are suitably vast, rivers squirm their way from highland to ocean, and heavily populated area like Kalamar are dotted with hundreds of settlements.

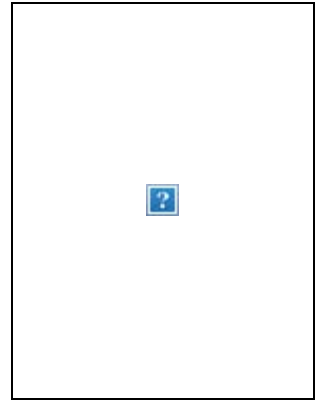
The *Kingdoms of Kalamar Atlas* is a 240-page hardback book with 139 pages of color maps. The spine has a mottled green band to help it stand out from the other Kalamar hardbacks on your gaming shelf. The short introduction briefly outlines the books features. A two-page overview map divides Tellene up into six sections and lists the page numbers for maps in that particular section (i.e. Section 5: Reanaaria Bay; Pages 95-114). This is an extremely handy feature and I found myself frequently flipping back to the overview map to reference a particular area of the world as I browsed the book. The introduction closes with a color map key and scale.

The color full-page maps are scaled at 25 miles to the inch and just plain gorgeous. The shades of brown, green, and blue are well-separated (although tiny road and waterways are a bit hard to pick out), and while I don't claim to be a map expert, they look very realistic, and nothing jumps out as being weird or out of place. The maps are divided into sections that roughly follow the layout of the *Kingdoms of Kalamar Sourcebook*, so it's a simple matter to find relevant maps for a particular area. There are a few pages that show little more than open ocean, but this is a small price to pay for an organization that is both useful and logical.

The Atlas has six informative and fact-filled appendices. The first contains 12 thematic maps that show common trade routes, ocean currents, winds and air pressure systems, precious metal deposits, utilitarian metal deposits, industry, fishing, herding and ranching, grain production, and military deployments. These are topped off with a Mercator projection of Tellene for the map purist. This level of detail really makes the *Kingdoms of Kalamar Atlas* feel like a fantasy Rand McNally. Other appendices contain a pronunciation guide for those funky words like Svimohzia, a discussion of Tellene's land types defined by relief and climate, a table of languages and words found in previous Kalmar releases, a Tellene language tree, and a geographical features index. A list of Tellene's primary population centers that includes population, country, and even longitude/latitude closes the book out.

I haven't extensively cross-checked the book with other *Kingdoms of Kalamar* resources, but it looks refreshingly free of errors and typos. The main complaint that I have is that many road and waterways are so tiny and colored so subtly that they are hard for my aging eyes to pick out. Also, since the maps' colors represent only elevation, you might find it a bit strange to see the Elos desert colored all in green. As an added bonus, if you don't play *Dungeons & Dragons*, the Atlas contains no game statistics, and so it's immediately portable to *HackMaster*, *GURPS*, or any other system you enjoy.

Of course, this book is primarily designed for use in a *Kingdoms of Kalamar* campaign. Combine it with the *Kingdoms*



of Kalamar Campaign Setting and the *Kingdoms of Kalamar Player's Guide* and you have a solid foundation for a *Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition* campaign. This is a product that was obviously a labor of love for its developers, and if you are interested in Kalamar or in a realistic and detailed fantasy world atlas, you should check it out. The Kenzer and Company website has a preview of the *Kingdoms of Kalamar Atlas* at <http://www.kenzerco.com/rpg/kalamar/atlaspreview.php>, so you can check out to see the maps for yourself.

--Anthony Roberson

Blood, Bathory, and Beyond

"Yes, very -- a cruel love -- strange love, that would have taken my life. Love will have its sacrifices. No sacrifice without blood. Let us go to sleep now; I feel so lazy. How can I get up just now and lock my door?" She was lying with her tiny hands buried in her rich wavy hair, under her cheek, her little head upon the pillow, and her glittering eyes followed me wherever I moved . . . "

-- J. Sheridan LeFanu, "Carmilla"

Once upon a time, in a castle high above the dark forest, there lived a wicked Queen with hair as black as ebony, skin as white as snow, and lips as red as blood. The fairest one in all the land, she cast her shadow into every villager's hut in the kingdom, killing any girl who threatened her beauty. She consorted with three witches and with the King of the Cats to maintain her power. Finally, she was locked up in a tower and fell into a deep slumber. And after that, she lived . . . ever after.

"Elizabeth used to dress up well in order to please her husband . . . On one occasion, her chambermaid saw something wrong with her headdress, and as a recompense for observing it, received such a severe box on the ears that blood gushed from her nose and spurted on her mistress's face . . . When the blood drops were washed off her face, her skin appeared more beautiful: whiter and more transparent on the spots where the blood had been. Elizabeth, therefore, formed the resolve to bathe her face and her entire body in human blood, so as to enhance her beauty."

-- Michael Wagener, *Articles on Philosophical Anthropology* (1796)

The most common version of the legend of Elizabeth Bathory (or, in proper Hungarian, Báthory Erzsébet) goes as follows. Elizabeth Bathory, born into the royal Bathory family in 1560 (her uncle was Prince of Transylvania and King of Poland), met and married Francis Nadasdy, the "Black Knight of Hungary," a sadist and a fearsome warrior.

Unfortunately, although her rare beauty was enough to win him, it was not enough to keep him from the front (and perhaps from other women). Left to her own devices, she took out her frustrations on the servant girls, scourging them with whips, burning them with hot irons, and piercing them with long needles. During such cruelties, she noticed that fresh blood gave her skin a more youthful appearance. From casual sadism, she turned to regular slaughter, draining the blood of first her servants, then her serfs, and finally the village girls around her castles. She had any number of intricate devices made to catch and store the blood, in which she bathed to retain her legendary beauty. After Francis died in 1604, she increased her sanguinary activity, hoping to stave off age and attract youthful lovers. Running out of peasant girls -- and perhaps noticing that their "common" blood wasn't having much of an effect -- she finally made the mistake of draining the blood of noble women, which brought the law down on her.

"His illustrious Highness, witnessing this evident and ferocious tyranny, having caught the bloody and godless woman, the widow Nadasdy, in flagrant criminality, placed her under immediate perpetual imprisonment in Castle Csejthe . . . "

-- final court decision of January 7, 1611

From the beginning of March, 1610, King Matthias II of Hungary ordered his minister Count Georg Thurzo to conduct an investigation into the increasing numbers of dead bodies found on Bathory lands, and into the rumors of Elizabeth's barbarities. Matthias was not only driven by justice -- Elizabeth's husband had loaned the king a substantial sum of money, and if she were executed, her properties would be forfeit and the debt canceled. On December 29, 1610, Count Thurzo burst into Elizabeth's castle in Csejthe and discovered three tortured bodies. He ordered "that damned woman" imprisoned immediately, and rapidly convened a trial in his own city of Bytca on January 2, 1611. At this trial, four of Elizabeth's accomplices testified to her murders and to their role in them; three of them were executed and one, incredibly, freed after some time in prison. Count Thurzo held a second trial on January 7, this one of Elizabeth herself, at which he introduced as evidence a diary in her own hand detailing over 650 murders. Elizabeth was not allowed to testify at either trial, and was sentenced to perpetual imprisonment, walled up in a small tower in her castle to be fed through a slot.

Suspicious types point out, quite rightly, that these were nothing more than show trials -- and hint at a conspiracy between the Bathory family and Thurzo to shunt the inconveniently long-lived Elizabeth out of the way while keeping

the Bathory properties intact. However, the weight of the testimony demonstrates that Elizabeth's crimes were quite real; the authenticity of the diary has never seriously been questioned, and although her accomplices talked under torture, many other eyewitnesses testified freely. What all the testimony remains silent about, however, is the baths of blood -- although Elizabeth is described as "bloodthirsty." In his well-researched, if unfortunately-titled, book *Dracula Was A Woman*, Raymond T. McNally makes the case that this was an element added by the peasant informers of the Jesuit chronicler Laszlo Turoczy, who compiled the first history of her crimes in 1729, during a wave of "vampire panics" in the region. Father Turoczy would probably not have been averse to bloodying the reputation of the Protestant Elizabeth, either -- and as we all know from the movies, peasants will say any old thing about murderous aristocrats.

"Elizabeth Bathory, wife of the great lord Francis of Nadasdy . . . who remained a widow, infamous for her murders, died in prison at Csejthe. Dead suddenly, without crucifix, and without light . . . "
-- chronicle of Istvan Krapinski, August 14, 1614

Interestingly, according to a letter to Count Thurzo, Elizabeth died a week later than Krapinski's memoir states, on the 21st; her body was "hurriedly buried" in Cjesthe, and later removed to her native soil at Ecsed. Well, a body was removed there. Elizabeth might well have had other tricks up her sleeve -- she had learned the arts of poisoning from one of her servants, Erzsi (short for Erzsébet) Majorova, and attempted to poison King Matthias and Count Thurzo during the Christmastide crisis time of 1610. If Elizabeth had somehow suborned a servant into slipping her the necessary herbs and simples, she might have faked her death and in the confusion of her hurried burial, switched bodies with some unfortunate servant woman. Better yet, she might have used astral projection to escape her oubliette, returning to her body safely from her time in the cloud realm. Elizabeth probably learned witchcraft in the 1590s from her sole male accomplice, the "dwarf" Janos Ujváry, known to her as "Ficzo" and "Thorko," although after 1604 her name is also linked with a witch called Anna Darvulia. Perhaps her blood drinking was part of her sorcery -- the priestess of the Earth at Aegira drank bull's blood before descending into the crypt of the goddess to prophesy, and many other examples abound. It ran in the family; her aunt Klara was executed as a witch (and husband-killer) by the Turks, and her cousin Anna Bathory was tried for witchcraft in 1618 and 1621 by Gabor Bethlen, a Prince of Transylvania who had climbed to the throne over the body of Anna's brother.

*"Help me, O clouds! O clouds, stay by me and protect me!
Let no harm come to me, Elizabeth, and grant me long life!
I am in peril, O clouds -- send me ninety cats, for thou art Lord of Cats!
By thy order gather them together, from mountains, rivers, rooftops, and the other side of the ocean.
Tell them to tear and devour the hearts of [my enemies], and so guard Elizabeth Bathory from harm."*
-- incantation of Elizabeth Bathory, as recorded by Rev. Janos Ponikenusz

Her enemy, the Lutheran pastor Janos Ponikenusz, kept complete records of her depredations, and was convinced that Elizabeth sent spectral hounds and cats after him. During that terrible Christmastide of 1610, he heard noises in his house -- "not the noise made by ordinary cats." He chased off the demons with prayer (and with a big walking stick), and survived to give evidence. Many other stories survive of Elizabeth torturing girls under the watching eyes of black cats, or forcing them to parade naked in front of her feline familiars. Intriguingly, much of the trial testimony focused on Elizabeth's habit of biting and tearing at the flesh of her victims with her teeth. She fed some of her victims' bodies to her guards, whether as sadistic prank or alchemical attempt to create [werewolves](#) (who, in Slovak lore as in [wendigo](#) myth, can be made by eating human flesh). Although no contemporary source hints that Elizabeth was a vampire, many accuse her of werewolfism -- and the Bathory family crest is three wolves' teeth on a red background. Could Elizabeth have been a rogue [benandanti](#), collaborating with witches and using her powers for evil?

"She owned a mirror, which had a frame running around it in the shape of a pretzel; in front of this [mirror] she would gaze at herself with her arms supporting her head for as long as two hours straight."
-- testimony of Janos "Ficzko" Ujváry, January 2, 1611

And if she was a vampire, what was she doing with a magic mirror? Of course, perhaps only vampires can use magic mirrors, since their reflection won't get in the way of the visions. Elizabeth's mirror, attested at the trial, fascinates with its parallels to the mirror of the Wicked Queen in Snow White, who like Elizabeth wished to be the fairest in the land,

and like Elizabeth ate the bodies of her rivals. (In Grimm, the Queen salts and eats what she thinks is Snow White's heart -- or "lungs and liver," in some versions.) Its "pretzel-shaped" frame meanwhile hints at non-Euclidean geometries, and at vistas into another dimension -- the cloud-kingdom of the King of the Cats, perhaps, or the [mirror realm](#) of "Bloody Mary." (Then there's the mirroring effect of one Erszébet -- Majorova -- working charms with another -- Bathory.) Elizabeth also had a specially constructed Iron Maiden, with real hair and articulated face, which grabbed unwitting servants with its arms when they touched a certain gem on its surface and pulled them into its knives. Was it simply a clever clockwork, or was it a metal golem? Intriguingly, Elizabeth's automaton vanished from the Csejte museum during WWII.

"There is in this castle a gentlewoman which we and this castle is hers, and many other. So it befell many years agone there fell upon her a malady; and when she had lain a great while she fell unto a measle, and of no leech she could have no remedy. But at the last an old man said an she might have a dish full of blood of a maid and a clene virgin in will and in work, and a king's daughter, that blood should be her health, and for to anoint her withal; and for this thing was this custom made."

-- Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, XVII:9

So what is left to us? We have a mysterious female werewolf playing both sides of a deep game in Transylvania and Hungary, taking counsel from witches, dwarves, and a magic mirror. Her family has a long lineage of brutality and magic combined with high politics -- Prince Stefan Bathory, a reputed Satanist, helped Dracula regain his throne in 1476. She is assisted (again) by the mysterious trinity of [murderers](#) or [witches](#) or [sorcerers](#), one of whom, Katarina Benecsky, vanishes (like [Gilles de Rais'](#) sorcerer Prelati did) after her death. Perhaps Katarina was the mysterious "woman dressed as a man" -- an alchemical androgyne? -- called "Stefan" whose arrival at Elizabeth's palace always signaled the beginning of the direst cruelties. Her enemy King Matthias was the hated rival of the occult emperor Rudolf II, patron of John Dee in Prague. (Although there's no proof that Elizabeth Bathory ever met John Dee during his sojourn in Rudolf's empire, the dates fit.) On the other hand, her cousin's prosecutor Gabor Bethlen was a major supporter of the Rosicrucian [Winter King](#) of Bohemia -- and one of his retainers, a Georg Ragoczy, married Sofia Bathory. (Making our old pal [Saint-Germain](#) a possible cadet Bathory as well, if he was actually Georg's great-grandson.) Somewhere in the palaces of Vienna or the forests of Transylvania, Snow White met Rose Red -- and perhaps the [Big Bad Wolf](#) met the King of the Cats -- and the truth was shut up in a tower, to wait for the life that waits in the blood.

Running The Adventure, Part I

The Pre-Game Show (And Before)

It seems like just a few weeks ago I spilled my guts about how I construct adventures. And a cursory glance over the archives reveals that it *was* just a few weeks ago. So my keen instincts are as sharp as ever.

Now, seeing as how that subject was good for a few columns, and since all our folks working from home now have an honest-to-goodness Marsh-Method adventure in their hands, I thought I'd take a few weeks to tell you how I *run* that adventure.

(Obviously this won't be an exhaustive treatment . . . heck, much of the past three *years* has been spent on this subject. But this will be tied to describing what I do what that hypothetical adventure outline I laboriously created while locking the players in a back room.)

Pre-Pre-Game

Before we begin the game proper, there are some fiddly bits that I take care of to make sure the game will progress as smoothly as possible. First, I make certain I know how long the game is supposed to last, or -- at the very least -- the maximum length the game *can* last. I try to have an idea for both the group as a whole, and the individual players. (For example, in one long-running campaign, we were generally able to keep gaming theoretically until two or three in the morning. However, one of our players consistently got sleepy at around midnight or one; the only way we really *could* until that later time was if we were really exciting or engrossing. As a result, I either made sure that we were probably going to wrap up before midnight, *or* was going to have something exciting going at midnight which would provide enough adrenaline to keep everyone awake.

Once I know how long I have my players for this game session, I try to pin down if and when I'll have them for the *next* game session. This doesn't necessarily mean a time and date (although if I can arrange that, great . . . if at all possible I try to have games meet at a regular interval). Rather, I try to make sure there are no upcoming extenuating circumstances (say, if someone is going out of town for a month, or a schedule is changing so someone can't make it at our regular time).

The reason I do this is simple . . . and it will be a recurring theme throughout this series, I suspect: pacing.

If I needed to pick my most important responsibility as a GM, there's a good chance I'd say it's to be the *hombre* who controls the pacing (or helps control the pacing, if the players have a good sense of pace themselves). Knowing when my players are going to need to end the session will help me control when (and how) the game ends. Knowing if there will be an unusual break before the next game also has an impact on this one; for example, if I learn that there will be a three-week break between sessions instead of the usual one-week break, I will try to make sure I don't end a mystery or complicated adventure on a cliffhanger. If I know that one player will be missing a week but the game will be going on without him, then I'll try to insert a graceful exit for that character. And so on.

The Pre-Game Show

Okay; the players are all seated, we have the schedules sorted out, and the Mountain Dew is flowing freely.

At this point we're ready for the pre-game. This is where all the bookkeeping-type stuff is done, and where we hash out what (if anything) has been going on between last adventure and this one. All expenditures of experience points, acquisition of equipment and goodies, and questions or disputes about the rules are sorted out now. Likewise, if the players had anything they wanted to do in their downtime -- pursue subplots, follow up on loose threads from past adventures, drink beer -- then this is the time for those activities. (If possible, I generally tell people at the end of the

previous game how much time will elapse in the campaign world before the next adventure . . . barring any activity on their part, of course. It's much easier for players to contemplate how the heroes are spending their downtime if they know how much of it there will be, and will help avoid the mad scrambling outcries that follow surprise declarations like, "Okay. A year passes without incident . . .")

If a PC has a significant goal he wants to accomplish, then I'll generally encourage the player to let me know *before* the game; that way I have time to ponder crafting a whole adventure around his request. But this isn't necessary, and I never want to keep the players from pursuing some course of action just because they didn't think of it until we met again . . . many's the time I've locked myself in the bathroom after a surprise player request, thinking furiously to come up with a new adventure.

Again, I try to make sure the players get everything out of their system that doesn't involve their being in characters and/or the plot. I tend to view adventures like a roller coaster. You can chat with your pal in the seat next to you all you want at the beginning, but once the ride starts, there's no getting off, and there's not much else to do but flail your arms and squeal for mercy . . . hopefully while loving every minute of it.

And why do I feel that way? Stay tuned, true believer . . .

--*Steven Marsh*

Pretty Things

by Matt Riggsby

Treasure is more than cash, particularly in chronically cash-poor historical societies. Certainly, shiny coins were desirable, but gifts, rewards, even regular pay were often given in the form of goods. Muslim rulers gave out richly made robes of honor and supported visiting ambassadors with material gifts, while their European counterparts would pay their retainers with more clothing and casks of wine. Even the staunchly professional Roman legions were paid in part with salt. Likewise, when characters in low-tech settings are rewarded, or even when they negotiate for payment, goods are likely to figure in the discussion.

There are, of course, practical issues associated with using goods as wealth. Obviously, it's a little harder to buy things if your "money" is wrapped up in inlaid thrones and bales of silk. On the other hand, if you've got fine robes and impressive chairs, you don't need to worry about buying furniture and clothes. You've already got them! Keeping value in the form of practical goods lets you use your wealth while keeping much of its value.

There are also social ramifications to the form one's wealth takes. While accumulating wealth in the form of furniture, tapestries, and fanciful silverware might be an annoyance for modern-minded adventurers, they're an important, sometimes even preferred, form of wealth in other settings. In some societies, it might be rude to give money to a close ally. It would make their assistance look like a service rendered by an inferior rather than aid given by a friend. Moreover, in most societies, it's important for rich and powerful people to *look* rich and powerful. You can't do that if all you have is stacks of coin stashed in your coffers, but you can if you have rich tapestries on your walls, an impressive chair in your hall, and fancy robes on your back.

The tables and rules below can be used to create lists of valuable items with which to reward and burden characters, determine the value of individual items, and even help craft-minded characters make their own. The contents of the tables below are suitable for historical and many traditional fantasy games. However, they contain blank spaces which may be filled in as appropriate for fantasy campaigns, where treasures might include adamantium coats, dragon-bone furniture, and bottles of quintessence. The tables can also be useful in higher tech campaigns for exotic cargoes, ancient treasure troves, and elegant or unusual gifts. They were designed for **GURPS**, but can be translated to any campaign easily; notes for doing so are included at the end.

Items

The GM can use the items table as an idea checklist, picking appropriate items from the table. However, if you feel you must use dice, the numbered columns can be used to pick items and attributes at random. To pick random items from the main table, roll 1d6 to determine a category of goods, then roll further dice as necessary to get to specific goods, usually rolling two dice, taking one die as a first digit and another as a second digit. For example, the GM rolls a 1 for category, indicating Consumables. He then rolls two dice, getting a 5 on one and a 1 on the other, indicating cloth. For cloth, he rolls another die, getting a 2 indicating wool. After an item is selected, consult the section on [Materials and Decoration](#) to determine what makes the item different from plain versions.

All costs and weights are for typical versions of the items, undecorated, and made with average skill. Both weight and cost can increase considerably depending on the quality of underlying material, skill in workmanship, and effort in decoration.

Categories

1. [Consumables](#)
2. [Furnishings, Livestock, and Large Objects](#)
3. [Wearables](#)

4. [Containers](#)
5. [Tools and Miscellaneous Objects](#)
6. Reroll or create your own

1. Consumables (roll two dice)

Roll	Item	Notes
1-2, 1	Wine	\$16/gallon
1-2, 2	Beer	\$4/gallon
1-2, 3	Spice (roll two dice)	\$1 to \$10/lb. in native areas, up to ten times as much elsewhere.
1, 1	Allspice	A dried berry tasting like cinnamon, nutmeg, and clove.
1, 2	Anise	A faintly liquorice-flavored seed
1, 3	Annato	A mild spice which produces a vivid yellow or red color
1, 4	Asafetida	An oniony dried gum
1, 5	Bay leaf	
1, 6	Cardamom	
2, 1	Carom	A sharp spice
2, 2	Chile peppers	Chile peppers come in dazzling variety of shapes, sizes, flavors, and degrees of heat, and are dried for long-term storage.
2, 3	Cinnamon	
2, 4	Clove	
2, 5	Coriander	
2, 6	Cumin	
3, 1	Fennel	
3, 2	Fenugreek	A fragrant, bitter bean
3, 3	Ginger	
3, 4	Mace	
3, 5	Mustard	
3, 6	Nigella	A tiny black seed with a peppery taste
4, 1	Nutmeg	
4, 2	Onion seed	
4, 3	Poppy seed	
4, 4	Saffron	
4, 5	Sumac	A dried, lemony berry
4, 6	Turmeric	
5, 1	Zeodary	A root related to turmeric but tasting more like mango
5, 2	Dried fruit powders	Many fruits and roots can be dried and used as flavorings, including licorice, mango, pomegranate, tamarind.

	5, 3+ 6	Reroll or insert your own	
1-2, 4	Salt		Usually white, salt is sometimes naturally tinted (black and red aren't unusual). \$3 to \$20/lb.
1-2, 5	Perfume (roll one die for source, one for form)		
	<i>Source</i>		
	1-3	Flower	For example, violet, iris, rose, lavender. Flower waters are also used in cooking. \$5 to \$30/oz.
	4	Spice/herb	For example, cinnamon, rosemary. \$10 to \$40/oz.
	5	Other plant source	Citrus rinds and resins such as myrrh, frankincense, turpentine. \$20 to \$80/oz.
	6	Animal	For example, ambergris, musk. Musk can be taken from many species, each with a different scent. \$40 to \$100/oz.
	<i>Form</i>		
	1-2	Scented water	
	3-4	Scented oil/fat	Stronger and longer-lasting, oil-based perfumes may be a liquid or thick ointment. Increase base cost by 20%. Oil-based perfumes give way to alcohol-based perfumes after the invention of distillation.
	5-6	Pomander	A scented object, often worn as an ornament. Pomanders aren't as good for improving the user's scent but can be raised to one's nose to ward off bad smells. Increase base cost by 15%.
1-2, 6	Dye		A variety of materials could be used as coloring agents, including roots, leaves, fruits and berries, minerals, and even animal parts (both insects and shells were used to produce prized dyes).
	Color (roll two dice)		There is considerable range for variation within and between colors. For example, purple and red tend to run together, and other reds can shade into orange and yellow. Common shades start at \$1/lb. Rare shades can go up to \$10/lb.
	1-5, 1	Purple	
	1-5, 2	Blue	

	1-5, 3	Green	
	1-5, 4	Yellow	
	1-5, 5	Orange	
	1-5, 6	Red	
	6, 1-3	Black	
	6, 4-6	Brown	
	Intensity and Durability (roll two dice)		Roll 1d6 for intensity (1 means a larger quantity of dye to produce color, 6 means a very concentrated color) and 1d6 for durability (1 means the color fades almost completely after a washing or two, 6 is essentially permanent). Multiply base cost × intensity × durability to get final cost. Black and brown dyes are common; divide final cost by five.
3-4, 1	Cosmetics		Pigments, usually derived from a plant or mineral, dry or in a fat or oil base. \$2 to \$10/oz.
3-4, 2	Grain		Unexciting, but bushels of grain were a common and useful commodity. \$.5/lb. Exotic varieties and notably good strains of seed grain may cost more.
3-4, 3	Preserved food (roll one die for method)		Food packed for long-term storage. \$3/lb. for fruits vegetables, \$5/lb. for meats, more if the preserved material is itself expensive.
	1	Pickled	Preserved in brine, vinegar, or other solution preventing the growth of microorganisms
	2	Dried	
	3	Smoked	Slow-cooked over a smoky fire, giving extra flavor and longer life than air-drying. Increase base cost by 10%
	4	Fermented	Includes cheese, yogurt, black eggs, fermented beans. Increase base cost by 15%
	5	Sealed	Simply sealed, although perhaps first heated to sterilize as with modern canning. Ancient sealing techniques are less than perfect, so some fermentation is likely.
	6	Spiced/salted	Packed in salt or spice mixtures which may have some antiseptic effect or at least keep out oxygen.
3-4, 4	Candles		\$3 (tallow) or \$6 (beeswax), .25 lb. per hour of light. Wax could be treated to change its properties, so increase cost by

50% for each of the following: superior color, brighter light, reduced smoking, perfume.

3-4, 5 Oil Cooking or lamp oil. \$16, 8 lb. per gallon

3-4, 6 Fabric/leather
5-6, 1 (roll one die for material)

1	Cotton/linen	\$1, .25 lb. per square yard
2	Wool	\$1.1, .3 lb. per square yard
3	Silk	\$5, .15 lb. per square yard
4	Leather/hide	Treated animal skin suitable for clothing or very light armor. \$4, 1 lb. per square yard.
5	Pelt	As above, but with a soft, attractive fur. \$6, 1.5 lb. per square yard.
6	Reroll or insert your own	

5-6, 2 Yarn/thread (roll one die for material) Thick yarn is about 700 yards/pound. Thin thread can be up to 2, 000 yards/pound.

1-2	Cotton/linen	\$2/lb.
3-4	Wool	\$1.8/lb.
5-6	Silk	\$17/lb.

5-6, 3 Raw fiber As for yarn/thread, but reduce cost by one third

5-6, 4 Incense \$20-60, 1 oz. for an hour's worth of stick or lump incense

5-6, 5 Soap Either semi-liquid or hard lumps/bars. \$10-15 lb.

5-6, 6 Reroll or add your own

2. Furnishings and Large Objects (roll two dice)

Roll	Item	Notes
1, 1	Rug/carpet	1d6 × 1d6 feet, \$20 to \$50 per square foot
1, 2	Tapestry	1d6 × 2d6 feet, \$15 to \$40 per square foot
1, 3	Chair	\$75, 8 lb. Increase base cost by 50% for each of the following: arms, back, rockers, cushions.
1, 4	Footstool	\$30, 3 lb. May be cushioned at increased cost.
1, 5	Bench/couch	Seating for at least two people. \$70, 7.5 lb per person. Increase cost for arms, back, and cushions as for chairs.

1, 6	Chest	A horizontal chest with an opening on top. \$4.5, 4.75 lb. per cf of capacity. Double cost for secret compartments, which may take up no more than 10% of the chest's volume.
2, 1	Cabinet	An upright cabinet with drawers or front-opening doors. \$4.5, 4.75 lb. per cf of capacity. Cabinets may also have secret compartments.
2, 2	Shelves	As a cabinet, but open. \$4, 4.5 lb. per cf of capacity
2, 3	Bed	A bedframe without mattress or bedding. \$140, 50 lb. per person.
2, 4	Mattress	A flat cloth sack filled with feathers or other soft material. \$100, 20 lb. per person
2, 5	Desk	Historical writing desks are usually small and portable, about the size of a footstool. \$15, 7 lb.
2, 6	Table	3d6 square feet, \$12, 6 lb. per square foot. Larger tables are possible, but cost \$18 per square foot.

3, 1 Timepiece
(roll one die for type)

1-2	Water clock	Most water clocks are stationary, but portable ones are possible. \$400, 15 lb. for a simple 24-hour timepiece. Add at least \$1,000 and 10 lb. for simple moving displays (dial showing sun or moon, dancing animals, etc.). Mechanical clocks are nascent Renaissance technology, but the GM may wish to replace water clocks with mechanical clocks.
3-4	Sundial	A functional sundial can be worn as a ring or pendant (\$40, negligible weight), taken off and aligned with north, but the most accurate models will be stationary. \$100, 12 lb.
5-6	Hourglass	\$60, .5 lb. per 5 minute increment or part thereof.

3, 2	Large mirror	Highly polished metal, often set in a decorative frame. 5 lb./square foot, \$100 × (area in square feet) ²
3, 3	Tub	Portable tub made from hammered metal. \$200, 10 lb. per person.
3, 4	Painting	Portable painted surface. Wood is a common material, but anything flat and portable is possible (cloth, paper, sheets

of ivory, etc.). Base cost is painter's skill × area in square feet × \$4. Cost for paintings and statues (below) can be modified enormously by the artist's reputation, subject matter, and skill with which the specific work was executed.

3, 5 Statue
(roll one die for material)

Relief or fully three-dimensional figure. Base cost is sculptor's skill × volume in cubic feet × \$5, modified by material. Weights are for solid figures; hollow ones will weigh much less.

1-2	Clay/porcelain	140/cu. ft. Multiply cost by 2 for regular clay, by 3 or more for porcelain.
3-4	Organic	Wood, bone, ivory, or some other solid organic material. Multiply cost by 3 for common woods and bone, or at least 5 for ivory and rare woods. 25 to 60 lb./cu. ft. for woods, 50-75 lb./cu. ft. for bone, 100-120 lb./cu. ft. for ivory.
5-6	Stone	Multiply cost by 10 for moderately hard stones such as limestone, 15 for very hard stones such as marble. 140-165 lb./cu. ft.

3, 6 Bedding
Sheets, blankets, bed-curtains (where appropriate), and headrests/pillows. \$40, 2 lb. per person.

4, 1 Sedan chair
\$100, 40 lb. Increase cost and weight by 50% for a fully enclosed palanquin

4, 2 Howdah
A chair or platform for mounting on an animal. Camels and horses can take single-seat versions, but elephants can take versions seating up to four. 150 lb., \$230 per seat

4, 3 Chariot
A light, unarmored vehicle carrying at most a driver and one passenger. \$400.

4, 4 Carriage
A covered vehicle carrying at least four passengers. \$8000

4, 5 Gondola
A small rowed or poled boat carrying two or three passengers in comfort. \$1,000

4, 6 Passenger barge
Boat with a large deck (up to twenty passengers plus several sailors will fit comfortably), appropriate for shallow water but not open seas. \$10,000

5, 1 Horse
Or other riding animal as appropriate to the campaign. p. B144

5, 2 Sheep/pig
Or other small farm animal as appropriate to the campaign. \$200 to \$500.

5, 3 Cow
Or other large farm animal as appropriate to the campaign. \$700 to \$1,200.

5, 4 Hunting
Falcon, trained dog. See p. B141-144 for

	animal	examples.
5, 5	Pet	Lap dog, colorful bird
5, 6	Exotic animal	A very rare animal or an animal from a radically different environment, such as a giraffe in Europe or a penguin in the tropics
6, 1-6	Reroll or add your own	

3. Wearables (roll two dice)

Most garments can be bought in a heavy version suitable for cold weather; double base price and weight.

Roll	Item	Notes
1, 1	Cape/shawl	\$20, 1 lb.
1, 2	Cloak	\$30, 2 lb.
1, 3	Robe/dress	\$ 40, 2 lb.
1, 4	Footwear (roll one die)	p. B210
	1-2	Slippers/sandals
	3-4	Shoes
	5-6	Boots
1, 5	Shirt	\$10, .5 lb.
1, 6	Jacket/doublet	A sleeved over-garment made from heavy or double-layered material. \$20, 1 lb.
2, 1	Vest/surcoat	A sleeveless over-garment. \$15, .5 lb.
2, 2	Overcoat	A full-length overgarment. \$25, 1 lb.
2, 3	Trousers	Many societies used short trousers supplemented with separate leg coverings. \$15, .5 lb.
2, 4	Hose/leggings	Stocking-like hose or wrap-around leggings. \$10
2, 5	Hat	The GM may want to consider the size and shape of the crown and brim. Manipulating the crown and brim can also give very similar hats very different appearances. For example, the brim of a low-crowned, broad-brimmed hat can be worn flat, pinned up in two places to produce a "Napoleon" hat, or in three places to produce a tricorn

			hat. \$5, negligible weight
	Crown Shape (roll one die)		Crowns are typically 3-8 inches (1d6+2) tall, although much taller hats are certainly possible. Exotic crowns , such as multi-horned jester's hats and spade-shaped bishops' miters, are also a possibility.
	1-2	Conical	
	3-4	Domed	
	5-6	Cylindrical	
	Brim (roll one die)		If a hat has a brim, it is probably 1-6 inches wide.
	1-3	Has a brim	
	4-6	Has no brim	
2, 6	Turban/keffiyeh		A long strip of cloth worn as a head covering, usually wrapped around a small skullcap. \$10, weight negligible.
3, 1	Wig		May be dyed or bleached to a desired shade and curled or dressed into an elaborate hairstyle. \$50 plus \$30/inch of hair length, 1lb. per inch of length.
3, 2	Gloves		\$7, negligible weight. These are lighter than the gloves on p. B210 and provide no armor protection.
3, 3	Sash/belt/scarf		\$5, negligible weight.
3, 4	Veil/mask		A veil may be made out of a gauzy, effectively transparent fabric, or a more opaque fabric with eye-slits. \$10, negligible weight.
3, 5	Foundation garment		Waist cinchers, corsets, bodices, bustles, and other undergarments made to subtly shape the user's body. Although usually thought of as women's clothing, some societies might see them worn by dandified men as well. \$20, 1 lb.
3, 6	Armor		Select an item or suit of armor from an appropriate table.
4, 1	Clothing parts		In some societies, garments had detachable parts, including leggings, hoods, sleeves, and codpieces. Generally \$10, negligible weight.

4, 2	Buttons/buckles	For much of history, clothing fasteners such as buttons and buckles were separate and removable. Buttons, along with the rest of the jewelry and accessories, often have negligible weight, but elaborate versions can weigh several pounds. Minimum cost is \$5, but prices can vary to infinity.
4, 3	Ring	
4, 4	Necklace/chain	
4, 5	Pin/brooch	
4, 6	Bracelet	
5, 1	Medallion/religious symbol	
5, 2	Seal	Cylinder seal, signet ring, or "hand-stamp" as appropriate to the society.
5, 3	Crown/tiara	
5, 4	Fan	
5, 5-6	Reroll or insert	
6, 1-6	your own	

4. Containers (roll two dice)

Unless otherwise stated, containers cost \$1 per pound.

Roll	Item	Notes
1-2, 1	Box	4.5 lb per cf; for boxes over 1 cf, see Chest in Furnishings
1-2, 2	Drinking vessel	A cup, mug, or goblet. In addition to material and decoration, the GM may consider the size, whether the vessel is footed and/or has handles.
1-2, 3	Cask	A wooden container for liquids. 3 lb. and \$3 per gallon.
1-2, 4	Bottle	A glass container for liquids. 1.5 lb. and \$5 per gallon (\$50 per gallon before the invention of glassblowing)
1-2, 5	Jug/pitcher	
1-2, 6	Amphora/krater	A very large jug, at least three feet tall.
3-4, 1	Basin/ewer	
3-4, 2	Vial	
3-4, 3	Water/wine skin	
3-4, 4	Scabbard	

3-4, 5	Purse	
3-4, 6	Salt cellar	
5-6, 1	Basket	
5-6, 2	Platter	
5-6, 3	Special-purpose serving vessel	Wine pitcher with strainer for dregs, teapot
5-6, 4	Cage	A small container suitable for carrying an animal. \$10, negligible weight for a container suitable for a mouse or cricket. \$40, 2 lb. for a cage for a songbird or small cat or dog.
5-6, 5-6	Reroll or insert your own	

5. Tools and Miscellaneous Items (roll two dice)

Roll	Item	Notes
1, 1	Weapon	Choose from an appropriate table.
1, 2	Book/scroll	Blank books cost \$0.2 per page, scrolls \$0.2 per foot (divide by 10 after the invention of paper). Written books and scrolls cost at least \$5 per page/foot, plus at least \$30 per page/foot for illumination (divide by 10 after the invention of printing).
1, 3	Map/chart	Maps and celestial charts of any accuracy are at least \$80 per square foot.
1, 4	Musical instrument (roll two dice)	Unless otherwise specified, .5 to 10 lb., \$4 per pound.
1-2, 1-2	Untuned percussion	Drum, castanets, or other percussion instrument intended more to make a loud bang than a particular note
1-2, 3-4	Tuned percussion	Bells, gong, xylophone, or other percussion

1-2, 5-6	Flute	instrument intended to produce specific notes Or any other wind instrument without a reed mouthpiece (for example, recorder, ocarina, digereedoo)
3-4, 1-2	Horn	Increase base cost by 20%
3-4, 3-4	Plucked String	For example, lute, harp, or sitar. Increase base cost by 50%
3-4, 5-6	Bowed string	For example, violin or cello. Increase base cost by 50%
5-6, 1-2	Reed	For example, krumhorn, serpent. Increase base cost by 10%
5-6, 3-4	Complex Instrument	A musical instrument using complex mechanisms, such as a portative organ (a portable keyboard instrument with reed pipes, played with one hand while another pumps a bellows), bagpipe, or hurdy-gurdy (a stringed instrument where notes are produced by pressing keys and strings are stroked by a crank-driven leather disk). Double base cost.
5-6, 5-6	Exotic	Instruments based on unusual principles, such as a bullroarer (a shaped plank whirled on the end of a thong to produce a surprisingly loud tone) or glass harmonica (a rotating series of

			wetted glass disks, producing eerie tones when touched).
1, 5	Writing implements		Some combination of office supplies
1, 6	Navigational/astronomical instrument		For example, astrolabe , quadrant , compass , spyglass .
2, 1	Professional tools (roll two dice)		A set of tools used in a particular trade, not including consumable materials (for example, no charcoal for a blacksmith) except where noted.
1-3, 1	Physician		Equivalent to a doctor's black bag (p. B212)
1-3, 2	Apothecary/Alchemist		Retorts, beakers, mortars and pestles, and other glassware appropriate to making potions and herbal cures (p. M86)
1-3, 3	Blacksmith		Hammers, bellows, tongs, and chisels. \$250, 30 lb.
1-3, 4	Cobbler		Large needles, shears, punches, and small hammers. \$100, 10 lb.
1-3, 5	Mason/sculptor		A wide range of hammers, chisels, levels, and grinding and polishing equipment. \$250, 30 lb.
1-3, 6	Carpenter		Saws, level, planes, hammers. \$200, 15 lb.
4-6, 1	Jeweler		Essentially a blacksmith's kit, but in miniature and of high quality. \$200, 10 lb.
4-6, 2	Surveyor		Levels, chains, poles, and sighting equipment. \$350, 50

4-6, 3	Scribe/illuminator	lb. Pumice, pens, brushes, inks, and paints. \$180, 6 lb.
4-6, 4	Glassblower	A crucible, pipes, blades and smoothing tools. \$170, 12 lb.
4-6, 5	Gardener	A variety of trowels and shears. \$40, 5 lb.
4-6, 6	Reroll or insert your own	

2, 2 Gaming equipment
(roll one die)

1-2	Simple randomizer	Dice, yarrow sticks
3-4	Complex randomizer	Playing cards, dominos
5-6	Game board and pieces	Chess, checkers, mah jong, etc.

2, 3 Sewing/weaving tools
(roll one die)

1	Sewing needles	
2	Knitting needles	
3	Spindle	
4	Distaff	
5	Loom	
6	Spinning wheel	

2, 4 Cooking tools
(roll one die)

1	Pot/kettle	
2	Pan	
3	Tongs/fork	
4	Spoon/ladle	
5	Spit/skewers	
6	Grinding tools	For example, mortar and pestle or manno and metate (a flat grinding surface and flatish stone rubbed against it)

2, 5 Eating utensils

Fork and knife, chopsticks

2, 6 Scale

A balance scale and weights

3, 1 Candlesticks

3, 2	Brush/comb	
3, 3	Razor/scissors	
3, 4	Hand mirror	
3, 5	Toy	For example, dolls, tops, toy soldiers
3, 6	Tinder box	
4, 1	Brazier	
4, 2	Censer/incense burner	
4, 3	Lamp	
4, 4	Saddle	
4, 5	Riding furniture	Reins, bridle, and other riding accessories not directly attached to a saddle
4, 6	Relic	Technically, the physical remains of a holy man, often held to carry good luck or magical power
5, 1	Ornament	
5, 2	Tent	
5, 3+ 6	Reroll or add your own	

Materials and Decoration

An item or set of items chosen from the tables above won't look terribly impressive. What, you might ask, is a hair brush and a hat worth? If that's all they are, not much. However, any item may have its value increased almost infinitely if it is lavishly decorated or made from exotic materials. Just about anything, save livestock and raw materials themselves, can be decorated.

Most items will have an obvious structural material (swords will be metal, lutes will be wooden), but if the GM wants the item to be made out of something different, roll on the Structural Materials table. The surface of the object may also be decorated. Roll for a decorative motif and a decorative method as many times as desired. It would not be unusual for an elaborately decorated item to have several different motifs and methods. For example, an item might have painted human figurines, geometric beadwork patterns, and a few gems.

Structural Materials

This list describes what the object is made from.

Roll	Material	Notes
1, 1-3	Ivory	
1, 4-6	Bone	
2, 1-3	Wood	

2, 4-6	Stone		
3, 1-3	Glass		
3, 4-6	Ceramic		
4, 1-3	Iron/steel		
4, 4-6	Copper		
5, 1-3	Bronze/copper alloy		
5, 4-6	Fabric (roll one die)	For many items, either a rigid skeleton covered with fabric or fabric stiffened with paint, glue, or lacquer.	
	1	Cotton/linen	
	2	Wool	From sheep, goats, or other long-haired animals.
	3	Silk	
	4	Leather	
	5	Fur	
	6	Bark	Durable tree bark pounded into a papery flat layer.
6, 1-3	Paper		Includes papyrus and parchment. Like fabric, either stiffened or a shell over a more solid skeleton.
6, 4-6	Precious metal (roll one die)		
	1	Billon	Copper-silver alloy
	2	Silver	
	3	Electrum	Gold-silver alloy
	4	Gold	
	5-6	Reroll or insert your own	

Decorative Motif

This list describes the general shape of the decoration.

Roll	Scheme	Notes
1-2, 1-2	Simple geometric	For example, stripes, concentric circles, or a checkerboard pattern
1-2, 3-4	Complex geometric	Complex patterns, such as Greek keys or Celtic knotwork.
1-2, 5-6	Calligraphy/arabesques	Actual writing or elaborate, flowing designs inspired by calligraphic styles
3-4, 1-2	Floral	Flowers or other plants
3-4, 3-4	Animal figures	

3-4, 5-6	Human figures	Generic human figures or specific portraits
5-6, 1-2	Landscape	
5-6, 3-4	Scene	Several figures depicted in action together. For example, a scene from a popular myth or a notable person's life
5-6, 5-6	Narrative	A series of scenes telling a story

Decorative Method

This list describes the physical techniques used for decoration.

Roll	Method	Notes
1-2, 1	Embroidery	Patterns applied with thread after the underlying material has been manufactured. (fabrics only)
1-2, 2	Weaving	Patterns are woven directly into the cloth during its production, not applied after the fact. (woven/knitted fabrics only)
1-2, 3	Quilting	A pattern of fine stitching picking out patterns, distinct from embroidery in that it's the pattern of stitches, not the thread itself, which is most visible. (fabrics only)
1-2, 4	Patchwork	A pattern of small pieces joined together (sewn, glued, welded, etc.)
1-2, 5	Painting	
1-2, 6	Block printing	
3-4, 1	Fringe/tassel	
3-4, 2	Feathers/ribbons	
3-4, 3	Mirrors	
3-4, 4	Beads/bosses	Roll on the materials list to determine what the beads/bosses are made from.
3-4, 5	Bells	
3-4, 6	Jewels	
5-6, 1	Branding	
5-6, 2	Inlay	(solid objects only; not applicable to textiles)
5-6, 3	Embossing/engraving	(solid objects only)
5-6, 4	Sculpted relief	(solid objects only)
5-6, 5	Metal leaf application	Includes electroplating and chemical techniques for concentrating precious metals on a surface. (solid objects only)
5-6, 6	Enamel/applique	(solid objects only)

Pricing

Quality: High-grade craftsmanship can give items increased durability. Increase cost by 5× for a high quality item, 20× for a very high quality item. The GM must decide what that means on an item-by-item basis (armor and weapons, for example, are already covered by other quality rules), but where applicable, a high quality item should have hit

points increased by 50% and +20% to DR. A very high quality item should have double hit points and +50% to DR.

Expensive materials: An otherwise garden-variety item can become much more expensive if it's made from an expensive material. Increase cost by 1× for garments made from high-quality but relatively common materials (fine but locally produced wool, superior cotton or linen), by up to 8× for rare materials (pashmina wool, silk). Increase costs similarly for wooden items made from exceptional woods (2× for excellent but common timber, up to 8× for exotic materials).

Double base weight and add \$1,000 per pound of adjusted weight for items made from silver. Quadruple weight and add \$20,000 per pound of adjusted weight for items made from gold. Many gold and silver items were alloys of precious and base metals, which reduced both cost and weight considerably.

Treatment: Increase base cost by 1× for each decorative method used above for a simple application, or up to 3× each for an extremely elaborate application. For example, a coat with a few tassels and simple beading would have its cost increased by 2×. A similar coat with more elaborate beading might be 3× more expensive (1× for the simple tassels and 2× for the beadwork) or as much as 4× more expensive if it was nearly encrusted in beads.

Making Your Own

Characters with craft skills may attempt to make their own valuable items. Take the base price and add multipliers for treatment and modifiers for quality $\times 3/5$ (3 for high quality, 15 for very high quality) to get basic cost of workmanship. Divide that cost by 20 to get the number of man-hours necessary to make the piece. Decrease time by 10% for effective craft skills of 15-17, 15% for craft skills of 18-20, and 20% for skills of 21+.

System Considerations

Where game-specific measurements are used, this article uses **GURPS** terminology, and where possible, **GURPS** page references for prices and weights are provided for reference. However, the vast majority of the material is entirely generic and most of the remainder can be converted easily. For example, the **GURPS** \$ simply means the game world's standard unit of currency, not an actual dollar's worth of value, and so can be used across games easily. For example, in a **d20 System** campaign, the \$ would be equivalent to a GP, while in **Fading Suns** it would be read as a firebird. A **GURPS** skill level of 10 to 12 is entry-level professional with 20 considered masterful; conversions to other systems can be found by finding an appropriate factor. For example, when computing time to make an item, divide skill levels in percentile systems by five to find the **GURPS** skill equivalent.

Variations of a Theme

Designing and Using Theme Villains

by Brian Rogers

Theme villains -- deranged individuals who plan their criminal motifs around a single concept -- are a classic comic book motif. Unfortunately, they're silly and hard to plan things around, making them less likely to appear in supers games than the more run-of-the-mill criminals. This is a shame, especially since perhaps the most iconic rogues gallery of them all, the Batman's, is chock full of them. What follows is a brief discourse on this criminal sub-species - their motives, habits, and plumage.

The Obsession

Theme villains obsess. This is more than the usual "Hey, I'll put on a spandex costume and use this arguably-patentable-to-make-a-million-dollars invention to show them all!" obsession. It's even greater than the "Since I was locked in a freezer as a child I've dedicated my life to the study of refrigeration, culminating in this arguably-patentable-to-make-a-million-dollars invention" obsession that grips much of the Flash's rogues gallery. No, the theme villain's level of obsession is complete. Every aspect of their criminal enterprise must revolve around the obsession: costume, weapons, henchmen, modus operandi, targets, method of payment. Everything.

This means that if you're designing a theme villain, you have to pick an obsession broad enough to give you some working room. If the players like the villain, you'll need a way to bring her back with new plans and targets . . . which is difficult to do if she's Lisa Mona. How many times can she try and steal the Mona Lisa before the players get bored? Better to have an obsession like great cats, Chinese myth, jazz music, or the number seven to give yourself some maneuvering room when it comes to criminal plots.

The obsession doesn't have to make a lot of sense. In a classic four-color comic environment its origin can be dismissed with a single line of exposition, such as "Since my brother was killed by seven bullets fired by seven cops on July 7th, 1977 -- my seventh birthday -- I knew the world's magic number!" What's important is not where it came from, but how it colors the villain's worldview. Lucky Seven will not rob a bank unless he can do it on the seventh day of the seventh week of the year, using his seven henchmen to steal seven million dollars. If he can rob seven such banks over seven days (or seven days apart), even better. It's this degree of exaction that makes a true theme villain.

Accoutrements and Abilities

Many theme villains are simply normal people who have been pushed over the edge by their obsession. Along the way they picked up lots of training or access to some advanced tech, but they normally aren't superhuman. This has some direct effects on plotting for them.

Other than some old standbys, a theme villain will have a new array of gear for each plot. This keeps him challenging, since the heroes will never know quite what to expect. If any heroes have known weaknesses, there's a good chance some gear will be tailored for that. Most gear will be one-trick wonders . . . good enough to give the heroes a hard time once but easily circumvented once the surprise is gone. Sure, Wixua will always have his robe of anti-gravity silk and martial arts skills, but he could be armed with darn near anything else from Hong King cinema or traditional Chinese myth: a flying sword that fights for him, a dragon's mouth wand that shoots fire, a sleeve that extends with explosive force and returns with unstoppable strength. The heroes won't trust his sleeve, never mind what's up it, but they know that given time they'll get around his gizmos and turn it into a skill-on-skill fight, which they will win.

Since theme villains are usually normal-but-obsessed humans, they have a tendency to plan in a comprehensive

manner. Theme villains, more than any other group except perhaps mad scientists, will have escape routes -- not just from their base, but from their crimes. Even when the heroes have Wixua dead to rights he may throw a smoke grenade and vanish. Be warned: some players hate this! It can be seen as stacking the deck for dramatic effect, that you're saying nothing they do will catch the villain. If you have such players, either don't use this technique or actually plot the escape routes -- Wixua ducked through the specially prepared window nearby into a radar-invisible hidey-hole marked in your notes -- that the heroes can block, spot, or deny. As long as you keep it "fair," your players have no right to complain. The occasional win for their side will make it clear that you are indeed playing fair.

A side effect of their compulsive over-planning and obsession makes theme villains the best practitioners of the mysterious death. This is a classic of the genre, and you should feel no guilt about using it unless you're running a particularly realistic game (in which case, why are you using theme villains at all?).

Henchmen

Theme villains often work alone. Heroes often work in teams. Since the average theme villain relies more on plans and gadgets than powers, he's going to have to use henchmen to balance the scales. Henchmen make creditable threats, are extra sets of hands, and can be sacrificed in a pinch. Just like everything else, the henchmen must be part of the obsession. This means silly outfits, bad nicknames and poor weapon choices, as long as they fit the theme.

Granted, anyone not able to see the problems in dressing up as Count Bastard's Jazz Trio (Double Bass, Licorice Stick, and Axe) and using weapons shaped like musical instruments to take on superheroes aren't the sharpest notes in the scale, so the henchmen probably aren't brilliant. They *can* be cunning, however. A troupe of tactically savvy henchmen encountered after run-ins with less-than-stellar ones may lead to an embarrassing defeat and a trip to the [deathtrap](#) for overconfident heroes.

Remember that the main purpose of the henchmen is to distract the heroes and buy the villain time. Their secondary purpose is to scare civilians and hold off conventional authorities. At this goal they work very much like the theme villain's gadgets: holding off the heroes once or twice in critical situations. Henchmen should be combat-worthy enough to be a mid-range threat to a hero, but weak enough that they'll fold after two or three solid hits. Combine their intellect with their use in sacrifice plays and you'll understand why the henchmen never get told the plan. The best the heroes can hope for is wringing the location of the villain's base out of them, and even that will take effort.

Care and Feeding

Why are theme villains fun for the players? Because it gives even the most doltish hero a chance to play detective. If the villain is going to telegraph his actions to this degree, heroes have a chance to second guess him in a way that they seldom do with everyday criminals. Once the heroes have an inkling that the Lion Lord is operating in town they know it's time to start looking about for cat-themed targets while the police, used to dealing with conventional criminals, stand dumbstruck.

Of course, theme villains will only let the heroes know of their presence in advance if their obsession includes riddles (or abject stupidity), so the traditional theme villain plot runs as follows:

- Heroes discover a crime has been committed, with clues that it was done by a theme villain (as subtle as traces of lion hair found at the crime scene or as blatant as witnesses saying "it was a guy in a lion suit") that the heroes will catch and the police won't. This is usually the crime that sets things up -- recruiting or rescuing henchmen, getting the gear or information he'll need for the actual crime -- but it may be the first in a series if the theme runs that way (such as killing the group of poachers and tomb robbers who have stolen the cat relics of Xandia). The heroes now know the theme villain is in town and the game is afoot.
- The theme villain commits a second crime, which the heroes are almost in time to stop. There's a brief encounter, but he gets away through luck or a cunning escape plan. This is either another set up for the main event or the next crime in the sequence. If you have players that hate these minor defeats, either skip this step, or be willing to end the whole theme villain plot if they manage to catch him. On the other hand, if your players

like these genre tropes, you can stretch this out for several such encounters.

- The heroes may succeed in tracking the theme villain to his base. His base, like everything else, should have something to do with his obsession. This makes finding it easier, but not too easy -- sure there's the abandoned zoo, but also the old Kit Kat Club, the abandoned mansion of the great white hunter who vanished decades ago, or even the tenement on the corner of Veldt and Savanna streets. Again, it works best for the classic story if the theme villain gets away, but you can just as easily end the plot with a climactic fight at the villain's base. Even if he does get away, he's now forced to finish the crime with fewer resources than planned, giving the heroes a partial victory.
- The climactic crime, which your heroes will hopefully be in a position to stop as it occurs. By this point, his target should be clear, either by the equipment he's stolen, clues found at his base, or the sequence of the crimes to date. This final crime is the one most tied to the obsession; sure, Lion Lord stole security circumvention equipment from Pantherco Security and hijacked a Flying Tiger replica from the air museum for the crime, but the collection of golden cat coins from a millionaire's penthouse was his *true* target. The other crimes let the heroes rule out the theft of the stone Bast statue from the museum (too heavy for the plane) or the kidnapping of heiress Kitty De Leon (no need for advanced safecracking equipment) so they can be waiting for Lion Lord atop the high-rise for the final showdown. As with the villain's base, there should be several possible obsession targets at any one time to keep things from being too easy -- another reason for broad obsessions.
- The theme villain is carted off to jail, or the heroes stand over the spot where he vanished, muttering that no one could have survived that. The stolen goods are returned, and the henchmen do another tour in the big house.

Note that while the concept of a theme villain is silly, there's nothing that says the theme villain himself must be silly or harmless. Sure, many are distractions at best and poor souls at worst, but they can be deadly serious in their obsession. Perhaps the most famous comic villain of all time, the Joker, is a theme villain, obsessed with comedy. While he makes use of practical jokes like squirting flowers, joy buzzers and guns that fire little flags reading "bang," he's also a homicidal maniac. Theme villain appearances can be a lighthearted romp for the heroes or a deadly serious descent into the madness of obsession. Even if you don't want to go to either extreme, theme villains can add spice to a [preexisting emergency](#), since Count Bastard wouldn't let anything like an impending earthquake stand in the way of his possession of Miles Davis' personal trumpet.

Marcel Lemieux: Time-Traveling Librarian

For *GURPS*

by Peter Miller

Biography

Lemieux was born in Paris in 1930, son of a union between a French librarian and writer and a privileged English lady. The family quickly emigrated back to the mother's richly appointed townhouse in downtown London. Marcel grew up among history books in his father's library, and the rich appointments of his mother's noble standing. Most of his youth was spent dreaming through texts detailing revolutionary France, Ancient Egypt, the Renaissance, and Greece rather than playing football and getting into mischief.

His love of history blossomed upon entrance into post-secondary education at Oxford in 1947. Majoring in European and Near-Eastern history, Lemieux completed his Master's and Doctoral dissertations by his 30th birthday. Teachers would comment that he spent little time on anything but his studies, and seemed to be a "bookwormish" young man. Lemieux dedicated himself to not only a perfunctory understanding of the events of history, but to an in-depth knowledge of the correlations and interrelations of events. Instead of treating history as a progression of numbers, people, and ideas, Lemieux sought to see history as a complex and intertwining web of ideas, events, and people strung up against the fabric of time.

After completing his doctorate, he traveled abroad extensively, funded by an endowment left for him after his father's death a few years earlier. Much of his time was spent split between dusty libraries in Egypt and Arabia as well as the collections of the Sorbonne and Cambridge.

During a trip to Egypt in 1965, Lemieux purchased a library at an estate sale of an upper-tier bureaucrat. In this collection, he uncovered a tome that would change his life: the *Manual of Time Travel*. Although doubting its authenticity, Lemieux had a weakness for the occult and decided to give the ritual a try upon returning to England in 1966.

One evening, in a sealed room in his home, surrounded by candles and the other attendant ritualistic needs the books proscribed, Lemieux completed the rites and -- to his utter shock and delight -- found himself not in his London townhouse, but in an alleyway in revolutionary France in 1790. He quickly reversed the ritual and, with relief, found himself back inside the safe confines of his townhouse.

After this monumental discovery, Lemieux's life, and his usability in a game can go two ways . . .

"Power Corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely . . ."

Sensing the power and control he could have over time, Lemieux sets out to turn the Manual to his advantage. Giving in to the greed his privileged upbringing gave him, and allowing his latent superiority complex to come out into the open, he begins to travel through time, altering history at his will, controlling armies, plundering riches, and laying waste to the

Destiny . . .

Upon returning to his own time, Lemieux is struck by a purpose in his life. He ties up the loose ends of the present, and embarks of a quest given to him (he believes) through divine intervention. He believes that his destiny is to travel through time in order to right wrongs and correct injustices, guiding the bloody timeline of human history to an endgame of peace and brotherhood rather than catastrophic disaster. Without his actions, he believes the world is

interconnected web of time he studied so thoroughly. Through all of this he seeks to understand and intuitively know the meaning of life and the universe. He has believed his whole life that the answers to these questions can be had through the study of history. Now, with the Manual in hand, he plans to prove this to himself by studying historical events firsthand. However, his megalomaniacal ways mean he cares not for the damage he does to people, events, or time itself on his quest.

doomed to irreversible suffering for the those who die, and dismal subsistence living for those remain alive.

Adventure Seeds

Lemieux could fit into any genre of adventure, as he literally can pop up out of nowhere. Either of his two probabilities can be the basis for many different adventures, and Lemieux himself works well as a catalyst for a single night of gaming, or the nemesis of a whole campaign.

Timepiece/Stopwatch Campaign (From *GURPS: Time Travel*)

In the Timepiece campaign, Lemieux is an aberration, able to travel through time somehow without aid of the AABET device, and without causing the characteristic ripple detectable by both Stopwatch and Timepiece. To both agencies, this megalomaniac represents a threat to the security of their timeline. He could provide the catalyst for an unprecedented cooperative intervention to cease his meddling with time.

On the other hand, the destined Lemieux, while still causing undesired eddies and ripples in history, could be of vital importance to both Stopwatch and Timepiece. Perhaps the event he is destined to partake in is the deciding point in which timeline comes into existence. Working against time (no pun intended), both agencies would be anxious to befriend Lemieux and find out more regarding his ultimate fate.

Historical Campaigns (*GURPS Egypt, Japan, Russia, etc.*)

A campaign set during any of the historical epochs covered by *GURPS* could find an evil Lemieux a deadly foe. As their history literally changes around them, characters would have to bring Lemieux's actions to an end before events he alters change the very epoch they live in so much that they themselves do not come into being.

The destined Lemieux could fit into one of many mythologies covered in the *GURPS* historical worldbooks. He could be in Imperial Rome to prevent the fall of the Empire, thus stopping Europe's Dark Ages, or in Japan to ensure the survival of the Shogun's rule. Any event that, sufficiently altered, would drastically change the world of the present is fair game as Lemieux's destined fate.

Science Fiction (*GURPS Space, Transhuman Space, GURPS Prime Directive*)

While the *Manual of Time Travel* requires the user to have a knowledge of the period that he wishes to travel to, creative GMs can of course alter this rule, and have the Lemieux of the mid-20th century arrive in a near or far-future setting.

The corrupted Lemieux would, of course, be anxious to use his ability to traverse time to take control of events in the future. However, his plans would be longer term, due to his lack of foresight he normally has into events in the past.

The destined Lemieux could be a savior for a dark world of the future, or fate could be conspiring to take him into the

world of the future to stop a world-ending holocaust, war, or other event. Regardless, the heroes would have to deal with this well-meaning man, who could very well be attempting to alter the history they believe to have been completed "correctly."

Marcel Lemieux

ST: 12 [20] **DX** 11 [10] **IQ** 14 [45] **HT** 12 [20].

Basic Speed: 5.75 Move: 5

Dodge: 5

Advantages: Absolute Direction, Attractive, Charisma +1, Language Talent +1

Disadvantages: Timesickness (Acute Freq/Mild Severity), Curious

Skills: Writing +1 (15), Skiing +0 (12), Swimming +0 (12), Black Powder Weapons +0 (12), Guns/TL7 +0 (12), Languages: French +2 (16), Spanish +1 (15), Arabic +1 (15) First Aid +1 (15), Naturalist +0 (14), Survival +1 (15), Archaeology +0 (14), History +2 (16), Literature +1 (15), Research +2 (16), Savior Faire +1 (15), Driving/TL7 +0 (12)

Equipment: Manual of Time Travel (written in Arabic). The manual is a set of rituals that the reader must utilize in order to physically transport himself and all who touch him through time. Concentration, silence, willpower, and a knowledge of the wished-for time period are all that are really necessary, though the Manual dictates several other esoteric necessities.

Corrupted Lemieux has the further disadvantages Greed (-15) and Megalomania (-10).

Destined Lemieux meanwhile has the advantage Destiny (+10) and the disadvantage Sense of Duty: To Destiny (-10).

Camping Out

An Optional Rule for *Frag*

by Douglas Cole

One aspect of first-person shooters that is currently absent from *Frag* is the sniper strategy: that really irritating dude perched in some unreachable nook with a sniper rifle and a juvenile fascination for head shots. He's everywhere.

Frag is turn-based, however, and there are currently no real benefits to taking long-ranged shots. Closer is nearly always better, and mentioning "opportunity fire" draws the response of, "What's that?" Naked aggression is the way to go.

For those who feel the need, only one small rules change is required to put the Camp back in Camping Out: Allow movement points to be saved and used to interrupt others turns.

New Rule: Camp Out

To "camp out," you must hold in reserve at least one unused movement point, and one or more attacks from your turn. During any other player's turn, you may interrupt their action if you have more movement points reserved than they do. You may only make one attack per interruption, and you must be able to see the target to interrupt. Each attack subtracts 1d6 from your remaining move total. If your move total is still higher than your target's, you may make another attack, if you have one remaining. When your move total drops to equal or less than your opponent's, they regain priority and may continue to conduct their turn. You may only interrupt any player's turn once, although you may take multiple shots at him during that interruption assuming your move total remains higher than his. Attacks and movement points do not accumulate from turn to turn. You conduct your own turn normally when it arrives.

Example: Sade Vicious has allocated three dice to movement, and has two attacks. On her turn, she rolls 14 movement points. She uses two points to move into a long corridor, and holds both attacks and 12 movement points in reserve. Fierce Frank must cross the corridor, and rolls eight movement points. One step into the corridor brings him into Sade's sightline. As she has 12 movement left, she preempts Frank's turn and attacks, leaving him wounded. She then rolls 1d, and rolls a 3. She now has nine movement points left, greater than Frank's seven. She attacks again, and Frags him. Had she rolled 5 or 6, Frank would have regained the initiative, and his turn would continue normally. Had she not Fragged him, and rolled a 1 (eight points remaining), she could attack again if she had more attacks in reserve.

This rule will allow "opportunity shots" as a player crosses your line of fire. It also makes camping out in a strategic location with a long-range weapon a valid course of action. If you can hold multiple attacks and lots of movement in reserve, you can Frag anyone who enters your line of fire!

New Weapon: Sniper Rifle

Ammo: 4

A powerful rifle with a telescopic sight. Divide range by three when figuring to-hit rolls.
Damage: 4d.

Special Attack: Head shot.
Treat range normally, but damage is 8d.

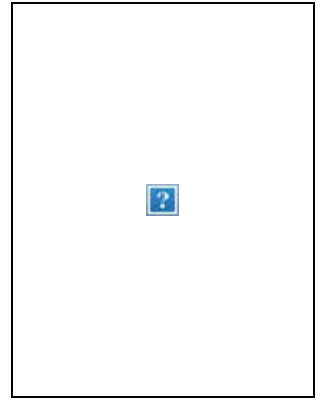
Pyramid Review

Champions Universe (for Hero System)

Written by Steve Long and Darren Watts

Published by [Hero Games](#)

160-page b&w paperback; \$21.99



I came to *Champions* during my freshman year at college, nearly two decades ago, and it didn't take me long to become a typical "Dork"-y "It MUST Be Mine!" *Champions* consumer. Part of the appeal was the implied background in the *Champions* books . . . this character was Hunted by U.N.T.I.L., that one was a former agent of VIPER, this one has a crush on that foe. It all resonated nicely to what I already felt about comic book stories, and the addition of the Enemies and Organization books contributed to that feeling. So when I heard that the *Champions* universe would get a full book treatment as part of the Hero Games Revival of 2002, I was quite pleased. Here, said I to myself, is a chance to revisit all those old friends and fiends and enjoy them once more. But for better or worse, Thomas Wolfe had it right. This isn't the *Champions* universe I remember and loved.

Champions Universe is a supplement to *Champions*, which in its turn is a supplement to the *Hero System* rulebook. This represents a pretty hefty outlay to get going in *Champions Universe*, even given the fine value you get for your investment in the two major books. *Champions Universe* takes full advantage of the groundwork laid in both the core rules and the genre supplement, giving new examples of applying the rules and seeing how the principles of the genre are implemented in the world of the Champions. One could use this book as a sourcebook and utilize the rules from another game systems, but the technical challenges of converting out of *Hero System* to another game are non-trivial.

The first five parts of the book present the Champions Universe world. The first gives the obligatory prose history and timeline of superheroics in the world. *Champions Universe* traces the presence of masked heroes all the way back to the American Revolution; superpowered heroes don't appear until much later. Part two gives the "write-up" for the Champions Universe using the terms and conditions established for *Hero System* and in *Champions*. Different basic campaign configurations are discussed, including character point levels for various sorts of campaigns. Parts three, four, and five are the meat of the "current day" Champions Universe. Part three describes the world in terms of its social communities; part four looks at the geographical places where interesting things are going on; and part five provides descriptions (and some full write-ups) for noteworthy figures, heroes, villains, and organizations.

The last part of the book is for GMs only. It offers some sample campaign starters and hooks, the hidden secrets in the existing Champions Universe for the game master to exploit or ignore, and an adventure outline. Quotes from major figures are scattered generously throughout the book and do much to give the setting a little more flavor.

As a matter of personal taste, I found the history rather predictable. This may be unavoidable, given the number of comic book hero histories around; there's bound to be some overlap in ideas or usage. Unfortunately, the strong presence of Sherlock Holmes in the timeline, or the destruction of Detroit to be replaced by a new and modern city . . . these struck me as trying to force verisimilitude. On the other hand, I was very pleased with the presentation of the current-day background information. Rather than focusing just on geography, the world is delineated by "communities" (the political community, the scientific, the criminal, the martial arts, the occult, and so on). I first saw this approach used in Gold Rush Games's excellent *San Angelo: City of Heroes*, and it is a very useful tool for focusing not only the world design but as a concentrated resource for characters operating out of any given community.

The art is "Champions-modern" . . . the familiar line-art drawings which were the hallmark of *Champions* are still

here, but perhaps a bit more polished, and a bit more skilled than they were when the game and the hobby were still in their toddlerhood. The cover and layout are in the new **Hero System** standard: maintext and sidebar, with relatively small print and thoroughly organized and indexed. It's very functional but also somewhat unromantic . . . one gets the impression of reading a textbook and not a game. The book has a thorough table of contents and index, although the table of contents is slightly marred by the presence of two "Chapter Four" headers (one inadvertently in place of "Chapter Five").

It's worth mentioning that the new **Hero Games** management is being very responsive to reader comments . . . witness that errata are already available for **Champions Universe** at <http://www.herogames.com/SupportFAQs/errataChampionsUniverse.htm>. Kudos to Long, Watts, and company for being on the ball at making fixes for errors available promptly.

Champions Universe brings all the old characters from **Champions**-days-gone-by and sets them in a new and consistent framework and world. That world is easy to work with and adapt, and can be suited to many different styles of characters and play, with many suggestions provided on "flavoring to taste." But by filling in all the gaps in the world structure, the authors have taken away the charm of the setting for me. I found the fun in seeing the foreground figures, not the entire background on which they rest. The new Champions Universe may be just the thing for **Hero System** fans looking to welcome back the flagship setting, but I'm afraid it only honed my nostalgia for the simpler times of yesteryear.

--Bob Portnell

Pyramid Review

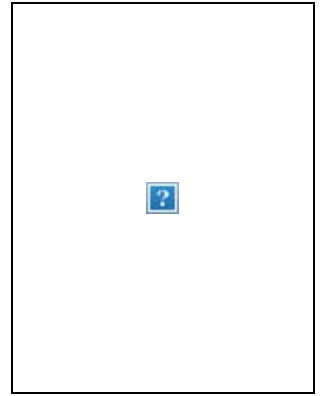
Dead Night of Space: Psibertroopers (for d6 Classic)

Published by [Final Sword Productions](#)

Written by Ron Fricke and Scott Palter

Illustrated by Tom Weighill

96-page b&w softcover; \$18.00



Despite the switch to the *d20 System*, for many the award winning *d6 Classic* system remains the only way to play in the *Star Wars* universe. Derived from the Chaosium-designed *Ghostbusters RPG*, West End Games employed the d6 engine to power a wide range of RPGs, most of them licensed properties. These included the aforementioned *Star Wars RPG*, plus the *Men in Black RPG*, *The Hercules & Xena Roleplaying Game*, and the *DC Universe RPG*. Where the *d6 Classic* system used dice with numbers or dots, the last two games used dice marked with symbols appropriate to the game and its source. It is from the last game produced by West End Games, *The Metabarons Roleplaying Game*, that the newest *d6 Classic* takes its rules.

Dead Night of Space: Psibertroopers is of course, not published by West End Games, but by Final Sword Productions. In drawing from *The Metabarons Roleplaying Game*, it does not present a complete *d6 Classic* ruleset, but instead gives a set of quick start rules. These should be enough for most, but the simplicity of the mechanics means that anyone with a little experience should be able to begin playing this almost immediately. The reasons for choosing them are simple -- the authors wanted rules that are both well known and easily available (either *The Metabarons Roleplaying Game*, or the relatively easy-to-find *Star Wars RPG*), and rules that also simulated both a genre and a certain feel. That genre is space opera, and the feel cinematic, which makes sense since *Star Wars* is seen to be the epitome of both.

Dead Night of Space: Psibertroopers is more than just space opera, adding psionics and mecha to its setting. It is also the first in a series of supplements for the *Dead Night of Space* campaign, detailing just the one star system of Ceybrodin in the early years of the 25th century. Mankind has spread to the stars using first slower-than-light colony ships and then by a barely understood FTL drive. Human space is divided into three rough spheres radiating out from Tau Ceti, the capital of the first sphere -- Federation space. This is the civilian bureaucratic and financial body that regulates trade and relations between its many governments. Beyond this, Fleet controls known space while also imposing peace throughout Federation space with the threat of the heavy rod. While Fleet has appropriated all military and security functions within the Federation, it does not attempt to govern. Instead, it prefers to protect the Federation from those that pose a threat to its stability and the trade across the "Line" that divides civilized space and the Diaspora. The most notable of these threats have been known as the Wreckers, since their first attacks of the opening years of the 21st century.

Even from before the 21st century, there have been those that have protested the globalization of human culture, and as it increased, these protestors have either resisted or attempted to escape. At first this was into the outer reaches of Earth's solar system, then onto other star systems, and finally beyond both Federation and Fleet space. One such system is Ceybrodin, already settled for two centuries by the time Fleet made contact in 2402. Although human, the Ceybrodin natives were capable of great psionic feats, none of which Fleet truly understands. The Psibers -- as they call themselves -- are able to listen to their "Inner Dark" and communicate with those of others through the very expedite skill of "Dark Speech." In addition, they can see into the "Outer Dark," which is in sense a model of reality that they can manipulate to have an effect upon the real world. Such methods of manipulation include controlling

energy and even folding space so that they can pass through solid objects. Though not as technologically advanced by Federation standards (which conducts relatively little research beyond that of military applications), they have created devices known as IDECs, or Inner Dark Elemental Computers. When fitted to vehicles such as a psibermechs, an IDEC greatly enhances a psibertrooper's innate psionic range and power. Psibermechs can jump light years in distance, hide itself from scans, and launch psiber-energy attacks. While this is a major advantage over individual Fleet ships and fighters, Fleet have greater numbers of both which they can bring to bear. As of 2410, Fleet have put Ceybrodin under a Ban that limits their trade and exploration beyond their system, and prevents all contact with the Federation. Fleet are also allowed to recruit Psibers. Non-compliance with the Ban will result in Fleet bombarding Ceybrodin with "dinosaur-killers" -- asteroids launched at the planet at fraction of light-speed. Of course, word is beginning to leak out of the Psiber's existence and across the Line.

The default campaign for ***Dead Night of Space: Psibertroopers*** has the players cast as the psibermech pilots assigned to police the enforcement of the Ban. Other options include playing Fleet personnel (who may or may not be psionically trained) or merchants trading handcrafted goods, intellectual properties, and raw materials back across the Line into Federation space in return for high-tech goods. Like other ***d6 Classic*** games, players can create their characters from scratch, assigning 18 dice to six attributes (Agility, Knowledge, Mechanical, Perception, Strength, and Technical) and another seven dice to skills. Psiber characters may receive another three dice for their attributes and will need to put at least three dice on their Psiber attribute, the minimum required to operate a psibermech. New ordinary skills are Psibermech Ops and Psiber Repair, while those listed under the Psiber attribute are Dark Energy (which covers the gifts of Telekinesis, Energy Blast, Energy Shield and Healing); Darkfold (being able to move from one point to another without crossing the space in between); Darksense (Farsensing and Hypersense); Darkspeak (Darkspeech and Darkattack); and Darkshield (Darkshield and Remote Control -- being able to control other humans). Each gift can be taken as a specialty, though the GM will need access to the full ***d6 Classic*** rules for more information on this. Again taken from ***The MetaBarons Roleplaying Game***, players need to select an honor code that reflects their character's personality and how they interact with others. Characters also possess Fate Points that work similarly to the Force Points of the ***Star Wars RPG***. Alternatively, players can just pick one of the prepared character templates and assign their skill dice as above.

In terms of new rules, ***Dead Night of Space: Psibertroopers*** adds very little, and what it does is really a method of classifying NPCs for quick-and-easy play. Called the "chess piece goons" system, this uses the familiar chess piece titles to indicate NPCs of ever increasing toughness and capability.

Physically, ***Dead Night of Space: Psibertroopers*** promises enough with its decent cover, but upon opening the book it all fails to deliver. The general layout is reasonable, but let down mainly by the dismal and stained internal illustrations. It also doesn't help that the various boxes of text could have done with better organizing and labeling. In addition, the support for the game is just ever so slightly underwhelming; neither the psibermechs or other vehicles are properly illustrated, the important NPCs feel flat and clichéd, and there are elements within the two given adventure hooks that jar heavily with the setting material.

Despite these problems, what the text does not hide is the enthusiasm of the authors. What is clear from their writing is an attempt to present a situation that is a clash of two very different societies. Descended from manipulated genetic stock, the Psiber society is young, both in age and its makeup. There is little in the way of direct government or organization, with society preferring to come to consensus through discussion. They organize themselves into associated groupings based upon common interests and agreement. Disagreements within groups lead to the dissenters creating groups of their own, and since the society is one of telepaths, that communication and discussion can be surprisingly swift.

One of the few times the psiber council -- more of a financial institution than ruling body -- has imposed an order and told the associations that there would be no dissent was with the Ban. In general their outlook is libertarian, but others like Fleet might call it communitarian or anarchy, depending on their persuasion. In contrast, Fleet is conservative, pessimistic, and bureaucratic. They want to keep the Psibers bottled up in their own space where their radically different culture cannot have the potentially destabilizing effect upon Federation society that Fleet so fears.

Dead Night of Space: Psibertroopers is the first in a planned line of "Star System" books that presents a situation

within the Dead Night of Space. Future books will detail other cultures out in the Diaspora, and just as with Psibertroopers they could easily be dropped into the other science fiction settings or kept in their own. That said the clash of cultures at the core of the setting theme is quite sophisticated for the normal space opera genre, so some may want a slightly harder-edged ruleset with which to run ***Dead Night of Space: Psibertroopers***.

One option is to use the ***MetaBarons RPG*** for a slightly more detailed set of rules that retains the cinematic feel of ***d6 classic***, but that harder, grittier edge might also be provided by DP9's ***Jovian Chronicles RPG***, with which it shares similarities . . . or a combination of ***GURPS Space***, ***Mecha***, and ***Psionics***. Alternatively, ***Big Eyes, Small Mouth*** would give a more anime feel, while for those who like the ***d20 System*** may find a number of books due for release that would simulate the elements of this setting. In spite of the problems with the presentation of ***Dead Night of Space: Psibertroopers*** -- both in terms of both actual appearance and its ideas -- the supplement does give an interesting setting in which to play.

--Matthew Pook

Splitting Up Is Hard To Do

We interrupt our regularly scheduled series on "Running Adventures" to bring you a specially unrequested column. Over on the [discussion boards](#), Peter Dell'Orto had some kind words for the February 21st column "[It's How You Play The Game . . . Err, And How Is That, Again?](#)" but noted this column came two weeks too late for him, since he needed to confront the issues therein two weeks earlier. Determined never to be so behind the times again, we are responding to Peter's request in another thread for advice about how to handle split-group games. Sure, he may have wanted a "real" article, but hopefully this'll do for now.

* * *

"Okay, gang . . . let's split up!"

Although groups split up time and again in many movies or television shows, the prospect of divided groups of PCs is generally cited by researchers as the primary reason that 78% of all GMs carry a large rubber mallet to all gaming sessions.

Unfortunately, the horrific logistics of gaming in this situation are often overshadowed by the in-game logic of doing so; after all, it's unrealistic for large groups to sneak around a castle, interrogate a janitor, or research arcane information at a library. In fact, one of the few circumstances where it *does* make sense to get as many folks together as possible is combat . . . and even then, it's logical to presume that there are many characters who are ill-suited for even that purpose.

What's a GM to do, then?

Well, I'm certain there are a myriad of means of handling this problem, but here are a few that I've used.

Smaller Is Better (Right? Right?!?)

The biggest technique I use to thwart the problem of splitting groups from the beginning is limiting my gaming group size. Consider that, in a group of six players, there are a *lot* more permutations for a sub-group to split off than a group of two players (which has two states: "together" or "apart"). I've found that, in a game where characters are expected to split off -- which is most games -- my ideal number of players is around three. Two players work just fine (the longest campaign I was ever in consisted of only two players), and four players is usually workable, provided the players Work Well With Others. Anything larger than that, however, and I find it almost impossible to keep tabs on everything. (I'm always amazed when I hear about GMs who can handle six, eight, or even more players.)

Once the gaming group is under control size-wise, most of the other problems fade away. In a group with two players, either the two players are interacting with the same thing -- which is likely -- or they've split up. If they've split up, then you pull aside one player, run a scene with him, and then go back to the other player and do the same.

Pull Them Aside?

Yes, pull them aside! (I hate it when subtitles talk back . . .) I have always been a *huge* believer in pulling players out of the room, or otherwise keeping them from witnessing what other players are doing (with one exception . . . see below). A player reads an arcane text? Talks with the king alone? Communes with his god? All reason to talk to the player one on one. That way, a lot of the pleasure and interest of the game comes from players choosing to share -- or *not* share -- their other experiences with each other. ("The king offers your group any single favor one of you asks for." "Groovy!" & returns; "So what did the king say?" "Umm . . . he said, 'Hi.'") While it's theoretically possible to play those scenes out in front of the other players, I've generally found that metagaming knowledge creeps into even the best players' actions. And even if it doesn't, accusations of such can make things difficult; after all, if you know that another PC is planning on killing your PC, is any suspicion you cast upon him automatically metagaming?

Now, it's a pain to schlep all over the house each time the player learns something the others don't know. So what I've generally done is . . . well, ask the other players to cover their ears. Undignified? Perhaps a bit. But it's remarkably quick, and soon becomes second nature:

"I check the king's journal."

"It's encoded. Make a Decipher check."

"I got a 12."

"Okay. [To everyone else] Cover your ears. [They do.] You learn that the king is having an affair with the Dutchess of Tremopolis. [louder, to everyone else] OKAY. [They uncover their ears]"

As an aside, if you don't trust your players to keep their ears covered, then (in my opinion) you probably shouldn't be gaming with them.

Now, I suppose the same function could be done with note-passing. But in practice I've found the act of writing notes to be *very* slow; in the example above, I could go over a broad description of the journals, complete with other useful information, in about the same time as it would take me to scrawl, "King's Journal." (I also have the option of saying, "You didn't learn anything" . . . I train the players never to assume that "covering ears" equals "something important.") Asking the other players to keep their ears covered for a few minutes allows for a *lot* of information . . . certainly more than I can handwrite quickly. (As an aside, as technology improves, I expect it may be possible to replace "ear covering" with "quick text to the other player's terminal" . . . but even then, it's difficult to sporadically roleplay through text in a tabletop game. With ears covered, however, it's entirely possible to have a brief private roleplaying exchange between a PC and an NPC.)

If I suspect that an interaction is going to take longer than five minutes or so, I'll pull the player aside, out of the room and run the scene. If possible, I try to do this with minimal dice-rolling, but it's not out of the question to bring along a clipboard, character sheet, and dice.

Again, keeping the number of players small here helps; with three players, letting each one pull you aside for a 10-minute scene only eats up 20 minutes of time for everyone else . . . not terribly much time, and it's time which can be used to drool over how they'll use those three unspent experience points. On the other hand, with six players, a 10-minute scene with each one is almost an hour of non-gaming time!

"Always Use Your Powers For Good; Never For Evil"

I try to make sure that my players understand (if they don't already) that I encourage separate actions within reason. But I also make sure they know that each such scene they do potentially pulls me aside from everyone else. This almost always works; players learn which actions they take will likely disrupt the game for everyone else, and either plan them accordingly (perhaps as a solo adventure or timed to happen before the beginning of the session) or work to get the other players involved. If I *do* get a player who, after warnings, pulls me aside and says, "I spend three weeks interrogating everyone in the court; what do I learn?", then that player and I may not be compatible.

I'd also note that just because a player requests something doesn't mean you need to handle their request immediately. For example, in the "three weeks at court" example above, it would be entirely reasonable to tell the player that you'll let him do it, but you need to cover that three weeks of time for the other players first. (Insert your own line about "the needs of the many versus the needs of the few" here.) The prospect that he'll miss out on the entire planned adventure is often an incentive to get him to reconsider.

Of course, I also tend to have dynamic enough worlds where it's unlikely for the other heroes to be able to just sit around and twiddle their thumbs while waiting for the errant PC to do his thing.

"We're Sorry; Miami Is Closed For Repairs . . ."

If a player pulls me aside for something that will probably be a lengthy encounter, I'm not unwilling to bend reality so that they aren't successful . . . or, at least, not entirely successful.

So let's say, in a supers campaign, that a PC wants to check with his secret scientist mentor to help him investigate the hero's mysterious origin. If this is likely to be a detailed scene, then maybe the scientist is busy with something else and can't devote his entire time to the hero.

If I do this, I'll generally try to make sure the player at least gets a smidgeon of a reward; after all, the goal isn't to punish the player for doing things away from the group. Thus, in our scientist example, I may say something like:

"Dr. Numan mutters, 'Busy busy, very busy. The Pentagon has me working on something. Tip-secret, top-secret; tip-top, right? Now, then . . . your origins. Hmm . . . I had a few minutes to examine that blood sample you gave me. Very curious, very curious. Energy readings are off the charts, in an otherwise unfamiliar spectrum; did you know your blood could probably be used as a power supply? Er, I'm still analyzing data, so this is all preliminary. I hope to have more time next month, but the Feds come first, don't you know . . .'"

The player now knows more than he did before (so he feels that splitting off was worthwhile), and it keeps the door open for future adventures.

Alternatively, I may recognize that a stated separate goal will take a while, and tell the player that the scene will be run later . . . but I may tell him the upshot of the scene. Thus, for example, if a PC wants to spend time with his wizardly college to receive additional training, I may tell him that he'll be expected to perform a service for the college; we'll assume that he completes it successfully, increase the ability as required, and schedule a time to run the sub-adventure as a flashback.

Restructure The Game

It's worth mentioning that characters splitting up isn't the problem per se; it's the players not having anything to do once character split up that's the problem. To that end, I don't have any problem restructuring the game so that the players whose PCs won't be playing aren't there. (As mentioned [last week](#), I encourage players to tell me if they want to do something substantial alone or with a subset of PCs. That way I can schedule solos or smaller meetings for just those players, ensuring we aren't wasting the uninvolved players' time. (One *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* game was even structured around the concept of splitting up the characters; one adventure would be with all three players, then I ran a round of solo adventures, then I ran three duo adventures [adventures with two PCs], then an adventure with all three players . . . and so on.)

Of course, it's also worth mentioning that groups shouldn't use this as an excuse to exclude players they don't like . . . but hopefully that's obvious.

"Team B -- That's you, Kenny . . ."

Finally, I present my most radical idea for accounting for splitting up groups: namely, build the game around the premise that the heroes *will* split up. I first used this technique when I ran a *Star Trek* game (way back in the dark ages, post-FASA but pre-Last Unicorn). I came to the realization while watching *Star Trek: The Next Generation* that, in practice, most of the time not all characters were necessary. In fact, there were certain characters that were specifically *unnecessary* on-screen at the same time. I observed that, for example, the Security Officer and the Counselor hardly ever had a reason to be in the same scene:

"The other ship is firing at us!"
"Captain, I sense hostility . . ."

There just weren't many scenarios where there was a simultaneous need for both a calm empathic voice *and* someone who could kick serious butt.

Likewise I noted that the Captain and First Officer hardly ever needed to be on-screen at the same time, since the Captain was supposed to be in command of events ship-board and the First Officer was supposed to be in charge of

planet-bound events.

Once I realized that, I reasoned to myself: Why can't the same player play both of the conflicting roles? That way, it's almost certain that at least *one* of the characters will be useful in any given situation; whichever character isn't useful at the time is just being quiet or otherwise doing their duties.

Thus in this *Star Trek* game I had three players. One played the Captain and First Officer, one played the Security Officer and Counselor, and one played the Ship's Doctor and Chief Bureaucrat . . . this was an experimental ship, so there were beans to count and reports to file.

(As an aside, this also solved one of the main problems I had with *Star Trek* games by creating a series of checks and balances, keeping the Captain from overshadowing everyone else. The Bureaucrat could object to actions if they seemed too dangerous to the ship or its instrumentation, and either the Doctor or Counselor could declare anyone physically or mentally incompetent.)

Once I did this, a magical thing happened: the game series looked *just* like a TV series. See, once players have multiple characters, you can have multiple scenes going on; PCs can split up into groups, two or three different goals can be necessary for a mission's success, *and* you don't need to pull players out of the room; you can just switch from scene to scene.

Thus in one memorable moment, there were four distinct groups:

The Captain was aboard a shuttlecraft on a diplomatic mission, the Security Officer and Bureaucrat were sneaking around some ductwork hoping to disable Something Nasty, and the First Officer and Counselor were planet-side investigating an unusual phenomenon, leaving the Doctor aboard the main ship. I kept switching between scenes, seeing what the various players were up to in each scene.

The funniest scene was with the Security Officer and Bureaucrat, both of whom were played by somewhat indecisive players:

GM: "Scene shift. Aboard the enemy duct work. There's one guard below. He's talking on a comm pin; it seems like he's talking with the enemy captain."

SO: "What do you want to do?"

B: "I don't know; what do you want to do?"

SO: "Do you want to attack him?"

B: "Do you think we can without the enemy captain learning?"

SO: "I don't know . . ."

B: "Do you have any other ideas?"

SO: "Um . . . let me think . . ."

ME: "Okay; scene shift! . . ."

And then the irate Klingon warlord decloaked his ship and hailed the main PC vessel. The Doctor panicked once she realized the chain of command fell past four other PCs to her.

In short, I was able to run a phenomenally complex plot with lots of little goals and lots of opportunities for the players to split up . . . and even in the circumstances where a player *wasn't* in a scene, he still had fun watching the other scenes.

I used this technique again in a two-player *Aberrant* campaign. Since this one didn't have the same easy distinctions as the *Star Trek* game, I set some rules for the players. In actuality, this was pretty simple; I merely told them to make characters that were unlikely to be on-screen at the same time.

Thus one player made a focused ex-military man-hating ice-powered Nova named "Ice Queen" and a Latina super-strong flying personable hero named "Sundown." The other made a silent shadow-clinging gun-toting assassin named "Arclight" and an ultra-charismatic lawyer with Mafia ties named "Smiley." This worked as well as the *Star Trek*

campaign; again, players feel more inclined to split up if they know the others won't be left without anything to do. (For this campaign I did all the techniques I discuss above . . . pulling players aside, covering ears, and so on.)

Now, this is an advanced technique, and I doubt it could work with more than, say, three or *maybe* four players. (The logistics of handling 12 characters between six players makes my brain hurt.) But in some circumstances with the right players, it allows for much more complex adventures and scenarios. (There's also no reason this technique couldn't be expanded, letting each player play three characters.) Perhaps more importantly, it allows for players to play character concepts that otherwise wouldn't be terribly feasible otherwise; in most games, there's an impulse to make as balanced a character as possible, so it will be useful in a myriad of situations. But under this system, provided the *set* of characters is balanced, the game should be fine. Hackers, dream-explorers, pilots, and other limited-use concepts can all become part of the PC group without the GM needing to ensure they will be constantly useful.

Splitting up is something that happens all the time, and there are excellent reasons for doing so. With a little bit of thought and some consideration on the players and GM's parts, it should be possible to ensure that characters can go off on their own and accomplish separate goals, without the rest of the group being bored. When they rejoin the main group, everyone will have different experiences and something to think about.

And hopefully you have something to think about before next week, when we should be rejoining our ongoing series.

--Steven Marsh

Modern Vikings

Naval Special Warfare Units in Northern Europe

by Hans-Christian Vortisch

Norden ("the North") is a modern descriptive term for the North of Europe, including the countries of the Scandinavian Peninsula (Norway and Sweden, and by extension, Denmark), but also Finland and even Iceland and the Danish and Norwegian possessions in the Atlantic (Greenland, Svalbard, and the Færøer islands).

These five countries share a close cultural and political history, down to the early Middle Ages, when bands of marine raiders and traders known as the norsemen ("people from the North") or Vikings lived in this area (see **GURPS Vikings** for much more detail on this).

Today, all of these countries with the exception of Iceland (which does not have a military force at all) have capable naval special warfare units. Those of Denmark and Sweden are described here in terms of their use with **GURPS Special Ops**; those of Finland and Norway may follow in a future article.

Both Denmark and Sweden still have the draft from age 18. While one of the units below is a professional force which only accepts longer-serving soldiers, the other is mainly composed of conscripts. Even though most draftees first finish their school education and thus enter the services around age 19, they are very young (similar to the U.S. Army Rangers), and may have received only a year or less of training; this is short if compared to most professional units, which often only take experienced soldiers and put them through a couple years of training. Entry standards ensure that all applicants have high physical and mental capabilities, but disadvantages such as Overconfidence may be more common in conscript units.

Strictly speaking, only the Danish FKP should be considered a special operations force; the Swedish Kustjägare are "only" an elite unit. The template of the latter doesn't use the Extremely Hazardous Duty disadvantage (p. SO56), but rather a -10 Duty, to account for the fact that unlike other special ops units, a conscript force is only called upon in wartime.

Denmark

Søværnet (The Sea Defense)

Frømandskorpset (The Frogman Corps)

The Danish Frømandskorps (FKP) was formed in 1957 as part of the navy's Dykkerskole (diving school), in the image of the British Special Boat Service (p. SO45). The first instructors had received training from the U.S. Navy's Underwater Demolition Teams (p. W:HS13) and the Norwegian Froskemannskorps. In 1970, the combat swimmers became independent from the Dykkerskole and were reorganized as the Frømandskorps.

The FKP has exactly the same tasks as the U.S. Navy SEALs (pp. SO30-31), which include amphibious reconnaissance and sabotage, as well as counterterrorist operations in a maritime environment; this includes Denmark's many islands, but also her ferries and off-shore oil rigs and wind power stations. In peacetime, the unit also closely cooperates with law enforcement agencies, such as diving in

Nordic Military Ranks

Ranks in the Danish navy and Swedish amphibious corps. Also see pp. B22, SO52-54. Military Rank above 5 is unlikely in these units.

	Denmark	Sweden
MR	FKP	KJ
8	Admiral	General
8	Viceadmiral	Generallöjtnant
7	Kontreadmiral	Generalmajor
7	Flotilleadmiral	Brigadgeneral
6	Kommandør	Överste
5	Kommandørkaptajn	Överstelöjtnant
4	Orlogskaptajn	Major
4	Kaptajnlöjtnant	Kapten
3	Premierlöjtnant	-
3	Løjtnant	Löjtnant

search of missing persons or evidence.

Denmark has not been involved in conflict since World War II, and consequently, there were no combat missions for the FKP for a long time. During the Gulf War in 1991, the Danish navy helped to enforce the embargo against Iraq. FKP operators performed in a number of boarding actions, as they also did in the Adriatic Sea to enforce the embargo against Yugoslavia in the late 1990s. A number of operators were deployed together with members of the army's Jægerkorps to Afghanistan in January 2002, to work together with American and allied special ops units in the hunt for Al Qaida; operations were performed together with U.S., Norwegian, and Dutch units.

3	-	Fänrik
2	Chef Sergeant	-
2	Oversergent	Sergeant
1	Sergent	Överfurir
1	Værnepligtig	Furir
0	Korporal	Korporal
0	Menig	Menig

In order to join the FKP, the applicants have to pass a daunting entrance test, and need to voluntarily enlist for three years and three months (rather than the normal nine months of mandatory conscript service). They must be between 19 and 27 years old. Women may join, but so far none have been able to meet the requirements. Of several hundred applicants each year, only a handful makes it to Graduation Ball at the end of basic training. After six weeks of basic seamanship training at the navy's main training facility, the recruit enters the basic FKP training, which takes 32 weeks and includes a Hell Week (p. SO30) after the first four weeks. After that, the recruit may call himself a Frømand (frogman). About two years of special training in the patrols follow. Winter warfare is trained in Norway and Sweden, while jungle skills are taught in Latin America by SEAL instructors. Many operators also take the Combat Survival Instructor course and other advanced training offered by the British SAS (pp. SO42-43). By the time the 39-month-conscription is over, the soldier can reenlist, usually taking NCO-courses and serving as instructor.

Interestingly enough, the Danish Crown Prince Frederik joined the FKP in 1995, after already having received officer's training in the army. He also took part in a Sirius patrol (see below) in 2000.

The Frømandskorps enjoys close ties with the Swedish Kustjägare (below), and most NATO naval special warfare units, including the British SBS, the German Kampfschwimmerkompanie, the Norwegian Marinejegerkommando, and the U.S. Navy SEALs, particularly SEAL Teams 2 and 4. They are highly capable; several Danes came up on top of SEAL classes or the German Fernspäher course at the NATO LRRP-school in Weingarten.

Organization: The FKP comes under the 5th (Submarine) Squadron of the Danish navy, and is stationed at Kongsøre naval station near Holbæk (on Zealand). In peacetime, it has a strength of some 50 men, but with reserves called in, it has a combat strength of about 200 men in three squadrons, Blå (blue) consisting of combat swimmers with boats, Grøn (green) of amphibious raiders, and Sort (black) of counterterrorist operators in a maritime environment.

Template: Cost 150 points. A soldier serving in the Frømandskorps must take the Basic Skills below and choose a unit of assignment. NCOs or commissioned officers, and those who have received special training, will also have the appropriate Special Skills package(s), which will increase template cost.

Attributes: ST 11 [10], DX 13 [30], IQ 13 [30], HT 12 [20].

Advantages: Fit [5], Military Rank 1 [5], and 10 points in additional ST or HT, *Desirable Advantages* (p. SO51), *Decorations* (pp. SO51-52), *Military Rank* (pp. SO52-54) or *Patrons* (p. SO54).

Disadvantages: Extremely Hazardous Duty [-20], and -20 points selected from the *Desirable Disadvantages* list (p. SO56).

Basic Skills: Administration (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-11, Area Knowledge (Danish Coastline) (M/E) IQ-1 [1/2]-12, Armoury (Small Arms) (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-11, Boating (P/A) DX+1 [4]-14, Brawling (P/E) DX [1]-13, Camouflage (M/E) IQ [1]-13, Climbing (P/A) DX [2]-13, Demolition (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-12, Driving (Automobile) (P/A) DX-1 [1]-12, Electronics Operation (Comm) (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-12, Electronics Operation (Sensors) (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-12, Engineer (Combat) (M/H) IQ-2 [1]-11, Escape (P/H) DX-1 [2]-12, Explosive Ordnance Disposal (M/H) IQ-2 [1]-11, First Aid (M/E) IQ-1 [1/2]-12, Forward Observer (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-11, Gunner (Machine Gun) (P/A) DX-2 [1/2]-13*, Guns

(Grenade Launcher) (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-14*, Guns (LAW) (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-14*, Guns (Light Auto) (P/E) DX [1]-15*, Guns (Pistol) (P/E) DX [1]-15*, Guns (Rifle) (P/E) DX [1]-15*, Hard-Hat Diving (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-11, Hiking (P/A) HT [2]-12, Jumping (P/E) DX [1]-13, Knife (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-12, Language (Danish) (M/A) IQ [0]-13, Language (English) (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-11, Leadership (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-11, Navigation (M/H) IQ-2 [1]-11, NBC Warfare (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-12, No-Landing Extraction (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-11, Orienteering (M/A) IQ [2]-13, Parachuting (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-12, Powerboat (P/A) DX-1 [1]-12, Savoir-Faire (Military) (M/E) IQ-1 [1/2]-12, Scrounging (M/E) IQ-1 [1/2]-12, Scuba (M/A) IQ+1 [4]-14, Seamanship (M/E) IQ [1]-13, Skiing (P/H) DX-2 [1]-11, Soldier (M/A) IQ [2]-13, Stealth (P/A) DX-1 [1]-12, Survival (Arctic) (M/A) IQ [2]-13, Survival (Island/Beach) (M/A) IQ [2]-13, Survival (Mountain) (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-11, Survival (Woodlands) (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-11, Swimming (P/E) DX+1 [2]-14, Tactics (Guerrilla) (M/H) IQ [4]-13, Tactics (Infantry) (M/H) IQ [4]-13, Telegraphy (M/E) IQ-1 [1/2]-12, Throwing (P/H) DX-1 [2]-12, Traps (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-12, Underwater Demolition (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-11.

* Includes +2 for IQ.

1. MOS Skills: Members of FKP do not receive MOS-specific training, but each soldier has a specialty on the team. Spend a *total* of 16 1/2 points on a closely related group of Basic Skills or relevant new skills such as Intelligence Analysis (M/H), Photography (M/A), SIGINT Collection/Jamming (M/H), Surgery (M/VH), Traffic Analysis (M/H), etc. The MOS skills of other templates in **GURPS Special Ops** are common choices, but unorthodox specialties are also possible (GM's option).

2. Unit of Assignment:

- *Black:* Increase Climbing, Demolition, Guns (Light Auto), Guns (Pistol), Guns (Rifle), and NBC Warfare; add Guns (Shotgun) (P/E) and Tactics (Counterterrorist) (M/H).
- *Blue:* Increase Boating, Powerboat, Scuba, Swimming, and Underwater Demolition.
- *Green:* Increase Hiking, Orienteering, Stealth, and Survival (Woodlands).

Special Skills:

Commissioned Officer ** (+2 1/2 points): Increase Administration to IQ-1 [1]-12, Language (English) to IQ-1 [1]-12, and Leadership to IQ [2]-13. Since all officers are career soldiers, they will usually have more points to spend.

Desert Operations (+2 1/2 points): Increase Orienteering to 14 [2]; add Survival (Desert) (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-11.

Foreign Language (n/a): The Danish military offers only language tutoring in Arabic and Russian; neither course is normally available to members of the FKP. Members from the German minority will also speak German at IQ-level; those from Greenland may also speak Inuit. A second or third language is studied at high school, French, German, and Spanish being common.

Jungle Operations (+2 1/2 points): Increase Orienteering to 14 [2]; add Survival (Jungle) (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-11.

*NCO*** (+1 1/2 point): Increase Leadership to 13 [1 1/2]. Since all higher NCOs are career soldiers, they will usually have more points to spend.

Slædepatrulje Sirius (+8 1/2 points): Increase First Aid to 13 [1/2], Orienteering to 14 [2], Skiing to 12 [2], Survival

Slædepatrulje Sirius

"This summer Erik sailed away to colonize the land he had discovered, calling it Greenland, for he maintained that men would be much more eager to go there if the land had an attractive name."
--*Eiríks Saga Rauða* ("The Saga of Erik the Red")

The arctic island of Greenland has been an official part of Denmark since 1953, but had already been a Danish colony from 1721 (taking over claims dating back to Viking times). The huge, largely uninhabited landmass is permanently covered with ice and snow, except for a few thin strips along the south coast where some small settlements are located. In order to put up a semblance of military presence in the vast north of the island, the Danish navy mounts regular dog sled patrols there -- the Slædepatrulje Sirius (sled patrol Sirius), or Patruljetjenesten i Nord- og Nordøstgrønland (PNG -- patrol service in North and Northeastern Greenland), based at the small Værlose airport on the east coast. Although sponsored by the navy, any suitable male NCO or officer (active or reserve) between 20 and 30 years can apply for the Slædepatrulje. Most come from the FKP and the

(Arctic) to 14 [2], and Telegraphy to 13 [1/2]; add Meteorology (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-11 and Teamster (Dogs) (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-12.

** Military Rank [5/level] is required: Rank 1-2 for NCOs, Rank 3 for warrant officers and Rank 3+ for commissioned officers.

Customization Notes: In a 150-point campaign, there will be no points left after purchasing this template; another -20 points in *Acceptable Disadvantages* (pp. SO56-57) and five quirks can be taken to get 25 points to customize with.

Weapons of Choice: Weapons include the SIG P M/49 pistol (P210, stats below); S&W Model 60 Chief's Special revolver (p. SO114); H&K P11 underwater dart pistol (p. MF19); H&K Mp M/85 submachine gun (MP5A3, pp. HT116, SO117) with Sure-Fire tactical light (p. MF12) and Aimpoint collimating sight (p. MF13); H&K Mp M/85LD sound-suppressed submachine gun (MP5SD3, pp. HT116, SO117), often with 4× scope; H&K Mp M/85 assault carbine (HK53A5, p. SO114); Diemaco Kb M/96OP assault carbine (C8SFW, pp. MF27, SO116) with ELCAN scope (p. MF13); Diemaco G M/95OP assault rifle (C7FT, p. MF22) with ELCAN scope; H&K Fsg M/85 rifle (PSG1, p. HT115) with 6× scope; KAC Fsg M/99 rifle (SR-25, pp. MF25, SO120) with 10× scope; McMillan Model 88 single-shot rifle (p. SO116) with 10× scope; Remington Model 870PS Wingmaster pump-action shotgun (p. HT112) with folding stock; H&K Mg M/85 LMG (HK23E, used both with belt-feed and the optional magazine adapter, stats below; compare HK21A1, p. HT120); Diemaco M203A1 underbarrel grenade launcher (pp. HT121, SO121, mounted under both the Kb M/96OP and G M/95OP); SM Hgr M/01 fragmentation hand grenade (HG 85, p. MF32); Precision Ordnance Model 452 Stingball less-than-lethal grenade (p. MF32); Bofors Pvv M/95 LAW (AT4CSHP, p. SO117); and FFV Dykn M/85 recoilless rifle (M3 Carl Gustaf, p. SO117) with 2× scope. Knives include the SOG SEAL 2000, a large knife with *Fine* blade.

Equipment: Equipment includes the Pro-Tec helmet (p. SO103); CGF Gallet Hj M/96 kevlar helmet (PD 4, DR 5 for areas 3-4 and back of 5, 2.6 lbs.); Fv M/92 kevlar vest (PD 2, DR 12 for areas 9-10, 17-18, 5 lbs.) with optional ceramic insert (PD 4, DR 35 for areas 9-10, 17-18 from the front only, 12 lbs.); Dräger LAR-V rebreather (p. SO111); Trelleborg Viking Pro 1000 dry suit; and Litton AN/AVS-6 ANVIS night vision goggles (p. SO110).

Vehicles: Support vehicles include the Mercedes-Benz MB 240GD 4×4 light truck (p. SO123); McDonnell Douglas MD 500M Defender helicopter (pp. SO123, VL61-62); Sikorsky S-61 Sea King helicopter; Westland Lynx Mk 91 helicopter; Lockheed C-130H Hercules transport aircraft (p. SO125); RIB boat (pp. SO126-127); Zodiac inflatable boat (p. SO126); and Klepper kayak (p. SO126).

Sweden

Svenska Marinen (The Swedish Navy) Kustjägarna (The Coastal Rangers)

-- *Mod, Kraft, Spänst* (courage, strength, vitality)

The Kustjägare (KJ), officially formed in 1959, are part of the Amfibieförband (amphibious units) which in turn

army's Jägerkorps. They receive six months of special training. In addition to military tasks, the patrols also serve as law enforcement assets as well as park rangers; the entire north of Greenland is one big national park.

Each patrol spends four months at a time on patrol, and consists of two men, 11 dogs, and a 1,000-lb. sled. Each day, a patrol travels 15-18 miles in six to eight hours. In the evening, notes and observations are sent to Denmark via satellite link. Due to their special operational requirements, the patrols are armed with a bolt-action rifle less susceptible to the adverse weather conditions of Greenland. The obsolete Winchester G M/53 (originally designed at Enfield and made in the USA as the M1917, stats below) is used; it is considered reasonably effective against polar bears. For the same reasons, the Glock 20 pistol (p. HT109) is issued.

belong to the Kustartilleri (coastal artillery), a branch of the Swedish navy. All KJ battalions come under the 1st Amfibieregiment (Amf1). They are similar to the U.S. Marine Corps (p. SO32), their missions including reconnaissance operations along the very long Swedish coastline, amphibious raids against high value targets, and counterattacks against invading enemies. The Swedish coast is very difficult to protect and includes numerous small islands, which they KJ are trained to take back in case of a hostile landing. They are trained in more aggressive combat than most other Swedish units, including extensive close-combat training and sabotage. From their ranks also come the longer-serving Attackdykare (A-dyk -- attack divers), which are similar to Force Recon (p. SO29); they conduct beach recon, hydrographical surveys, small-scale raids, and sabotage.

Conscripts serve either 10 or 15 months with the KJ -- those serving 10 months are trained for section-level jobs, those serving 15 months are trained as low-ranking NCOs (Rank 0-1) to serve at platoon-level. Women are exempted from conscription, but may voluntarily enlist to either serve a conscript term (about 2% of all conscripts are women) or to become a professional officer (3%). However, no woman has so far been able to meet the requirements of the entrance tests.

Interestingly enough, Prince Carl Phillip served his conscript term with the KJ in 1999/2000.

Organization: Each of the six battalions in Amf1 consists of five companies: one HQ company including the Spaningpluton (reconnaissance platoon) -- a combat diver/LRRP platoon of Attackdykarna -- and an air defense platoon with two Bofors Rbs70 shoulder-fired SAM launchers; one heavy weapons company with sea mines and six Rockwell-Bofors Rbs17 HELLFIRE anti-shiping missile launchers (p. VL59); one mortar company with eight 81mm Tampella-IMI Grk84 mortars (use stats of the M29, p. HT121); and two companies of KJ. Each KJ company has 183 men, divided into a HQ platoon and three platoons. Each platoon has three sections; each section has two 6-man patrols. The Spaningpluton has three to four 6-man patrols. Battalion-level vehicles include 35 Strb90H assault boats (below) and 19 Klepper kayaks.

Template: 100 points. A soldier serving with the Kustjägare must take the Basic Skills below and choose a basic MOS. NCOs or commissioned officers, and those who have received special training, will also have the appropriate Special Skills package(s), which will increase template cost.

Modern Longship: The Stridsbåt 90H

This 53-foot vessel, internationally marketed as the Combat Boat 90, was specifically designed for amphibious combat in the Swedish archipelago. Its shallow draft, hydrojet propulsion, heavy armament, reinforced bottom to withstand rough landings, and forward bow hatch make it perfect for shoreline assault. The aluminum-hulled craft is armed with twin fixed 12.7×99mm FN-Browning TKsp machine guns (M2QCB, pp. HT119, SO121, and VL57) in the bow, and also features a ring mount above the cabin, which is fitted with either another heavy machine gun, or twin 7.62×51mm FN Ksp58B machine guns (MAG, pp. HT120, VL57) or a 40×53mmSR Saco Grsp grenade machine gun (MK19 MOD 3, pp. HT121, SO121, and VL57). Rails on the aft deck can take sea mines. The skipper, navigator, and section-leader have seats on the bridge. The engineer/gunner mans the weapon(s) installed at the ring mount amidships. The 1,100-cf main cabin accommodates 20 men plus their equipment. Further cargo is stowed in the bow or on the tarpaulin-covered aft deck. A passageway leads from the cabin to the assault hatch in the bow.

Each company of KJ has eight of these at its primary means of transportation.

Variants of this boat have been delivered to Estonia, Greece, Malaysia, Mexico, and Norway (there known as the S90N).

All components are TL7. The Strb90H burns 32.6 gallons of diesel per hour at routine usage. Fuel and 2,000 rounds of 12.7×99mm ammo cost \$1,713.

Subassemblies: Body +5, Open Mount 1 [Body:T] -1, Open Mount 2 [Body:T] +1.

P&P: 2× 466-kW standard diesel engines, 4× 4,032-kWs lead-acid batteries, 2× 466-kWs hydrojets.

Fuel: 594.45 gallons (Fire 8).

Occupancy: 3 RCS, 21 RS. **Cargo:** 500 cf.

Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
All:	3/5	3/5	3/5	3/5	4/20

Weaponry

Attributes: ST 11 [10], DX 13 [30], IQ 13 [30], HT 11 [10].

Advantages: Fit [5], and 10 points in additional ST or HT, *Desirable Advantages* (p. SO51), *Decorations* (pp. SO51-52), *Military Rank* (pp. SO52-54) or *Patrons* (p. SO54).

Disadvantages: Duty [-10], and -20 points selected from the *Desirable Disadvantages* list (p. SO56).

Basic Skills: Armoury (Small Arms) (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-12, Area Knowledge (Swedish Coastline) (M/E) IQ-1 [1/2]-12, Boating (P/A) DX [2]-13, Brawling (P/E) DX [1]-13, Camouflage (M/E) IQ-1 [1/2]-12, Climbing (P/A) DX-1 [1]-12, Driving (Automobile) (P/A) DX-1 [1]-12, First Aid (M/E) IQ-1 [1/2]-12, Guns (Light Auto) (P/E) (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-14*, Guns (Rifle) (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-14*, Hiking (P/A) HT [2]-11, Jumping (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-12, Knife (P/E) DX [1]-13, Language (English) (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-12, Language (Swedish) (M/A) IQ [0]-13, NBC Warfare (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-12, Orienteering (M/A) IQ [2]-13, Savoir-Faire (Military) (M/E) IQ-1 [1/2]-12, Seamanship (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-12, Skiing (P/H) DX-2 [1]-11, Soldier (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-12, Stealth (P/A) DX-1 [1]-12, Survival (Arctic) (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-12, Survival (Island/Beach) (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-12, Survival (Woodland) (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-12, Swimming (P/E) DX [1]-13, Tactics (Infantry) (M/H) IQ-3 [1/2]-10, Throwing (P/H) DX-2 [1]-11.

* Includes +2 for IQ.

Section-Level MOS Skills: Choose an MOS, and then spend a *total* of 8 1/2 points on them as follows: All skills that appear as Basic Skills (above) must be increased by at least one skill level. Any spare points should be put into other Basic Skills.

- *Assistance Section Leader:* Increase Tactics (Infantry); add Administration (M/A) and Leadership (M/A).
- *Combat Diver:* Increase Boating, Stealth, and Swimming; add Scuba (M/A).
- *Communications:* Add Electronics Operation (Comm) (M/A) and Telegraphy (M/E).
- *Courier/Sniper:* Increase Camouflage, Guns (Rifle), Orienteering, and Stealth; add Navigation (M/H) and Powerboat (P/A).
- *Demolition:* Add Demolition (M/A), Engineer (Combat) (M/H), Explosive Ordnance Disposal (M/H), and Traps (M/A).
- *Forward Observer:* Increase Camouflage and Stealth; add Forward Observer (M/A), Electronics Operation (Comm) (M/A), and Electronics Operation (Sensors) (M/A).
- *Heavy Support Weapons:* Add Guns (LAW) (P/E) and Gunner (ATGM) (P/A) or Gunner (Grenade Launcher) (P/A).
- *Light Support Weapons:* Increase Guns (Light Auto) (P/E) or add Guns (Grenade Launcher) (P/E).
- *Machine Gunner:* Increase Guns (Light Auto) (P/E) and add Gunner (MG) (P/A).
- *Medic:* Increase First Aid.

Special Skills:

2× 12.7mm Browning TKsp [Body:F] (400 ready each). Linked.

12.7mm Browning TKsp [OM2:F] (100 ready).

6× 800-lb. hardpoints for sea mines [Body:T].

Equipment

Body: 1,100 rounds of 12.7mm ammo as cargo; fire extinguisher system (in engine compartment); mini computer (Complexity 2) with Computer Navigation and 1-gig Database (maps); computer terminal; 30-mile radio with scrambler; military global positioning system; and navigation instruments. *Open Mount 1:* 55-mile navigation radar with no targeting and surface option (Scan 21).

Statistics

Size: 53'×13'×4' *Payload:* 7.92 tons. *Lwt.:* 18.64 tons (normal), 22.55 tons (max)

Volume: 2,832.5 cf. *Maint.:* 34.5 hours. *Price:* \$550,000.

HT: 12. *HP:* 2,250 *OM1:* 28 *OM2:* 200.

wSpeed: 20 (40 if Lwt. below 18.64 tons) *wAccel:* 5

wDecel: 2(5) *wMR:* 0.1 *wSR:* 5

Draft: 2.6

Design Notes

Body is medium, standard, with fine lines. Area is 1,500 sf. Armor is expensive, metal. Empty weight was raised from designed 27,140.96 lbs. to real-life 29,260 lbs. Cost was raised from designed \$336,501.70 to real-life \$550,000.

Commissioned Officer ** (+6 points): Add Administration (M/A) IQ [2]-13 and Leadership (M/A) IQ+1 [4]-14.

NCO ** (+3 points): Add Administration (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-12 and Leadership (M/A) IQ [2]-13.

** Military Rank [5/level] is required: Rank 1-2 for NCOs, Rank 3 for warrant officers and Rank 3+ for commissioned officers.

Customization Notes: Spend your remaining points (50 points, in a 150-point campaign, or no points in a 100-point campaign) to customize your character. Another -20 points in *Acceptable Disadvantages* (pp. SO56-57) and five quirks can be taken to get a further 25 points.

Weapons of Choice: Weapons include the Glock P88 pistol (Glock 17, p. HT109); FFV Ak5 assault rifle, FFV Ak5B assault rifle with SUSAT 4× scope and IR targeting laser (pp. HT103, MF12-13), Bofors Ak5C assault rifle with P-rail (p. MF11) for a Simrad KDN50 3.5× night vision scope (p. MF14), Bofors Ak5D assault carbine (all variants of the Belgian FN FNC, see "[Designer's Notes for GURPS Modern Firepower](#)," stats below, some of them fitted with Sure-Fire tactical lights, p. MF12, or 90-round MWG drum magazines, AWt 3.6); Accuracy International Psg90 bolt-action sniper rifle (modified AW, p. MF24) with 10× scope; Barrett Ag90B sniper rifle (variant of the Model 82A1, p. HT115, stats below) with 10× scope; Remington Model 870PS Wingmaster pump-action shotgun (p. HT112); FN Ksp90 LMG (MINIMI, p. HT120); FN Ksp90B LMG (MINIMI-Para, see "[Designer's Notes for GURPS Modern Firepower](#)," stats below); FN Ksp58B GPMG (MAG, p. HT120); FN-Browning TKsp HMG (M2QCB, pp. HT119, SO121, and W97) with Våpensmia reflex sight (p. MF13); Titanite Shgr2000 hand grenade (stats below); Colt M203 underbarrel grenade launcher (pp. HT121, SO121); Milkor Grg revolver launcher (MGL MK1, p. HT121) with Armson reflex sight (p. MF13); Saco Grsp grenade machine gun (MK19 MOD 3, pp. HT121, SO121) with Våpensmia reflex sight; FFV Pskott86 LAW (AT4, p. SO117); FFV Grg48C recoilless rifle (M2 Carl Gustaf, p. HT122) with 2× scope; FFV Grg86 recoilless rifle (M3 Carl Gustaf, p. SO117) with 2× scope; and Bofors Rbs56 BILL ATGM launcher.

Equipment: Equipment includes the NP Aerospace Hj90 kevlar helmet (PD 4, DR 6 for area 3-4 and back of 5, 3.1 lbs.); Åkers Krutbruk Ks94 kevlar vest (PD 2, DR 5 for areas 9-11, 17-18, 8.8 lbs.) with optional ceramic plates (PD 4, DR 35 for areas 9-11, 17-18, 22 lbs.); AGA Oxydive rebreather (3 hrs 20 min, 28.6 lbs., p. SO111); Trelleborg Viking Pro 1000 dry suit; and Simrad GN1 night vision goggles (p. SO110).

Vehicles: Support vehicles include the Agusta Hkp15 helicopter (A 109M, p. SO124); Kawasaki Hkp4C helicopter (licensed Boeing CH-46 Sea Knight); Lockheed Tp84 transport aircraft (C-130H Hercules, p. SO125); Dockstarvet Strb90H assault boat (see BOX); Marine Alutech G-båt section boat; Klepper kayak (p. SO126); and a single *Mala*-class swimmer delivery vehicle.

Adventure Seeds

Direct Action in Afghanistan: FKP Report on Operations in Afghanistan (Unclassified):

"Some 30 operators from the FKP were sent to Afghanistan and worked there as part of Joint Special Operations Task Force South, based in Camp Rhino near Khandahar. Late in February 2002, they took part in a mission to capture the Taliban governor Mullah Khairullah Khairkhwa. An USAF RQ-1A Predator drone had reported that he had left his stronghold in a convoy; after putting together a plan in only half an hour, an assault team consisting of SEALs and Danes boarded an AFSOC MH-53M Pave LowIII helicopter, escorted by an U.S. Army AH-64D Apache gunship. Thirty minutes later, it was all over; the team had interdicted his convoy and taken him alive."

The Royals: The Swedish Crown Princess has decided to be the first woman to make it through KJ training. The PCs could include fellow volunteers (or her bodyguards) struggling through the training together with her, instructors teaching either a hard-working woman with her own head or a spoiled child, or the princess herself.

Suddenly, a crisis develops in the Baltic Sea, and the KJ are ordered to re-take a small island. Will the princess excel in the mission? Who rescues her and the remnants of her patrol after being trapped and captured by the enemy?

*Note: In the real world, neither Kronprincessan Victoria nor her sister Princessan Madeleine has so far shown **any** inclination to join the military; on the other hand, all the male members of the Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish royal families have served.*

Weapon Tables

Pistols use Guns/TL (Pistol)

Name	Malf	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt	AWt	RoF	Shots	ST	Rcl	Hold	Cost	TL
SIG P M/49, 9×19mm	ver	Cr	2d+2	10	3	150	1,850	2.4	0.4	3~	8+1	9	-1	-1	\$2,100	7

Rifles use Guns/TL (Rifle) for single shots, Guns/TL (Light Auto) for burst-fire

Name	Malf	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt	AWt	RoF	Shots	ST	Rcl	Hold	Cost	TL
Barrett Ag90B, 12.7×99mm	crit	Cr	11d+2+	15	11+3	1,500	6,800	35.2	3.5	1	10+1	13B	-2	-8	\$7,200	7
Bofors Ak5D, 5.56×45mm	crit	Cr	4d(1.25)	10	8	400	2,500	8.4	1	11*	30+1	9	-1	-4	\$1,550	7
FFV Ak5, 5.56×45mm	crit	Cr	5d(1.25)	12	11	800	3,500	9.7	1	11*	30+1	9	-1	-5	\$1,450	7
FFV Ak5B, 5.56×45mm	crit	Cr	5d(1.25)	12	11+2	800	3,500	11.9	1	11*	30+1	9	-1	-5	\$2,200	7
Winchester G M/53, .30-06	ver	Cr	7d+1	14	11	1,000	4,700	9.3	0.3	1/2	5+1	11	-3	-7	-	6

Machine Guns use Guns/TL (Light Auto) for burst-fire, Guns/TL (Rifle) for single shots

Name	Malf	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt	AWt	RoF	Shots	ST	Rcl	Hold	Cost	TL
FN Ksp90B, 5.56×45mm	crit	Cr	5d(1.25)	14	8	500	3,200	21.7	7	12	200	11B	-1	-6	\$4,000	7
H&K Mg M/85, 5.56×45mm	crit	Cr	5d(1.25)	17	11	800	3,500	26.3	7	13**	200	11B	-1	-7	\$2,350	7

Hand Grenades use Throwing

Name	Malf	Type	Damage	Wt	Fuse	Hold	Cost	TL
Titanite Shgr2000	crit	Exp.	3d+1 [3d]	0.8	4 seconds	0	\$25	7

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- *Kustjägarna*: Covers the KJ and their equipment and training. In Swedish. -- <http://www.surfasnabbt.nu/kj/index.html>
- *Kustjägarna*: Covers the KJ and their equipment and training. In Swedish. -- <http://user.tninet.se/~huv222o/>
- *Swedish Weapons*: Depicts all small arms in use with the KJ, including the twin MG mount on the Strb90H. In English. -- <http://home.swipnet.se/~w-52089/marine/wpns.htm>
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Nan Madol

The South Pacific's Answer to the Pyramids

by Steve Honeywell

On the southeastern side of the island of Pohnpei (formerly Ponape) in the Federated States of Micronesia sits Nan Madol, also called Nan Matol, one of the least-known examples of monumental architecture from the ancient world. Called the "Machu Pichu of the Pacific," the site has been heard of by few and is understood by far fewer. The Nan Madol site consists of a series of man-made islands constructed from basalt. Some of the wilder theories that have been constructed to explain the presence of the site included believing it to be evidence of the lost civilization of Mu and evidence of extraterrestrial visitors. In a word, it offers tons of possibilities for gaming, in no small part because almost no one has heard of it.

The History of Nan Madol

Pohnpei is located at 158.2 degrees east, 6.9 degrees north in the middle of the South Pacific. It is the central island in the State of Pohnpei in the modern Federated States of Micronesia, lying west of the island of Kosrae and east of Chuuk (formerly called Truk). The Federates States of Micronesia sit to the west of the Marshall islands and south of the Marianas. Yap, the westernmost state in the FSM lies almost directly south of Guam. (See <http://www.destmic.com/index.html> for an excellent, if somewhat small map of the islands and their nearest neighbors.)

According to the legends of the Pohnpeians, Nan Madol was the legendary capitol of the island of Pohnpei. The natives hold the ruins with a particular reverence. The local population speaks of the ruins in hushed tones, telling half-remembered stories of the original rulers who created the basalt islands. Access to the Nan Madol ruins is restricted, particularly at night. There are many tales of trouble befalling those who attempt to spend the night in the ruins or who try to extract the magical amulets from the site.

But what, precisely, is Nan Madol? Essentially, it is a collection of 92 man-made islets covering an area roughly 11 square miles, although the islands themselves have a total land area of approximately 200 acres. The islands were created by moving huge prismatic basalt columns from the northern and central parts of Pohnpei itself. These basalt columns were then built upon each other "log cabin style" and filled with coral boulders and earth. Presumably, thatched buildings were then built on top of these islands, and transportation between the islands was facilitated by the creation of canals. While mining techniques are not known precisely, it seems likely that the natural basalt flows were heated with fires, then doused with cold water to cause the rock to split. The resulting basalt "logs" were then transported to the site via boat. Evidence for the water transportation of the materials (as well as real-world evidence against supernatural and extraterrestrial assistance) comes from the many basalt logs found on top of the coral reef ringing the island of Pohnpei itself. For a computer reconstruction of the Nan Madol islands and a possible view of buildings there, see <http://www.uoregon.edu/~wsayres/NanMadol.html>. A small map, drawings of structures and some excellent photography of Nan Madol are located at http://www.janeresture.com/micronesia_madol/.

The islands themselves are significant in size. The walls of Nan Douwas, one of the more spectacular of the site's islets, reach as high as 25 feet. Many of the islets themselves are large enough to support relatively big structures. Some of the elite residences on Nan Madol were more than 450 square feet.

Radiocarbon dates suggest that the construction of Nan Madol began about 1500 years ago. Theories on why the site was built differ. Part of this difference comes from a certain amount of confusion over *who* built the site. Scholars who have studied the Nan Madol ruins agree that the area was used as the capitol of Pohnpei between 1000 and 1200 A.D. by a group of outsiders who called themselves the Saudeleus, or Sau Deleus. Some believe the site was created by the Saudeleus, or at least by labor that they gathered. This, however, does not fit with the radiocarbon evidence that

suggests Nan Madol was created nearly 500 years before the arrival of this group of conquerors. Other findings suggest the site was under construction for hundreds of years, and wasn't completed until the arrival of the Saudeleurs, who turned it in to a religious and cultural center. Other radiocarbon dates indicate construction of the site began in the 13th century.

Local legend holds that Nan Madol was the creation of the Saudeleurs, specifically two brothers named Ohlosihpa and Ohlosohpa who arrived with a large party and established themselves on Sounahleng, a small reef area just southwest of the main island. This location corresponds with that of the Nan Madol site. The two brothers divided Nan Madol into two distinct regions: Madol Powe (Upper Madol), which consisted of a priests' town, and Madol Pah (Lower Madol), which operated as an administrative center. Each of the 92 islets of the complex served as a place for one or more specialized activities.

Additional evidence that the elites ruled from Nan Madol is found in the archeological record. Artifacts that indicate rank in Pohnpeian society such as beads and ornaments are rare on the Pohnpei mainland but relatively common at Nan Madol. Additionally, these items are usually found in association with elite residences and important ceremonial structures. Also found in the ruins of Nan Madol is evidence of specialized activities. Stone pounding tools, potsherds, shell tools and bone artifacts make up some of the many elite items located on the islands. Finally, the remains of elite foods like parrotfish and dog have been found in Nan Madol.

Nan Madol was an attractive place for the Saudeleurs to rule from for one significant reason: It allowed them to remain apart from the main population of the island. This sort of distance granted them a level of mystery and intimidation. Certainly, the megalithic aspect of Nan Madol was instrumental in allowing the Saudeleurs to keep the native population in line with their desires. However, assertions that the "alien character" of the architecture of the islets does not seem to fit with the evidence suggesting that the natives of Pohnpei had been building Nan Madol for nearly half a millennium before the arrival of the outsiders.

The assertion of the early construction of Nan Madol is disputed by a significant fact: Before the arrival of the Saudeleurs, Pohnpei did not have unified rule, and consisted of a number of independent chiefdoms, unlikely to cooperate on the creation of a monumental site the size and complexity of Nan Madol. The Saudeleur reign unified the island. The new rulers recognized the claims of the leading clans in the different areas of Pohnpei, bestowing titles on different chiefs, further unifying the island and reconstituting the authority of the chiefs under the new rulers.

Ultimately, the actual time of the construction of Nan Madol remains in mystery. However, the various dates given from radiocarbon dating bracket the occupation of Pohnpei by the Saudeleur dynasty. It seems reasonable to assert that Nan Madol was, in fact, created under the direction of the Saudeleurs approximately 1,000 years ago. The creation of the islets for the Saudeleurs makes additional sense by giving them a specific location to rule from while keeping them apart from Pohnpeian society in general, allowing them to rule through fear and intimidation and through the demand of tribute.

In addition to its function as the seat of government, Nan Madol was also important in the religious life of Pohnpei society. Before the arrival of the Saudeleurs, many of the clans of Pohnpei venerated a sacred freshwater eel that inhabited many of the streams on the island. The Saudeleurs, however, worshipped other gods, and paid tribute to Nahn Samwohl, a great saltwater eel that lived in a shallow pool on the islet of Idehd in Nan Madol. At a time determined both by the change of agricultural seasons and divination, the Saudeleur priests performed a long ceremony of supplication and atonement called *Pwung en Sapw*. This ceremony ended with the offering of a turtle to Nahn Samwohl. Nahn Samwohl's acceptance of the tribute was seen as indicating the pleasure of the Nahnisohtsapw, the main god of the Saudeleurs. In addition to pleasing their gods with the sacrifice of the turtle, there was significant symbolism underlying the ritual. Where the freshwater eel venerated by the natives as sacred was small and harmless, Nahn Samwohl was large, foreign, vicious, and ravenous. It very strongly demonstrated the rule of Nan Madol's chiefs over the rest of the island and community. Additionally, the Saudeleurs called the three major political entities they had divided the island into "turtle" states.

An ancient tale further emphasizes the symbolic nature of the *Pwung en Sapw* sacrifice of the turtle. An altar constructed near Idehd called *Pei en Namweiiias* (Altar of the Life-Giving Turtle) commemorates the first sacrifice of

the turtle Liahnensokole, who accepted her sacrifice to Nahn Samwohl in order to save her sons. The turtle, a symbol of a nourishing, benevolent mother, represented the land. The Saudeleurs had forced themselves between the land and the people of the land. To preserve their own lives, the people of Pohnpei were forced to sacrifice their land to the Saudeleurs. This submission was ritually renewed at each ceremony and sacrifice of *Pwung en Sapw*.

Native folklore says that Nan Madol operated as a cultural center until the overthrow of the Saudeleurs by a warrior from the east, possibly the island of Kosrae. Archaeological evidence suggests this occurred sometime in the 16th century. With the destruction of the Saudeleurs, additional construction at Nan Madol stopped. As the power and influence of this foreign ruler abated, Pohnpei's independent chiefs reasserted themselves, causing a fragmentation of the overall leadership of the island. Nan Madol fell into disuse and slowly degenerated into the ruins that remain today.

Languages

For ancient campaigns, language will obviously be a problem, because the inhabitants of Pohnpei will not speak any Western tongue, and adventurers are unlikely to speak Pohnpeian. Language may be much less of a problem depending on the nationality of the characters and the time period in which the area is visited. Much of Micronesia was controlled by Spain from roughly 1850 through to the earliest part of the last century, and a few Spanish missions wouldn't be too out of place. It was controlled briefly by Germany, who lost control to Japan around the time of World War I. Japan held the islands until nearly the end of World War II, and during that time, indoctrinated the inhabitants in Japanese culture and language. The United States took control around 1944, and to this day, English remains one of the five official languages of the country, along with the native tongues Pohnpeian, Kosraean, Yapese, and Chuukese. For Nan Madol itself, Pohnpeian and English would be the most common tongues in a modern or nearly-modern campaign. In earlier colonizations of the islands, Pohnpei was often ignored, so Spanish, German, or Japanese-speaking characters will still experience difficulties in conversing with the natives.

Adventure Possibilities

Nan Madol is strange, little-known, and extremely exotic, making it a perfect place for adventuring. Seafarers searching for a passage around the world or a faster route to China might come across it, or pirates might find its isolation attractive and its primitive natives easily persuaded to guard their treasure. A **GURPS Swashbucklers** campaign would certainly find a lot to explore, and would have to deal with plenty of angry natives ready to make war against those who defiled their sacred land. Conversely, a group of explorers might arrive just as the native population was preparing to rebel against the Saudeleur rulers, and might be forced to take sides. For that matter, a **GURPS Low-Tech** campaign might easily take place on Pohnpei, with the characters as the rebels or the Saudeleurs themselves.

And what of the Saudeleurs? Perhaps they didn't come from other, nearby islands like Yap and Kosrae. In an Illuminated campaign, it's possible that they are a group of Westerners who have discovered a place of power and are exploiting the native population in order to gain access to it. Or perhaps the Saudeleurs are the remnants of the ancient civilization of Mu, or the advance party for a group of aliens planning a terrestrial invasion. In fact, the Saudeleurs might still be there today, coming out only at night, which is why the ruins are off-limits after the sun goes down. Nan Madol itself may have been created by aliens, and the basalt slabs that seem to serve as evidence of terrestrial construction may have been placed there accidentally by natives attempting to recreate the extraterrestrial building techniques. Nan Madol could be a recreation of Mu, or could be built on the tops of what remains of the lost civilization.

Micronesia was the site of several major naval battles during World War II, in no small part because of Japanese holdings there. Chuuk, which was called Truk at the time, was a major Japanese base for a large part of the war, until the Allied forces pushed the Japanese out. Certainly a campaign that takes place in the Pacific during WWII could encounter some strange goings-on on Pohnpei or at Nan Madol.

In a more modern campaign, the jealously guarded ruins of Nan Madol may hold vast power and sacred relics that can be used for either good or evil. Certainly, the site would have benefits for those attempting ritualistic magic. Perhaps the *Pwung en Sapw* rituals continue to the present day. The islets may be inhabited by restless undead creatures

looking for vengeance against those who steal the relics or simply feeding on the incautious who come to the islands after dark. Both **GURPS Spirits** and **GURPS Undead** offer interesting possibilities for what may still be crawling around the man-made islands. Naturally, this ties into a **GURPS Horror** campaign very neatly.

Nan Madol may also be the home of Things Man Was Not Meant To Know. Perhaps the curse talked about by the natives is a real thing. The islets themselves may have been laid in a particular pattern to keep something at bay (or summon it!) or may be guarding terrible secrets. Micronesia in general and Pohnpei in specific rest in little-known waters of great depth. Who knows what might be lurking below? Investigations may lead to the true nature of the Saudeleur masters who once controlled Pohnpei, a truth that proves to be almost too terrible to contemplate.

Whatever the campaign, Nan Madol makes an interesting place to visit and explore. As a seat of ancient power, a place of horror, a magical site bursting with occult power, or merely an interesting piece of architecture and archaeology, it can serve as a mysterious and potentially deadly location for adventures from the 11th century to today and beyond.

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Amnerestes and Klathedros

Two Atlantean Overlords for *GURPS*

by Phil Masters

General Notes

These two *Supporting Cast* characters are designed as much to illustrate a point as to serve as NPC encounters -- although they should work just fine in the latter function, too. In fact, they could also work as sample PCs in a particular sort of game. The issue here is campaigns set in (or visiting) ancient Atlantis.

The version of that legendary land described in Chapter 4 of *GURPS Atlantis* can be used for all sorts of styles of play, from combat-heavy (bronze) Swords and (subtle) sorcery to tough "low fantasy" tales set during the end of a world. However, one approach that reading up on the subject of Atlantis may encourage involves melodramatic, romantic plots in and around the courts of that land.

This can be inspired by, in equal parts, Greek myth and Victorian fantasy stories. Both tend to focus on the courts and rulers of the places wherein they are set (with occasional excursions into the depths of the underworld, whether social or metaphysical). However, these are monarchies whose rulers have more or less absolute power, and who are driven more by their passions than by rational, realistic political concerns. In other words, this is high soap opera, with swords and (quite likely) interfering deities, and the world to play for, to win and lose. (Mostly lose, in fact. With the island scheduled to sink, sooner or later, this is an inherently tragic setting, though heroic individuals may survive to sail away into a lurid sunset with their true loves.)

PCs who have to visit these courts will usually have some specific objective in mind, and will have to thread their way through an overheated maze of ambition, decadence, and latent madness to reach their goals. (Alternatively, they may just become annoyed and look for ways to destroy the place.) However, ambitious groups with a taste for politics and a willingness to play unsympathetic or confused characters who may not even get on that well with each other may actually think about playing an Atlantean courtly campaign as "insiders" -- members of the court, perhaps even of noble or even royal rank.

Which is why the following characters might even be considered as model PCs, apart from their obvious functions as encounters or antagonists.

Amnerestes of Mneseusa

100 points

Age 16; 5'6", 135 lbs.; A dark-complexioned youth with a distracted air.

Attributes: ST 9 [-10]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 10 [0]; HT 10 [0].

Basic Speed 5; Move 5.

Dodge 5; Parry 4 (sword); Block 4.

Advantages: Claim to Hospitality (Atlantean aristocracy) [8]; Fearlessness +2 [4]; Literacy [10]; Luck [15]; Status 6 [25]; Very Wealthy [30].

Disadvantages: Chauvinistic [-1]; Hidebound [-5]; Youth (age 16) [-4].

Quirks: Enjoys praying and sacrificing; Quiet. [-2]

Skills: Animal Handling-12 [8]; History-7 [1/2]; Knife- 11 [2]; Lasso-10 [2]; Riding (Stirrupless)-8 [1/2]; Sacrifice-11 [6]; Savoir-Faire-12 [0]; Shield-9 [1/2]; Shortsword-8 [1/2]; Spear-8 [1/2]; Spear Throwing-9 [1/2]; Staff-7 [1/2]; Teamster (Horses)-8 [1/2]; Theology-12 [8].

Languages: Atlantean (native)-10 [0].

Equipment: High-class clothes; fine weapons, armor and chariot.

The second son of the Prince of Mneseusa (p.AT75) was brought up to revere the old ways, and the teaching *stuck*. While his older brother learned how to rule and play politics, he learned how to pray.

He became obsessed with piety, spending much of his time in the temples to Poseidon. However, events suggest to some people that, rather frighteningly, the patron deity of Atlantis may truly, darkly favor him for this. His father and brother, sailing home together from a trip along the coast, were caught in a sudden storm, and their ship was lost with all hands.

Amnerestes has thus unexpectedly inherited power. However, this seems to have affected him little; he continues his life of prayer and dedication, although he is slowly being drawn into political affairs.

Note: This treatment of the character leaves open the question of how far Amnerestes's peculiar good fortune is a genuine sign of deliberate supernatural favor -- either from Poseidon or from some other being. He is generally lucky, and attained the throne through an accident, and the events in question do seem to suggest the involvement of a sea god -- but it could all be chance (if such a thing really exists in this deity-infested setting). If he is genuinely blessed by a god, Amnerestes could have Extraordinary or Ridiculous Luck, a Destiny, or even Poseidon as a Patron. For a really strange effect, give him Extraordinary Luck and a -15 point Destiny (thus keeping him balanced as a 100 point character); this sets him up as the unwitting but seemingly unstoppable agent of terrible events.

Klathedros of Atlantis

100 points

Age 33; 5'8", 140 lbs.; A slim nobleman with a permanent worried expression.

Attributes: ST 12 [20]; DX 11 [10]; IQ 13 [30]; HT 11 [10].

Basic Speed 5.5; Move 5.

Dodge 5; Parry 5; Block 5.

Advantages: Status +4 [15]; Literacy [10]; Very Wealthy [30]; Voice [10].

Disadvantages: Dependent (concubine, 20 points, loved one, 6-) [-12]; Duty (to Emperor, 15-, nonhazardous) [-10]; Enemy (Eumelian faction, 6-) [-10]; Secret (conflicting loyalties) [-10]; Sense of Duty (everyone he knows personally) [-10]; Workaholic [-5].

Quirks: Romantic; Tolerant. [-2]

Skills: Administration-13 [2]; Animal Handling-12 [2]; Area Knowledge (Atlantis)-14 [2]; Carousing-10 [1]; Diplomacy- 15* [4]; Poetry-12 [1]; Riding (Stirrupless)-11 [2]; Savoir- Faire-17* [0]; Shield-11 [1]; Shortsword-11 [2]; Spear-11 [2]; Spear Throwing-12 [2]; Teamster-13 [2]; Tracking-12 [1].

*Include +2 for Voice.

Languages: Atlantean (native)-13 [0].

Equipment: High-class clothes; fine weapons, armor and chariot (at his home).

Klathedros is a court advisor, loyally serving the Emperor Poseidophilios of Atlantis (p.AT80). Born into the Atlantean nobility, he was friendly with people close to the ruling family from infancy, and when his shrewd intelligence and natural skills became obvious, they began to pay attention to him. When it also became obvious that Klathedros was intensely loyal, with no overwhelming ambitions for himself, he was honored with a place close to the throne, and Poseidophilios has come to lean on his advice in many matters, and to use him as an emissary for delicate and important tasks when he can be spared. Somehow, he has made only a few enemies so far, and they come from groups who really do not have the best interests of Atlantis at heart.

What few people realize is that Klathedros is *also* loyal to his boyhood companion, the Prince of Azaeton. He is not a man to discard one loyalty when he gains another; rather, he struggles to reconcile his friendships and duties, despite the Prince's private ambitions. Furthermore, he is being emotionally manipulated by his favorite Egyptian slave-concubine, a shrewd young woman who understands him perhaps better than he does himself. It is possible that she has connections to the enemies of the land, and while Klathedros could *never* be turned against Atlantis, he may eventually be steered into unwise courses of action.

Of course, Klathedros is no fool, even if he lacks some self awareness and has too romantic an idea of loyalty. Anyone else seeking to use him for their own ends would be well advised to tread very carefully.

The Blue Screen of Death

by Nate Fichthorn

"Life? I had one of those once. Forget what happened to it."

--Anon. Hacker

The Blue Screen of Death is, some claim, the natural outgrowth of computer technology, that literally steals the user's life, rather than metaphorically. Whenever the computer crashes, the Blue Screen of Death sucks away a portion of the life of the user(s) of that computer. How much, and how often is of course left up to the sadism of the GM involved.

Description

The Blue Screen of Death is, at the most basic level, a computer virus. It installs without the user's knowledge, occupies their system, disguises itself, and runs in the background. It increases the instability of any programs run on the computer, making them more likely to crash, and replaces the error screen with one that appears identical but steals away a portion of the user's life. Like most virii, the Blue Screen of Death (BSOD) can come hidden with nearly any other piece of software. However, due to its unique nature, the BSOD is difficult to copy. Even if the CD containing it is duplicated, the file is sent over the Internet, or other methods are used to try and copy it, chances are that the BSOD will not be copied along with the rest of the files. Whether this is due to the half-magical nature of the BSOD, hypertext copy protection, a conspiracy to place deliberate errors in all hardware that could copy it, or reasons unknown, no one is sure (or is saying).

History

The first mention of a program resembling the BSOD was in the early 1980s, involving a college student who was working on his school's mainframe. The student, while debugging a program, discovered a series of commands he didn't recognize. They proved to be the source of a number of unexpected errors within his program. Despite his best efforts, he was unable to permanently remove the errors and mysterious code, until he resorted to (unknown to the administrators) completely erasing and physically wiping the mainframe, then restoring it with a backup he had appropriated from another lab for that purpose. This story is, however, nearly impossible to corroborate, as within a few years the student alleged to be involved disappeared completely. The BSOD reemerged as the computer boom hit full stride. Since then, it has been discovered in computers across the world, but not as widely as would be expected, especially since the creation of the Internet. This discrepancy led to experiments which discovered the difficulty of copying the BSOD in working condition.

Despite evidence of the advent of the BSOD in the early 1980s, some have theorized that the BSOD may be somehow inherent in the structure of computers, even the earliest ones. They cite as evidence a number of early computer specialists who died young, such as Alan Turing. If true, this perhaps has more disturbing implications for modern society than any of the other theories.

Exactly how the BSOD works, as well as where it comes from, who controls it, and its purpose have been quietly speculated about in the small circles of people who are even aware it exists. Some say that the BSOD is a half-magical creation of a cabal of sorcerers, who are using it to remove their enemies and augment their own power. Others insist that it is a tool of the Illuminati, who tested it first on its creator. Perhaps it is being used by other dimensional horrors to provide an easy channel for them to feed. A group of modern technophobes has been blamed for creating it, to reduce the usage of computers. It could even be the cosmic correction fluid of Fate, designed to ensure that certain people die at a certain time. Perhaps it is the "white blood cells" of an AI, a self-aware portion of the Internet, or something that "lives" a great deal on the 'net (such as [Self-Aware-Meme Complex Alpha](#)). Any or none of these could be true, and the only people who know aren't talking.

Some of those who have studied the BSOD the most know of access codes that can allow one to exert limited control over the program. There are a number of codes, each of which provides different access to the user. Certain codes allow one to create a copy of the BSOD, to accompany any program of their choice, or change the frequency of the crashes it causes, perhaps even allowing someone with the proper codes to use the BSOD to kill . . . in a way that appears accidental. The danger with any of these uses is that the BSOD makes all programs liable to crash, including the controls for it. When the control panel crashes, it drains away even more of a person's life than normal.

In addition to who controls the BSOD, most speculation revolves around the question of: What happens to the life it drains? There are, again, a number of theories, though the lack of certain facts makes them all equally speculative. Perhaps it is being used to power some sort of magical ritual, or feed some kind of otherworldly creature. Maybe the life drained from people is then given to others, and it is being used to gain immortality. Perhaps it is used to power experiments, or give robots a "spark of life." Or perhaps it is just gone.

Adventure Seeds

Modern

- One of the characters purchases a new computer, that continues to crash incessantly despite everything done. Reinstalling programs, virus scans, even complete formatting and reinstallation do no good. No computer technician can find a hardware problem. Those who own or use the computer begin to feel tired and old, in addition to frustrated. Eventually, the computer's owner ends up in bed, sick for no discernable cause, and the party investigates, discovering rumors of a program that could be to blame.
- A celebrity, politician, or other public figure receives a free copy of new piece of software as a gift. Within a short time, his secretary dies unexpectedly, apparently of natural causes. Before very long, another secretary (or the celebrity himself) follows suit. Our intrepid investigators discover a trail which leads to a conspiracy, using the BSOD as a tool to assassinate their opponents.
- A number of people about town die abruptly, even young, perfectly healthy people. Others complain of feeling sick or drained. Upon investigating, a group of concerned citizens discover that all of those who had died recently bought software from a mail order house. Investigating, they find that the mail order house does not actually exist. Following the trail further, the group discover a group of sorcerers, using a number of mail order fronts to distribute the BSOD, and drawing the drained life energy back to themselves, to give themselves immortality.

Cyberpunk/Cthulhupunk

- A company has come out with a new android design, which more accurately acts and reacts like humans. These androids become an instant hit. First they replace the old style robots that had filled positions such as acting as cashiers, maids, or general servants; eventually they even replace human workers in other jobs, simply because they never need to eat or sleep, and never ask for raises. At about the same time, people begin to be found slumped over, dead, anywhere from in their cubicles to at home watching the latest VR flicks. All of the people found dead were using either software or hardware created by a single company, but not the one making the androids. Assigned to investigate the deaths, the agents discover the existence of the BSOD, and the secret behind the new androids, which are each charged at the factory with a bit of the energy/data drawn from the victims. This is the source of their nearly humanlike reactions.
- The runners are hired by a corporation to investigate the deaths of several of their best researchers, who were found at their terminals one morning by the janitors without a mark on their bodies. The corp suspects a rival, attempting to remove the important R&D people. The researchers were indeed assassinated, but not by ordinary means. Instead, an agent placed software on the researcher's computers which sent out a signal to hungry otherworldly entities, which, once in the computer systems, gradually devoured the lives and brains of the researchers.

Space Opera

- The players encounter a ghost ship floating in space with no distress beacon or other signs of disaster. Inside, the entire crew is found dead, without any signs of poison or other cause of death. Some of the crew, however, appear older than expected for crew; one even seems withered like a mummy, perhaps caused by some freak action of the environmental systems. All of the ship's systems are inoperable; the control computers appear to have crashed. Only the simplest emergency functions work. Even upon restarting the main computer and/or the other systems, the salvage team finds that they continue to be unstable. The original crew were actually killed by an AI that somehow occupied their ship's computer. The BSOD is a defensive mechanism; it crashed the systems whenever the crew tried to take action against the AI, and eventually drained them of their life, which strengthened the AI. Perhaps their memories or even personalities live on somewhere inside of it.

Pyramid Review

Pulp Zombies

Published by [Eden Studios, Inc.](#)

Written by Jeff Tidball

Illustrated by Steve Bryant, C. Brent Ferguson, Jon Hodgsen, Jason Millet, Gregory Price, Chris Stevens, and George Vasilakos

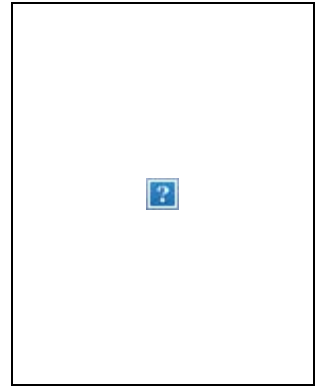
152-page b&w softcover; \$20.00

The "pulp" and horror genres are no strangers to each other, so it is no surprise that they are also a natural combination when it comes to creating RPG backgrounds. It is a combination best typified by the weird or cosmic pulp horror of the classic *Call of Cthulhu* game, while at the other end, there comes an "undead," but no less entertaining take upon the meld of pulp and horror. *Pulp Zombies* is the second genre book for the zombie-themed RPG [All Flesh Must Be Eaten](#), following last year's martial arts/Hong Kong cinema action combo [Enter the Zombie](#). Written by Jeff Tidball, the author of the boardgame *Cults Across America* and numerous supplements for *Ars Magica*, it presents an exploration of how to handle the shuffling corpse cortege in the pulp setting, along with advice upon the era, and several more "Deadworlds," each a campaign setting in which said cortege plays a big or small roll -- mostly big.

What *Pulp Zombies* is *not* is a historical sourcebook for the pulp decade of the 1930s. Instead it is set within the pulp "period," which lies roughly between the Wall Street Crash and the outbreak of World War II. Zombie Masters and players alike need not strictly adhere to the true events of history, but rather use and refer to such events as necessary *and* when it feels right. The book does give various facts and pieces of information about the era, which is both useful and enough to for most games of *Pulp Zombies*: the average price of houses, vehicles and goods, politics and history, travel and crimes, and so on. It does also include a few named guns for the period, such as the Mauser "Broomhandle" and Colt .45 pistols, and the Tommy Gun, which allows players to take what might be their character's signature gun. That said, the Unisystem mechanics employed in *All Flesh Must Be Eaten* are far from meticulously detailed, and it would be just as easy to select a weapon's statistics and match it with a player's cool gun of choice. Unfortunately neither this supplement nor the *All Flesh Must Be Eaten* rulebook list the whip as weapon or give any rules for it. There is a short note about the status of both women and other minorities during this time; it suggests for the sake of game play that such "niceties" are best left ignored.

Of course, pulp is not so much a genre as a printing format. Fortunately, most people have an instinct for what pulp signifies -- stories of exploration and high adventure, when men were real heroes, femmes were really fatale, villains were really villainous, and cheese was really cheesy, if not downright fragrant. This is especially true of the plots of the pulps; consider the tales of Doc Savage, Dick Tracy, The Shadow, and more recently, those of Indiana Jones. Indeed, the author plays up (or is it down?) to this feel and keeps the tone of *Pulp Zombies*, light, tight, and cheesy. The artwork is just as good, with some of it being particularly so.

In keeping with the genre, the players create characters who are real heroes, either in an ordinary way -- such as being a rocket scientist, nuclear physicist, Olympic gymnast, or barnstorming aviator; or in a genuinely outré fashion that might be innate invisibility or Mentalism powers. The power of the latter roughly equates to that of "costumed adventurers" rather than full-fledged superheroes. To simulate this feel of hyper-competent characters under the Unisystem, our pulp heroes are designed using a total of 70 character points. This places them on a par with the



Survivor and Inspired character category in *All Flesh Must Be Eaten*. As an option, and at the Zombie Master's discretion, players can design truly "Legendary Heroes" built on an increased total of 110 points. It should be noted that, unlike *Enter the Zombie*, this supplement does not allow players to play zombie characters as a default, though one or two Deadworlds do allow the possibility. Again, this is at the Zombie Master's discretion, as is letting characters use the various chi moves and techniques from *Enter the Zombie*.

Existing qualities and drawbacks such as resources and minority are slightly modified, but *Pulp Zombies* introduces several new ones. All appropriate to the genre, they include animal companion, force of law, (essentially legal enforcement powers), hyperlingual (language ability) and trademark (identifying signature move, such as leaving the ace of spades card at the scene of a crime). Unfortunately, the animal companion quality is not supported by a list of animals in *Pulp Zombies*. The author plugs the [Terra Primate RPG](#) as a source of full stats for these, and in addition it would provide full rules for creating ape characters, which could easily be added to a pulp zombies game!

Unlike other Unisystem games, characters do not need to possess the Gift quality before they can take the Mentalism quality, which itself allows the purchase of Mentalism powers. These are actually a slightly altered version of those given for the seer in the *Witchcraft RPG*. These abilities are quite low-powered and include Clairvoyance, Mind Control, Psychokinesis, Pyrokinesis (though not the reverse), Read Mind, and Telepathy. Each is measured in terms of strength (or raw power) and art (or experience and finesse), neither of which can be rated higher than the character's Mentalism quality. Throughout the chapter on Mentalism, a number of sidebars discuss the place of these abilities within the pulps themselves.

The other new addition to the rules also stems from a new Quality and a staple of the genre. Gadgetmaster is described as a supernatural quality. This is purely to quantify the Gadgetmaster quality under the Unisystem mechanics rather than describing it as supernatural in the traditional sense, and is rated in levels. These cannot be rated more than the highest of a character's science or mechanic skill. Each Gadgetmaster level gives a gadget slot, which can be filled by a device, created by the character. The higher a gadget's rating, the more slots it occupies, with the rating determined by its complexity and utility levels, further modified by it being miniaturized, possessing onerous requirements, horrible consequences, dangerous side effects, or conflicting with another device. Slots can be filled up with laboratory-created gadgets: totally predesigned items built with the consent of the Zombie Master and requiring no dice rolls or skill checks upon the player's part. Alternatively, the gadgetmaster can create them spontaneously, usually as the need arises within the game. An open slot or two is required before this is possible, as is a skill roll to see if the device performs properly upon its first use. Such devices are invariably miniaturized, making them easy to hide. The player need only be as inventive as the situation and game warrants, so a secret compartment containing a lock pick, or new formula blasting powder would be both appropriate if the gadgetmaster were to find himself handcuffed to a chair. Several sample gadgets are provided, but it would be easy enough to come up with more. Overall, the rules given for gadgeteering are delightfully simple and very easy to use.

For those wanting to cut to the chase, several ready-to-play archetypes are provided. They are mostly pulp heroes: the Academic Turned Explorer, Dare Devil (barnstorming aviator), Human Mountain (the strong, tough, but not-so-bright guy), the Masked Vigilante, Private Dick, and the Scientific Wizard. The exception to these is the Legendary Hero version -- built on 110 points -- of the Masked Vigilante.

Approximately half of *Pulp Zombies* is given over to new Deadworlds.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The first of these is "The Hollow Earth." This is more than the average Deadworld, being an extended campaign outline. It opens with a worldwide trip in search of ancient antiquities and ends with a journey deep into the bowels of the Earth. There is room for lots of Indiana Jones-style adventures in the first part of the campaign before taking a creepy turn for the worst in the second. The highlight of that second half has to be a zombie T-Rex, which should throw for a loop any player used to the average humanoid zombie.

The second Deadworld is also world-spanning, but "Zombies, Inc." looks to the prominence of gangsters and the mafia in Chicago during the time of *Pulp Zombies*. As the name suggests, somebody is using corpses for crime and the best or worst of gangland's most notorious are coming back after their deaths to continue their spree. Zombies, Inc. is

pitched at a masked vigilante-style type of game, with the team being assisted by the legendary hero Zaxor, known as the "Pinnacle of Humanity."

Taking a leaf out of *Mars Attacks* -- both the trading card set and the Tim Burton movie -- is the tongue-in-cheek "They Want Our Women!" Coming in small, medium, and large-headed versions, the Martians want our women; when they have them, they plan to zombify each and every one of them. Of course, the exact process happens off-screen (as befitting the pulp game), but another result is that a Martian who successfully zombifies an earth woman also increases its head size and thus its status. Naturally this could be played out in a 1950s-set ***All Flesh Must Be Eaten*** game, but it is just as fun, if not more interesting, to have the characters deal with the swollen-headed invaders with pulp technology. Oh, and woe befall any player who tries to deal with them with a spin or two of that ol' Slim Whitman.

"Scattered Pulp" is not one Deadworld, but four mini-Deadworlds. The first of these is "War Of The Worlds Part II," in which the Orson Welles broadcast sets up a cry-wolf situation when "Re-Entry Zombies" plummet to Earth from orbit and fail to burn up! A pleasant visit to Chinatown turns desperate when all-Asian zombies beset a group of bright and cheery tourists -- that is, the player characters. There is potential here for crossover with the "Flesh Eaters in Little China" Deadworld from ***Enter the Zombie***. "The Maltese Zombie" is, of course, inspired by the classic noir movie and has an amusing domestic set-up. The last of these mini Deadworlds is the Lovecraft-derived "Hannibal East: Reanimator."

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Pulp Zombies is rounded out with a short bibliography followed by a short piece on "Finding Pulp" -- the letter contributed by James Lowder, who also pens the supplement's opening, entertaining fiction that touches upon the high points of the genre. "Finding Pulp" is a useful and interesting article, which matches the advice given throughout the rest of the volume. Particularly important to the Zombie Master will be the "Golden Rule Of Pulp Zombies: Too Much Is Never Enough," as well as the "Zombie Master's Credo: Bring on the Cheese!"

Pulp Zombies is never going to work as a sourcebook for running straight games set in the pulp era, but then it isn't intended for that purpose. Instead it presents a slight but fun take upon the period that touches all the genre's key points for character creation. Then it gives them an undead twist and a slice of everyone's favorite dairy product in each of the three big and the four smaller Deadworlds. Just serve, and wait for the players to scream, slice, and groan.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Terran Empire (for Star Hero)

Published by [Hero Games](#)

Written by James Cambias and Steven Long

Art by Nate Barnes, Andrew Cremeans, Storn Cook, Keith Curtis, Albert Deschanes, Nick Ingeneri, Bryce Nakagawa, Brad Nault, Newton Ewell, Klaus Scherwinski, Greg Smith, Chris Stevens, Derek Stevens, and Richard Taylor

208-page softcover; \$24.99

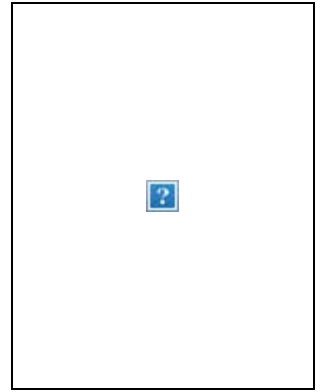
Terran Empire is the first of a planned series of settings for **Star Hero** campaigns, a space opera setting a la *Star Wars*. While it is linked into the Hero Universe metasetting (described in the "Free Stuff" section of the Hero Games website), it could easily be run outside that setting.

The book opens with an overview of the Empire's nearly three centuries of existence. Admiral Marissa DeValiere's takeover of the Terran Union in 2436 is seen by later historians as the beginning of the Empire, though Marissa herself never claimed the title of Empress. The DeValiere line (and one non-DeValiere regent) would rule the Empire for its entire lifespan. While it had some close calls, it eventually covered approximately one-fifth of the galaxy, and its influence stretched even further. Unfortunately, not all the DeValieres were as competent as Marissa I had been. Under later Emperors, power shifted to the military and the secret police. Planets began to rebel against Imperial tyranny, joined by some sections of the Imperial fleet itself. The rebels also established diplomatic relations with two other governments. Finally, in January of 2703, the rebellion and allied forces managed to defeat the remaining Imperial ships. Emperor Sigismund and his elite guards were shot by the crew of his own flagship, and the Terran Empire came to an end.

The next section is a look at the major races of the galaxy. There are full descriptions and package deals for 25 races, plus four genetically-altered subraces of humanity. Seven other races have sufficiently detailed sidebar notes that they could be used in a game as well. Most of these races are not part of the Terran Empire, but there's enough contact with the other powers of the galaxy that most could be used as player characters with the right game setup.

The political structure of the galaxy is the subject of the next chapter. This varies throughout the era, so the authors have chosen to concentrate on the reign of Marissa III (2633-2651). This is a period when the Terran Empire is at its peak strength and size, but when the seeds of its fall have begun to sprout. While the Empire gets most of the chapter, there are also discussions and maps of the other major powers of the galaxy. The following chapter, "Life Among The Stars," also concentrates on the Terran Empire. It has an assortment of information ranging from ticket prices for a first class space liner to criminal organizations of the setting to the Galactic Church of the Creator.

Character creation is next. There is a wide assortment of package deals, for everything from an Imperial Marine to a freelance artist or entertainer. There is no package deal for a PC robot, since there are too many variations possible, but there is a discussion of appropriate Social Limitations for a robotic character. There is also an extensive discussion of skills, perks, and disadvantages in this setting. Psionics get their own section, as do cyberware and bioware (which isn't a major feature of this campaign, but still present).



The next two chapters are the hardware section. Chapter Six is the general tech chapter, with a discussion of the ATRI Scale (the "Tech Levels" of the setting, alluded to in ***Star Hero***). Game writeups are included for a range of different weapons, defensive systems, computers and miscellaneous gear, plus the dreaded Dracon battlesuit. The summary charts include the year each item was invented, for those who choose to set their games in a different period of the Empire. Chapter Seven is the spaceship chapter. The first section looks at different ship components. A GM who doesn't have time to build a spaceship entirely "from scratch" could run through this section and pick out appropriate pre-written drive systems, defenses, weapons, sensors, and life support. The second section has 10 fully written-up spaceships for this setting.

The final chapter is intended for GM use. It has a brief discussion of campaign guidelines (the Terran Empire assumes a Heroic-level game) and themes, but the meat of the chapter is the GM's Vault. This section is full of spoiler-warning information -- if you want a character sheet for Marissa III, the facts on the Mandaarian Exodus, or the real story on the supposed "Xenovore Fertility Statuettes," it's in here. The book wraps up with a detailed index.

Some typos snuck through, and the Hero logo on page 154 overlaps a couple words, but overall the book is quite readable. The galactic maps are clear, and are dual-scaled; one scale measures thousands of light years, the second measures transmission time on the Hyperspace Relay Network. Yes, it's possible to be too far away from HQ to get orders immediately, something explorer PCs will probably enjoy. The artwork is largely grayscale, and is well done.

A *Hero System 5th Edition* GM who wants to run a science fiction game should definitely take a look at ***Terran Empire***. GMs running other systems may want to look at it as well; the package deals and technology writeups might not be as useful, but the history and cultural information could be used in any game. There's a lot of useful information for players in this setting as well, if your GM trusts you not to use any information from the GM's Vault (or intends to change it). It's a solid start to the new Hero Games' plan to support more settings than ***Champions***.

--Leah Watts

Running The Adventure, Part II

It Was A Dark And Stormy Night . . .

Where was I?

Ah, yes. I'd begun driving down that road to damnation, also known as ["How do I run a roleplaying session?"](#) We'd taken a detour last week to look at groups splitting up, and now we rejoin our series, already in progress.

In The Beginning . . .

In the classic art tutorial book *How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way*, one of the sections compares two art samples, both drawn from the same outline, which basically boils down to "The Avengers are standing around their headquarters when a monster breaks in." Now, the first "Don't Do This" sample has a bit that I'm not sure I can do justice to . . . but I'll try. (For those of you with the book, it's on page 119.) The first panel depicts the monster barging in, the fragmented bits of the wall flying around. And at the bottom of the panel are the heroes, "standing around . . . like three simpletons" (to quote the advice pointing out why it's a bad illustration). The blank slates of their faces just beg for all kinds of invented dialogue:

Vision: Help me name my pinkie toe.

Captain America: Jell-O is nummy.

Iron Man: At least no monsters are attac . . . what the?!?

In short, it's a wonderfully bad picture.

Now, what does this have to do with how I run adventures?

Well, I've always pondered that picture whenever I've gone to start an adventure. It helps keep me focused, and reminds me that, no matter what monsters barge in, the heroes are never just standing around, naming toes and contemplating Jell-O.

So once the pre-game show is said and done, I try to start the adventure.

How, exactly, this happens varies wildly. In my *Star Trek* campaign, for example, I had scripts that I gave the players at the beginning of the game (usually detailing some aspect of shipboard life or other subplots that have been brewing). Other times I have a specific opening in mind, regardless of past continuity . . . like the **Werewolf** game where the PCs "woke up" in an asylum, with a stern-looking doctor scolding them that, unless they could see past their collective delusion, they would never get to leave.

But most of the time I don't have an opening, per se, so much as a catalyst. So let's say we're running my Mad Mayor plot (detailed in full [two months ago](#)). The first scene I have written down on my flowchart is a gala ball the PCs will be attending.

Personally, I've found that most of the time I like to work in adventures as organically as possible. I do this by determining what the PCs have been up to, and working in the catalyst into the game. So once game has started, I'll usually ask something along the lines of, "It's downtime; it's been [X] days/weeks/whatever since your last adventure. What have you all been up to?" I'll then listen to them, seeing which of the hooks I can incorporate into starting the adventure.

So our mayoral transcript might resemble:

GM: "It's been about two months since the last adventure. What's everyone up to?"

Player 1 (Bob): "Hmm . . . I've been trying to raise my Martial Arts skill, so I've been meeting with Sensei Shyu when he's available. I've also been spending time with my aunt; I've been trying to make contacts with publishers for her book."

Player 2 (Carol): "I've been maintaining my mob contacts; I'm also trying to see if I can't find any blackmail material to leverage against any professors of Aztec Mythology, so I can get them to analyze that book I found last adventure."

Player 3 (Ted): "(sigh) You couldn't ask them?!? (smiles) Anyway, I actually have a *job*, so I spend most of my time being a policeman. I'm also part of the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program, so I try to make sure my charge Jackson is on the straight and narrow."

GM: "Okay; things have been relatively quiet lately, until one Monday when you all receive more mail than normal. Sure, there's the usual bills, junk mail, and magazines (depending what you read), but there's also something else that catches your eye. Bob, you got two letters from publishers. Ted, you got a letter addressed from Pioneer Middle; you know that's Jackson's middle school. Carol, you have an official-looking envelope from the IRS. Oh, and all three of you have received a beautiful embossed oversized envelope; it looks like an invitation."

Note that I tried to give everyone a bit of advancement in their subplots; it's not necessary, or even always feasible, but I like to do it if possible. All of the elements in the sample above are either non-events (the publishers say, "Thanks but no thanks;" the school letter is from an appreciative teacher) or open-ended (the IRS letter is from an agent who wants to schedule a meeting next month or a possible audit). Note that all of these elements were made up on the fly; they were all designed either to provide subplot feedback or act as place-holders for future plots.

Regardless, that transcript represents how I try to avoid the monster comic panel mistake: I don't make the PCs stand around like simpletons, waiting for the plot to erupt through their wall.

Now, depending on the hook, I quite possibly only need to incorporate *one* of the heroes into the adventure (the assumption being that he'll round up his buddies); in this case I'll usually [incorporate the hook privately](#), and let the adventure go on from there.

Now, this assumes that I have a definite way the adventure is going to begin. Often I don't; in those cases, I'm certainly not ashamed to ask the players to come up with a reason:

"Okay; the annual crafts fair is coming to town. How would your characters react? Would they attend? If so, when?"

Or

"Okay, folks. What would it take to get your characters to Paris?"

And I'll generally get answers along the lines of, "I want to patrol the fair and make sure no one is doing anything evil there," or "Hmm . . . maybe I'm on a diplomatic mission to Paris from my liege?" Then I'll work in their ideas for why they would be at a place I need them to be.

I first used this technique with apprehension; after all, it feels tremendously railroading. But I've never had a player complain; I think they like the freedom of influencing the plot. After all, they may know (on some level) that if they object to the fair or Paris, then by gum we're not going to have an adventure tonight; it's better to go there on their terms than wait for the Crochet Mallet Of God to whack them into where they need to be.

Okay; I now know how I'm going to begin the game. So all I need to do is run the scene . . . and build toward my [pivotal piece](#).

And how do I do *that*?

Tune in next time, as our glacially paced series continues.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

Last time's answer: ***Creature Collection*** (for ***d20 System***), p. 73.

Special Catch-Up Edition Trivia!

(one star) "**Knowledge Points--**

1-- 'All I saw was a red and blue blur.'

3-- 'I saw a man changing clothes.'

5-- 'I saw Clark Kent changing to Superman.'"

(two stars) "2. Builders are encouraged to move and animate the Shape Cards to help players identify the picture being built."

(two stars) "Or use them as is for a parking lot, football field, warehouse . . . Never mind. We'll stop now."

(three stars) "The train now has a complete salon car including a full-size grand piano (a touch which has led to the a-historic inclusion of such a car among the plans found in this supplement). None of the staff will divulge how they got the piano on the train - it is a secret among the company."

(four stars) "Snakes! The whole tanker is full of *snakes*! You jump back as they come wriggling out."

(four stars) "As you look to your left, you suddenly see a large painted canvas, with some sort of prairie scene, which was not there before. It is at least as tall as you are and twice as wide."

(five stars) "Now roll two dice for your bedroom performance - let's hope you're up on your KamaSutra! [*sic*] Doubles add and roll over.

3 - 8: You are truly a lousy lover. She turns you into a lizard. That's the end of this character! Close the book."

Designer's Notes: *GURPS Deadlands: Varmints*

by Michael Suileabhain-Wilson

The *GURPS Deadlands* line presents interesting challenges. Each book must condense many, many pages of Pinnacle's previous work into a concise, coherent whole, while still accomplishing something original within that framework. The sheer mass of the existing canon can be intimidating, and finding for the tenth time that your nifty idea is inconsistent with some minor piece of precedent is . . . frustrating.

It's no unique dilemma, of course. Every GM who's ever tried to run a game in a setting with strong and ongoing campaign support has faced a similar problem. The strength and vigor of the setting are the reason you would want to play in it in the first place, but there's little point in playing a game with no room for your own group's contributions.

The easiest solution is to throw continuity to the winds and do what seems best, but it's not always the best one. It doesn't help if you want to be able to use future releases for the setting; if your group rotates GMs, messing with the setting willy-nilly may not go over well. Even in a world that's solely your own creation, you may eventually be stymied by what you have yourself established in play. And for those of us writing books, licenses and contracts have something to say on the matter as well.

Over the years, I've developed a bag of tricks that I use to work through these sorts of situations, and *GURPS Deadlands: Varmints* worked them to the limit. I don't pretend that these methods are exhaustive -- there are countless ways to approach world development -- but they do work. Most of the tricks and techniques that I use fall into four categories: implication, connection, patterning, and intersection.

Implication

Implication is a very simple technique; it's really just plain logic. You use it by examining any one element of the setting -- a monster, a character, a piece of history -- and asking what the natural consequences of that element must be. Usually you'll be picking out elements which define the difference between the fictional setting and our own reality, but examining familiar elements of our world can also be useful, sparking possibilities that could have been, but weren't. Many of the best alternate histories begin this way.

It's usually especially productive to focus on how a setting's elements affect people's everyday routines. Given that a certain setting element exists, how does that change the way people live their lives? Do they deal with it directly, or does someone shield them from its implications? If the latter, who takes on that role? In many settings, the answer to that question is "the PCs," but it's still a good question to ask.

This type of implication work was essential to the Templates section. Thinking about how the people of the Weird West would deal with the monsters I was writing about helped generate a slew of ideas for character types. Each major type of varmint spawned at least one template.

I began with weird animals. When a steer-sized wolverine comes to town, something has to be done about it. But who takes on the task? Regular law enforcement would be overwhelmed; they already have their hands full with the mundane lawlessness running amuck in the Weird West. The Union and the Confederacy each maintain agencies to deal with exotic threats, but they can't be everywhere at once. Normal citizens aren't trained or equipped to handle man-eating cattle or intelligent swarms of bees.

So who do you call when a demon-possessed dog holes up in your basement? The town dogcatcher, presumably. It seems likely that when faced with an animal no one else has the time or inclination to wrangle with, citizens would turn to what animal control authority there is. Now, if dogcatchers found themselves faced with magically enhanced

critters, how would they deal with that? They'd need enhanced powers, both legally and mechanically; your average Weird West dogcatcher would have to have some level of combat training, and would probably be deputized by the local sheriff and empowered to convene a posse for the purpose of clearing infestations. A template was on the make.

The same process, applied to the undead, was equally fruitful. Who deals with corpse-related problems? Probably the coroner. But the coroner ought to be an experienced doctor, and probably none too interested in patrolling the graveyard in the wee hours of the morning. Thus, a clever coroner hires assistants -- assistants with strong stomachs, a little medical experience, and a good touch with an axe-handle. They can rebury the restless dead, chase off grave robbers and resurrectionists, and investigate weird deaths that the coroner doesn't have time to handle personally. It's an interesting character concept that is implied by the existing canon but not explicitly discussed.

Another excellent way to use implication is to scan the established canon for possibilities that are already explicit, but not developed. For example, original **Deadlands** states that manitous cannot possess living people unless the manitou is invited in or unless the subject is extremely weak and infirm. The "extremely weak and infirm" hook then gets no further attention. So I ran with that and created the senescent zombie: a monster created when a manitou possesses a senile person, fakes a miraculous recovery, and does its best to sow dissension in its host's family before going on a final killing spree.

It's hard to go astray with implication; if your logic is sound, its produce is usually uncontroversial. The only real way for implication to go awry is if you arrive at a conclusion that makes sense, but contradicts some other portion of the canon -- in which case you simply have to cast about for a line of reasoning which leads to an unoccupied niche.

Connection

Connection is a slightly more complicated technique than implication; where implication uses a single element of the setting, connection requires at least two. Connection entails picking out elements of a setting that ought to have a relationship but do not, and then creating that relationship. If you have two major NPCs who logically must have met at some point, figure out how they feel about each other. If the discovery of a new super-steel occurs the year before its inventor's nation wins a smashing military victory, figure out how the super-steel contributed (or, if there's a crushing defeat to explain, how the government put all its eggs in a super- steel basket).

Varmints had more than its share of relationships waiting to be discovered. Material from several different books, developed independently, went into **Varmints**; in a number of cases, issues appeared when different monsters were placed side by side for the first time. For example, the **Deadlands** canon mentions three different intelligent amphibious races, all of which live off the coast of California. No interactions between any of them are mentioned. When they appear in different books, it's not a problem, but presenting them all at once with no context seemed like a bad idea.

Fortunately, I was also working on a section called Antagonistic Peoples, dedicated to monsters that were both intelligent and civilized (well, organized, anyway). Individually, all the aquatic races were questionable to include under that standard . . . but what if they were allied against humanity? The Law of the Ocean -- a loose alliance of undersea peoples dedicated to exploiting the bounty of the land -- was born.

The great advantage to using connection is that it patches holes in existing material while it creates new material. It requires you to ferret out the bits of a setting which are underdeveloped or even contradictory. As a result, it produces a setting that feels more seamless and organic; its component parts have strong relations to each other, and you can avoid the odd element which feels tacked on.

This can be difficult. When working so closely with preexisting material, it's a challenge to walk the line between supplementing precedent and changing it. The goal should be not merely to avoid contradicting canon, but to create material that flows naturally from what came before.

Patterning

To use patterning, you find patterns within the canon, and then complete them. Patterns can appear anywhere a setting has a set of linked elements. So if, for example, your secret-magic campaign includes super-powerful geomantic dragon spirits, and you've already introduced the Dragon of North America and the Dragon of Asia, it seems likely that there are also Dragons of Africa, Antarctica, and so on. You'll have to answer some questions such as whether Australia gets a dragon all to itself or if it has to share with Oceania, and whether subcontinents like India and Greenland get some sort of minor spirits. However, those sorts of questions are precisely what gives patterning its value, and are usually well worth answering. Just in writing this, I find myself wondering whether there was once a Dragon of Atlantis, and what happened to it if there was.

Ironically, I didn't initially think to use patterning while working on *Varmints*; I usually find it more useful when I have more latitude for development. However, one of my proofreaders commented that since Deadlands has ice zombies, fire zombies, and water zombies, the logic of computer RPGs would seem to demand a poison zombie. I thought it was a pretty clever idea, and the Noxious Dead -- a toxic, oozing zombie created by industrial accidents -- came out of it. Thinking about it now, I realize that I missed the opportunity for a lightning zombie, which would have tied in well with mad science. Fortunately, it's not too late.

Patterning becomes even more useful, however, when you realize that it's a commutative process. You can link two sets of concepts to each other through a third set. To return to our secret-magic setting, if you described the Dragon of North America as red and the Dragon of Asia as green, you could opt to link the set of continents, through the set of dragons, to the set of the colors of the spectrum. At that point, you have access to all the concepts that colors are linked to. What does it mean that Communism, which controlled much of Asia for most of the twentieth century, took red as its color? Coincidence, or hidden magical offensive from North America? Now you can bring in the Hermetic system of correspondences to find out which astrological signs and planets correspond to which colors, and then it gets too complicated for me to get into right now.

When patterning works right, it can be extremely powerful -- so much so that it can be worth it to introduce patterns into a setting just to facilitate it. Continents, planets, classical elements, Knights of the Round Table, popes, World's Fairs . . . any set of related elements can be linked up to another set, suggesting new ideas and suggesting new connections between previously unrelated elements. It's an incredibly fertile process.

Its power, however, is also its weakness. As I said before, I usually prefer to use patterning when I have a lot of elbow room -- most often in the early stages of developing a setting. Patterning wreaks a lot more havoc on a setting than implication and connection do; it's more useful for generating new material than filling in gaps.

Intersection

Sometimes, you just come up blank, and you don't even know where to begin. In these moments, intersection is

Galvanic Dead

Most mad science devices rely on steam and hydraulics to give them life, but mad science has also harnessed the power of the thunderstorm -- electricity. And wherever there is new technology, there are new industrial accidents. Many a hapless worker has placed a hand wrong and died instantly, titanic forces surging through his flesh.

After such an accident, a manitou may seize the opportunity to reanimate the electrified corpse. The manitou's magic preserves the lethal charge within the dead flesh, creating a galvanic dead.

Galvanic dead are clearly identifiable by their rictus grins and jerky, spasmodic movements. These unpredictable convulsions, so unlike the usual sluggish undead, make it difficult to draw a bead on a galvanic dead.

Salt Lake City is plagued with galvanic dead; the city's plethora of industrial works are matched by an equal number of industrial accidents, and the galvanic dead's ability to damage intricate machinery with a mere touch is particularly troublesome in the highly technological City of Gloom.

GURPS Galvanic Dead

ST: 11	Move/Dodge: 7/8	Size: 1
DX: 12	PD/DR: 0/0	Weight: 150 lbs.
IQ: 11	Damage: 1d cut	
HT: 12	Reach: C	Habitat: Any

useful. It's time-consuming, but systematic and very productive.

Intersection requires you to first compile a list of the setting's most important elements. How many elements make up that list is up to you. Next, construct a table with that list on each axis. Finally, consider the possible interactions at each field of that table. Each intersection may have several potential interactions; mull over the ideas for a while.

So, as an example, let's make a partial list of the elements of *Deadlands*. For the purposes of this argument, let's use the following elements: undead, weird animals, the frontier, and mad science. One could easily add dozens more to the list, but space (and my list of convenient examples) is limited. Our table, therefore, looks like this:

	Undead	Frontier	Weird Critters	Mad Science
Undead	xx	Railrunner	?	Smoke
Frontier		xx	?	?
Weird Critters			xx	Vitriolecat
Mad Science				xx

Three monsters from *Varmints* fit into this table. Intersecting undead with the frontier generated the railrunner, a spike-fisted undead who haunts the railroads which opened up the West. Combining the undead with mad science created the smoke, a cloud of industrial outgassings controlled by an errant soul. This intersection could also have generated the galvanic dead (above). The intersection of weird critters and mad science produced the vitriolecat, a skunk-like beast that sprays a potent industrial solvent from its glands.

The empty fields in the table represent combinations I wasn't able to use during development. This is one of the beauties of intersection; it produces so much material you don't have to use it all. Frontier plus weird critters seemed adequately explored in the setting, and undead weird critters seemed like overkill. Though, as I think about it, a weird critter that *feeds* on the undead would be pretty cool. Another day, perhaps.

Intersection is also a powerful tool for creating crossovers. Rather than intersecting a list of setting elements with itself, make a list for each setting to be crossed, and intersect the two lists. Even a short pair of lists will generate dozens of ideas for your crossover.

Skills: Brawling-15; Climbing-13.

Special Abilities:

Damage: A galvanic dead may bite for 1d-1 cutting damage, or claw for 1d cutting damage. The coruscating electricity around the galvanic dead makes its blows more painful than ordinary; its victims suffer shock penalties from its wounds as if it had done one more point of damage than it actually did.

Discharge: When a galvanic dead is struck with a conductive object, such as a metal weapon, some of the electricity in its body will discharge up the weapon, doing 1d-1 electrical damage to the wielder. Insulating gloves will protect against this discharge.

Horrific Appearance: See p. 7. Victims are at a -4 penalty to Fright Checks.

Imperturbable: See p. CI26.

Recharge: A galvanic dead, given access to an adequate source of electrical current, may tap that flow to restore its own charge, which the manitou can then use to restore its body. A galvanic dead may heal 1 hit point every other second as long as it remains connected to the current source. The zombie may do nothing else while recharging. A current source must be industrial-scale to be usable; batteries and electric fences won't do the job.

Sabotage: Galvanic dead may derange the delicate works of mad science simply by touching them. Any mad science contraption touched by a galvanic dead must immediately roll for a malfunction; the device will malfunction on a 15-18 (see p. DL59 for more details).

Undead: A galvanic dead has the Independent Body Parts (Detachable Head), Injury Tolerance (No Blood, No Neck, No Vitals), Vampiric Immortality, and Undead Invulnerability advantages. It cannot be stunned or fatigued, and it suffers no debilitating effects from damage. Its focus is its head.

Deadlands Galvanic Dead

Corporeal: D: 3d6, N: 2d8, S: 2d8, Q: 3d6, V: 3d6
Fightin': brawlin' 5d8, climbin' 3d8, dodge 4d8
Mental: C: 2d8, K: 1d4, M: 1d6, Sm: 2d8, Sp: 1d4
Pace: 9
Size: 6
Wind: -
Error: 9

Worked Example: The Chinese Underworld

Now let's put this all together and see what happens when we apply these techniques to an ill-defined portion of the *Deadlands* universe -- the Chinese Underworld.

According to *Deadlands* canon, many of the monsters that stalk California's Great Maze (and, presumably, China) hail from a different plane of existence called the Chinese Underworld. This Underworld seems not to be the same place as the Hunting Grounds, the origin of Native American and European legendary beasts. The details, however, are left vague -- vaguer, even, than the descriptions we get of the Hunting Grounds.

On one level, this is all well and good; it leaves the field open for future development. At the same time, however, it gives you very little guidance as to how to proceed. The temptation is strong to ignore the question and simply use Chinese monsters as superficial mooks. While I'm all for superficial mooks in RPG, I think it's better to make that choice deliberately than to be driven into it by a vague background. There are also a few elements of Chinese-inspired monsters that seem inconsistent with the rest of canon; reconciling those elements is another goal to aim for.

I'll mostly be using implication and connection here. Patterning and intersection are really at their best when you work with a world in its entirety. We're also trying mainly to flesh out background, which is where implication and connection really shine.

First Principles

To begin with, it seems likely that the Chinese Underworld ought to be at least linked to the Hunting Grounds. There's precedent that may suggest multiple spiritual planes, but keeping things simple is usually wise. Besides, the supernatural critters of the Far East seem to have been affected by the Great Spirit War and the Reckoning as much as their Western brethren, which wouldn't make sense if they drew power from a different source.

So we have two setting elements that require a relationship. The simplest relationship in situations like this is to decide that the two elements are actually one and the same. However, some distinction seems valuable. The true identity of the Reckoners who rule the Hunting Grounds (which I'll refrain from mentioning, though at this late date it feels somewhat like concealing the fact that Rosebud was a sled) is strongly tied to Western occultism. Having them govern the Chinese supernatural seems odd (and Eurocentric, for that matter).

Instead, let's posit that there is a single spiritual plane, but different regions of that plane are controlled by different groups of beings. There are published precedents for areas that are physically contiguous with the Hunting Grounds but outside the domain of the Reckoners and manitous. Settling upon a divided spiritual plane provides a foundation for future work, explains the current canon, and leaves room for expansion if necessary (into, say, the African Underworld or Aborigine Dreamtime).

In the Flesh

Special Abilities:

Claw: STR. Hand-to-hand attacks from a galvanic dead also do one more point of Wind than normal.

Discharge: When a galvanic dead is struck with a conductive object, such as a metal weapon, some of the electricity in its body will discharge up the weapon, doing 1d10 damage to the wielder.

Insulating gloves will protect against this discharge.

Fearless

Recharge: A galvanic dead, given access to an adequate source of electrical current, may tap that flow to restore its own charge, which the manitou can then use to restore its body. A galvanic dead may heal 1 wound every other round as long as it remains connected to the current source. The zombie may do nothing else while recharging. A current must be industrial-scale to be usable.

Sabotage: Galvanic dead may derange the delicate works of mad science simply by touching them.

Any mad science contraption touched by a galvanic dead must immediately make a Reliability check at -3.

Undead.

This compromise allows us to wrangle with one of the difficulties that the Chinese Underworld presents: the problem of ogres.

Among the creatures controlled by the Reckoners, there is a clear line between the corporeal and spiritual. Manitous and intangible undead are spirit beings that come from the Hunting Grounds, and cannot manifest physically in the mortal world without possessing a mortal body. Abominations are solid, physical monsters that are created, live, and die in the physical world. Only very rarely does a physical being enter or leave the Hunting Grounds.

The Chinese Underworld, however, features creatures such as the Chinese ogre, a physical being that serves in the lower echelons of the Underworld hierarchy unless they are sent or escape to the mortal world. Both physical and spiritual beings move back and forth to the Underworld with some frequency; apparently even some human groups in the employ of Underworld beings pass through gateways to the Underworld when they must move around quickly.

This dilemma requires us to use implication in reverse. Rather than asking what the consequences of a setting element are, we have to ask what condition this setting element is a consequence of. What situation led to the Chinese Underworld having both physical and spiritual denizens?

Those gateways to the Underworld are the key. Let's imagine that Chinese ogres and their ilk, like their Western counterparts, are abominations. However, when the Great Spirit War came and the spiritual world was sealed away, they, unlike the Reckoners' abomination, were not abandoned to their fate. Instead, they were summoned through the Underworld's portals before those gates were sealed, to serve their masters in the spiritual world. Thus, since that time, the Chinese Underworld has contained physical and spiritual contingents.

This hypothesis demands the question of why the Underworld's rulers would choose to do such a thing. Recall that the Underworld is described as a rigid hierarchical society. This means that the Underworld's minions are under tighter control, but like feudal systems everywhere, it also means the masters have certain obligations to their thralls. The Reckoners' minions don't have to follow orders, but they get no help when they get into trouble; the Chinese Underworld might well work differently. The top levels might even need their underlings. Without lackeys, they'd have no one to boss around but each other, and that can't possibly end well.

New Directions

Up to this point, we've been closing gaps -- exploring the cosmological issues raised by the Underworld, and dealing with the inconsistency created by the Chinese ogres and other tangible demons. However, we can go even further, and use our tools to go beyond the canon.

For example, the work we've done so far suggests that the masters of the Chinese Underworld have a different agenda than the Reckoners do. The Underworld seems more interested in its own internal politics -- even though it is clearly more organized than the Reckoners' organization, its minions do no more, and often less, than the manitous and their creations do. Why? Presumably the Underworld's masters also feed on fear.

There are a number of possibilities. Perhaps they are content feeding on the fear of their subordinates. Or perhaps they just don't want to rock the boat. If the Underworld was content with the status quo, the Reckoning would be a real wrench in the works. Maybe they're just mobilizing slowly; after centuries of the same old thing, 15 years goes by pretty fast.

None of this, however, explains why there is a disorganized Underworld presence in the mortal world. The different demons identified in the Maze don't cooperate; Chinese ogres seem to be all but escapees from the Underworld. It's inexplicable behavior for members of a strict hierarchy.

Well, maybe they aren't members any more. Maybe the Chinese monsters seen on the mortal plane are all renegades and exiles. More interestingly, perhaps there's a schism in the Underworld hierarchy, split between trying to uphold the status quo and trying to get some of the mortal pie while the getting is good. Or, to raise the stakes even higher, maybe the Underworld is split between trying to get some of the mortal-plane booty and trying to fend off the newly

powered-up Reckoners from throwing their weight around on the spiritual plane.

The end result is the possibility that there may be factions among the forces of darkness which a savvy party of PCs might be able to use to good effect. It certainly adds a complexity of supernatural politics to match the temporal politics in the Maze.

I wouldn't pursue this line of thought in published material -- even if it doesn't explicitly break with canon, I think that the spirit of the setting as published demands a united front among the bad guys at the highest level. Indeed, fiddling with the Underworld at all flirts with getting into what *In Nomine* calls "canon areas of doubt and uncertainty". However, I'd certainly do something along these lines if I were starting a new campaign. I like politically complex environments, and because I've tried to work within the constraints of canon, future publications shouldn't invalidate my work unless Pinnacle starts getting very detailed about Chinese mysticism.

Further Reading

- [Six Degrees of Sir Kevin Bacon](#) -- Most Suppressed Transmissions are excellent examples of fill-in setting design at its finest, but Six Degrees of Sir Kevin Bacon is, I think, the clearest example of connection I know.
- [GURPS Traveller Alien Races 2 Designer's Notes](#) -- Unsurprisingly, **GURPS Traveller** is a good example of the kind of work I'm talking about; writers in that line also face the challenge of balancing innovation and canon. As a result, most of the line's Designer's Notes are good stuff, but I particularly like the **Alien Races 2** Notes; it wrestles most explicitly with the difficulties of that balance.
- [RTT: Considering the Ick in Dynamic](#)
- [RTT: The Charge of A Static World](#) -- These linked episodes of Random Thought Table are not directly relevant, but I think they're good examinations of the nature of canon, and the challenges of wrangling with it.

The National Technical Intelligence Bureau (NTIB)

for *Transhuman Space*

by Aaron Kavli

A Short History

As the proliferation of advanced communications systems made global data streams ubiquitous, the US government decided it was time to have a cohesive agency to address security concerns associated with the Web. Hypothetical information wars had actually come to pass, capable of interfering with a nation's economic, military, and government data systems.

The US Senate Intelligence Oversight Committee and National Security Council decided that the National Security Agency and Executive Order 12333 (December 4th, 1981), that established the NSA's responsibilities, weren't sufficient to meet the new threats. Between the FBI, CIA, NSA, and local enforcement agencies there simply was not enough effective communication. At the speed in which a security threat around the web can spread in this new information, lack of inter agency communication could be disastrous.

During the 2010s, Congress began drafting the principles and missions of the National Technical Intelligence Bureau (NTIB), with the help of various intelligence and web experts. The agency needed the authority and skills to handle the current leaps in cryptology, web, and computer technologies. It also needed a flexible charter that allowed it to meet the, correctly, perceived advances of future advances, as well as perform current SIGINT operations. The experts also decided that the NTIB should be responsible for monitoring all government web access and communications to ensure that no one agency lagged behind, possibly compromising the integrity of other departments.

The final proposal was presented to the US administration in June of 2014, and Executive Order 13563 was signed on August 12th. The NTIB was placed under the Department of Homeland Security, and staffed with the majority of the prior NSA personnel, whose skills were still needed, and new technicians and agents skilled in matters of web operations.

While signal and information intelligence gathering remains paramount, cyber warfare is a real and constant danger to the stability of the United States. Terrorists and other hostile political agencies no longer need transports to launch an invasion on foreign shores. And cyberspace attacks don't show up on radar.

Countless attempts each day are made to cause mischief via the Web. During the Andes War and the Pacific War, US data systems, both public and private, were under constant attack. The NTIB was responsible for defending against these attacks. Only one attack during the Pacific War, perpetrated by a dedicated TSA data warfare unit in a secret location in Vietnam, managed to penetrate NTIB defenses (though it wasn't the only success against other US assets), causing a great upset in federal payrolls for the Department of Immigration that took a week to fix. The computer counter-attack launched by the NTIB seemed to have little effect, but the secret building "accidentally" burned to the ground two weeks later.

The Current NTIB

The NTIB is constantly walking the fine line between national security and information privacy. The US has had a definite shift from the solid patriotism of the beginning of the century, to a more independent attitude from its citizens. This shift has seen the NTIB become somewhat unpopular in many areas, as fewer people are willing to accept information monitoring in the name of national security. The most hostile attitudes come from free web advocates; AI rights groups, and cyberdemocratic groups. Especially since the US government doesn't regard AI infomorphs as

citizens.

Accusations from the NTIB's detractors range from being corrupt federates, to actively hunting down and assassinating innocent SAIs, to making people disappear if they speak out against the government, to controlling the minds US citizens via insidious memetic campaigns. Critics refer to the agency as "Big Sister" (derived from the SISINT division), and have a rather Orwellian view of their activities in the name of national security.

While it is a notable and vocal minority that object to the NTIB on general principle, the NTIB enjoys acceptance from most US citizens as a necessary evil, and has a great deal of support from the government. In 2100, there is no organization that could survive long without some sort of information intelligence and defense capability.

Despite having vocal critics, few argue the fact that the NTIB has one of the most skilled cadres of technicians, mathematicians, operatives, and analysts available. The NTIB has small field offices all over the nation, especially in larger cities and arcologies on the coasts. The bureau's headquarters are currently in Denver, CO. This was one of the first departments to have its main offices any distance from the capital. The ability to telecommute effectively and the desire for a more centralized location to aid in speedy deployment, made this move acceptable. The NTIB currently employs over 15,000 people on all levels across the solar system, of these almost 600 are ghosts.

NTIB HQ is housed in the old Denver Mint, which was shut down in 2053 when it was decided the Philadelphia mint alone, in the wake of global shifts to electronic transactions, could handle the amount of physical currency needed for circulation.

While the outside of the mint building retains its classical look, the interior was upgraded for top line networking and security against cyber intrusion. The bureau also maintains facilities and personnel in the Martian Commonwealth on Mars, Titan AFB, and has a small but active department on DeSoto station in GEO around Earth. As off world areas lack the extensive web of Earth, the NTIB sticks mostly to SISINT operations, monitoring Chinese and Duncanite communications, as well as tracking hostile organizations such as Negative Growth. These listening posts work very closely with the SIA and US military assets on location.

The NTIB is divided up into five divisions.

The Signal and Information Systems Intelligence (SISINT) Division performs many of the same duties the NSA did. This division is comprised mostly of skilled technicians and a handful of SAIs. Their main function is to intercept and analyze information gained via RF, laser, and web surveillance. The SISINT division operates a series of satellites, data nodes, and Earth based listening posts. They work in conjunction with US military forces, especially the USN and USAF, for close in monitoring of foreign signals.

On the web, the NTIB maintains several AIs that try to infiltrate foreign data nodes, lurk at interconnect points, and inconspicuously monitor data streams. The SISINT division also performs all cryptology functions and has a network of dedicated macroframes and SAIs that constantly work to decode impossibly encrypted data.

The current Chief of SISINT is Marita Juanita Johnson, known as Mary Jane or M.J. She joined the NTIB after college as an agent in 2015 during a massive hiring wave for the new agency. Mary Jane is considered one of the foremost experts in the US on SISINT, and with her specially raised SAI, Samson, seems to be able to pull important information from the most innocent bits of data. After threatening to retire in 2050, the Director of SISINT offered her free rejuvenation treatments as an incentive. Though over 100 years old, Mary Jane appears no older than 50.

The Memetics Defense Division (MDD) has the responsibility of monitoring and analyzing any harmful memetic codes introduced to the web of the United States . . . which is to say *any* web, as the US has the most extensive on Earth. They rely on the SISINT and IIDD to trace the sources of introduced hostile memes, but the MDD specializes in analyzing the intended effect of a meme, and its likely developers. As memetic warfare has become the favored attack of terrorists and hostile NGOs, it is the MDD that maintains the database and follows the movements of those agencies.

The damage done to the citizens of the US can go undetected for a time before the hostile meme is discovered. Almost

half of the MDD staff is made up of memesplicers and psychologists. In an effort to try to undo any meme damage, the division has extensive meme counseling facilities across the US in various universities and medical centers. This counseling is free to anyone who feels they've been affected by a hostile meme, and the MDD maintains a dedicated facility at their office in Aurora, CO. This meme center is used for interrogations and for those who don't realize the full extent of their memetic tampering.

Currently the MDD does little in the way of long term, strategic, offensive memetic operations. Most operations are usually directed at area known to house small cells of dissidents, foreign and domestic, that are known to carry out violent or memetic actions against US interests. There are no acknowledged operations against any civilian populations as a whole.

The current Chief of the MDD is Dr. Raymond Kalipikov. With a doctorate in criminal psychology, memetic engineering, and pathological psychology, he is well in his element. Unfortunately his skills as an administrator leave much to be desired. Raymond was forced into the position after his predecessor disappeared without a trace. Skilled in research and analysis, Dr. Kalipikov was ill prepared for the politics and responsibilities of his new post.

The Information Intrusion and Detection Division (IIDD) specializes in the tracking, hacking, and cracking of data nodes. They are also responsible for security and data systems for the US government and any agencies granted access to those systems. IIDD also specializes in breaking the security of hostile data nodes, study and analysis of viruses and weblife, as well as investigating crimes committed by infomorphs. They maintain a database of all known rogue AIs, shadows, ghosts, and xoxs. Of all the NTIB divisions, the IIDD investigates the Free Net most often. This division also actively hunts new forms of weblife with a series of honey pot data nodes, called online arcologies, and detains any criminal infomorphs that have been captured.

The most controversial duty of the IIDD is the handling of rogue infomorphs. All digital entities in custody, even weblife, are given the ASIT (p. TS91) to legally determine their status. Ghosts are considered citizens in the US, with the same legal rights as any other human, and are kept in a "VR jail" (called Digitraz) if need be, and handed over to the Justice Department for legal proceedings. The US however, does not recognize the rights of SAIs or EIs as citizens, and has issued the authority to handle them to the NTIB. As it is an uncertain, expensive, and time consuming process, criminal infomorphs are no longer reprogrammed; they are simply studied and deleted. No judicial proceedings are required. This authority above all else is the most objectionable to pan-sapient rights groups.

The IIDD has a specialized agency called the Emulation Enforcement Task Force (EETF) that deals directly with the investigation and tracking down of criminal infomorphs to their physical location. As some ghosts and rogue AIs can have very violent temperaments and well-armed cybershells and bioshells, the agents of the EETF are trained in the use of military hardware and tactics, as well as criminal investigation. As it falls in their purview of operation, the task force is also responsible for investigating and prosecuting illegal emulations, earning them the nickname, "Xox Cops," or "H/K Boys." Those on the task force insist H/K means "hunter/killer," but others claim it means "Hugs and Kisses," from the "xoxo" that adolescent girls often sign letters with.

The current Chief of IIDD is Thomas Simpson, a Major in the US Army. Simpson has spent his entire career in the intelligence field, including field operations during the Pacific War. He was critically wounded in 2090 when his transport, on route to Titan AFB, was destroyed by a rouge TSA AKV. Unable to save his physical body, Simpson was placed in nanostasis and was later destructively uploaded. He is currently one of the few "ghosts" to hold such a high rank in the military or position in the US Government. His unique abilities and great knowledge of emulation operations makes him a valuable asset to the NTIB. Simpson is also the training liaison with the US Army Special Forces, who train the EETF in the use of modern weaponry and tactics. The Major is known to still perform his own operations on the web, to the displeasure of the Director.

The Technical Research and Development Division (TR&D) has the daunting task of keeping up with the onslaught of new technology in the Fifth Wave world. The engineers of TR&D must not only analyze technical data and equipment (captured or otherwise) from nations and corporations from throughout the solar system, they must also develop their own equipment and modify existing US gear to meet the challenges of the advanced world. Lower ranking technicians are responsible for updating, programming, and maintaining the equipment used by engineers and agents, as well as

the massive computer assets of the Bureau. The NTIB, needless to say, has access to top of the line military, computer, and spy gear. Most of the personnel in the division refer to it as simply R&D, as their official acronym has an unfortunate sobriquet oft used by other NTIB departments.

The current Chief of TR&D is Francis Xue, former dean of the MIT Virtual Web Program. Xue left his position after charges were brought against him by a number of students concerning corruption and bribery. Xue was dismissed with little investigation or any attempt to talk to him about the charges. Using his own impressive technical abilities, Xue managed to find a subtle conspiracy that included the use of memetic influence, bribery, and blackmail. While he was never able to uncover the true culprits or find out why he had been targeted, Francis Xue was able to sue the university for several million dollars, get a severance package, and the case resulted in a majority of the Web Program administrators being fired. NTIB monitors noticed Xue's efforts on the Web and he was offered a job in 2088, which he accepted.

The Public Information and Liaison Division (PILD) is responsible for collating data from the MDD, SISINT, and IIDD to inform the US public about new memetic and web threats. They develop new systems, free to the public, that are designed to allow everyone to keep informed and defend themselves against new viruses, rogue infomorphs, dangerous web life, and memetic introduction. The PILD maintains a large online arcology that houses safe and interesting weblife for public virtual viewing.

As a Public Relations body, they are also the contact for the security forces of other nations like the GRA and the BND. This contact is as often to coordinate operations, as it is to file complaints about NTIB activities. As rogue infomorphs can essentially travel at the speed of light, crossing borders across and between countries handily, the NTIB works closely with the FBI's Emulation Crimes Bureau.

The PILD is also responsible for sanitizing publicly released NTIB and other US Government documents and maintaining public opinion about the department. Officially, no meme work is done on its public relations front, but most are cynical to that claim.

The current Chief of the PILD is Allison Nakimora, a long time federal employee. She has worked in the departments of transportation, treasury, agriculture, and the Pentagon in one form of public relations or the other. Allison's skills are admirable, but she has become involved in an infomorph rights activist group and is secretly under close scrutiny.

The Director of the NTIB is Admiral Lars Gesperston, who has spent over 48 years in the US Navy, which required he get a waiver after having had rejuvenation treatments. After a four-year enlistment as an electrician, Lars entered the officer candidate school and graduated to be a pilot. A decade after, however, he was forced to switch jobs as UCAV's became more popular in the US military. Lars entered Naval Intelligence and worked with special forces before finally making it to the Pentagon. With his political connections and years of service and experience, he was appointed to the position of Director of the NTIB in 2097. Admiral Gesperston is a highly intelligent and motivated man who manages to keep abreast of all NTIB operations without undue interference on his own behalf. The Admiral must give final approval on all infomorph erasures, a duty that sometimes troubles him.

The Deputy Director of the NTIB is Dr. Madison Giles. She entered the NTIB only ten years ago as a cryptology technician. She has degrees from several advanced universities and teaches several online courses in between her duties as deputy director. She is not overly popular due to her somewhat coarse personality and almost absolute refusal to answer messages or correspondence personally, leaving the task to her equally unpopular LAI, Numero Uno. There are some who despairingly claim Madison has only been promoted due to her obvious "off the shelf" cosmetic upgrades and a stray backstabber meme.

Mission Statement

Executive Order 12333 of December 4th, 1981, described the duties of the National Security Agency. Executive Order 13563, signed on August 12th, 2014 established the NTIB and its duties, incorporating the mission of the NSA. The resources and responsibilities of the National Technical Intelligence Bureau were organized to allow performing of seven national missions. The mission statement has undergone revisions three times since its creation.

1. The Information Assurance mission provides the solutions, products and services, and conducts defensive information operations, to achieve information assurance for information infrastructures critical to U.S. national security interests.
2. The foreign signals and information systems intelligence, or SISINT, mission allows for an effective, unified organization and control of all the foreign signals and data transfer collection and processing activities of the United States. NTIB is authorized to produce SISINT in accordance with objectives, requirements and priorities established by the Department of Homeland Security, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and Director of the Space Intelligence Agency with the advice of the National Foreign Intelligence Board and any other security agency as ordered.
3. The effective monitoring and defense of US information resources are vital to national security. The NTIB is given the authority to monitor and enforce all matters of information defense deemed to be hostile in nature from internal or external sources. This includes, but is not limited to: espionage efforts, destructive data introduction, corporate or financial tampering, hostile meme manipulation and propagation, attempts at illegal access, and other violations of information legislation and national security.
4. Due to the instant access and data transfer speeds readily available to the public at large, not to mention possibly hostile government agencies and NGOs, hostile action can be launched from nearly anywhere on the globe. To ensure the NTIB is able to react quickly to physically apprehend violators, local law enforcement assets, including FBI, DEA, and other federal enforcement agencies, will be required to instantly provide on site support in NTIB apprehension operations via the auspices of the Department of Homeland Security. This may extend to CIA, SIA, and other foreign or domestic US assets on a case-by-case basis depending on the level of threat and available resources.
5. To ensure that no department of the US government -- through lack of expertise, budgeting, or miscommunication -- is allowed to compromise national information security, the NTIB will be responsible for monitoring and maintaining all US information systems with access outside of internal data systems. This includes all hardware, software, and AI systems employed by US government agencies and any civilian agencies granted access to government systems. Ensuring that all departments with concerns for national security have a common, accessible database will require the NTIB to create, operate, and maintain the Interdepartmental Security and Homeland Defense Database.
6. Hostile data and memetic manipulation efforts can be launched against the unsuspecting citizens of the United States by almost anyone. The NTIB will be responsible for monitoring information systems for such efforts and devise ways to defend against them. NTIB experts will constantly evaluate such threats and make readily available to the public education and information to aid in countering and preventing such threats. This includes providing software and operating system operating system and memetic counseling to undo any such psychological damage that may have occurred.
7. With the coming of sentient AI infomorphs and the independent formation of new and unknown weblife, a new class of possible danger threatens the US government. Constant monitoring for illegal actions carried out by infomorphs and weblife is essential to the data security of the United States. To this end the NTIB will have jurisdiction over crimes committed by infomorphs, including the right to investigate, monitor, detain, and even delete such infomorphs as is deemed necessary. The NTIB will also offer any and all technical assistance requested by the FBI, CIA, SIA, local law enforcement, and any other division of the Department of Homeland Security.

A Few Good Sapients

The NTIB is a powerful Patron or Enemy, depending on the situation. PCs who actually work for the NTIB must have Patron (NTIB) 15 points, Duty (NTIB, 15 or less) -15 points, Rank 1 (US Government) 10 points, and Taboo Traits (Criminal Reputation, Genetic Defects, Mental Instability). Agents and Enforcers must have the Legal Enforcement (international jurisdiction, covert investigations, effective suspension of privacy rights) 15 points, as they are given wide leeway in undercover and intelligence operations. Most technical or administrative members of the NTIB will have no legal enforcement powers unless specifically assigned to a case. Employees acting on orders from a senior supervisor, or assigned to a task force, will be granted a temporary 10-point Legal Enforcement advantage at no character cost.

As an Enemy, the NTIB qualifies as a -30-point disadvantage due to their skills, size, funding, and ubiquitous monitoring of the web. The frequency of appearance will of course depend on how badly they want the PC. For infomorph characters that go out on the web, the minimum frequency of appearance is 9 or less for those who use the Web. Individual NTIB agents with an axe to grind against a PC will probably be a base -10 points.

The NTIB works in several high tech fields, and this requires a number of skilled workers. The bureau uses AI systems extensively, but there are many tasks the US government does not want left in the hands of computers alone.

Administrators

Despite a relatively integrated and streamlined organization, the NTIB is at heart a government bureaucracy. All manner of clerks, administrators, lawyers, spokesmen, and number crunchers are needed to work with departmental AIs to keep track of the massive amount of raw data the bureau deals with on a daily basis. They are also tasked with investigating financial accounts, ledgers, and documents to aid investigations. Useful skills include Accounting, Administration, Diplomacy, Computer Operation, Law, Professional Skill (Office Clerk), and any other skills useful to a government office environment.

Agents

Each division has need of field operators. SISINT agents set up remote taps and man observation posts; IIDD agents infiltrate facilities to deploy spy bots; MDD agents observe groups bent on spreading memes; and even the PILD are known to investigate overly vocal dissidents within the US. These are the people who follow physical suspects, gather material evidence, infiltrate hostile organizations, and work undercover for sting operations. See Intelligence Agent (p. TS111) for appropriate skills. NTIB agents will also have Combat/Weapon, Intelligence Analyst, and Computer Hacking skills.

Enforcers

The Emulation Enforcement Task Force is considered by some (especially the EETF) to be the elite of the NTIB. They perform many of the same functions as other agents as far as investigations and intelligence gathering, especially when tracking down xoxs, but are issued heavy hardware to deal with hyped up cyber and bio shells. They are also called in to assist other divisions when some serious firepower may be needed. Enforcers go undercover occasionally, but tend to limit such operations to US held areas. Foreign government frown on armed members of the US government carrying out raids within their borders, which may or may not be a consideration for NTIB planners. Enforcers will have skills similar to a Gunjin (p. TS111).

Technicians & Specialists

All manner of skilled technical personnel are needed by the NTIB. This includes armorers, computer technicians, robotic engineers, linguists, cryptologists, programmers, hackers, sensor operators, and even mechanics for NTIB vehicles. Obviously, PC technical experts need at least one appropriate technical skill! Engineers, Programmers, Hazmat Specialist, and other technical fields are appropriate. SIGINT and Electronics Operation (Sensors and Communications) are needed for those who intercept data. Some of the most valued, and rare, technicians are those skilled in obsolete technology!

Infomorphs

While one of the missions of the NTIB is monitoring and hunting down rogue infomorphs, these digital beings are among the most useful of the bureau's tools. Infomorphs are one with the web and can provide a great deal of information and analysis of threats. Any manner of infomorph PC can find a place in the NTIB; from simple office assistants, to the personal advisor of a field agent, to an SAI quantum macroframe used to crack codes and break into enemy data nodes. Some of the current infomorphs in service to the NTIB were at one time informants used to crack

cases. While controversial, the NTIB has been accused of using bioshells to house its ghost and infomorph employees. AI characters will be treated as property in this US agency; ghosts will have full citizen's rights.

Freelancers

While somewhat rare for a governmental agency, the NTIB has been known to hire freelancers for irregular missions. This could be people who have a special knowledge of a new threat, contacts that would allow operations where NTIB agents would be suspect, or the occasional plausible deniability mission. Regardless of the reasons, PC freelancers will be given certain guidelines to follow. How strict depends on the needs of the mission, but outright wetwork will usually be right out except for self defense, and contracts (except for plausible deniability missions) will be signed ensuring PCs will pay the consequences for any ill fated plans they carry out.

Medical Field Specialists

In order to keep up with new biological and memetic threats, the NTIB has a great need for medical specialists. Medical doctors are needed for autopsies, genesplicers are needed to analyze bioroids and biological threats, and memetic engineers analyze and counter threats introduced to the US public. Psychologists offer counseling and perform high tech interrogations. Skills from the Doctor/Medic, Genehacker, Memetic Engineer, and Psychologist are appropriate.

See ***GURPS Cops*** for ideas on running a federal agency. Keep in mind that the NTIB is an intelligence agency, however.

Oh, Brother!

by Mike Musteric

This little side adventure can be used in any fantasy setting. It is a good "mini-adventure" when your entire gaming group can't get together, easily modified for a various number of heroes. It's also a useful scenario to introduce new players, new adventure hooks, or a new villain.

Ingredients

Damsel in Distress: Through any number of ways, the party of adventurers hear of news of a local girl in need of some help -- a perfect way for new heroes to prove themselves. If they seek out the woman, she will tell them of her troubles: an evil wizard has placed a spell on her brother because of money that the girl's family owed to the magician. "The wizard has poisoned my brother's mind," the girl sobs, "and now remains at the wizard's side." Good-minded heroes should be foaming at the mouth by now to right this wrong. If other more mercenary or selfish characters need more persuasion, be sure to have the extremely attractive maiden mention her generously wealthy family.

The Villain: Should the heroes accept the mission and seek out the wizard, they will easily find him. The wizard hangs out at a well-known tavern, surrounding himself with other merry-makers and his own entourage -- consisting of various misfits, human or otherwise. The wizard is the center of attention, whether he's telling tales or making deals of various sorts. It's not uncommon that there will be a line of people waiting to speak with him. Close to the wizard at all times is a meek lad of 19, furiously scribbling on parchment.

Cooking Tips

Can We Talk? If the heroes try to approach the popular wizard, they will find out that it's not as easy as it seems. The tavern is always crowded with people seeking his audience. If the adventurers elect to stand in line, they wait for a long time as the line inches forward -- only to discover that it's a line to make an appointment with the wizard's aide! The next scheduled free slot is three weeks from now . . .

Pushing and shoving to the front of the line will only anger the other people waiting to see the wizard. Many folks won't take this impatient pushiness lightly -- especially, say, the barbarian hoping to get a cure for his corns. Brawls are likely to ensue.

If the heroes *do* wait to see the wizard, they will find that he is a shrewd businessman, surrounded by his bodyguards. He is not willing to let any of his entourage go without a price. Heroes can try to strike a deal with the wizard, but the price will not light. The wizard might send the adventurers on some mission -- obtaining some rare spell component, rough up another debtor, or some other fool's errand. In the end, the wizard will try to find some loophole in order to keep the girl's brother and whatever the PCs bring to him.

Have at Thee! If the heroes attack the wizard outright, whether it's at first meeting or after jumping through hoops, it will be an uphill struggle. The wizard has made several friends and keeps many henchmen on his payroll. Anyone with an aggressive attitude will be blocked from the wizard by his loyal underlings. If a fight does break out, the wizard will make for a hasty exit and take the lad with him while his henchmen stay to deal with the PCs.

Extra Spice

Oops!: They party might be confused as to who the girl's brother is; it is not the lad that is always at the wizard's side. The girl's brother is a fighter that the wizard has charmed (or otherwise magically coerced) and is using for muscle. If the heroes start a fight, they will likely be fighting the exact same person that they are trying to save. The charmed

warrior will fight to the death protecting the wizard.

The boy that tags along with the wizard is some orphan that the wizard has taken in to teach him the way of spellcraft. He is shy, quiet, and doesn't speak to anyone except his master.

Celebrity Status: If a fight breaks out, the local authorities will be summoned and the PCs will find themselves on the wrong side of the law. If they try to tell their story, the lawmen won't believe them as they are wary to arrest the wizard -- he's got friends in high (political) places. The heroes will be arrested or, if they escape, on the lam.

Side Salad

Yoo Got A Lot Splainin' to Do: If the heroes accidentally kill the girl's brother, not knowing who he was, they'll discover that their problems are just beginning. The girl might have another brother, an experienced warrior or sorcerer, who returns from some crusade and learns of his younger sibling's death -- and wants payback. He either pursues the PCs or sends various henchmen or assassins to make the heroes' lives hell.

Heir to the Throne: If the PCs do kill the wizard, the boy apprentice will grow up angry and bitter. He'll want to make those pay who took away the only father figure he's ever had. He continues to learn spellcraft, but dabble in much darker and destructive magics. He could return at a later time to pester the PCs, wanting revenge.

Adventure Seeds: This scenario could have other adventure hooks contained within it. Perhaps the wizard, when fleeing the PCs, drops some map to a forgotten dungeon. Noteworthy NPCs can be introduced as patrons of the wizard, including the characters of new players.

High-Tech Wizardry: This adventure can also be modified to a cyberpunk setting, by simply replacing the wizard's magic with some mind-altering brainchip. The wizard is some hacker that hangs out at some cyber-café, surrounded by mecha-enhanced bodyguards.

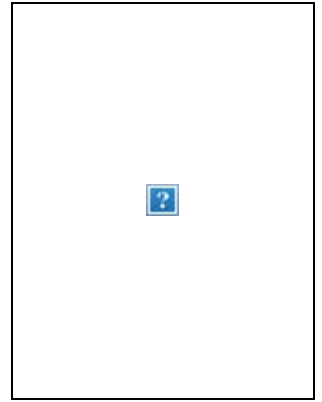
Pyramid Review

Dungeoneer: Tomb of the Lich Lord Card Game

Published by [Citizen Games](#)

Designed and illustrated by Thomas Denmark

116 cards, counters, character stand-ups; \$20



Dungeoneer: Tomb of the Lich Lord - a fantasy adventure game is the newest entry into the range of games with the theme of the dungeon crawl. Published by Citizen Games, it is played as a board game, but comes formatted and packaged as a card game. Designed for between two and four players, they each control a brave hero delving into the tomb of the Lich Lord in the hope of being the first to complete three quests. This will make them the greatest living hero and their player the winner of the game.

Inside the box is a four-page black-and-white leaflet, and a deck of 116 cards. These are done in full-color by the game's designer and despite being a little dark, the look of the cards and their excellent art does much to both make ***Dungeoneer*** very attractive and also impart the dangerous feel of dungeon delving. The ***Dungeoneer*** deck consists of:

- 4 character cards
- 1 reference card, 2 sheets of counters, 1 sheet of character stand-ups
- 18 map cards
- 14 quest cards
- 76 adventure cards

The game is not complete upon purchase, as a pair of six-sided dice are needed to play. Character stand-ups and counters also need to be cut out. Unfortunately, both the counters and stand-ups feel a little inadequate; there also isn't anywhere to store these components once they are cut out. It is better to substitute glass beads for the counters and two colors are needed, preferably red and green. Further, pawns from other games could stand in for the stand-ups; replacing both components would add a tactile element to ***Dungeoneer*** that is otherwise missing.

Each of the four character cards depicts a different individual: a Dwarven warrior, a Human paladin, a Dark Halfling rogue, and an Elven sorceress. They have three main statistics -- melee, magic, and move -- which improve as a character gains a new level. The mix of characters includes one high magic/low melee, one high melee/low magic, with the other two being more of a compromise. Characters have a range of statistics that do not improve as they rise in level, and these measure their Life, Carrying Capacity, and the number of Special Abilities they can acquire. Each of these statistics is clearly marked with a different symbol. Characters also have a special ability that can be used throughout the game and remains unchanged. For example, the sorceress has magical aptitude and can reroll a die in magic combat each turn, and the dwarf's melee aptitude works the same way for melee combat. The paladin can heal himself or others, and the rogue's "Quicken" ability adds a bonus to his move to overcome physical hindrances.

The quest cards, of which a player receives three at the game's beginning, mostly require a hero to get to a particular room and achieve a task or defeat a monster. This might be to "Impale Vladimir" or go to "Smooov's Riddle" in the Mirror Chamber. Others are slightly different, such as defeating "Serak the Assassin," who is easier to find in rooms further away from the entrance chamber. Two quests require escorting either a maiden or a wizard from one room to another. Quest cards are kept face up, so everyone is aware of the quests currently in play with an eye to hindering a rival hero's progress.

The map cards depict the 12 rooms and six corridors of the tomb of the Lich Lord. The corridors can have pits in them,

and similarly the doors between rooms can be trapped and/or locked. The 12 rooms are all individualised and possess special effects that have to be overcome before any hero can attempt a quest that has to be completed there. This might be as simple as undead being easier to summon within the Crypt or as complex as attempting to control the Throne Of Tyranny and if successful, enables the hero to attack another hero from a distance until they leave the room.

All map cards are marked with the number of Glory and Peril Points they generate whenever a hero enters that location. These Glory and Peril Points are the core mechanic to **Dungeons** and accumulate in two separate pools beside a player's hero card. They regulate the use of the game's Adventure Cards, with Glory Points being spent on boons and treasures to add to a hero, and a player's Peril Points being spent by the *other* players to inflict banes and encounters on their hero. This is a clever mechanic that, besides regulating the play of the adventure cards, also ultimately limits how many banes and encounters can be played against the currently most successful player. In general, a room generates more Peril than Glory Points.

The adventure cards come in four color-coded types: the gray-bordered Banes, blue-bordered Boons, red-bordered Encounters, and yellow-bordered Treasures. Banes can either be temporary or permanent, and are played on other players; the Boon Cards are also permanent or temporary, but they are played into a player's inventory. Encounter Cards can either be a monster or a trap and are played on other players. Treasure Cards are put in a player's inventory and represent things like the life-sucking Vampiric Dagger, the Golden Key that will help open any door, and -- the Dwarven favorite -- the Axe Of Weeping Wounds. Boons can improve a hero's statistics or the amount of damage that a hero can inflict, while Banes can shift map cards or heroes, or give monsters and traps their own temporary bonuses.

On a turn, a player discards a card and refreshes his hand. They play Encounter and Bane Cards on other heroes, spending an opponent's Peril Points to do so, any combat with Encounters is resolved during this phase. A map card is drawn and put down, before the hero is moved through the dungeon, collecting both Glory and Peril Points, spending Glory Points to give their hero Treasure and Boon Cards, as well as attempting quests if they are in the correct location. Combat is simple, requiring a roll of the die plus the appropriate stat to beat the roll of the opposing monster or hero. Traps and other obstacles are overcome in a similar fashion. Successful combat earns a hero more Glory, but defeats gain them Peril Points.

Completing a quest can restore a hero's points to their Life score if they have suffered damage, as well as earning them more Glory Points and a raise in level, which increases their core statistics. Upon the completion of three quests, a hero is declared mightiest of heroes and has won the game.

Suggested game length for **Dungeons** is 15-20 minutes per player, but an initial two-handed game took an hour -- a time that should shorten with a few more games. The rules leaflet is tightly written and does not always agree with itself -- is it two starting quests or three? (The reviewing group began with three.) The balance between map and quest cards is quite tight, especially in a four-handed game. In actual play, **Dungeons** is a card game played as a board game, which has some elements of the CCG format. Comparisons could be drawn with classics such as Games Workshop's **Talisman**, but play is far more balanced in **Dungeons**, primarily because of the Glory/Peril Point mechanics. Perhaps in some ways, the game is *too* tight, particularly so with the support of the game -- the cut out counters and stand-ups, together with the lack of storage capacity feels both inadequate and unworthy of the design. It begs for a "deluxe" version in a sturdier box with miniatures for each hero and a set of red and green counters that would give it a more tactile feel. Our group would have liked to have had more map cards -- corridors, in particular -- as the tomb of the Lich Lord does feel quite cramped.

There is only one style of play available in **Dungeons**, that of "competitive." It does not currently possess the capacity for either cooperative or solo play, which is a pity, as their inclusion would very much extend the play life of the game. That said, there is plenty of potential for expansion with **Dungeons**, whether it is with extra dungeon sets or something simple packaged in the booster pack format. One option that is included in the rules covers tournament play, which has each player creating their own personal decks geared to the strengths and weaknesses of their heroes. While this is a worthy option, it seems a superfluous and expensive one when only the basic set is available. Rules for either co-operative or solo play (if not both) should have been included in their stead. On the plus side, the format and theme of **Dungeons** does leave plenty of room for its owners to tinker or modify the game, as well as creating cards of their own.

Dungeoneer: Tomb of the Lich Lord - a fantasy adventure game is a pleasing "little" entry into the dungeon bash genre of board game. In some ways it is perhaps too little, but it very much makes up for this in the cleverness of its design. It will be interesting to see the designer's future expansions for ***Dungeoneer***.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

Light Speed



Published by [Cheapass Games](#)

Designed by Tom Jolly and James Ernest

Art by Eduardo Müller, colored by James Ernest

42 color cards, rule sheet; \$5.00

I have to admit, I played a major role in the creation of Cheapass Games' new card game Light Speed. See, James Ernest of Cheapass Games was a guest of honor last year at Game Storm, a con in Portland, Oregon. I played a few games with him there, and he told me he had a game proposal from Tom Jolly. I love Cheapass Games, and I'm a long-time fan of Tom Jolly's *Wiz-War*, so I told Mr. Ernest he should publish that game. He obviously took my advice very seriously. The game turned out to be *Light Speed*.

It was published as a Hip Pocket game, the cards-and-rules-in-a-baggie division of Cheapass. I was a little disappointed that Mr. Ernest didn't send me a complimentary copy for my contribution, but I bought it off the shelves of my local game shop just a couple of days before Game Storm came 'round again. Billed as a game of space combat that "takes less than a minute to play," I figured *Light Speed* would be the perfect game to play between events at a con.

Light Speed has a sci-fi theme, or at least a futuristic one. Each player (from two to four of them) has a team of 10 ships, each ship represented by a card, to fight over and around a mineral-rich asteroid, represented by another card. You'll need to add counters (colored glass pebbles work just fine) to represent minerals you mine from the asteroid, and damage you do to ships after laser fire. And you'll need an area about three feet by three feet to play. With four players, a little more space doesn't hurt.

Light Speed is played in two rounds. The first round (called the "Fast Round") simulates the ships coming out of warp around the asteroid. You place the asteroid card in the middle of the playing surface, and you shuffle your ten ship cards. Then players start dealing their cards onto the table in position around the asteroid. When one player declares he's done, all players stop placing cards on the table. So the player who deals her cards the fastest gets the most ships into play.

Each of the ship cards features an attractively drawn spacecraft with lasers pointing in various directions, and shields clearly marked on the cards. Each ship has a number from one to 10, and a number of health points indicating how much damage it can survive.

In the second round (called the "Scoring Round"), players check the lasers pointing from their ship cards to see if they hit other ships to damage them. They can also hit the asteroid to mine rocks from it. The lowest-numbered ships fire first, and the ships tend to get stronger (more resistant to damage, better shielded, and with more numerous and powerful lasers) as the numbers get higher. Scoring is based on the number of rock counters you manage to mine, and the number of ships you destroy (even your own, in multiplayer games).

It was in this second round that I found the claim that "each round takes less than a minute to play" to be a little inaccurate. The fast round was indeed very fast, but the scoring round takes some time -- not more than 5 or 10 minutes, but some. This isn't necessarily a bad thing; in fact it's one of my favorite things about this game.

As with most Cheapass games, the rules are both short and thorough. Examples in illustration and in the text are presented in a compact space, and it's evident from the clear wording that this game was enthusiastically play tested -- again, a normal feature of a Cheapass presentation. The rules also include helpful suggestions about the play surface, about how to trace line of sight (they recommend a broken rubber band as a straight edge), and about rules variants. Such suggestions make the concise rules feel even friendlier and more robust than most Cheapass Games. On the other hand, I noticed that my name does not appear in the credits anywhere on the rule sheet, obviously a sloppy oversight.

The graphic design of the game is extremely playable. That's an impressive feat, given the nature of the game. There are some difficult graphical challenges to overcome with **Light Speed**, dealing with shield facings, laser paths, 10 different ships, and four teams. By employing color liberally and computer design discreetly, **Light Speed** overcomes the challenges. My favorite little touch in the graphic design is that the asteroid cards can be turned over and put together to combine a larger version of the asteroid artwork. Keen!

Beyond playability, the design is just cool, especially the art by Eduardo Müller. The ships have attractive vent panels, slick-looking wings, aerodynamic contours, and a variety of wicked shapes. And they're colorful . . . far more colorful than previous Hip Pocket offerings. At the con, the eye candy of a four-player game pulled in quite a few rubbernecks.

At first, **Light Speed** strategy seemed pretty limited. Luck seemed to be the determining factor in the game, so just getting as many ships in play as fast as possible seemed the best strategy. After a couple of games, I started forming strategies about deploying my ships very close to the asteroid to mine as much as possible, or around the perimeter of the battle to pick off as many ships as I could. With a little more play, I began to recognize that some ships are best suited to be positioned very close to the asteroid, some to do a lot of damage in the middle of the pack, and others to lurk around the edges poking at enemies without taking much fire. But it will take some practice to know which ships are which while playing **Light Speed's** fast round. I still think luck is a major factor in the game, which should make it easy to mix beginners with more practiced players, but it also has elements of strategy that will make repeated play more rewarding.

I think my favorite thing about **Light Speed** is that it combines the rapid-fire play of James Ernest's other "real-time" card games with a more calculated scoring round that pulls in all the players. In short, **Light Speed** is both exciting and engagingly detail oriented. I also appreciate any game that welcomes beginners into competition, but still has rewards to offer experienced players.

In the end, I bet James Ernest is pretty glad he took my advice. **Light Speed** is attractive and easy to learn, and its presentation is an accomplishment even for a game company whose hallmark is quality without high prices. **Light Speed** carries on the Cheapass tradition very well, and raises the bar for the Hip Pocket line.

--McRey B. Moyer

Pyramid Review

Red Dwarf: The Roleplaying Game

Published by [Deep7](#)

Written by Todd Downing, Mark Bruno, John Sullivan, Andrew Kenrick, Lee Hammock, Gavin Downing, Allan McComas, and Samantha Downing

Original art by Steve Hartley, Todd Downing

Starbug schematics by Julian De Puma

176-page two-color hardcover with 19 full-color plates; \$34.95

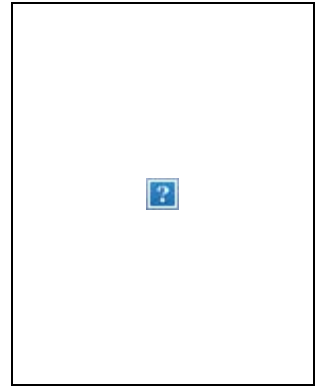
For such a cold and desolate setting almost entirely devoid of life, the British sci-fi TV series *Red Dwarf* certainly has a lot of fans. Devoid of life forms, mind you, not creative juices. In spite of its expansive subject, it doesn't stand out as prime roleplaying real estate when one considers the limitations. But tell that to Deep7. They believe they can make a go of ***Red Dwarf: The Roleplaying Game*** by appealing to a cross-section of the show's aficionados and those in the gaming community who love to see popular properties laid out on a character sheet.

Red Dwarf is about the mining ship that bears that name, and the adventures it has three million years after it suffers a massive radiation leak, killing everyone on board. Everyone, that is, except layabout Dave Lister, who was locked in stasis as punishment for bringing a pregnant feline aboard, and his hyper-evolved cat Cat. Dave's immediate superior Arnold Rimmer, though quite dead from the explosion he caused, persists as a hologram maintained by Holly, the shipboard supercomputer. Three million years out from whatever is left of Earth, the crew now seeks sense and meaning in an all-but-empty universe (which often amounts to resurrecting the strawberry or trying to scavenge new technologies from garbage scows).

The book uses the XPG System Deep7 introduced in their ***Mean Streets RPG***, using the combination of attribute and skill levels to come up with a Target Number for actions. Few changes have been made -- you still toss 2d6 and hope for the low rolls. About the only practical difference comes with the vehicle combat system, which uses both Shields and Hull in place of Chassis for futuristic dogfights.

PCs still have Assets, Liabilities, and Behavior Tags, but a few changes have been made, mostly cosmetic or to better fit the *Red Dwarf* motif. Luck becomes Dumb Luck (of course); Contacts are gone (you're three million years from home -- who were you planning on calling?); and Material Wealth is fuzzy at best (money means nothing to anyone but the food dispenser, and an enemy GELF may be more easily bribed with ladies' unmentionables than with a Time Drive, depending on which side of the hut they woke up on). At the same time, the liability Enemy is gone (the older the universe gets, the fewer people are left to take a disliking to you), and if you have Smeghead on your character sheet, you know you're playing a different game.

Everything is dealt with here in much the same way as it is on the show -- there's just enough detail given to make things interesting, but not enough to get in the way of telling rousing stories of the entire party running away very quickly from things that want to eat them. All the cool ships are described, including the *Red Dwarf* itself and the popular *Starbug*. The equipment that solves all the problems it started is listed, so you can shoot the people you dislike (some of them your enemies) and heal the ones you like (given enough practice and a sufficient margin for error).



Hook up time devices, kit out your hologrammic crewmates, and spend some leisure time getting attacked by Artificial Reality games.

The refereeing section is a little too brief, especially considering instead of a GM you have an AI. An amusing spin, the gamemaster is encouraged to interact with the party as much as possible in the guise of Holly or his/her equivalent. There are some encouraging examples of how this can work in play, but since the book is intended to straddle the camps of both fans and players, additional tips for newbies (there are a few -- tips, not newbies, not that there aren't enough newbies . . . never mind) would have seemed in order. On the other hand, there's an excellent primer on the key factors that go into making the show funny, and these invaluable insights are conveyed painlessly to the reader. An alternate campaign frame is also provided, as a springboard for ideas on how to recreate the world in your image. Add in some semi-misplaced odds and ends about damage from fire and vacuum and the uses of time travel, and that's your GM's guide.

More attention is given to descriptions of people, places, and things than to their statistics, so the AI can streamline them into the game with a minimum of fuss. Combat is brief. Planets are troves of adventure and not a bunch of bland figures about "percentage of surface area covered by water." The whole cast of characters from the eight seasons and 15 years of the show are here, with a brief but informative synopsis of their role to complement their vitals.

Deep7 also adds a list of creatures (always tricky, defining what a "creature" is in this setting -- the monsters often carry on the best conversations); nice record sheets for characters and vehicles done with an official Jupiter Mining Corporation design; a scenario generator; an extrapolation of what the Sol system may look like should anyone ever get around to returning home; and a quick little adventure that pits a crew against the GELF in a winner-take-all, no-holds-barred game of, um . . . golf. With monsters.

Like their mission statement concerning at whom the book is directed, Deep7 is frank about the stills from the show -- the early years were pretty lean, and who knew it would take off? The publishers have nonetheless gathered some nice shots (some in color) of the major characters and sets, and have even tweaked them into mock advertisements for mining corporations and android merchants. The schematics are first-rate, though with the admission about the scarcity of photos, it's a shame they didn't add more of the whimsical, cartoonish artwork that fills in at many points. It's overall a standout example of graphic design even if it does fall prey to the current trend of putting everything out in hardbound.

There are a number of tips secreted throughout the text about alternate universes and how to milk them for a fresh and original *Red Dwarf* setting, a wide selection of character options, and a great deal of imagination packed into the pages. The best licenses show severe limitations and heavy strain when transferred from one medium to another, but one as insular as ***Red Dwarf: The Roleplaying Game*** had two strikes against it going in. That makes the finished product from Deep7 so much more remarkable, and a benchmark by which similar efforts should be judged.

--Andy Vetromile

Running The Adventure, Part III

Pace . . . The Final Frontier

Okay; we're continuing our series on the techniques I use when running adventures. The players have [gathered](#); the adventure has [begun](#). Now what?

Well, at this point the game follows the outline I established for the adventure. The advice breaks down a bit here linearly, since there isn't a set formula I follow for running adventures ("After the combat, the heroes meet an NPC ally . . ."). Nevertheless, there are two facets here I keep in mind:

- Control the pacing, and
- Work toward the pivotal scene.

This time I'll be talking about the pacing; the next part of this series I'll talk about that pivotal scene.

My philosophy regarding pacing combines two seemingly contradictory ideas:

- Continue the scene as long as players are having fun, and
- End the scene *before* the players stop having fun.

In and of themselves these ideas are, of course, fairly useless, and merely a step above those horribly inadequate directions given by some folks: "Make a right nine miles before you get to the old barn; turn left at the tree that isn't there anymore." But with experience, and a rapport with the group, you can get a feel for this advice.

And They'll Have Fun, Fun, Fun 'Til The GM Takes The Scene Away . . .

The first part of the advice is pretty straightforward; as long as the players are having fun with a scene, I'll generally continue it. This seems obvious, but it really isn't (at least to me); in my early days, I ruined -- or at least dampened -- what would otherwise have been an enjoyable gaming experience by ending a scene when I thought it was appropriate, because, by gum, I had a plot to continue, and trivialities like player enjoyment weren't going to concern me.

But nowadays I know better. If the players are all having a ball exploring the city and spending their hard-won loot, taking up hours in what was expected to be a 20-minute pre-adventure jaunt, then who am I to argue with them? Clearly there is group interest in a [downtime adventure](#); the post-shopping extravaganza can just wait for another day. Likewise if the players are enjoying their cat-and-mouse conversation with the Big Baddie, then why not let it drag out a while longer than the sneer-insult-riposte-deathtrap action planned?

Of course, this has its own complications. First, in any significantly sized gaming group there will probably be varying ideas of what is and isn't fun. If three of your players are having fun shopping and exploring the city, while the fourth is bored out of his skull, what do you do?

Well, personally (as I've explained in previous columns) I tend to keep my gaming group sizes small, so that the odds of there being this group dissent are lessened. If at all possible, I also make sure that my players are all at least somewhat compatible; having a player that enjoys hour-long chat and intrigue sessions is probably not going to get along well with the guy who just wants to boot monsters in the head.

But even in these cases I think it's possible to control the pacing of the game for the enjoyment of all (or at least most of) the players. For example, let's take a simple plot: The heroes are going to be approached by a mother whose child has been kidnapped by strange evil creatures, and the adventurers will track them down and release the child. In the pre-game, most of the players are buying stuff and exploring the city, with the combat-lovin' guy looking increasingly bored. Well, at a point when it seemed like the other players were all poring over shopping lists or other goodies, I'd

probably pull the bored player [out of the room](#), and have him stumble across *another* kidnapping attempt. Perhaps he encounters one of the lone creatures, intent on another child; he disrupts the attempt, but the creature dies or gets away. Once the player rejoins the party, he'll have a story to tell them, and that may well prod the others to realize that, oh, yeah, maybe there's an adventure they should be getting to. (If there happened to be two or three players in a large who were bored with shopping, I might ask them to [come up with a reason](#) why they were wandering off together.)

The other thing I realize is that, in a balanced game, it's entirely possible for some party members to *really* enjoy a scene while others merely tolerate it; that's okay, just so long as there are other scenes where the situation is reversed. For example, in the long-running *Fading Suns* game I was a player in (and occasionally GMed), my character was a diplomat while the other player's character was a holy warrior. My primary interests were exploration and courtly intrigues, while she enjoyed tactical combat and roleplaying. Well, most scenes worked fine; we could roleplay and interact at court at the same time and have fun. Those scenes she didn't enjoy as much -- say, exploring an alien world -- were offset by the realization that such exploration usually led to tactical combat . . . wherein she would kick butt and *I'd* step out of the limelight for a while. The scenes remained roughly balanced, so there were no problems.

In short, if the scene is fun for everyone, never feel pressured to end it just because you've got an adventure checklist that needs a-checking.

Stop The Scene; I Want To Get Off!

There's a theory about many vacations and many other activities that's "fun" -- leave the participants having had a good time, but wishing they could have done more. For example, I generally have a great time at [DragonCon](#), but I also leave there every time with a list of people I *didn't* get to see, exhibits I missed, and so on. Likewise a really good movie for me is often one I thoroughly enjoyed, but found myself wishing I could have gotten just a *bit* more plot/dialogue/action. (This advice is often curiously different in the dining world, where it's not unusual to be given portions so large that some part of dinner is destined to be left on the plate or taken home in a doggie-bag . . . or the diner will feel utterly stuffed.)

Anyway, the same advice applies when running a scene; if you let the players frolic around the city buying stuff until they specifically are no longer having fun, then those last minutes of non-enjoyment may be enough to cancel -- or at least taint -- the previous fun they *had* been having. (Think of a movie that was good, but was a little long in places . . . or the comedy sketch that was funny at first but dragged toward the end.) No, it's often best to end a scene when you're sure the players are still having fun, but are also sated enough so that they can happily go on and do other things. ("Sated" is a very good word to keep in mind here . . .)

Figuring out when to end a scene is one of the great challenges of a GM, and there are no easy cues. Fortunately, it gets easier with experience, especially if with the same group of players for a long time.

(Of course, your mileage may well vary . . . especially if you believe more in simulationist gaming, and thus may feel that pacing isn't as important; if that bar is going to get attacked by ninjas at 7:13pm, then once 7:13pm rolls around, so, too, shall the ninjas, no matter *what* the heroes are doing, or how much fun they are having.)

When Suddenly . . .

Okay; you've got a grasp on when a scene should end. And last week we talked about how that first scene should begin. So how do you go from one scene to the next?

Ideally, I try to end a scene with some emotional high: Something gained, something lost, something learned, something questioned, something reinforced. That gives the scene the dramatic thrust necessary to move to the next scene:

So let's go back to our town-creature-kidnapping plot. If the heroes have been wandering all over the city having fun, I may reinforce that by having the mother run up to the heroes, breathless and agitated. "Aren't you . . . finally found you

... you just left the weaponsmith ... heroes ... son ... help ... kidnapped ... creatu ... " And then she passes out.

Once she passes out, the scene ends. Even though the next scene may technically start from the same location (although it doesn't have to), you've given the players the clues they need to realize that they are in a new scene. (It would probably be inappropriate for a hero, after this snippet, to say, "Hmm ... I go to the tanner and try on some boots.") In this particular case, I would get to use a number of techniques: Something is reinforced ("You all were shopping"), something is learned ("This woman's son has been kidnapped"), and something has been questioned ("Creatures? What creatures?"). This should provide ample reason for the adventure to continue.

In the adventures I run, most scene shifts tend to be of the "something learned" variety, although this is often coupled with the "something questioned" aspect as well. Thus, most scenes end with the heroes getting another piece of the puzzle ("Look! A note about two airline tickets ... and the plane takes off in 90 minutes!"), while possibly giving them something else to consider ("Two?!? I thought we were only chasing *one* guy ..."). These scene "wipes" have generally been determined when I [created the adventure](#).

Once one scene has ended, I usually open the next scene with, "What are you all doing?" This puts the impetus on determining the pace of the adventure on the players. Thus to go back to our fainting woman example, the players might say:

- *"Good woman! Are you all right?"* -- This may indicate a desire for social interaction. The woman may regain consciousness and begin talking.
- *"I attempt to revive her."* -- The players may be looking to use their skills to help solve the problem; allow some skill rolls and continue.
- *"I carry the woman to our Inn. They know us there, so we can get a room and wait for her to wake up."* -- The players may be looking to fast-forward a bit; have some time pass, let the woman wake up.

And so on.

It's important to remember that you don't need to treat these cues as gospel; the goal is almost always to [give the players what they want, not what they expect](#). Thus if the heroes try to revive the woman using skill rolls, then she may wake up and start confusedly attacking the heroes; they are now in a position of using their (probably considerable) skills to *not* hurt someone, and to keep her from harming herself.

If nothing else, remember Raymond Chandler's advice: "In writing a novel, when in doubt, have two guys come through the door with guns." The same advice applies to controlling the pacing of an adventure.

And the purpose of all these scenes? Well, for me, it's to build toward my pivotal scene ... maybe.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answers:

- ***Countdown to Armageddon (for DC Heroes)***, p. 12. (This Superman adventure is probably one of my favorite high-level adventures of all time, and has served as a good template for many of my ultra-powerful adventures. And it had neat props like Clark Kent's *Daily Planet* Press Pass!)
- ***Squint*** rules, tips section
- ***Floor Plan 2: The Great Salt Flats (Blank Map Sheets)***
- ***Horror on the Orient Express***, p. 4
- ***Convoy***, p. 45 (paragraph 261). (This was one of the "fake" paragraphs of this solo adventure.)
- ***En Route***, p. 26.
- ***Deathtrap Equalizer Dungeon: Solo Dungeon 2*** (p. 5)

Beyond Cold Steel

Premodern Chemical, Biological, and Incendiary Weaponry for *GURPS*

by Volker Bach

Many roleplaying books dealing with weapons and armor give the impression that the battlefield before the introduction of guns around 1400 was dominated entirely by swords and spears, while afterwards they almost immediately became obsolete and the age of technological arms races began. In fact, chemical, incendiary, and explosive weapons were used almost a millennium before guns became common; conversely, the introduction of early guns failed to change the shape of war for several centuries. Having them in a standard fantasy or historical campaign will not irreversibly alter the balance of power, and many players and GMs may relish the opportunity to spice up things with a dash of naphtha or a dusting of quicklime.

Incendiary Weapons

Incendiary weapons are not difficult to manufacture, and were in fact used by Chinese, Muslim, and Byzantine armies as early as the 7th century, if not earlier. A factory for weapons similar to modern Molotov cocktails was found in the ruins of a medieval Syrian town. Both Byzantine and Crusader chronicles record the terror spread by Greek Fire. The Far East, too, had its tradition of incendiary weapons, including the widespread use of rockets, early applications of gunpowder, and the particular Chinese method of shooting clay jugs filled with molten iron. (The iron mined in many parts of China has a high sulfur content and consequently low melting point, allowing it to be molten in small mobile furnaces. Most European iron cannot be used for this purpose, at least not without access to a massive blast furnace.)

The most common ingredient of incendiary weapons was naphtha, a light fraction of crude oil, which could be separated either by distillation (as is still done today) or by filtering it through fuller's earth. Crude oil was known to humans from at least the late stone age, and oil products found various uses as glue, mortar, or medicine before a way of separating the more volatile fractions was discovered (probably around 700). Such techniques were likely kept secret initially (legend has it that all workers in the Byzantine naval arsenals, where such weapons were created, had their tongues cut out lest they betray them), but by 1200 naphtha-based incendiary weapons seem to have been common throughout the Far East and the Islamic world, and at least understood in Europe. Naphtha, somewhere between gasoline and kerosene in modern terms, could be used pure or mixed with various substances to make it sticky and viscous, create noxious fumes, or make it burn with bright and colorful flames.

A flask or jug filled with unmixed naphtha works like a Molotov Cocktail (see p B121). A rag, twig or other fuse (the Chinese used betel husks) is inserted into the opening and lit and it is thrown at an enemy. On impacting on any hard surface it shatters, spilling the oil and setting it alight on a 1-5 on 1d. A character hit directly catches fire and has his clothes soaked in burning oil, taking 1d fire damage each turn. Water will douse the flame and remove the oil. Shattering the flask on the ground spills the contents, creating one hex of flame for every pint of oil (most flasks contain about one pint, making them handy to throw). Any character in such a hex will take 1d-1 fire damage each turn. Objects in it (such as curtains, furniture, vehicles, or ammunition stockpiles) will catch fire according to the rules in p. HT24. If a target is already soaked in naphtha, it will catch fire on 16 or less on 3d when exposed to flame. A target may be soaked, for example, by unlit flasks thrown earlier or by flasks that did not ignite; anything porous can be targeted this way, including the clothes worn by a character.

Naphtha can be mixed with animal fat or tar to produce a sticky, gooey substance similar to napalm. Filled into clay containers and thrown, it creates one hex of flame for every two pints of liquid, but clings to angled or slick surfaces and inflicts damage. A character hit by "sticky" naphtha takes 1d+1 burning damage every turn. The fire can be extinguished normally, but the naphtha compound can only be removed by scraping it off and the character remains likely to catch fire until this is done (it takes 3d6 seconds). Stepping into a fire hex caused by "sticky" naphtha causes 1d- 1 fire damage. The burning liquid also sticks to the character's feet, causing additional 1d-3 fire damage per turn to

that location.

Saltpeter or other oxidants were sometimes added to "sticky" naphtha compounds. This method produced the fearsome "Greek Fire." It increased the heat of the flame and made it impossible to extinguish with water or smother with blankets. A character hit by a flask of Greek Fire takes 2d+1 fire damage every turn. A flask shattering on the ground creates one hex of fire for every two pints of liquid. Characters stepping into such a hex take 1d fire damage and the liquid sticks to their feet, causing 1d-1 fire damage to that location. Sources report that the fire could only be extinguished with vinegar or urine, though sand should also work in a realistic setting. Water will not help, neither will rolling a burning character on the ground.

Oil flasks use the Throwing or Throwing (Dropping Rocks) Skill. They require one second to ready and one to light the fuse before attacking. Of course, handling both volatile liquids and fire at the same time might strike some people as a dangerous way to make a living. Larger projectiles could be shot from catapults, working on the same principle. They had to be thick-shelled to withstand the acceleration and needed to be handled carefully. Any potter could make them if given instructions, but suitable containers would be unlikely to be found anywhere by accident. Improvising one from a water jug is foolhardy, to say the least. Even purpose-built firejugs may burst in the event of a critical failure on the Gunner (Catapult) roll, setting fire to the engine and crew. Improvised ones increase this chance by -4! Any jug or vase will work for dropping it from a wall or tower, though.

A catapult projectile filled with molten iron is very tricky to handle, needing specially trained troops. This is represented as a Familiarity of Gunner (Catapult). The commander and loader of a catapult crew must have this Skill and Familiarity; anyone trained with catapults but not in the technique is at Gunner (Catapult)-4 to handle the catapult will have to use the IQ-default to fill the projectile properly, unless he has experience with casting iron from other Skills such as Blacksmith. The clay projectile -- a thick-walled jug -- is first loaded into the catapult, then quickly filled with molten iron from a mobile furnace and carefully stoppered. If it is then shot immediately, a target will take 3d fire damage on the first round and 3d-2 the next, progressively reducing the damage by 2 points every round until the iron has cooled completely. Pouring cold water over the target will accelerate the reduction to 3 points per round. It can not be extinguished except, perhaps, by magic (a Cold Spell could dissipate the heat almost instantly, and some Earth College Spells could transform the iron into harmless substances). The effectiveness of a molten iron bomb deteriorates quickly, and it should be used immediately after being filled. The initial damage will be reduced by 1 for every two seconds it remains unused. After about a minute it will transform itself into an uncomfortably hot catapult rock.

As well as thrown in flasks, Greek Fire was sometimes shot from either a hand siphon or a stationary pump. Hand siphons look and work like large brass syringes filled with naphtha mixture. An oil-soaked rag is tied over the nozzle and lit, setting fire to the content when it is squirted out. They come in various sizes ranging from 3 lbs (1 shot, largely a toy) to 30 lbs (10 shots, useable only in sieges and from shipboard), with the most common size around 12 lbs (4 shots). The shooter may choose to fire one or several shots at once, up to the entire content of the siphon. If any of the mixture remains in the siphon, a new rag has to be tied over the nozzle and lit before it becomes reusable as a weapon (5 seconds with a ready source of fire). Of course, an unready siphon can be used to spray the enemy with fuel for other sources of flame to light. A shooter can squirt out up to four pints (4 shots) of liquid per second in a continuous stream. Hitting with these should be resolved as a group of automatic fire (p. B120). Hand Siphons use the Fire Siphon (Hand Siphon) Skill.

Six-Shot Siphon

Weapon	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2Dam	Max	Shots	RoF	Cost	Weight	MinST
Hand Siphon	Fire	2d+1	20	0	-	ST-6	6	4	\$280	25	12

While we have no evidence that pressure-actuated siphons were ever built, the state of technology in the ancient world makes them perfectly viable. They use compressed air instead of a handle to force out the Greek Fire. They can only store enough air for one complete emptying of their tube and require pumping up for 10 seconds per shot before they can be reused. Once the valve is opened, the entire content is fired in one continuous stream. All types of hand siphons can be produced as pressure reservoir siphons. These have a Malf of 13. Treat ST for calculating range as 12, add 20%

to weight and multiply price by 10. Pressure reservoir siphons may have their uses in game settings, but like the pneumatic catapults we know to have existed, they would mostly be technical toys.

When shooting from shipboard or fortifications, stationary pumps were used. Attached to a large reservoir and powered by a hand pump, they could project a continuous jet of flame far enough to count in a naval engagement and long enough to act as a deterrent to attacking troops. Light, moderately mobile versions (about the size and weight of a small piano) had reservoirs holding several hundred pints of Greek Fire mixture and a pump worked by a single gunner while large, fixed designs were served by crews and filled the holds of small ships. These can be designed according to the rules in p VE2 118-122.

An unusual method of delivering Greek Fire was used by Byzantine and Turkish troops in Anatolia. The tufenk blowpipe was made of a five-foot length of wooden tube, most commonly bamboo, that was filled with a thick Greek Fire mixture probably held in place by wax or fabric plugs. To use it, an oil-soaked rag was tied over the front end and lit (it burns for 10 seconds, after which it must be replaced and relit). The tufenk was then leveled at the enemy and aimed, and the shooter blew the Greek Fire mixture out, carrying the burning rag with it. A tufenk contains enough Greek Fire to set a man on fire or damage an object, but not enough to fill a whole hex. The tufenk uses the Blowpipe (Tufenk) Skill defaults to Blowpipe -3). Reloading a tufenk takes 20 seconds and requires a skill roll. On a failure, the liquid flows out.

In a crunch, the tube can be used to hit people with (Staff, Spear, or Two- Handed Sword Skills, -2 to damage). Wielding with the burning rag tied on will not cause additional damage like a torch, but the rag may go out (1-4 chance on 1d on every attack) and the load is likely to spill (1-5 on 1d on every swinging attack). This may soak the target in burning liquid, but more likely will simply splatter it around the wielder ineffectively.

Weapon	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2Dam	Max	Shots	RoF	Cost	Weight	MinST
Tufenk	Fire	2d+1	15	0	-	ST/5	1	1/20	\$30	3	10

Early Chemical Warfare

While far from the horrors of the World War I battlefield, medieval fighting men were familiar with the military uses of various chemicals. Not all of these approaches required the sophisticated skills of an alchemist, though. Some could be quite robust.

Quicklime

Powdered quicklime was used in siege and naval warfare to blind enemy troops. When this practice began is uncertain. It may be very early, given that quicklime is easily available. We know that the method was known in the late 13th century, when English ships used it to capture the notorious corsair Eustache le Moine. Its applications were limited -- the only effective delivery system was scattering it and hoping the wind was right -- but if it reached its target it could do terrible things to its victims. Limedust could be scattered by hand (the preferred method in naval battles and when the users had the advantage of height, such as from a rooftop or wall) or shot from catapults. One pound of quicklime dust covers one hex, settling in five seconds. A bag shot from a catapult does not automatically scatter. Roll 1d6. On a 3-6, it tears on impact and spreads, covering one hex for every two pounds of lime. On a 1 or 2, it does not spread. Anyone within a hex filled with limedust whose eyes are not protected will take 1d- 4 points of damage to the eyes and must roll vs. HT-6 or be blinded for one minute. For 18-HT rounds after exposure or until the eyes are washed out with water, they continue to take 1d-5 damage per round. It is possible to permanently lose eyesight this way (if the eyes take more than HT/2 damage, treat this as a crippling injury that may be permanent), though more likely the victim will be paralyzed with intense pain and blinded long enough for the attackers to come over and collect prisoners at their leisure.

Protecting against quicklime was difficult without sealed goggles, masks, or helmets. Anyone wearing these is, of course, immune to the effects, but such devices were rare or unknown through much of the middle ages. A closed helmet with nothing more than eyeslits reduces exposure -- take 1d-5 damage per round and roll vs HT-2 to avoid

temporary blinding. Gauze or other fabric tied before eyes, mouth, and nose will afford the same protection, but limit visibility. Wide-mesh veils as are traditionally worn by women in many Islamic countries will not protect.

Stinkpots

Stinkpots were round clay jugs filled with a malodorous mixture that, when set alight, produced thick, aggressive smoke. The exact composition was a well-kept secret, but it commonly involved human or animal excrement, sulfur, nail clippings, hair, bone or hoof shavings, offal, insects, and assorted garbage. Stinkpots were most effective when used in closed confines such as mines and ship interiors, or against troops lodged in buildings (they should also work well in dungeons and tombs). In the open, the smoke quickly dissipated. A small stinkpot (about 10 lbs) would fill a 30ft × 30ft room with smoke, though in the open it covers no more than five hexes downwind. Larger versions could fill entire buildings. In mining warfare, the fumes of stinkpots were sometimes pumped into enemy excavations by complex arrangements of wooden air ducts or hoses.

The smoke from a stinkpot is choking and blinding, designed to force people away rather than kill them. An exposed character rolls against HT every turn. On a failure, he takes 1 point of damage. He will also be at -6 to DX and -2 to IQ, partially blinded (-5 to combat), and convulsed by a racking cough. It is possible to hold one's breath and close one's eyes to avoid taking damage (though this will render the character blinded and at -10 to combat). Just holding one's breath still results in -5 to all actions because the smoke irritates the eyes. If exposed too long (e.g. from passing out), a victim may suffocate. Use the rules for smoke inhalation on p. B132-133.

Poisoning Wells

In arid areas, poisoning wells was a time-honored tactic. The usual method was throwing dung or animal carcasses into the water. A dead goat or sheep could render a well foul and a few horses or cattle suffice for a pond or small reservoir. Water contaminated with necrotoxins stinks; recognition is automatic and under normal circumstances a character has to force himself to drink it. This will result in violent diarrhea, vomiting, and abdominal cramps (-4 to all Skill rolls for 1d days. Roll vs. HT every hour for the first 24 hours. On a failure, take 1 point of damage). Other poisons were rarely used if only because they were hard to obtain in sufficient quantities. However, there are reports of wells or reservoirs being laced with strong laxatives to render enemy forces incapable of coordinated defense.

Poison Gases

Chinese sources especially display a fascination with poison gas. Burning various chemicals (mostly arsenic) was to create fumes that instantly killed enemy troops exposed to them. It is probably a safe assumption that the real weapons were nowhere near as effective, as there would have been no way of protecting one's own troops. Burning arsenic creates toxic fumes, but short-term exposure in the open air may not have any immediate effect. Most poison gas attacks of this type should be treated as stinkpot fumes that may cause 1 or 2 points of systemic damage several hours or days later. Some mixtures were significantly more powerful, though. While many surviving recipes do not look very effective we know that arsenic-based mixtures were used in war and for pest control. Used as weapons, these will be deadly in confined spaces and cause damage even in the open. An exposed character rolls vs. HT-2 every turn. In the open, a failure will result in the same effects as a stinkpot, but the character also suffers 1d-4 poison damage every round. This can take the form of corrosive burns to the lungs and mucous membranes or a general systemic poisoning, which would only make its effects felt after several hours. In confined spaces, the damage is increased to 1d-2 and it may be impossible to escape the smoke before falling unconscious. The smoke is quickly dispersed by wind, but will linger for several hours in tunnels or caves. It may also leave a poisonous residue on all surfaces that can be ingested or absorbed through the skin by careless characters (at the GM's discretion -- 1-3 points of systemic poison damage unless all skin is protected).

Contemporary chroniclers tell of terrifying weapons used by particularly diabolical foes like the Mongols or Kipchaks. They can be included in a cinematic or fantasy campaign, but probably have no basis in reality. Delivered from tubes, a thick, black, heavy smoke rolled along the ground. It was reported to drop its victims unconscious within seconds, killing them without fail if they were not dragged to safety. Anyone breathing the Smoke of Death has to roll vs. HT-

4. On a failure, he takes 3d damage. On a success, he takes 1d+2. Roll again every second afterwards. On a failure, the character takes a further 1d.

A Bag of Tricks

In siege operations, beehives (and wasp or hornet nests) were sometimes used as weapons, either shot from catapults or dropped on besiegers. The emerging angry insects attacked any creature within their range (about 15 hexes) doing 1 point of damage each round (normal armor does not protect, though a beekeeper's suit would). Afterwards they swarmed, causing additional complications if they chose to settle in an inconvenient location. A variation of this was for troops in warmer climates to collect snakes, venomous spiders, or scorpions to seal in clay pots and drop on enemy soldiers. The actual damage done by the bewildered, terrified, starved and asphyxiated animals was probably minimal, but the psychological effect must have been considerable, especially among barefoot or sandalled troops within the confines of a siege tower or ship. Assess Fright Checks, at penalties if the creepy-crawlies get into their armor! Of course, in a cinematic campaign the snakes and scorpions can all be highly venomous and aggressive, killing soldiers left and right.

Another trick widely used by defenders of a fortress was to boil a decoction of fenugreek and pour this over enemy siege engines or ladders. The liquid rendered every surface slippery, making scaling defended walls almost impossible. All Climbing rolls are at -4 and anyone standing on a horizontal surface covered in it must roll against DX for every movement to avoid falling.

A particularly fiendish weapon used against armored besiegers was hot sand. Sieved to remove all larger objects and impurities, it was heated in shallow dishes until it was red-hot and then poured over the enemy from walls or towers. Anyone hit suffers 1d-2 burning damage against which armor protects. However, the hot sand will then pass into armor and clothing, doing 1d-5 damage for 10 rounds afterwards. Even after cooling completely, it continues to cause pain and irritation to the burned areas, putting the victim at -2 to all actions (High Pain Threshold negates this penalty, Low Pain Threshold doubles it). It can only be removed after removing all armor. Men who were hit often panicked, tearing off their breastplates and helmets in full view (and range) of enemy archers and slingers. Affected characters must roll vs. Will (with bonuses or penalties for High and Low Pain Threshold, respectively) to avoid doing this.

Gunpowder Weapons

Incendiary Arrows

The earliest use of gunpowder was as an incendiary rather than an explosive. Arrows fitted with soft-shelled gunpowder packages were used in China by the 11th century, and naphtha-based compounds even earlier. Shot from powerful siege crossbows, the spear-sized arrows could carry several pounds of incendiary lit immediately before shooting. They must have been considerably more accurate than rockets. A two-pound package of gunpowder strapped to the arrow of a powerful siege crossbow (or delivered by throwing or dropping) will do 6d burning damage to whatever it is in contact with when going off, half that within the same hex, a quarter within two hexes. Concussion damage is negligible and there is no fragmentation damage unless something frangible gets in the way. Resolve starting fires by the rules on p. HT 24. A naphtha compound container shot with an arrow will cause the same damage as a similar-sized flask.

Hand and Catapult Bombs

True explosive bombs were first shot from trebuchets in the 12th century in China. They were iron-cased and filled with gunpowder, ranging from apple-sized hand grenades weighing about two pounds and doing 1d+2 [2d] damage (see p. HT44-45 for details on hand grenades) to pumpkin-sized catapult missiles fitted with small wheels to allow the service crew to move them. These gained little popularity in Europe, where they became known only after guns came into use. A bomb shot from a relatively light trebuchet might weigh 15 lbs and cause 6d×4 [10d] damage. The largest ones shot from huge trebuchets weighed 750 lbs and caused 6d×150 [12d] damage. They used slowmatch fuses

that burned for a set period of time and thus could be extinguished by a fast-acting soldier on the receiving end before exploding or endanger the catapult crew in the event of a mishap on shooting. Handling catapult bombs is a Familiarity of Gunner (Catapult). The Loader of the catapult must have this Skill and Familiarity to use them safely.

Firelance

A firelance is an outsize Roman candle, normally strapped to a spearshaft or polearm. They were popular in China from the 12th century on, and later came into use in the West as well. A typical firelance creates a three-foot tongue of flame for about twenty seconds. Pointing it at an enemy within range (use the higher of Polearm+2, Spear+2 or DX) will cause 1d-1 fire damage per second. Armor protects normally, but the protection deteriorates against fire (p. B130). The attack can be blocked or dodged, but not parried. In battle, it can be used to frighten horses, break up infantry formations, or set alight rigging and structures. A "firelance" weighs six lbs and costs \$10.

Larger and more powerful firelances are recorded in the sources, including some that also fired projectiles (broken pieces of porcelain and poisoned darts are mentioned) or discharged poison gas. The largest versions were said to burn for five minutes, shooting flame as far as 10 yards. This is likely to be exaggeration on the part of the writers, but the possibility should not be entirely discounted. Firelances shooting multiple bullets sequentially are known in Europe in the 15th century.

Rockets

Black-powder-driven rockets similar to those used by fireworks companies today can make effective weapons, though their weight-to-power ratio is worse than that of guns. Historically they preceded guns in the Far East, where they were most likely known from the 12th century onwards. The simplest (if not necessarily earliest) rockets, known as "ground rats," were small and inaccurate. Their purpose was to fly about among enemy troops and cause annoyance by burning their clothes and skin. For game purposes, which direction a "ground rat" jumps is decided randomly (roll for Scatter, see p. B119). A character inside the entered hex must roll vs. DX or suffer damage (1d-3 fire, armor protects normally). "Ground rats" can be evaded by stepping outside the hex. Where it is important not to do this (e.g. in infantry formations) an affected character rolls vs. the higher of Will, Soldier or Tactics (Drill) to fight the impulse. Pyrophobic characters or those dressed in easily flammable clothes can be sent into a panic by such weapons.

More effective rockets were launched in volleys from racks. Tipped with arrowheads they made effective antipersonnel weapons, though aiming was a matter of luck and numbers rather than skill and accuracy. Small vase- shaped containers with 6-12 rockets could be carried by individual soldiers while larger cart- and wheelbarrow-mounted racks holding up to 100 were moved about by artillery teams. Placed in the frontline, their volleys could blunt a cavalry charge or tear great holes into infantry formations. Their main weakness was the long reloading time which made them effectively one-shot weapons unless used from a fortified position.

Small rocket

(Huge solid warhead, Wwt 0.22 lbs, Wcost \$0.22, Mwt 1.54 lbs (7×) , Mcost \$1.54 WPS 1.76 lbs, VPS 0.035 cf, CPS \$1.76)

Malf	Guid	Type	Damage	Speed	End	Max	Acc
13	None	Imp	4d+1imp	140	0.687	100/500	7

Heavier rockets were launched with incendiary or explosive warheads, either singly or in volleys. They were mostly used in siege operations to destroy engines of war or terrorize city populations. Their accuracy was low and they probably malfunctioned catastrophically on occasion, but their effectiveness -- when successful -- made up for their deficiencies.

Large siege rocket

(Normal LE warhead, Wwt 13.82 lbs, Wcost \$27.64, Mwt 20.73 lbs (1.5×), Mcost \$20.73 WPS 34.55 lbs, VPS 0.69 cf, CPS \$48.37)

Malf	Guid	Type	Damage	Speed	End	Max	Acc
13	None	Imp	6d×13 exp [10d]	100	12.01	1,200	10

Gadget Rocketry

In China, rocketry was developed into an advanced art. Some fascinating devices were built, among them the "Fire Dragon Issuing from the Water," a two-stage rocket the sources claim was intended for naval warfare. This was a five-foot tube made to look like a dragon to which two or four smaller rockets were attached at the sides. These were to carry it over the water at a low trajectory until the main stage ignited, smashing the heavy warhead into its target.

The Fire dragon is a very fickle, over-engineered weapon that is best used against large targets such as fleets (aiming it in any meaningful sense is out of the question). We do not know how it was launched, but most likely it was placed in a shallow trough pointed upwards and the side rockets lit. Its advantage lies in its flat trajectory -- it can be used against floating targets at a very long range. Skipping so low over the water that it will intersect the rigging of a ship at any given point along its flight path rather than having to be aimed in an indirect fire arc, it is an anti- squadron weapon rather than one for combat between individual vessels. One also suspects it must have been beloved more by its designers than artillerymen.

Malf	Type	Damage	End	Max	Acc	WPS	CPS	VPS
13	Expl	6d×27 [12d]	(total) 55 sec, (stage II) 3.9 sec	(total) 1,800 yds, (stage II) 780 yds)	n.a.	688.09 lbs	\$907	7.46cf

Another design described in the sources is a winged bird driven by rockets, with explosives concealed in the body. It is unknown whether the wings were ornamental or whether it was a true aerodynamic flyer, but given the kites built at the time the latter is at least possible. Such a design would be almost impossible to aim in more than a general direction, but have a long range and large payload.

Flying Crow With Magic Fire Rocket (TL3 air vehicle)

The "Flying Crow with Magic Fire" designed here is a bird figure made from bamboo splints covered in paper in the manner if modern model planes. Unlike those, the "Flying Crow" is powered by rockets. Its core is a bag of 40 lbs of loose serpentine gunpowder with a slow fuse. It is assumed to be an aerodynamic flyer that can travel about 400 yards under its own power in the first 15 seconds, then gliding until it meets an obstacle or hits the ground. The powder will go off several seconds after the rockets burn out (the fuse can be cut to varying lengths), causing 6d×24 fire damage to anything in contact with it. The Chinese sources particularly stress the bright flash that "can be seen miles away." Especially at night, such "Flying Crows" could be effective terror weapons, silent and almost invisible in their final approach.

Subassemblies: Wings -3
Power & Propulsion: solid fuel rockets, 40lbs-thrust for 15 seconds
Occupancy: none
Cargo: 0.5 cf
Armor: none
Size: 2'x1.5'x0.75' *Payload:* 40 lbs *Lwt:* 57 lbs
Volume: 1.0 cf *Size Mod:* -2 *Price:* \$24.50
HT: 8 **HP:** 1 [Bo] 1 [Wing]
ASpd 280 mph
AAccel 14 mph/s
ADecel 6 mph/s
AMR 1.5

The Shared Network Focus

by Steven Marsh

*"Oh, Charles!" Scarlet gasped, wrapping her arms around him. "You saved my father's life! How can I **ever** repay you? I never knew you were skilled in open heart surgery!"*

*"There's a lot about me you don't know, my dear . . ." said Charles with a wink, adjusting his simple crossed-loop pendant. **At last**, he thought. **My chance to impress her. I've caught her eye, and I can now use my natural charm and wits to win her over!** "But we shouldn't think about that now. Your father's health is all that matters. And yet, we should let him rest; would you like to get some coffee?"*

And then it was gone.

But still he continued, unaware. "Umm . . . yep, coffee. Do you want some? You're pretty. What's your sign?"

Scarlet arched an eyebrow. Charles began to sweat.

Meanwhile, in Bogotá, a local librarian named Anna was adjusting her crossed-loop pendant and seducing a shopkeeper named Eduardo with uncharacteristic ease.

* * *

The Shared Network Focus is a generic plot device; although intended primarily for comedic effect, it should also find a home in more "serious" games.

The concept is simple: Take any given group of people, and imagine that all their skills are in a communal pool. Any members of that group can use any of the skills of anyone else . . . *but*, when in use, that skill is unavailable to the person it belongs to.

This concept is embodied by the Shared Network Focus. Someone with the Focus is able to tap into this network; likewise, other people in the Network are able to tap into his abilities. (The exact nature of the Focus is up to the GM, although some ideas are below.)

The upshot of this is that a person who is part of the Network will find himself capable of skills and feats previously unknown to him . . . yet he may also find himself robbed of his own abilities at crucial times.

Rules of the Network

Although the exact nature of the Network and the Focus are left up to the GM, here are some general guidelines that are common among all known Foci:

Each person may only enter and leave the Network once. This "feature" of the Network seems designed to keep people from joining briefly to acquire they need, then disconnecting to keep other people from accessing his abilities. Although it is possible to use the Focus in this way, it then in essence becomes a one-shot device.

The Network always provides the best it can for its users. The Network is not omniscient; it doesn't know to provide only what is necessary. Thus someone who uses the focus to speak Latin will find himself in possession of the best Latin-speaking ability in the Network (even if he only needs it briefly for a trivial translation).

It is difficult to say what happens if two people need the same ability at roughly the same. Most known Foci are absolute in their skill loaning, and merely lock out *all* other attempts at that skill until it is relinquished; thus if

someone is in possession of the best Latin skill, then all other Network requests for Latin are denied until the current skill possessor relinquishes it. But at least one known Focus (the Ugly Plaid Clip-On Power Tie) is able to handle a sophisticated recursive queue; thus if a second person requests Latin in this circumstance, he will be in possession of the *second* best Latin ability in the Network, and so on. This has the odd consequence that, in times of great Network stress, certain skills are completely drained and locked; for example, around tax day in the United States (April 15th), the best accountants in the Network are reduced to clueless paper-gnawers while the rest all struggle to hold on to their accounting knowledge.

One upshot of this aspect of the Network is that some more civic-minded members tend to think long and hard before "borrowing" certain skills. After all, someone who borrows, say, driving will be taking it from the best driver in the Network . . . who almost certainly uses that skill in life-or-death situations often.

The Network doesn't provide abilities you already have. Thus if you are already a doctor, you can't borrow the skills of the greatest doctor in the world. (In games with a default skill system, it is probably best to assume that anyone who is working off a default does not, in fact, possess the skill.) For those networks that allow a recursive queue borrowing system, this means that someone who finds his skill suddenly robbed cannot immediately request the "second best" skill.

The Network requires conscious activation. Almost all known Shared Network Foci require conscious effort to activate ("I start thinking about the Network, looking for cooking skills."); some even require more active effort ("I turn the knob on the watch for 10 seconds, then whisper 'Acrobatics' to it."). Thus while it's possible to use the Network for more "martial" pursuits, it is usually ineffective for surprise combat situations.

The Network requires conscious deactivation, or unconsciousness. Likewise Network members need to specifically give up the skill once they no longer want it. Otherwise they continue to possess the skill. However, this does not seem to apply with sleep or other unconsciousness; a Network member who goes to bed with borrowed History knowledge will not wake up with that information.

The Network only provides one skill at a time. The Network seems to know that, human nature being what it is, people may become greedy and hold on to as many skills as possible for as long as possible, "Just in case." The Network doesn't like this. Thus a member is unable to tap the Network for knowledge of nuclear physics, blacksmithing, and belly dancing, all at the same time. The Network *does* seem to allow members to acquire "clusters" of related skills necessary, especially if those skills are tied. Thus someone may be able to borrow an ability in both fighting and dodging, or cryptography and computers (if the latter is required to do the former). However, the Network is unable to synthesize abilities, and any such linked abilities all need to come from the same person; thus if the best cryptographer in the Network is unable to use computers, then a request for cryptography skills will not impart any computer skills. (This means that a request to the Network for "the best fighter who can avoid blows" may well result in a different borrowed skill set than a request for "the best dodger who can fight.") The Network member *is* able to use his own skills in conjunction with the borrowed ability; for example, if an expert computer programmer were to borrow cryptography, he would be able to use that skill to work on a computer problem, even if the originating cryptographer didn't have any computer skills.

Beyond these aspects, there seems to be a wide variance in the abilities of the Network. Some of the elements that influence the abilities of the Network are:

- **Network Size:** The more members there are, the greater the information base, and the higher the "best" skills will tend to be. Also, the individual members in this situation will probably not be tapped on for their skills very often (unless they possess truly exceptional abilities).
- **Range:** Most Foci have an infinite (or at least seemingly so) range; others are more limited. Limited Networks tend to have more variance in the available skills; after all, "the best doctor in the Network" isn't the same thing as "the best doctor in the Network in a 100-mile radius."
- **Limits on Information:** What, exactly, is a skill to the Network is up to the GM to define. In particular this becomes questionable regarding information skills; it is theoretically possible for the Network to be able to

provide knowledge to one who requests something like, "I desire information on the Great Conspiracy" . . . especially if someone with that information is a member of the Network. In general, most Networks frown on being used as a form of telepathy, and while requests for "knowledge of English literature" or "lore on the Occult" might be honored, a desire for "information only Doug knows" probably will not.

- **Traceability:** Most Foci are unable to track down the other members of the Network, but some might allow that as a possibility; a Focus pendant, for example, may glow warmer as it nears another of its kind. In general, the Network probably works best if the PCs can't easily track down other members, but it's still a possibility, and one that allows for exciting (if different) adventures.

Sample Foci

The "You Can Do It!" Motivational Tape

This ordinary cassette tape sounds at a casual listen like any number of infomercial self-help tapes. But Dr. Ziff's "You Can Do It!" program is truly different. It encourages the listener to focus on his goals, and decide what he *really* wants out of life at that moment. (It also contains motivational lines like, "How do you really *know* you're not bulletproof? Have you ever been shot?") Many listeners have recorded remarkable results, but just as many who have listened to the tapes repeatedly have found their own abilities faltering at unusual times. Practitioners are encouraged by the tape (but not required) to say, "I can do it!" before using their newfound skill. (Unlimited Range; Hundreds or Thousands of Members; Queued Skill Acquisition; 30-minute activation time)

The Cosmic Costume

As near as anyone can determine, a crate of these Cosmic Costumes fell to earth at some time in the 1970s; breaking open in an ocean, the currents spread the costumes far and wide. Garish, gaudy, and with an odd glyph on the front that looks like a nose, this costume (and the accompanying cape) would never be worn by any self-respecting person in other circumstances. Although they function similarly to other Foci regarding skills, the Cosmic Costume *really* comes into its own when worn by individuals with metahuman abilities. The powers possessed by these super-beings can be swapped around the Network the same way as other abilities. Currently most of the costumes are in possession of low-powered superheroes, who have formed a loose affiliation (The Costumeers). Unfortunately, they haven't had much luck; three members with significant defensive abilities have been seriously injured or died when their powers were borrowed at inopportune times, and Captain X-Ray finds himself without his uncanny vision almost continuously. What the Costumeers don't realize is that five of the costumes are in possession of an evil, shadowy organization (well, as shadowy as you can be while wearing gaudy costumes) -- an organization called, creatively, the Anticostumeers. Oh, and one costume is also possessed by a Detroit, Michigan native (who wears it with a Detroit Tigers baseball cap and a London Fog trench coat); this otherwise normal man is viewed as a loony by others in the city, but he doesn't care . . . not so long as he has that wonderful, wonderful see-through vision. (Unlimited Range; 30 Costumes; Absolute Skill Acquisition; Near-Instantaneous Activation)

Smart Chalk

Why do brilliant scientists always seem so addlebrained? Why do so-called "mad doctors" trail off at the end of their thoughts? Why do all brilliant scientific minds all speak with the same vaguely European accent? Smart Chalk! Yes, practically all the great minds use chalk, and one reason they *don't* change the world with their brilliant research and plans is because they are continuously swapping around the same knowledge among themselves. The first box of Smart Chalk is presented as a gift by the Aetherfact Scientific Supply House to all scientists who complete post-doctoral research. (Aetherfact makes its money on subsequent orders.) Smart Chalk is probably the finest chalk for scientists, and if the recipient uses it, he is a part of the Network for as long as he possesses that brand of chalk (or has it on order). Smart Chalk's powers are activated by writing with it; as the scientist scribbles more and more arcane symbols with the chalk, he finds his knowledge augmented; it lasts until he's distracted. (Unlimited Range; Tens of Thousands Of Members; Absolute Skill Acquisition; Significant Activation Time; Limited to Scientific Theories,

The Urban Hive

The origins of the Urban Hive are, for the most part, unknown (or not being revealed). It was originally called simply "the Hive;" once its members realized they grew more powerful the more of them were clustered together, however, they became known as the Urban Hive. Individual clusters are spread out throughout the world, although they congregate in cities. Members of the Hive are known by simple featureless reddish-gold rings they wear on their pinkies. Members of the Urban Hive who wish to activate their ability must first whistle a seemingly tuneless five-note sequence (envision "Pop Goes The Weasel" whistled backwards). Those who have crossed the Urban Hive often find themselves living in terror of hearing those notes, and it is not uncommon to hear the five-note sequence followed by a rifle shot from an expert marksman. There is currently a struggle in the Hive between two factions, one which seems to want to use the power for a sinister end, while the other which seems to have a higher benevolent purpose in mind. (This can make an interesting alternative *In Nomine* plot device or overarching goal.) (50-mile range; Hundreds of Thousands of Members [or more]; Absolute Skill Acquisition; Near-Instantaneous Activation)

Using The Foci In A Game

The Shared Network Focus can be very powerful and unbalancing, and the GM will need to think carefully before allowing it into his game. For game balance in general, it should probably only be offered to a character who has something to give up (in other words, a skill or ability at a high enough level that it's conceivable someone may borrow it). Ideally the Network should be very mercurial and chaotic in nature; members may swap skills around like crazy, then find themselves locked up when specific abilities they need (or should already possess) are unavailable. The Focus works well in humorous campaigns -- since it's amusing to suddenly possess abilities you didn't before, then forget abilities you were supposed to have -- but it can be adapted to many other genres as well (as the horror-tilted Urban Hive shows). If the player seems to be abusing the ability, make sure you emphasize that the skills so borrowed are unavailable to the original possessor during that time; if it continues to be a problem with borrowed vital skills, have repercussions from those originating practitioners come back to haunt the PCs. And, of course, since the Focus is, ultimately, an object, it can always be taken away if it grows too unwieldy, powerful, or unbalancing.

In general, for the most part it's not important to actually determine *what* skills are available; for medium or large Networks, simply assume that most abilities can be accessed. Common abilities (Calculus, Spanish) have a greater chance of being available than more esoteric ones (Demonology), and the former will generally be available at higher skill levels than the latter. In play the Focus can be used to keep the Network member off-balance (knowing things he shouldn't and forgetting things he knows), or as a plot device in the hands of, say, an eccentric scientist who seems to know *everything*.

The Lighter Side of Darkness

Three Non-Depressive Adventure Outlines for White Wolf's *World of Darkness*

by Steven Marsh

White Wolf's World of Darkness is known for being . . . well, *dark*. Sure, that's the point, but too much gloom-and-doom can weigh down otherwise interesting campaigns. Unfortunately, it can be difficult to work in an amusing storyline without damaging the long-term horrific integrity of the game. Here are three ideas for different World of Darkness games that can give the campaign a break from more serious fare . . . while still making it possible to wallow in despair the next session.

Dark Elder's Gambit

for *Vampire: The Masquerade*

In 1429, Italian scholar Antonio DiAncona, an 11th Generation Lasombra, became involved with a group of other Lasombra cultists who were intent on demon worship, serving dark masters, and the like. They convinced Antonio to become a cultist and adapt the Via Diabolis (see *Vampire: The Dark Ages*), despite the fact that Antonio wasn't particularly evil or dedicated to the cause.

While the other followers were attempting to summon infernal masters to provide wealth and power, Antonio tried summoning a demon to defeat the fledgling Anarch movement. The altruistic nature of his request was too much for his (newly instituted) code of "honor," and when he botched his summoning, the resultant earthquake brought his cave crumbling down around him, driving him into a long, long torpor.

Over 500 years later, Antonio awoke; using Potence, he eventually managed to dig himself out of the cave. Disoriented and confused, the vampire happened across a dog and devoured its blood. Sated for the moment, and unaware of how much time has elapsed, Antonio began searching for the knowledge to resummon his demon, so he can end the Anarchs' treachery once and for all (unaware that the Anarch threat was resolved five centuries earlier).

The PCs learn of Antonio, either by seeing him directly, or learning of thefts involving ancient occult scrolls.

Presuming the players take an interest, this adventure could be full of complications. Clan Lasombra, hearing (incorrect) rumors of a powerful antitribu elder, would be out in full force trying to destroy him. Demonists could hear (incorrect) rumors of an ancient master, returned to continue some dark ritual, and seek his wisdom.

Characters could be drawn into this conflict for a number of reasons. They may believe rumors of a powerful demon worshipper and wish to stop him. They may hear of a disoriented elder and seek his blood. Antonio may plow headlong into the players' coterie, antagonists in hot pursuit. Antonio should be played as harmless, confused, and anachronistic, dressed in 15th century merchant garb, shrieking in near-incomprehensible Italian about Anarchs, demons, and rapidly-moving metal horses.

Antonio is basically good at heart, which could prove disastrous; the Beast is very close to the surface for him (since he still technically follows the Road of the Devil). Ideally, the players should convert Antonio to a new path (Humanity, in all likelihood), keep him out of Lasombra hands, defeat some demon worshippers, instruct him in what's happened in the last 500 years, and so on.

If this adventure isn't complicated enough, other things can go wrong. Antonio could start a panic by walking down a

heavily-windowed city street, unaware that the glass fails to show a reflection. If the information and history of what transpired is explained to him wrong, he may believe that *he* ended the Anarch revolt through his actions. The storyteller should make every effort to portray Antonio as a harmless loser, but a loser who deserves to be saved.

If he is saved, the rewards are few but not insignificant: Montano, the Lasambra antitribu leader of London, would probably consider himself indebted to the characters. In addition, Antonio remembers his era much more clearly than many vampires who lived it, owing to the fact that he has not had any distractions in the past five centuries. Antonio is also a good teacher; several minor skills or knowledges from the era thought lost might be learned from him.

(This adventure could easily be reworked to be used as a ***Vampire: The Dark Ages*** campaign; simply push back Antonio's failed summoning to an earlier time, and associate it with a different event, like trying to prevent the fall of the Roman Empire.)

Talon Show

for *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*

With the success of *Lupus: The Manwolf Legacy* (a syndicated show about an immortal werewolf who destroys evil every week . . . Catch phrase: "It's your fight, Lupus!" Check your local listings.), Lupusmania has swept the nation.

Unfortunately, one of the PC's Homid forms coincidentally looks an *awful* lot like Lupus's protagonist actor Thom McAlpin . . . not exactly like, but pretty close. In addition, the PC has the attitude of the Lupus character, and unaware bystanders will start to comment on it.

While fighting a Bane who's seeking to corrupt a classroom of high school students taking the SAT (thus ruining many futures economically and intellectually), the fight spills over to the street. (The Bane has whatever powers are necessary to make this happen, being able to push them out of the Umbra or seeking to escape into the "real" world.) Somehow -- during or after the fight; whenever they're in Homid form -- a seemingly overzealous fan shouts out, "It's Thom McAlpin, star of the hit syndicated show *Lupus: the Manwolf Legacy!*"

Soon, bystanders should be hounding the character, and the other PCs, for autographs, locks of hair, "Give us a snarl!", and the like; if the characters start getting angry at the unwanted attention, give everyone a Rage point. One of the characters notice that the "fan" who instigated the fan riot has, further down the street, turned into a wolf and is running away. The "fan" is actually a Ragabash Black Spiral Dancer, who sensed an opportunity to make the characters' lives a little more difficult.

The pressure is now on the characters to assume Crinos form and rip the snot out of the troublemaker. Let them; make the fight quick and in the heroes' favor. If the PCs have attempted to uphold the Veil by trying to keep the fight quiet, make sure the enemy tries to remain able to speak and scream; ideally it's most humorous to have the hapless Dancer yelling out, "Help! Help! I'm being mauled by Thom McAlpin, star of *Lupus: the Manwolf* AAARGH . . ." and so on.

The next day, the daily press reports rumors that Thom McAlpin (Star of *Lupus* . . . blah blah) snapped and attacked a fan who asked for an autograph; the location of the fan and actor is unknown, but Thom McAlpin is wanted for questioning by police. (Although the report is wildly inaccurate, it nonetheless contains some kernel of truth; obviously a reporter with an abnormally high Willpower was on the scene, so that the Delirium didn't take full effect.)

Thom McAlpin, for his part, is a tough-guy actor in the tradition of the tough guys of the 1950s and 1960s, and he doesn't take the besmirching of his name lightly. So Thom gets on a plane and goes to the city where the characters were, looking for the false-Thom so he can teach him a lesson, using his fists, if need be.

Now, Thom is stronger than your average Joe, but not much. If he squares off against any werewolf, he's going to die. Quickly. Painfully.

Complications from this adventure are many. The police can catch up to the PCs, and assume that it's the enraged star

and friends. Thom can catch up to the PCs. The rest of the Black Spiral pack the Ragabash belonged to can catch up to Thom (hopefully while the heroes are around). Thom may catch up to the party, only to have the cops appear, with the Garou and Thom forced to run away.

Ideally, after a lot of running around (and hopefully not too many hapless cops getting mauled), Thom should confront the similar-looking PC. "We finish it, man to man," he says, putting his dukes in a fighting stance.

Should the look-alike engage, this won't even be a challenge -- Whomp; down goes Thom.

This is when the Black Spirals show up. If Thom has been portrayed as a brave -- but stupid -- macho nut, hopefully the party won't let him get slain. The Black Spiral fight should be intense, but not overwhelming; the biggest challenge should be keeping the unconscious Thom alive.

Afterwards, Thom will wake up, and grudgingly admit that the character is okay; he will then go to offer the look-alike a job as a stuntman for his hit syndicated show. (*Lupus: The . . .* you know the routine.) Any tribal elders will probably frown on this, but if the players want to, let them get involved with Hollywood . . . home of the Wyrms, backyard of the Glass Walkers.

Be warned that this whole adventure only works if the players are not of the "slay first, ask questions later" school of thought; dead cops just aren't funny.

The Mages of War

for *Mage: The Ascension*

Agatha Gills, 39, is a confused woman, and has been ever since her fiancée, Kurt Kessel, Awakened and was recruited by the New World Order the day before they were to be married, three years ago. "Unfortunately, it appears our union was not within our intended destinies," said the new Man In Black, "comforting" his broken-hearted ex-fiancée. Then he left.

And she got angry. Awakening, she was Angry and Mad.

The new Marauder Agatha's worldview warped around her senses; she now viewed all magic as evil, and all men as magical (and, thus, all men as evil). All of her magical effects arise from over her shoulder . . . obviously the result of a man who was trying to hurt her, but who missed and did her bidding. (If anyone specifically looks over her shoulder as she uses magic, they will actually see a conjured man-like form doing the effect . . . a hobgoblin created by her Quiet.)

She remained relatively obscure, until the \$100,000 ***Sorcerer's Challenge*** miniatures game tournament was held in the heroes' city. Observing the endless horde of men entering the arena, she reached the logical conclusion: Something Evil is going on with these men and their . . . Sorcery. I must destroy it.

Like most ***Mage*** adventures, how the heroes get involved is pretty variable. Anyone with a sufficient Time Sphere may sense the impending mayhem. Or one of the PCs may actually be involved in the ***Sorcerer's Challenge*** tournament. Or they may miss the opening moments of the battle, but become involved once the Magickal surge is felt over the city.

Agatha's goal is pretty simple; destroy their Foci, then destroy all men. The Foci are the little miniatures they are using; she will attack them with an unrestricted vigor: Fire, Lightning, etc. (And, since she doesn't believe she controls her magic, she will continually whirl about in a circle to see the man who tried to "fry" her, but missed and hit the plastic and metal pieces.)

Fortunately she's too intent on destroying the miniatures for the men to be in much danger. Unfortunately, the ***Sorcerer's Challenge*** players themselves don't seem to realize the danger; when the heroes become involved, they are not fleeing, but rather gasping in awe and disbelief, yelling, "My Runic Enchanter! That's worth two hundred dollars!

No! Not the Dragon Master! Kill me instead!" and the like.

The characters will need to contend with getting the players safe, then dealing with Agatha. Unfortunately, Agatha will have escaped, teleporting away with Marie Powers, an innocent woman obviously meant as a sacrifice for the evil men's Dark Masters. In actuality, Marie is one of the tournament contestants (the only woman in the tournament), and a Hollow One adept at Entropy at that. Marie's boyfriend, Tim Rusoux, a newly-Awakened Hollow One with an affinity for Mind magick, is also a contestant, and will team up with the player characters to find Marie.

But as the players are trying to figure out what to do, the Men In Black show up to construct plausible deniability for the Marauder's actions. One of the Men In Black is (of course) Kurt. There is a fair chance for Kurt to also team up with the heroes, either with his allies, or (breaking Technocratic alliances), by himself. Kurt's connection to the proceedings should come out through roleplaying, and should be coldly romantic ("At times I feel myself emote, directed towards her." and similar expressions). If the heroes are having too easy a time in sorting things out, feel free to add more complications, like the Sports News Network's cameramen and crew, here to record the (aborted) ***Sorcerer's Challenge*** tournament.

Regardless, the PCs should go looking for Agatha; if they've teamed up with Kurt alone, other MIBs will attempt to keep the party from "kidnapping" their agent. If the heroes teamed up with the entire MIB unit, then some of the allies of the PCs may show up to keep the Men In Black from "kidnapping" their allies. These should be played as giant misunderstandings, not seriously threatening scenarios.

Eventually, the heroes will find Agatha, who has retreated to her apartment (her high Arcane rating makes her difficult to find) with the protesting Marie. Assuming Kurt is with the heroes, this should be pretty straight-forward; Kurt talks Agatha into giving up, everyone's happy, and so on.

It should be, but it isn't. Marie's boyfriend Tim, if he's along, will start yelling at Agatha, calling her a mad witch, and other helpful diplomatic maneuvers (despite the furious "No!"s mouthed by Marie). Hopefully, the heroes will subdue Tim before the entire situation blows up.

Ultimately, if the heroes have done well (or at least survived all the complications), love should conquer all in the climax. Screwed-up, wacko love, to be sure, but love nonetheless. Let the renegade happy-go-lucky MIB go off into the sunset with his (slightly less mad) true love. Marie and Tim probably break up, as Marie realizes what an idiot Tim is. (Note that a renegade MIB agent usually has his memories of Technocracy operations wiped by a powerful contingent Mind effect; they do not self-destruct, as the New World Order is afraid that someone might exploit such an effect to wipe out all their Men in Black.)

Pyramid Review

Soap: The Game of Soap Opera Mayhem

Published by [Wingnut Games](#)

Written by Ferry Bazelmans

Illustrated by Tristan Bronkhorst

24-page saddle stitched book; \$7.95

After encouraging you to bring out your inner grunt with their caveman RPG, *The Land of Og* and letting you conduct combat with cows in *Battle Cattle*, the latest release from Wingnut Games lets you rise to the shallow end of the roleplaying pool and also revisits a genre that has not been tackled in over two decades . . . and that was with the very first licensed RPG, *Dallas*, published by SPI in 1980. *Soap: The Game of Soap Opera Mayhem* follows the life of soap opera stars as they get shot, discover that their paramour is their long lost sibling, get swindled out of their inheritance, undergo a life-threatening operation, engage in illicit affairs with all and sundry, find themselves blackmailed for a crime they certainly did commit and undergo a personality change from good guy to bad bitch -- or vice versa. All of which takes place across five daily episodes of half an hour each -- with a compilation on Sunday -- or a once a week, exceedingly glossy hour length episode in which shoulder pads are *de rigueur*. Storylines go on and on and on and on -- until somebody pulls the plug or wakes up in the shower and discovers that it was all a dream . . .

Describing itself as "more or less a roleplaying game," *Soap: The Game of Soap Opera Mayhem* is more of a storytelling game that owes a nod or two to the late Hogshead Publishing's line of New Style games that each attempted to push at the boundaries of the roleplaying game in both concept and format. The author admits that Robin D Laws' [Pantheon and Other Roleplaying Games](#) as being a major inspiration, though *The Extraordinary Adventures of Baron Munchausen Roleplaying Game* has also had its influence. Where the latter game is a game of fine wine and tall tales, *Soap: The Game of Soap Opera Mayhem* is a game of shallow fascination served with a bag or two of potato chips on the sofa.

Playing the game does not require a GM, but a set of counters is needed to use as Plot Tokens. Each player selects and designs a character archetype from the soap opera genre, and these can be done from the ground up, or taken from the list of Package Characters included in the book. These include the Hunk, Bitch, Loser, Arch-Villain, Sweet Girl, Mother, Kid, and Dilettante. Each archetype is defined by several descriptive factors rather than words -- a Suggested Role, Traits, Goal, Relationships -- Friendly and Unfriendly, plus a Secret.

Thus for the Suggested Role for the Bitch could be businesswoman, actress, model, rich girl, girlfriend, or journalist and have the Traits of manipulative, bitchy, mean, murderous, and cold-hearted. Her secret could be the child that nobody knows she had, that she used to be a man, has been arrested for murder or actually killed the parent of another player character, or is just plain dying. Her goal would be to obtain someone or something by ruining another character, while her Unfriendly relationships could be with the Sweet Girl, Mother, Kid Loser or (naturally) another Bitch, or if Friendly, with the Arch-Villain, Hunk or Dilettante. The gender of each of the Package Characters is easily mutable, so that they could be male, female, or somewhere in between . . .

Two aspects of a character -- their Traits and Secret -- require further explanation in the form of a simple paragraph. Within this paragraph are five key words that define their Traits or Secret, usually in the form of nouns and adjectives to make them easily identifiable. The five key words are underlined within the paragraph for easy play. Finally a character needs a Home Set or location where they will be at an advantage during the game and they also receive a pair of Plot Tokens.

The play of ***Soap: The Game of Soap Opera Mayhem*** revolves around the construction of Sentences to further the general story and each character's goals. Sentences are not actually sentences, but rather paragraphs that describe a whole scene within an episode. The Plot Tokens are used to protect or alter a Sentence when it becomes contested. On their turn, each player describes where their character is (or rather in which Set they are in -- only one Set per sentence), what they are doing and the dialogue being delivered. A player can involve the characters of the other players and members of the supporting cast as well as their own character. Essentially, in constructing a Sentence, the players are describing the action and dialogue that a soap addict might see on their favourite series.

Should another player object to the Sentence currently being constructed, it then becomes contested and all of the players can participate in an auction to take control of the Sentence. Bidding lasts until the participants run out of Tokens or decline to place another bid. If its creator wins the auction, the Sentence remains unchanged and becomes part of the soap's ongoing plot. Should an objector win, then they can alter, but not erase the Sentence . . . invariably to their benefit.

As the game progresses, players can acquire additional Plot Tokens through enforcing a friendship (being nice to the friend, nasty to an enemy), successfully pursuing a Goal, using one of their five key underlined Traits within a Sentence and even by dropping hints as to the nature of their Secret. The other players can take notes when such hints are dropped and will gain more Tokens if they successfully guess the five key words of another character's Secret. Only when their Secret has been revealed, is a character vulnerable to being fully killed off . . . Otherwise, they can and will survive *any* injury, from the run-of-the-mill stabbings and shootings to an assault by a haggles of garlic press-wielding marmosets in stiletto heels.

The rules suggest that a session of ***Soap*** should last 90 minutes, but it could last as long or as short as required. Upon reaching the allotted time, the current player ends their Sentence as normal, and the next player devises a session ending Sentence in the form of a terse situation or cliffhanger. The game is then over. It is perfectly possible to continue at a later date, picking up where the cliffhanger left things hanging . . .

Soap is supported only relatively so -- it is only a slight game, after all. There is a character sheet, a cast of ready to play soap opera characters (unfortunately, none of their Secret or Trait words have been underlined for ease of use) and general advice on how to play. There is an example of play and three alternative genres -- espionage (goals are replaced by assignments), Shakespearian court intrigue, and Science Fiction set aboard a spaceship set adrift after a meteor storm. These three, along with the simplicity of the rules and the universal nature of the soap opera format, all suggest how easily the game can be adapted to plenty of other settings and themes. For example, British country soap could be created with the addition of an "Ooo-ar" or two and a "Mummerset" accent. For the East End genre, the accent should be mockney-Cockney and all the players have to shout (or is that, "shaout?") a lot. Australian soaps need either a beach or cardboard sets. South American soaps require Hispanic accents and inappropriate subtitles, and the Italian Gangster soaps just need everyone's best rendition of, "Just when I think it's all over . . . they pull me back in."

Soap: The Game of Soap Opera Mayhem is more of a chips 'n' sofa game than a beer 'n' pretzels game. Even this is mutable -- just add pints of Shires for the British country soap, lager and peanuts to the East End game, tequila for the South American soap and so on . . . Although the game is done in the mode and format of a New Style game, the author makes no attempt to push at the boundaries of what might considered an RPG, like those published by Hogshead Publishing did. This is not necessarily a bad thing, and should not detract from the fact that ***Soap: The Game of Soap Opera Mayhem*** is light, fluffy (sudsy?) game, best played in the right frame of mind.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

NeoTerra (for EABA)

Published by [BTRC](#)

Written by Greg Porter

97-page PDF download; \$8.00

NeoTerra is the latest campaign setting to come out for the **EABA** universal RPG system. Like all good setting books, the majority of the text is dedicated to pure background information, and can be easily transplanted to most rule systems. BTRC has free conversion rules for **GURPS**, **d20**, **CORPS**, **Timelords**, and **3G3** on its home page.

This product is only available by download only in PDF format. Each purchase includes a full color (4.5meg) and a gray scale version (3.3meg). It is available from various online shops such as [rpgnow.com](#) and [hyperbooks.com](#) for \$8.

For your \$8 you get 99 pages (per version) in double column format. The table of contents and index are fully hyper-linked, as are other areas throughout. There are internal illustrations by Chris Martinez mixed in the text, and the cover and the beginning of each chapter really stand out with high-quality, full-page computer generated images by Thomas Weiss and Deanne Harper.

NeoTerra is divided into eight chapters. The first chapters give the history as known by the common man and an in-depth review of life, circa 2984 CE to help GMs and players play in the world. The middle two chapters describe character types and creation, as well as describing the Archetypes. The last chapters discuss GM's eyes only material, gear, important organizations, gadgets, and such. Players of **EABA** will find the information on using cyber and bio gear informative, and users of other systems will likely find the technology easy to convert. *NeoTerra* also comes a short adventure or two, as well as several ideas and plot hooks throughout for easy GM development, as well as a section about the basics of GMing the setting.

NeoTerra takes place some 800 years after mankind lost the war with the emergent global super AI, now known simply as the Net. They called it the Asymptote, but others may know what happened as the Singularity. The uncontrolled advance of technology that destroys the world as we know it. Few saw the development as a scientific inevitability, and when it became obvious, national leaders could only posture, bluster, and fumble with useless and largely ineffective knee-jerk reactions. Those few who did see it coming may have saved mankind, but certainly not themselves.

Now the 10 billion inhabitants of Earth share the planet with a nearly all-powerful AI with a mission. The Net has been working for the last eight centuries to mold mankind into a race mature and civilized enough to responsibly rule a world without destroying it. Apparently it feels there much left to do.

The setting is a brash and dynamic mix of social Darwinism, a socialist "utopia," and a rampant free market. The Net provides all those things needed for survival, and only those things, at no cost. Every citizen of *NeoTerra* receives a stylish and reasonably sized home, food, utilities, clothes, and basic entertainment. Most people, known as drones, are content to sit in their free homes, eat their free food, and abide in an existence where the Net provides all, and all you need is what the Net gives. Ubiquitous and free public transportation and armies of mutable mousebots round out the Net's civic services. It's pretty hard to whip up any sort of revolution when the Net provides everything for free, and asks nothing in return.

"If it's not free, you can't buy it." At least not from the net, that is. But not all are willing to sit mindlessly as welfare slugs and accept only those things that some uncaring super-AI thinks they need. These rare people go out of their

way, learn skills needed to employ themselves, create their own business, or pursue their own endeavors. **NeoTerra** has a unique economy in that there is no cash as such, only credits that are kept track of by the Net. A person earns credits by doing their trade, and the Net assesses how valuable a person's time and skills are and how many credits it is worth. Time is, literally, money in this barter like economy.

While it is a price regulated free market economy, there is no capitalism as such. A person can grow quite wealthy, buying larger homes, off-net computers, vehicles, and equipment, but all their wealth must come one's own sweat and blood. Everything must be made by hand. The Net does not like investing, automated industry, and inheritance, and does what it can to prevent them.

The Net sees all, but cares little for the individual. There are essentially no laws on NeoTerra enforced by the Net. The Net has created a world where the strong and ambitious succeed. There are no Net-provided police, protection, or privacy, though the Net will show you just about anything one asks to see. The only deterrent to any sort of crime from theft to murder is whatever defenses a citizen can acquire for himself. This can include, but is not limited to, personal weaponry, neighborhood hired security, guild vendetta, and retribution insurance. Anger too many people, and they are likely to chip in to hire someone from the Assassin's Guild to have you permanently killed. Lawlessness works both ways!

The above aspects of **NeoTerra** are simply extensions of the Net's massive social experiments. It looks for the most motivated and capable people to send to the stars to spread humanity's seed. The Archetype competition is just that: Every year a very few people -- the best at what they do -- are selected to send their genes and memes into massive, sub-light colony ships. These Archetypes are basic human attitudes or ethics the Net has decided are important for future generations, such as teacher, warrior, or psychopath. There are 20 listed in the game, but GMs are encouraged to add more if they see fit. A person's trade has no bearing on such choices, the most skilled carpenter is just as important as the most skilled. Everyone is killed at 200, and to be chosen as an Archetype champion before that time is the pinnacle of NeoTerra achievement. Being competent isn't enough; you've got to have flare, panache, and style to make Archetype champion.

NeoTerra provides a sci-fi/cyberpunk setting with a unique social background. It steers it away from worn cyberpunk dystopias, and provides PCs with a specific set of campaign goals: succeed and be recognized. How they decide to do it is up to them. While the setting and advanced gadgets allow for mass-weapon, super armor mayhem with no official laws or police, the setting also provides for some very interesting RP dynamics. The GM is provided with several things going on behind the scenes that can be used to flavor a campaign (including a secret which, while big, doesn't really change anything).

Aside from the description of the society, laws, and economy of NeoTerra, the book also includes an appreciable list of various organizations and numerous guilds that provide a list of allies and enemies, as well as a good cross section as to the sort of organizations that exist in the setting.

There is little detail given to specific cities and such, but there are setting a few specific locations described, including a very interesting underground warehouse. There are no maps, but the cities of today mostly exist in NeoTerra in a slightly altered form, rebuilt after the war by the Net. Ideas on how local culture may vary are presented. Supersonic, evacuated, maglev tubes that carry trains going 2,000 kph connect the world . . . all provided by the Net, making it a very global society.

There is also a full section about the technology available in NeoTerra. The most interesting aspect of NeoTerra technology is the disparity that can be found within the confines of presented society. The Net will not make weapons, computers, vehicles, or anything that isn't a basic service for an individual. This means that everyone has to scrape together their own, or buy them handmade from a human builder. The craftsmen of NeoTerra are capable of producing very advanced items such as air cars, computers, and Macroquantum Probability Shields, and these things can found next to blades of broken plas, jury-rigged black powder shotguns, and taped together clubs.

In all, the world of **NeoTerra** provides some interesting new ideas for the cyberpunk genre, and fans of that style of game may find something interesting, especially since much of the book is generic or easily convertible.

--*Aaron Kavli*

The Agonies of Creation

"Started out on absinthe, drank a bottle of good red wine with dinner, shifted to vodka in town Š and then battened it down with whiskeys and sodas until 3 a.m. Feel good today. But not like working."

-- Ernest Hemingway, letter to Maxwell Perkins

Occasionally, an aficionado of these diversions will exclaim, as if in compliment, "You make it all look so simple!" On such occasions, the only meet response is an abashed toss of the head, as if to say, "'Twere nothing." But like the audiences enraptured by the great Houdini, the adoring throngs see only the smooth, practiced showmanship rather than the grunting and straining and dislocated shoulders and smuggled-in lockpicks. Truth be told, although there are some columns that, as they say, write themselves, there are others -- the vast majority -- that take a great deal of grunting and straining and dislocated causalities and smuggled-in Templars. Not that I seek your pity -- far from it. But just as we can appreciate the artistry of Houdini the more for knowing the unyielding struggles that went into it, perhaps you, my fond audience, would enjoy an April Fool's look in doggerel verse (Poet's Note: "Icke" rhymes with "picky.") at the creative processes that occasionally conspire to more-than-usually suppress a transmission.

And, with apologies to Ernest L. Thayer, it goes a little something like this:

The outlook wasn't brilliant for Transmission Wednesday night;
Three fifty-word quotations, 1350 words to write.
And then when Crowley came up blank, and Brewer's gave up squat,
The column lost all pretense of an organizing thought.

Despite a supplication to the Gnostic St. Sophia,
The only thing resulting was a desperate idea.
The thought: "If only Reptoids could be somehow jammed in there.
This column would come roaring back with Reptoids everywhere."

But quote one was on alchemy, and the second, William Blake,
And a modicum of research proved that quote three was a fake.
So upon the stricken columnist, there fell a sickly grin,
For there seemed but little chance of Reptoids somehow fitting in.

But alchemy's Green Dragon is the Serpent of the Fall,
And Blake, manipulated, can mean anything at all.
And with the words "Red Dragon" typed, a miracle occurred,
Two paragraphs on dragons and the outline of a third.

Eight hundred-odd words later, the piece was still unclear,
But only needed one good hook to make it all cohere.
The columnist had typed all night and overstrained himself,
But Icke, David Icke, rested there upon the shelf.

There was ease in Icke's language as he warned us of the threat,
There was joy in Icke's message that the Reptoids can't win yet.
And even though the thesis just recycled Leigh and Lincoln,
The reader felt the soothing calm of David Icke's thinkin'.

A promised chapter heading on the Reptoid George the Third
Left the columnist in wonder, understanding not a word.
The linkage, though, was present -- David Icke had come through!
Or so it claimed in chapter sixteen, footnote eighty-two.

But following that footnote, academically solemn,
Led only to the second quote that started off the column.
Such empty tautologic left the situation sticky,
Conclusion unmistakable: there was no help in Icke.

Back to the bookshelves' vasty maw he went in search of lore,
A meager link with Himmler that he knew he'd seen before.
A tie-in with Marconi's airship empire in Peru,
Or even channeled Tesla quotes -- Hell, anything would do.

But little there was usable, though madness came in waves,
He damned the facts of Charles Fort, and dug up Robert Graves.
Though he searched through every index, annotated every crank,
From Agrippa to Dame Frances Yates, the bookshelves came up blank.

The writer's calm was splintering; he held to just one thought,
That somewhere on the World Wide Web was evidence he sought.
"If a thousand books by madmen will not make the links I need,
Three billion pages must contain the perfect Reptoid screed."

The columnist's pale visage seems beset by brain disease.
He pounds, with cruel violence, his fingers on the keys.
And now the keywords are typed in, and now the mouse clicks "Go"
And now the office brightens with the browser's blessed glow.

Oh, Friday morning's *Pyramid* has John Kovalic 'toons,
And Underkoffler's setting notes for pulp-besotted loons,
And Steven Marsh's Random Thoughts remove all trace of doubt,

But no Suppressed Transmission --
Mighty Google has struck out.

'I'm a Fool!' He Said, Jesting Madly

Shortly after Grant Morrison took over writing *JLA* for DC Comics, he commented that - with the most powerful and well-known superheroes in the world on this team (Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, etc.) - just about all of the major heroic archetypes were represented. But he realized there was one absent: The jester (a.k.a. the fool). He filled this void by adding Plastic Man to the lineup.

Now, not to be confused with "comedic jackass" - who cracks jokes without purpose or pranks without reason - the jester serves a valuable role. In medieval times the fool was often empowered to say things that others could not, commenting openly on character flaws, weaknesses, and shortcomings. Presuming he was amusing - and thus kept spirits high - he couldn't be punished for the things he said (in theory . . . in practice, no doubt sharp-tongued jesters and furl-browed nobles clashed with predictable results, involving dungeons and boiling oil). But even in other group settings - such as, say, your standard gaming party - there can be a role for someone who is able to speak his mind with impunity, and for one who can raise the team's spirits.

Many games feature some kind of comedic element; most notable are probably many of the White Wolf games, such as the Malkavians in *Vampire*, the Ragabash in *Werewolf*, or the Pooka in *Changeling*. And within these games it is very often possible for that comedic element to serve the role of the jester. But just because a game *doesn't* have built-in comic relief doesn't mean there isn't still a place for the fool. Especially in large groups, having one member who takes it upon himself to assume these duties can open up gaming possibilities in a niche that is often unexplored: plucky 18-year-old mascots in a World War II game, drunken scam artists in a Weird West world, or goofball say-anything hackers in a cyberpunk campaign. (In smaller groups, it's not uncommon for one member to take up the duties of the fool; in this case, the tips below may not entirely apply to the concept.)

Be funny. It may be unfair, but perhaps more so than any other character concept, the fool is probably only as funny as the player playing him. Unlike combat ability, tactical skills, or other things that can be resolved with dice, it usually falls to the fool character to amuse the other *players* (even if the characters are annoyed) . . . and frankly, it just doesn't work to say, "I roll a 18 on my Make You Laugh skill." "Moderate success. I laugh." Now, this doesn't mean that your character needs to be Jim Carry or the like; our Western drunkard mentioned above probably isn't even *trying* to make jokes, but instead just happens to say things that are both amusing and insightful. ("If'n you're done lookin' all glassy-starin' and killin' those des-per-a-dos, ah do believe the school marm who we were originally sent to help does have some spirits that looked awwwfully lonely in their little bottles . . .")

Be wise. One of the primary duties of the jester is to say things that others are unwilling (or unable) to; thus, you'll only have as much to say as you have to see. Fortunately, you *can* play a character who's smarter or more observant than you; just expect the GM to feed you a lot of information.

Don't be annoying to the other players. It's a very fine line between "the other PCs are annoyed but the players are having fun" and "the other PCs are annoyed, and players want to make use of a stump grinder." And if the jester is making non-stop wisecracks, interrupting play, and working on everyone's last nerve with a jackhammer, that's not good. As ever, communication between all the players is really useful; assuming the rest of the group doesn't object to the concept of a fool outright, it's probably just a matter of finding the balance between contributing to and disrupting game.

Make friends in the group. Very often the fool manages to become beloved by the group (or at least tolerated). But in large groups or bigger gatherings (like LARPs) it is common for one or more characters to *really* dislike him. Assuming this is just roleplaying (and, again, not a case of the player himself hating the character), it behooves the jester to befriend one or more of the other PCs; that way, if it comes to blows, he'll have at least one person interposing on his behalf.

Consider being weaker. Although not a requirement, traditionally the person in the fool roll is a fair bit weaker than the rest of the group; in some cases he's *remarkably* weaker than those he's around (such as the "era of straight-talking teenage sidekicks amid costumed powerhouses" of the 1960s). After all, if you're an überskilled ex-Marine with

uncanny mystical powers, the fact you make wisecracks is just a quirk instead of your *raison d'être* (French for "artistic grape"; c.f. *Raison d'California*). This can also help mitigate the "Don't be annoying to others" point above; many other players are much more understanding and appreciative of fools when there's little chance of being upstaged by them in abilities. In point-based games, consider buying up all the "little" things that help the rest of the group, but don't directly make you more powerful, like wealth and resources, contacts, or esoteric allies. ("How in the *world* did you get Targmon the Unyielding to owe you a favor?" "Won it in a poker game five years ago; 'Unyielding' is right . . . I can't *believe* he didn't fold when I was showing a four-card flush on the table.")

Survive. Especially if your character is considerably weaker than the rest of the party, do whatever it takes to ensure his survival. If available, buy large quantities of Luck, Dodge, or Extra Lives. If there are personal escape options (teleportation, invisibility) or options to not even *be* in danger (holographic uplink, telecommunication options) consider acquiring them. Not only will it keep you around when you're caught up in battles you have no business being in, it will also protect you when you make one comment too many to Moo-Dee the Barbarian. Remember: "God watches over drunks, fools, and little children." Take God as a patron; consider tweaking your concept to "drunken child."

Be prepared to die. One sad fact about the fool is that, even with additional protective abilities, he often just doesn't make it. Sometimes the plucky comic sidekick lives; sometimes he gets devoured in the last reel right after saying, "Thank goodness *that's* over . . ." And it's always possible, again, that the jester will make the One Comment That Should Go Unsaid, and wind up with a berserker's battle axe where his widow's peak used to be.

As far as concepts go, the fool is perhaps one of the most common in heroic fiction and stories, yet most underutilized in the gaming world. With the right players, however, there's no reason for this to be so; wisdom has a place in many games, and so too does humor. As a wise scholar and one-hit-wonder once said, "Everybody plays the fool sometimes."

--Steven Marsh

Worldwide Temporary Staffing

"You Take Over The World, We'll Take Care Of The Rest!"

by Michael Anguiano

"Have you any idea how many anonymous henchmen I've killed over the years?"

-- Nigel Powers, British superspy

The dashing hero, following a series of vague yet oddly compelling clues, stumbles onto the villain's secret headquarters. The complex is a bustling hive of activity, as the villain's evil agenda is carried out unquestioningly by a legion of uniformed technicians and guards. While the hero sets about saving the world, the audience is left to wonder just how anyone could build a totally secret, state-of-the-art scientific facility in the middle of the Amazon (or Antarctica, or Arizona . . .), let alone recruit and train hundreds of loyal and (relatively) competent henchmen. A villainous madman willing to kill his underlings is usually not the sort of "people person" who inspires strong staff loyalty. So why does every madman bent on world domination happen to have a secret headquarters and the staff to run it?

Simple: they hire someone else to do it.

Excerpt from a Worldwide brochure:

Much to his chagrin, Ephraim Dalgliesh Klaugh, better known to the world by his nom de evil, CLAW!!!, discovered that world domination was not his strong suit. Certainly, his twisted genius as a geneticist and marine biologist was indisputable. He had created a species of spiny lobsters which grew to monstrous size and produced an adamantium chitin, capable of following simple instructions and using an assortment of deadly weaponry. His mutant army of "Megalo Panulirus Argus Rex" was to be the lynchpin of his brilliant scheme, allowing him to seize various nuclear stockpiles and thereafter dictate his will to the world. His plan was foolproof . . .but not proof against fools. The proper oversight of feeding schedules had been left to inadequately trained support staff, and a series of simple errors caused the mutant lobsters to turn on each other and upon their creator. The need to build and maintain a reliable support organization was the final lesson that CLAW!!! would learn as he was consumed by his folly.

His story, while tragic, is hardly unique. The bitter truth is that it takes more than twisted genius to rule the world. An evil genius needs a qualified technical and scientific staff, not to mention plenty of anonymous guards, to carry out his (or her) plans. Worldwide Temporary Staffing Management & Employment Alternatives For Sinister Enterprises exists to address those needs. Worldwide will provide trained, reliable support staff of all kinds: technical, scientific, office, security, even janitorial.

You have important business on your mind: world domination. You don't have time to establish an organization, to build a secret headquarters, to design guard uniforms, to read resumes. That's where we come in!

You take over the world -- we'll take care of the rest!

Worldwide provides labor and staffing for visionary madmen, evil geniuses, shadowy cabals, and sinister enterprises that require significant manpower but lack more overt (i.e. legal) options. Worldwide also has a construction division for the design, development, completion, and equipping of secret headquarters, underground lairs, or similar facilities. Worldwide recognizes that these enterprises are typically doomed to ultimate failure at the hands of two-fisted heroes and dashing spies, and consequently has a salvage division as well.

While the principal service offered by Worldwide, staffing is actually its least profitable operation but remains the easiest way to recruit new customers. This provides an avenue for more lucrative construction services, including consulting fees and equipment sales, but salvage operations are the true profit margin for Worldwide.

Staffing:

Faceless Guards, Anonymous Henchmen

Staffing provided by Worldwide falls into four categories: security, office personnel, professional services, and janitorial staff. Worldwide does not provide military personnel or combat troops, despite numerous requests. The stated reason is that Worldwide is geared toward support operations for a static facility, rather than a series of military campaigns. More accurately, however, Worldwide considers military operations an unprofitable risk while facing more overt competition from other sources. Worldwide deliberately maintains a low profile to avoid undue interference by governments or international bodies. Such military action would threaten that profile, as well as increasing costs without allowing the profit opportunities that underwrite their other operations.

Recruiting is done clandestinely through a series of employment agencies, which typically look for moderate intelligence, physical fitness, financial need, personal loyalty, and a lack of family or community ties. Worldwide observes potential candidates closely under the pretext of job assignments before assessing suitability through a battery of psychological and aptitude tests.

Once selected, a recruit is brought in for processing and training as a guard, the entry-level position of Worldwide staffers. The processing includes psychological and pharmacological conditioning to induce the combination of job loyalty and intellectual ennui that exemplifies the Worldwide security guard: quiet, loyal, trustworthy, reliable, unimaginative, and housebroken. This conditioning also hinders certain memory functions and draws a veil between the new staffer's current assignment and previous life. While a guard, the staffer will have only vague recollections of life outside being a guard, and conversely will remember only fuzzy details once the assignment is over. This protects both Worldwide and the staffer from unscrupulous clients. The conditioning process requires biannual augmentation for full continued effectiveness.

After serving (and surviving) a minimum of three assignments as guard, the staffer is assessed for possible retraining and upgrade to other staffing categories. The staffer's degree of conditioning will be adjusted to reflect any change in job category. Until recently, female staffers were typically channeled towards secretarial training, while male staffers were more likely to remain guards in the absence of a clear aptitude for the science or technical fields. This has changed under Worldwide's current management.

Office personnel typically include secretaries, receptionists, file clerks, office managers, accountants, etc. Paperwork is a necessary evil of any organization, doubly so for an evil organization, and the proper communication and documentation will ensure efficiency and effectiveness. While a step above the drones in guard uniforms, the office staffers receive equivalent conditioning because of a greater exposure to sensitive information.

Professional services are subdivided into medical, scientific, and technical sections, although some overlap is to be expected. Each section covers a broad spectrum of skill and training, so conditioning is reduced to reflect the appropriate degree of initiative and independent thought. Worldwide also cross-trains its professional workers to increase the available skill pool without increasing the labor pool itself.

Janitorial services are the Trojan horse of Worldwide. Typically ignored as the lowest and most menial of workers, this

elite team of operatives has the widest access to the entire facility but remain virtually invisible to everyone around them. Consequently, they are the on-site eyes and ears of Worldwide. Rigorously trained and virtually free of conditioning, these highly resourceful individuals are charged with guarding the company interests and covertly protecting staffers from excessive abuse by clients. The janitorial staff also keeps a diligent eye on the other staffers to assess quality of work and efficacy of conditioning. The viability of escape routes and mechanisms is the particular responsibility of the janitorial staff, to minimize staff casualties if (when) the facility is discovered/infiltrated/destroyed. Of course, other staffers are unaware of the janitorial staff's true status at the top rung of the staffer ladder.

After six to eight years of successful service, a staffer may eventually be selected for reassignment to Salvage or to Construction. This reflects that the staffer is extremely trustworthy and reliable . . . or, perhaps, romantically involved with a member of management. Following a period of intense retraining and minor reconditioning, the employee leaves Staffing behind and sees the inside of Worldwide.

Construction:

Secretly Building The Secret Lair In Secret

Offering a range of discreet construction services, Worldwide can conceptualize and develop facility designs to each client's needs. Worldwide will also outfit the facility with state-of-the-art systems, including computers, communications, security and surveillance, as required by the client. Of course, Worldwide will typically work from standard templates, with minimal revisions to suit each client. Even if the client already has the plans or blueprints in hand, Worldwide will typically press for additional design input, allowing higher fees for "consulting services." This also allows Worldwide to add hidden escape routes for Worldwide staffers, in the (inevitable) event that the client's plan fails and the facility is threatened with destruction.

Worldwide maintains a strict control over the construction site itself until the facilities are completed and presented to the client. This isolation serves to limit local knowledge of the facility as well as allowing Worldwide to add features without the client's awareness. Isolation also allows conditioning of construction personnel to be kept at very mild levels, minimizing incidental threats to project safety. Of course, the construction division's security personnel are vastly more effective than those provided through staffing services.

Due to their homogeneity of design, familiarity with any Worldwide-constructed facility will typically allow a working understanding of the others. This maximizes the versatility of Worldwide staffers by reducing training to individual facilities, as well as enhancing awareness of escape routes. An incidental effect is that an intruder at one Worldwide facility will have an easier time finding his way around another Worldwide facility.

Salvage:

Picking Up The Pieces

Excerpt from each Worldwide brochure

{back page, bottom section, slightly below copyright information):

In the event that the client relocates or repurposes operation(s) from the specified facility(s), in whole or in part, Worldwide reserves the right to salvage equipment and materials from or related to the facility or parts thereof. All local permits, leases, deeds, and other legal and proprietary matters and documentation pertaining thereunto, shall reflect this reversion of ownership rights (as stipulated in the appendices to this document). Client hereby indemnifies and stipulates Worldwide free of all obligation and liability, financial or otherwise, generated by

Client's operation(s) contemporaneous with or subsequent to this contractual agreement.

While Worldwide downplays this aspect, salvage is acknowledged as a function of their business. Worldwide actually makes a very tidy profit by recovering and refurbishing the components of a destroyed secret lair, which is usually resold to the next evil genius who needs a secret lair.

When the client has lost functional operation of a Worldwide facility, Worldwide immediately dispatches a salvage detail to recover any useful facility resources which have aftermarket value, such as weapons, fissionable material, vehicles, electronics, computer systems, technical and scientific equipment, controlled substances, botanical and zoological specimens, artwork, precious metals and stones, and office equipment. The salvage teams assess the facility, assign values and priorities to the various parts and systems, then begin the recovery process. The site itself is protected by the salvage guard detail, which is second only to the janitorial staff in training and effectiveness. Recovered materials are shipped out in innocuous, camouflaged vehicles. Local officials are bribed, misled, intimidated, or eliminated as necessary.

Data collection and reconstruction is the most valuable element of the salvage operations. The intelligence information and scientific data developed by a sinister organization is usually far more valuable to Worldwide than the client's actual contract. This is the true imperative behind Worldwide's emphasis on the proper use of office staff and data documentation. Computer systems and data management processes are carefully designed to create redundant stores of information, which are protected from possible facility destruction. The salvage teams recover these stores first, then sift through the wreckage to glean any additional information possible.

Worldwide will usually resell the data through various front organizations, which provides profit while disassociating the company from the unsuccessful client. Worldwide will also use the data when developing its own investment strategies. As a result, Worldwide usually remains profitable and well-capitalized even in the most sluggish global economy.

Management: Behind The Paper Curtain

Worldwide is operated by the husband and wife team of Owen Parsons and Dorothea Klaugh, who serve as the CEO and COO, respectively. A moderately successful corporate lawyer, Parsons was married to Dorrie for eight years before he discovered that her father was CLAW!!! Dorrie, for her part, was rather embarrassed by her father's pursuits. She had become an accomplished chemist in the area of neuropharmaceuticals when she and her husband learned of the destruction of her father's labs. While he survived with minor injuries, CLAW!!! was deeply demoralized by the loss of his beloved Megalo Panulirus Argus Rex.

In the process of salvaging and liquidating the operation's remaining assets, Parsons deduced the mundane details that had led to the collapse of a grand scheme. This, he realized, was a business opportunity of global proportions. Corporate and administrative structure was his particular talent, neuropharmaceuticals were Dorrie's specialty, and so they created an agency to meet the staffing needs of evil geniuses like her father. The initial business contacts were provided by CLAW!!! but the business has grown far beyond its humble and twisted beginnings.

Parsons handles the administrative structure, corporate management, and client recruitment, while Dorrie oversees the day-to-day functions of employee recruitment, training, and conditioning, as well as facility construction and salvage. The conditioning process is primarily hers, with technical assistance from her father. CLAW!!!, while purportedly dead, is still working on his lobsters in the mistaken belief that his daughter and son-in-law are building him a new organization and secret headquarters to take over the world.

Advance payment is required for all facility construction and equipment services. Staffing contracts require advance payment on the initial six months of employment, with a smaller amount garnished thereafter from the employee's

monthly salary. The money is deposited with a series of front organizations, holding companies, and dummy corporations, then transferred through a score of international accounts before arriving at several Swiss banks. Parsons and his accountants constantly revise, dismantle, reshuffle, and replace the various corporate organizations and officers. As a result, police and intelligence agencies know little about Owen Parsons and Dorrie Klaugh Parsons.

Contractual disagreements are handled by diplomacy and subtle threats. Nonpayment is mostly a matter of issuing a series of friendly sounding threats, concurrent with a campaign of escalating sabotage. If a client is consistently recalcitrant, then Worldwide will usually draw in a third party to add pressure to the client. This involves leaving a series of vague yet oddly compelling clues that lead the client's opposition to the facility in question. Worldwide's reasoning is that the destroyed facility will ultimately profit the company more than a lengthy client contract, so the client becomes dispensable once the facility has been in full operation for any reasonable length of time (usually four months).

If a particularly extreme case should present itself, Worldwide will act directly against the client. The janitorial staff is directed to activate self-destruct mechanisms while strike teams of Megalo Panulirus Argus Rex eliminate all non-Worldwide staff. The lobsters, while not really necessary, make Dorrie's father very, very happy.

Plot Devices:

It's Déjà Vu, All Over Again

These are the particular shticks that emerge when using Worldwide:

- *"That guy looks familiar."* Locked in a prison cell in the underground lair, the PCs recognize the guard from the last time they were locked in a prison cell in an underground lair. Will he fall for the same stupid trick as last time?
- *"No, it's this way!"* PCs have no trouble navigating the secret headquarters, even though they've never been in this particular one before.
- *"No, it's this button!"* PCs have no trouble operating the equipment, accessing the systems, downloading the information, activating the self-destruct mechanism, etc. Equipment is completely compatible from one mad scientist's lab to the next (Worldwide always uses Apple computers).
- *"Nice uniform."* Everyone in the secret lair has crisp, clean, tailored, color-coordinated uniforms that indicate function and rank. Each uniform has been recently laundered.
- *"Is he supposed to be in here?"* No matter how restricted the area, how sensitive the equipment, how carefully guarded the prisoners, there's always a guy with a mop off to one side of the room. No turn of events can faze him, and nobody notices him except the PCs.
- *"How did that get there?"* The PCs find a fully equipped, fully staffed, state-of-the-art high-tech complex. The location is either completely cut off from civilization or somehow hidden right in the middle of a major city. Nobody who lives or works nearby will know anything about the complex.
- *"Ninjas! Hundreds of them!"* The PCs find themselves facing a small army of ninjas, Thuggee cultists, Shaolin monks, Templar knights, Men in Black, Amazonian priestesses, or other colorful niche threat group. Nobody who lives or works nearby will know anything about the threat group, except perhaps for legends of their fearsome power. None of the threat group are very good.

Adventure Seeds:

It's Déjà Vu, All Over Again

Worldwide can fit into any contemporary campaign featuring espionage and world domination. The campy humor elements lend themselves in particular to games involving four-color superheroes, larger-than-life two-fisted action heroes, dashing superspies, weird science, and atomic horrors. Worldwide can also serve as a connecting device for divergent story arcs, so that PCs don't lose momentum in a dramatic hiatus between adventures.

- **Need a job?** A temp agency recruits the PCs for cushy security jobs at a "resort" in the tropics. The pay is good,

- the food is great, and the uniforms are pretty nice, but the boss is a little weird. Still, it's an easy gig until a secret agent starts shooting at them. Hilarity ensues. This scenario works best with low-level PCs, caught between dangerous villains and dangerous heroes, and mostly trying not to get shot/electrocuted/eaten/blown up.
- **Collections!** Worldwide has to foreclose on a delinquent client. The PCs could be on assignment at the client's facility or perhaps are sent with the strike teams as "lobster wranglers." Alternately, the PCs could be agents who are infiltrating the client's operation when the collection team arrives. Of course, the PCs could *be* the delinquent client . . .
 - **"I am Number 2. You are Bob. Did you sign the waiver?"** In an offbeat *GURPS Prisoner* game, The Village has outsourced most of its low-level work to Worldwide, while it concentrates the important personnel on Number 6 and other key Village projects. In this scenario, the PCs might be Village residents who discover that some of the warders are temps with mixed allegiances. Alternately, the PCs might be Worldwide employees who find out that the Village is a permanent assignment. Of course, Worldwide could be connected somehow to Number One, so that retiring employees might find themselves with a gold watch and a Village badge. All that mind control tech had to come from somewhere . . .
 - **Follow the money!** The PCs stop some madman bent on world domination, destroy his secret lair, etc. Later, the PCs are accused of destroying evidence, the newspapers scream about a cover-up, and defense attorneys claim that their client was framed. The PCs have only a couple of shipping invoices and random bits of equipment from which to start an investigation. In this scenario, Worldwide's salvage teams have done their work, effectively sanitizing the area in their wake. The heroes follow clues which lead to other sinister enterprises, but can't seem to find the shadowy organization that connects them all together. Is this "Worldwide" really just a service organization, or do they secretly control all the rest? Who are they really working for? And what's with the lobsters?

Perfumery in Medieval Europe

For *GURPS* and *Ars Magica*

by Sheila Thomas
GURPS Notes by Phil Masters

The Background

The use of aromatic herbs and flowers to sweeten the air or to embellish an individual has been known for a very long time, and had developed into a widespread, sophisticated craft in Europe by the Middle Ages. Given the value of many of the ingredients involved, and the near-alchemical, even magical nature of the processes and results -- taking simple plant, animal, and mineral ingredients, and producing something capable of influencing moods and evoking memories, with possible medical applications -- it's something which deserves to feature in RPGs set in medieval times (or in pseudo-medieval worlds). It is also associated with the spice trade (see [Variety... of Life](#) for more on that subject).

*Note: This article first appeared, in a slightly different, **Ars Magica**-specific form, in issue 2 of **Hermes' Portal**, November 2001.*

The Romans introduced many species of aromatic plants to the fringes of their Empire, and these continued to be cultivated after the Empire fell. It was common for people to wear garlands of flowers, hang fragrant plants indoors, and add aromatic plants to sweet-smelling rushes when these were spread on a floor. (This last probably started as a Norman custom.) In the making of special perfumed preparations, plants were usually used as dried flowers, dried leaves, dried and crushed roots, or extracts in water (by maceration or "digestion"), oils or fats, and later alcohol. An association between pleasant smells and good health was very widespread, so there was considerable overlap between perfumery and healing.

From the 9th century, there was great trade between Byzantium and Venice, bringing eastern perfumes into Europe. There was also much trade within Islamic domains, bringing perfumes from Baghdad to Spain. Arabian perfumery arts were very highly developed; having learned much from the Persians, the Arabs used ingredients from China, India, and Africa, producing perfumes on a large scale. They had also been using distillation since before the 9th century. *Al-Hawi*, a book by Rhazes, who lived in the late 9th or early 10th century, contains a chapter on cosmetics; it was translated into Latin in France in the late 12th century.

Musk and floral perfumes were brought to northwest Europe from Arabia in the 11th and 12th centuries, through trade with the Islamic world and with the returning Crusaders. Those who traded for these were most often also involved in trade for spices and dyestuffs. Records of the "Pepperers' Guild" of London go back to 1179; their activities include trade in spices, perfume ingredients, and dyes. There are also records from the reign of Edward I (1272-1307) which show that spices and other aromatic exotic materials were being traded in England.

Techniques

The use of alcohol in perfumery was known in northwest Europe in the 12th century but was not widespread until later. A variant of distilled alcohol, rather than alcohol mixed with water, was known in France in the 13th century, prepared by using quicklime in the mix to remove much of the water. Alcohol-based perfume was well known in parts of mainland Europe and came into use in England in the 14th century.

A common technique was to extract essential oil into fat, and then either use it in that form, or extract the essential oil from the fat with alcohol. Another was to heat plant material in water. Beeswax was sometimes used as a base instead of fats and oils. *Pot Pourri* was originally made and used wet; it started as the residue of the perfume-making process.

GURPS

Mundane Perfumery can be treated as a Mental/Average Professional Skill in **GURPS**. As it involves a fair amount of specialized technology, it is qualified by TL. GMs may permit characters with Alertness and/or Acute Taste and Smell to add their Sense roll bonus to the skill, as a keen sense of smell is very important to this line of work. (No, characters with Anosmia cannot learn this skill. A perfumer with a cold may well be useless.)

There is no general default to Perfumery from any other skill or attribute, as it involves specialized techniques and knowledge, but perfume-makers share many ideas with chemists, doctors, and alchemists, especially in the Middle Ages. At the GM's option, at TL4 or below, skills such as Chemistry, Herbalist, and Pharmacy may default from Perfumery at -6, and characters with Perfumery skill may roll it to understand and employ many standard chemical/alchemical techniques, such as distillation, and to recognize any chemical preparations or activities which their own trade employs. Likewise, at these low TLs, characters with these other skills may roll at -2 to at least recognize *what* a perfumer is doing, if not necessarily *why*.

Perfumery skill may prove useful to identify scents, including perfumes worn by other characters, which, if perfumery has a magical aspect, may give a trained magician a hint as to what another has planned. In fact, in this and other cases, Appreciate Beauty skill might serve the same purpose, at, say, a -3 penalty; knowledge of the finer things in life can extend to perfumes. Untrained characters can be given a standard Smell sense roll to recognize obvious scents (such as roses or violets), but the subtler elements of the perfumer's craft require special knowledge to name, if not to detect.

GURPS Magic Alchemy

In games where magical alchemy works, characters with Alchemy skill may roll at -2 (as above) to recognize basic perfumery processes, and perfumers may occasionally recognize some very basic ingredients in an alchemist's lab, but otherwise there is no cross-defaulting between the two skills; magical Alchemy is just too abstruse and supernatural. However, an alchemist who has also learned Perfumery skill may be especially adept at creating subtle scent-based elixirs. Suggested rules are as follows:

Employ the rules in **GURPS Magic** (chapter 6), but use the *lower* of the character's Alchemy or Perfumery skills when creating a "scent elixir," which takes three times as long to create and costs three times as much as normal liquid or powder versions. The perfume must be stored in an airtight container (it loses its power after an hour if exposed to air), and is activated by being gently warmed (human body heat is fine); fire or boiling destroys it. It may be designed to become effective 1d, 2d, or 3d minutes after application, at the maker's option -- the scent is simply made slow to develop.

The effects are similar to a pastille (on those nearby) or unguent (on the wearer), as decided by the maker, but an alchemical perfume produces no smoke or spectacular visual effect; rather, it works through a distinctive (and usually pleasant) scent. Thus, unwitting subjects may well have to make an IQ roll, perhaps at penalties, to even realize that they are subject to any sort of effect. This is typically only possible *after* it is too late to hold one's breath or avoid putting the perfume on . . .

The GM should decide which elixirs are appropriate in perfume form; subtle dramatic effect and style are good guidelines here. Animal Control, Hostile, Mental Ability, or Mental Control elixirs are usually the best. Whether or not elixirs can usually be combined safely in the campaign, mixing two perfume elixirs produces a clash of scents which will offend anyone of any taste or sensitivity.

Note that vicious tricks may be possible as well as useful benefits, especially as an alchemical perfume may be defined to affect anyone who smells it, but not the wearer, and to smell like a fairly ordinary perfume. A Juno perfume (Elixir of Jealousy) with delayed activation, presented to an attractive or witty person about to go to a party, can make a mess of their social life; a Priapus perfume (Elixir of Lecherousness) is a powerful aid to a seducer, but downright dangerous in many circumstances for an unknowing wearer. Some perfume elixirs may be barred as simply too

powerful, or made much more expensive; somehow covering a victim (or their horse) in delayed-release Sisyphus (Frustration) perfume would be a crippling trick.

Identification: Alchemists can recognize perfume elixirs by smell just as they can recognize other types, and analyze them using the standard rules. In addition, any character with Perfumer skill, whether an alchemist or not, can recognize the perfume as weird and probably having very unusual ingredients; roll vs. the skill, with modifiers for how well the character caught the smell. (Of course, the character may well have been affected by it at that point.) With another roll, the perfumer may identify some of the ingredients, which in turn may permit a guess at its nature by someone with Alchemy skill (at the GM's option).

Skilled perfumers may also be able to recognize aromatic ingredients in other mixtures (including non-perfume elixirs) with a careful sniff and a skill roll, if the GM thinks that the mixture includes such things; this is worth a +1 to any attempt at analysis, and may very occasionally permit quick guesses at the nature of unknown alchemical preparations.

GURPS Cabal

In games using the magic rules from **GURPS Cabal**, scents and exotic materials are of course often useful and effective as astrological or decanic correspondences. This implies an interesting possibility; a skilled perfumer could create a scent which incorporates and concentrates several of the effective correspondences for a given college of magic, in a convenient, portable, and seemingly innocuous form.

This might feel most appropriate for Communication and Empathy or Mind Control spells, which have very different Hermetic associations. A Hermetic agent who wears a simple rosewater scent probably intends *only* to attempt some kind of telepathic activity, whereas one who carries the subtler odors of lilies and gentian violets, seemingly to mask the unpleasantness of tobacco-smoke-saturated clothes, may actually prove dangerously *charming*. But there is little reason not to use the same trick for more direct magics; the wizard who wishes to resort to old-fashioned fireballs may smother his food in garlic and cayenne, but he may also have an apparent fondness for aloe-scented deodorants. The association between perfumery and healing holds here, too, with Phthenoth, the relevant decan, associated directly or indirectly with ambergris, jasmine, lavender and balm.

Ars Magica

Perfumery is a Craft Skill in *Ars Magica* terms, and potentially a profitable line of work for some characters. It can be learned much like any other Craft. However, the borderline magical aspects of the matter can be represented by a new Virtue:

Perfumery (+1 Virtue)

You know the aromatic properties of substances and how to prepare them. You are skilled at creating balms, perfumes and incense. You know the common scented herbs. You are also familiar with spices and dyes and their uses -- including some which border on alchemy or hedge magic.

You also have some knowledge of healing, but only in areas where an aroma is used for its beneficial effect; for example, scented beeswax candles may be burnt to promote healing sleep, or resin burnt to purify the air in a room.

This Virtue confers the Skill Craft: Perfumery 1 which can be improved like any other Skill, and used in its mundane aspects in the usual way.

If you are capable of performing magical activities to prepare substances for supernatural purposes, whether using Hermetic magic to manufacture potions, or employing any form of Alchemy, Herbalism, or Natural Magic (see the **Ars Magica** rulebook and the supplements *Hedge Magic* and *The Mysteries*), you may sometimes employ your knowledge of perfumery and scents to augment the effects. This is represented by a bonus to the relevant rolls, Lab Totals, etc., when preparing materials for specific purposes:

Altering moods and emotions:	+5
Inducing sleep:	+3
Purification:	+3
Warding spirits:	+2

(The storyguide is the final arbiter of what is or is not appropriate here. In general, substances augmented in this way must be used up when in operation, and should work at least partly through scent, or produce a very characteristic odor.)

Even if you have no other magical abilities, you may create balms, incense, scented candles, or perfumes which produce magical effects from the above list. (Again, the storyguide should determine what may or may not be within the capabilities of an expert perfumer.) This uses the same rules as the creation of Hermetic potions (see the **Ars Magica** rulebook), except that your Lab Total for the purpose is Intelligence + Perfumery Skill + Aura of the place where you are working, and you cannot use vis of any kind to enhance the results.

*Note: A character who possesses the Craft Skill but not the Virtue may of course manufacture perfumes with the intention of influencing moods, assisting in healing, and so on. However, their effects will be strictly realistic, and slow and subtle at best. Nonetheless, given that these effects are very much part of the medieval world view, storyguides may be fairly generous in allowing such perfumes to achieve **something**.*

Useful Ingredients

Native Plants

The following plants are likely to be available for collection or cultivation by typical medieval European perfume-makers:

- **Scented Agrimony:** A perennial herb; dried flowers and leaves are used.
- **Angelica:** A biennial herb, reputed to be effective against evil spirits and infectious disease. A fragrant oil is extracted from the seeds and root for use in perfumery; the seed and root are used dry in pot pourri.
- **Apple.**
- **Avens (Geum):** Dried rhizomes and leaves.
- **Birch:** Essential oil from leaf buds.
- **Blackcurrant:** Essential oil from flower buds.
- **Broom:** Flowers.
- **Calamint:** Several species used dried or as essential oil.
- **Camomile:** A herb used as medicine and for strewing. Dried flowers or oil extracted from flowers are employed.
- **Clover:** Dried flowers.
- **Cyperus (Sedge roots):** Rhizomes, used dried and powdered, yield a violet-like fragrance.
- **Elderflower:** Oil extracted from flowers, or dried flowers.
- **Fennel:** Essential oil from seeds. Fennel also has culinary and medical uses, and is reputed to ward off evil spirits and witches.
- **Fern:** Oil extracted from rhizomes of Common Male Fern had medical and perfumes uses.
- **Feverfew:** A perennial plant; extracts from flowers and leaves are used in medicine and, less frequently, in perfume.
- **Hawthorn:** Fragrant flowers.
- **Hyssop:** Extracted oil or dried leaves.
- **Lavender:** Extracts and dried flowers and leaves.
- **Lemon balm:** Oil from leaves and dried leaves.
- **Lily of the Valley:** Flowers.
- **Melilot:** Dried flowers and leaves.

- **Milfoil (Yarrow):** Dried flowers. The plant has diabolical associations.
- **Mint:** Medical, culinary, strewing, and perfume uses.
- **Oak moss (lichen):** Powdered and used as a fixative.
- **Orris (Iris rhizome):** Dried, acts as a fixative with violet fragrance.
- **Rose:** Extracts from petals and fresh or dried petals.
- **Rosemary:** A strewing herb; the dried leaves are used.
- **Rue:** Oil from leaves; medical and perfume use; reputed to guard against witches.
- **Sage:** Dried leaves.
- **Tansy:** Another strewing herb whose dried leaves are used.
- **Violet:** Oil from flowers.

Imported Ingredients

In medieval times, the following would probably be obtained from traders. Many of these ingredients would have to have been imported from distant lands, including Asia and the tropics.

- **Aloewood:** Introduced into Europe by Arabs in 8th century and spread rapidly. An aromatic heartwood from an evergreen tree obtained by the Arabs from China, Assam, and Malaysia, which produces a fragrant oil when diseased. An important ingredient of pomanders (as oil) and pot pourri (dried).
- **Alpine rose:** Oil obtained from the roots.
- **Ambergris:** A sperm whale excretion (although this origin was unknown for a very long time) found on the Indian Ocean coast. Used since early Arabian times (6th century) in alcohol.
- **Ammoniacum:** Juice from a North African plant. Used as incense.
- **Anise:** Cultivated through Europe and in England during the Middle Ages for medical and culinary use; dried seeds and oil extracted from them are used in perfumery.
- **Apricot kernels:** Oil extract frequently used in early Arabian perfumes.
- **Basil:** A herb with culinary and perfume use (both the essential oil and dried leaves).
- **Ben oil:** From seeds of the Moringa tree native to North India, frequently used as a base in early Arabian perfumes.
- **Bitter almond:** Essential oil from the fruit used as a base.
- **Camphor:** Crystals formed from oil extracted from wood; very frequently used in early Arabian perfumes.
- **Caraway:** An Asian and Mediterranean spice plant; oil extracted from the fruit and leaves has culinary and perfume uses.
- **Cassia:** A name used for a number of similar Asian plants. The dried buds and dried bark are used in cooking; oil is used in perfume. Cassia bark is often used as an inferior substitute for cinnamon (see below) in cooking, and there is some confusion in old texts between cassia, cinnamon, and other fragrant barks.
- **Cedar wood:** Dried twigs and roots are used in incense; oil extract is used in perfume.
- **Cinnamon:** Dried bark used as perfumed beads and in pomanders; oil from leaves is used in perfume and unguents.
- **Civet:** A glandular secretion from the African civet cat, used in very small quantities; became popular in Arabia in the 10th century.
- **Clary sage (Salvia):** Fragrant oil and dried leaves. Also used for eye problems.
- **Cumin:** Oil from dried "seeds" (actually fruit). Also has medical and culinary uses (the latter in seed form).
- **Dill:** Oil extracted from plant. Dill has culinary, medical, and perfume use, and is reputed to be good against witchcraft.
- **Frankincense:** A gum resin extruded from wood of certain trees, often used in incense.
- **Gum arabic:** A gum extruded by Acacia trees, dried and used in incense, and in early Arabian perfumes.
- **Jasmine:** Leaves, flowers and oils, commonly used in early Arabian perfumes.
- **Labdanum:** A resin secreted by Cistus (Rock Rose) species, popularly collected by combing it from the beards of goats. Used in early Arabian perfumes and in European pomanders.
- **Lovage:** Dried leaves and roots.
- **Marjoram:** Oil from seeds and leaves and dried leaves, with medical, culinary and perfume uses.
- **Mignonette (Reseda):** Essential oil from flowers.

- Musk:** A glandular secretion from musk deer, very frequently used in early Arabian perfumes.
- **Myrrh (includes Opoponax):** A gum resin from a type of tree, used in perfumes and incense.
 - **Myrtle:** Oil or dried flowers and leaves. Berries and fresh leaves were used in early Arabian perfumes.
 - **Rosewater (also Attar of Roses):** Made by a distillation process from rose petals in water. Attar (essential oil) is obtained by redistillation of rosewater. Very popular in Arabia.
 - **Saffron:** The dried stigmas of a type of crocus, and oil from these. Grown in Europe, but very expensive as production is very labor-intensive. Saffron has uses in cooking, dying, and perfume, and is very important in Arabian perfumery.
 - **Sandalwood:** Oil from the heartwood of a tree; a fragrance and fixative.
 - **Savory:** Dried leaves and flowers, with culinary and perfume uses.
 - **Storax:** Resin from bark is used in incense and pomanders.
 - **Sweet orange:** Essential oil from the fruit peel; the peel is also used dried.
 - **Terebinth:** Oil and gum resin, used in pomanders.
 - **Thyme:** Oil from leaves; the leaves are also used in incense.
 - **Valerian:** Oil, leaves, and roots have medical, culinary and perfume use.

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The Universal Canary

by Alice Turov

"Quiet!" shouted Dr. Lewart, addressing the parlor full of wealthy businessmen. "Don't you understand?!? We have been infiltrated by demons!" The bemused silence that followed was only overshadowed by the gentle warbling of Pip-Pip, the yellow-gold canary that was the mascot of the Gentleman's Club.

"Tea is now being served," announced the butler as he entered the room.

Pip-Pip grew silent, then fell over dead.

* * *

Life is truly diverse, in ways that almost cannot be fathomed. For perhaps the ultimate proof of this truism, look no further than the universal canary. Its more mundane counterpart, the regular canary (*serinus canarius*), was often carried by miners to detect lethal levels of methane or a depletion of oxygen; its respiratory system was much more delicate than those of the miners, so it succumbed to the effects of those dangerous situations before the humans. In comparison, the universal canary (*universus canarius*) can be conditioned so that it dies when exposed to *any* specific stimulus; as such, the universal canary can serve as a powerful -- if limited -- detection device.

Breeding

Creating a universal canary that is conditioned for the correct stimulus is very difficult; as such, in some societies the canariers -- as those who train them are called -- are highly respected and sought-after. Still, the basic procedure they use is roughly the same, although there are variances between breeders.

First it is necessary to start with a healthy bird, preferably one that has not yet reached sexual maturity; a canary greater than one month yet less than nine months is acceptable, with two to six months being ideal. The canary is then placed in a controlled environment, often a sealed room. The next step is relatively simple yet cruel; the canary is brought to near-death in as slow a way as possible, while being exposed to the desired stimulus. If possible, this is done through direct contact of the stimulus; for example, to make a canary that would be sensitive to temperatures above 100°F, it would be necessary to keep the bird at that temperature until it comes close to dying.

However, it is not always possible to damage the canary with the stimulus in question. In this case it becomes necessary to ensure that a varied range of the stimulus is provided, and the animal is harmed in the process (usually through starvation). For example, to breed a universal canary that can detect lies, you would need to expose it to various people telling deliberate lies in front of it, while depriving it of food and water. (If only one person was telling lies, the canary would probably become useful in detecting if that *specific* person was lying.) Sometimes both techniques may be combined; for example, to make a universal canary that was sensitive to magic, you would fill its controlled environment with a wide variety of magical effects, *and* you would seek to cause the bird direct damage through magic.

Once the universal canary has been exposed to the stimulus, it is then necessary to make sure it *doesn't* die; most canariers are well-trained in avian medicine. If that bird is then bred with another bird that underwent a nearly identical stimulus, the resultant chicks will be specifically vulnerable to that stimulus . . . even though its parents never will be. (Unfortunately, owing to the canary's attention span, it is almost always necessary to stimulate both male and female separately.) Once so bred, those children can continue the lineage of that stimulus to its children and beyond; as such, stimulus breeding usually only needs to be done once per desired condition, and canariers tend to guard their breeders jealously.

Canariers are split as to what effect cross-breeding has; some claim that you end up with a combinative detector, while

others believe you end up with an exclusive one. Thus breeding a universal canary that can detect magic with one that can detect lies may result in a chick that can detect magic or lies, or it may only detect deceptive magics. Regardless, such cross-breeds are always complicated, and canariers generally try to avoid it unless a client has a specific need.

The Result

Once it has been born of appropriately conditioned parents, the universal canary will respond to its stimulus very similarly as a mundane canary responds to dangerous levels of methane or lack of oxygen: It will die, quickly (usually . . . if the amount is miniscule enough, it may merely pass out or stop singing). As such, universal canaries are usually not appropriate for any common or expected conditions; keeping a magic-detecting canary in a king's court where magic is forbidden is useful, while carrying one through a diverse high-fantasy marketplace will probably be tragic. Its senses, however, are not infinite. For ease of play, assume that a canary has senses comparable to a human; thus a death-detecting canary may be able to see something die or smell death in the building, but it would not be able to detect a demise a half-mile away.

Generally speaking, canariers can breed the lineage to detect whatever levels are requested; the limitations seem to be more on the creativity of the canarier than the abilities of the universal canary. Thus a lie-detecting canary may be bred so it dies when exposed to *any* lie, lies that pertain to one person, treasonous lies, and so on.

Presuming they are never exposed to their fatal element, universal canaries can live as long as their mundane brethren; six to 12 years is common, with 20 being an upper limit.

Canaries in the Game

Universal canaries are ideal for slightly unrealistic campaigns where better detection means are unavailable; although real canaries weren't used in coal mines until the 1800s, there's nothing to keep universal canaries from being used much earlier (or later) than that. Their inexact nature and one-time usability makes them perfect to maintain some semblance of mystery; while a "detect magic" spell may unbalance many campaigns, a magic-detecting canary would not. In addition, carrying animals is much more difficult than more mundane detection advices. And sometimes canaries just die on their own, which can lead to a "false positive" that can make for intriguing possibilities.

Some possibilities for detectable stimuli include: any radiation or energy (infrared, ultraviolet, gamma); any type of creature or monster (ghosts, demons, vampires); any moral/ethical ideal (law, chaos, good, evil); any unusual forces (super-powers, psionics); any emotion (love, hatred, infidelity). In actuality, the canaries are only limited by creativity and the GM's willingness to detect outrageous objects. (Of course, the GM is free to dispense with the notion of the universal canary entirely, sticking with one breed of detector.)

Campaign Ideas

- In an **Atomic Horror** campaign, Particle X has begun imbuing people with strange powers and murderous thoughts. Fortunately, Professor Flotsam has devised a long-term and seemingly crazy means of detecting these hidden monsters . . . if only the heroes can capture someone *known* to be infected with the radiation.
- In a cyberpunk campaign, the protagonists have thwarted the corp's myriad of defensive measures, and reached the final room that contains the mainframe with their goal. So why is it surrounded with different breeds of canaries, all hooked up to monitoring devices? What are they there to detect . . . and how can this low-tech conundrum be dealt with?
- A bird-handler approaches the king with a lineage of canaries he claims will detect traitors to the court. Derided at first, his credibility increases when one of his birds dies near the scowling vizier. Within weeks the entire court is in an uproar to root out those who oppose the king. So how do the adventurers react to the mysterious old man's claims that the handler's bird *really* detect those with an ancestral link to an artifact of great power?

Running The Adventure, Part IV -- Let's Get Pivotal

Two weeks ago we were talking about pacing the game. This was, of course, part of my larger rambling series on running adventures in general, which began with [gathering the players](#) and [starting the adventure](#).

This week I'm going to be talking about the pivotal scene, whose very existence I've postulated from the [very beginning](#) of the *previous* series on creating adventures. Yes, this is the exciting bit: The dramatic revelation from what appeared to be an unnoteworthy NPC. The moral conundrum of a seemingly impossible situation. The intriguing offer from a questionable patron.

So what do I do with that pivotal scene . . . the scene which I built the rest of the adventure around . . . the very hook necessary for me to conceptualize the adventure?

Well, it's entirely possible the answer is "nothing."

In one of my more memorable creative writing classes back in college, our professor encouraged us to "throw away our babies." No, she wasn't some [Elizabeth Béthory](#) wannabe. What she meant was that, in some creative pieces, there are often instances where an entire work is written and built around some central concept -- perhaps a scene or line of text. And very often the rest of the piece is completely fine and laudable . . . except that one bit, which stands out like a sore thumb. When it's suggested that the unusual bit be exorcised, the writer often exclaims, "But that's my baby!" . . . to which the teacher would respond, "Well, then, you may just need to get rid of that baby."

Anyway, the same point applies in my adventure; if I find that my pivotal scene isn't going to work -- usually because the players have wandered far from where I'd originally planned -- I simply won't use it. After all, the pivotal scene has already served its purpose as far as I'm concerned; I was able to concoct the entire adventure around it, and it gave me the focus and confidence necessary to release the players from the closet I locked them in and allow them to the gaming table. (A few times in the past I pushed the PCs back to that pivotal scene; in most instances it *did* feel forced, and disrupted the flow of an otherwise enjoyable adventure.)

Now, it's entirely possible that the pivotal scene is no longer necessary. But, more often than not, it is . . . which is good, because, after all, I love that pivotal scene. (In fact, that's why often I front-load that scene to the beginning of the adventure; that way there are fewer opportunities for it to go awry.)

So, if and when the need comes to run that pivotal scene, I make sure to keep some things in mind.

It's just another scene. Yes, the prospect of the pivotal scene is exciting to me, but ultimately it's just another brick in the well-balanced diet of a basket of uncounted chickens (or something like that). Some GMs use a similar "key scene" technique, but often while observing them I'll note that they aren't able to keep their poker face or focus on it being no more important than other scenes. As such, they'll spoil some of the enjoyment for the players:

"Okay; okay; okay . . . you all are at the party, and everything's normal . . . you're having fun, when a servant comes up and . . . *offers you all a DRINK!!!!*"

"Ummm . . . I think I'm going to examine that drink."

"What?!? You *can't!*"

Although the scene may well provide the impetus for the rest of the adventure, that doesn't necessarily mean the players will know this . . . and I try not to spoil anything by being too gleeful.

It's all about the players. Hopefully I kept this in mind when I devised the scene in the first place. But if not, I try to reinforce this when it comes time to run the pivotal moment.

What does this mean? Well, if at all possible, I try to ensure that the big pivotal moment directly involves the players. Unlike the climax of the adventure, which almost de facto needs to involve the players, the pivotal moment doesn't

necessarily bring the PCs in. So I try to make sure it does.

Let's go back to the example we've been building off from the beginning: The mayor (or someone who resembles him) barges into a party the PCs are attending and starts shooting people. Done without the players in mind, it's possible for the event to overshadow the heroes; the mayor barges in, bullets start flying, people fall over wounded, the mayor escapes. (As a hint, if the players are ever stammering because they're trying to react, but you keep on going with the scene, that may be sign of a problem.)

But what if you break this pivotal moment down? To steal a *Matrix*-ism, what if you slowed things down to "bullet-time?"

GM: "The mayor enters."

PLAYER 1: "I keep chatting with the councilwoman."

PLAYER 2: "I try to catch his eye."

GM: "It's difficult to do; he's moving purposefully. <making perception rolls, pulling Player 1 aside> Everything slows down as your heart jumps; you note the mayor has a gun. Declare your next action."

PLAYER 1: "Can I shout anything?"

GM: "When you return, you can say one word to the group."

PLAYER 1: "I'm going to dart to the Mayor."

[GM and Player 1 return to the table]

GM: "Dugan seems intent on darting into the crowd; he shouts out . . . [points to Player 1.]

PLAYER 1: "GUN!!!"

GM [To Player 2]: "What do you do?"

PLAYER 2: "I try to interpose in front of the mayor, looking for a gunman."

[Player 1 smacks his forehead]

GM [to Player 2]: "You see a flash; the afterimages fog your retinas. You feel a burning in your side, and feel some liquid begin to drip from there onto your expensive rental shoes."

And so on.

Obviously there are a lot of ways I could run this scene, but this way keeps the players active and involved, feeling more like they were directly involved instead of the Raging Rolling Pin of GM Plot bowling over them.

(Of course, this advice might seem entirely contradictory to the previous point of "it's just another scene." Welllll . . . yeah. Quote: "Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself. I am large, I contain multitudes." More to the point, I try to make sure that I vary scenes regardless, and keep players involved in all situations. So there.)

Now let's take another example: The pivotal moment is a revelation by the Galactic Emperor that he is going to declare war against the barbarians in the Psi Phi Quadrant. Now, this can be done as a standard Space Opera political scene - with the PCs staring slack-jawed as the Emperor gives his long-winded speech to the inactive throngs - but how can it be made to involve the players more?

Well, how about:

GM: "The Emperor's trusted aide comes to you. 'May I . . . and the Empire . . . have a moment of your time?'"

PLAYER 1: "For the Empire . . . Of course; what is it?"

GM: "'You have considerable knowledge in speech-writing, yes?'"

PLAYER 1: "Well, I don't like to brag . . ."

PLAYER 2: "Yes he does."

GM: "'I apologize; this is not the time for levity. I must ask for your help on behalf of the Emperor.'"

PLAYER 1: "What is it?"

GM: "'He needs you to compose a speech he will be giving in an hour.'"

PLAYER 1: "Really? What's the topic?"

GM: "'War.'"

And so it goes.

If the idea of the war was going to be the big surprising event of the pivotal moment, then both possibilities retain the same emotional effect . . . but the latter version makes the players more involved.

Be prepared to be derailed. For me personally, my pivotal moments are often the "weak points" of the adventure; in the examples above, if the heroes somehow manage to capture the mayor or flatly deny to help the Emperor (or even interact with his aide), things may deflate quickly. Hopefully I've taken those into account when I've designed the adventure, but if not, I always try to prepare myself for it to All Go Wrong.

But hopefully it won't, and the players will have a great time as their characters scramble to react. Having players call me "evil" is perhaps one of the biggest perks of the GMing job.

Next time we'll talk about the adventure's climax . . . and no tittering from those of you in the back of the room!

--*Steven Marsh*

Pyramid Review

Starfleet Operations Manual (for Star Trek Roleplaying Game)

Published by [Decipher, Inc.](#)

Written by Ken Hite

Illustrated by C. Brent Ferguson and David Pipgras

96-page full-color hardback; \$20

Bar the recently released *Star Trek Roleplaying Game Narrator's Screen*, Decipher Inc has been somewhat remiss in providing support for the roleplaying side of its *Star Trek* license since the publication last year of the [Player's](#) and [Narrators Guides](#). They rectify this with the *Starfleet Operations Manual*, a sourcebook that expands upon and acts as a companion to the *Player's Guide*. Written by Ken Hite, its material is not wholly restricted to the province of the player, as the Narrator will get as much use out of the *Starfleet Operations Manual* in creating and adding elements to their own series. If there is a restriction, it lies in what it covers. It is primarily designed for use with Starfleet characters rather than with civilian groups, but that said, much of the *Starfleet Operations Manual* could just as easily be applied to a series built around personnel serving aboard the space fleets of other species, such as the Klingons or Romulans.

The *Starfleet Operations Manual* is a slim-but-attractive tan volume. Inside its full-color layout is pleasingly clear and lacks the clutter of the two core books. It also isn't as heavily illustrated as either of those, but it does make more use of photographs taken from the current *Star Trek* series, *Enterprise*. Despite these images, the emphasis in the *Starfleet Operations Manual* is firmly upon Starfleet, which means that the time of *Enterprise* falls outside of its scope. Over the course of its six chapters, the supplement includes a discussion of Starfleet operational practice, another look at skills and traits, officer training programs, eight new species, standard Starfleet equipment, and finally fleet operations and sample ships of the line.

The supplement opens with an explanation of Starfleet standard operations. This overview provides a thumbnail explanation of each of the many varied missions its personnel might undertake, each of the shipboard Alert Status conditions along with their Ship Contact Protocol, Tactical Doctrine, and Away Team Guidelines. In looking at intelligence type missions, it also suggests how an intelligence-orientated series could be run. This includes groups comprised of a mix of character types, civilian and/or Starfleet personnel with intelligence professionals, and also those comprised solely of intelligence professionals. The chapter is rounded out with an explanation and illustration of all Starfleet's uniforms over its history, and finally an explanation of what happens should a member of Starfleet be subject to disciplinary procedures.

The next chapter begins by revisiting the game's core skills, providing a more detailed explanation of how some of them work, as well as expanding upon several others. Thus for armed combat, several schools are provided -- Anbo-jytsu (Centauran blind fighting using a staff), Chaka Hramdel (the Andorian art of fighting with their traditional dagger, the Chaka), and for fans of Hikaru Sulu, Fencing. Each school provides familiarity with a weapon class, but gives bonuses to its speciality weapons; thus Fencing would enable the pupil to pick up and wield swords, Klingon Mek'leth or something similar, but it gives bonuses for particular use with the sword. Pupils can learn maneuvers and abilities taught by each school, and these are purchased as traits. Unarmed combat is treated in the same fashion, while Ranged Combat: Energy Weapons receives a number of new traits that could just as easily be applied to other projectile weapons. The other skills receive more of a clarification rather than an expansion. One nice touch is an insert giving both the layout of an atypical Starfleet vessel's bridge and the various skill tests that apply to the various stations. Only one new skill is added: Operate Vehicle, which covers land, sea, and air vessel specializations; the two

new Edges (the game's answer to advantages) are Famous Ship and Famous Fleet. The former can be taken to reflect an officer's previous tour of duty aboard a ship such as the *USS Enterprise*, while the latter applies to service with a famous fleet. Several examples of these are given later in the supplement.

The following chapter contains a plethora of new professional abilities to add to those included in the *Player's Guide*. There are whole new professional packages in the form of the A&A (Anthropology and Archaeology) officer, the Communications Officer and the Phaser Control Officer. In the case of the latter two, their inclusion seems more suited to the creation of Starfleet officers prior to the *Next Generation* setting, but the author also describes how they can be used in the modern era.

The chapter is rounded with a variation upon the selection of advancements in which characters do not take individual picks, but instead take a whole package that counts as one complete advancement. The 10 listed are tied into the Famous Fleet trait listed earlier, and also discussed in the section on fleet deployment. They also hark back to the packages given for tours in the designers' previous take on the license published by Last Unicorn Games. Also given are two optional alternatives for handling promotions in the game.

The eight new species can be found serving as members of Starfleet. Fans of *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* will appreciate the inclusion of the Deltans, while the Tellarites and Tiburonese are welcome additions from *The Original Series* (both game and television series). Curiously the Alpha Centaurans have dropped the "Alpha," and while the game finally receives a felinoid race, it is not the Caitans, but the Regulans (fans of *The Animated Series* could just rename them anyway). Other races include the Bolians, Grazerites, and Zaldans.

Although Starfleet prefers missions to be performed with just the standard issue communicator, phaser, and Tricorder, plus medikit for the doctor, the chapter on Mission Equipment list some 25 items that its officers might wield at some time or another. The list includes the standard issue listed above plus personal items such as the flight vest or rocket boots; medical equipment from the Energy Scalpel to the now-frowned-upon Psychotricorder; Polaron Probes and Verteron Inducers for the Engineering Department; and Security can play with the Exographic Sensor that allows them to see distant objects through solid matter. The list of weapons includes both standard-issue sidearms, heavy weapons and one or two classified weapons. Players with Medical-branch characters will find the table of Hypospray drugs particularly useful, as are the rules covering equipment cost, scrounging, and the black market for characters that prefer to circumvent pesky things like red tape. Although the Tricorder receives a double-page spread explaining its functions and appropriate skill tests, this is really the only device to receive such treatment . . . or indeed be properly illustrated, which is a major downside to an otherwise solid chapter.

The last chapter concentrates on the ship and fleet aspects of Starfleet, describing the history and organization of both from its earliest days until after the defeat of the Dominion in the 24th century. Originally ships were organized into Task Forces to take account of Starfleet's relatively low complement of vessels, but this changed as a result of the original war with Cardassia, and ships were organized into standing fleets. The purpose of these fleets is also described, and they tie back into the Famous Fleet Edge and various advancement packages given earlier in the supplement. In addition, many starbases of various kinds are described, with this done so in a manner that would make them of use for any part of Starfleet's history. The table on Starfleet Flag Rank can also applied to any part of Starfleet's history, explaining as it does the promotion of officers beyond the rank of captain and also why the ranks of Fleet Captain and Commodore are no longer used in the 24th century. This table supplants the one given in the *Player's Guide*.

Eight new Starfleet vessels are described and given stats, from the 22nd century Daedalus-class and 23rd century Ranger-class through workhorses like the Miranda-class, to the current top-of-the-line Sovereign class. These are all ready for play, although it is a pity that none of them are given their own "Starship Range Increment Bar" for use in ship-to-ship combat. Finally, the *Starfleet Operations Manual* is rounded out with an expanded four-page character sheet -- or "Starfleet Personnel Jacket" -- that is a vast improvement upon the one given in the *Player's Guide*. It is done in shades of blue upon a white background with black text, making it much easier to photocopy. While it is a pleasure to be given a workable character sheet, it is a pity that it could not have been included in the recently published *Narrator's Screen*.

The ***Starfleet Operations Manual*** represents a solid sourcebook that expands upon the information given in the ***Player's Guide***, more so if both player and narrator have gamed under *only* Decipher's Coda rules. Those coming to this book after having seen the ***Star Trek: The Next Generation Player's Guide*** and ***The Price of Freedom: The United Federation of Planets*** supplements published by Last Unicorn Games may suffer slight bouts of *déjà vu*, as some of the material is similar. In truth, this should be no surprise, given both the commonality of both source material and the designers. The ***Starfleet Operations Manual*** does feel a little slim and seems to be continuing a recent trend of smaller-sized, slightly-more-expensive hardbacks, and is thus likely to leave the purchaser wanting more in all of the various subjects it covers. Despite this, there is enough here for most Starfleet focused games, with ***the Starfleet Operations Manual*** working to underpin and bolster such campaigns rather than extend the possibilities of the setting.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Fraud Squad -- Who Cooked the Books?

Published by [Diet Evil Games](#)

56 full-color cards & instructions; \$11.95

Fraud Squad is the first release from a new Austin-based game publisher, Diet Evil Games. It is a timely and topical card game in which each player is part of a Securities & Exchange Commission team assigned to investigate corporate fraud. A source has tipped the SEC off that a major company has been filing false accounts, but provided no more details than this. The investigator that successfully unmasks the culprit will get a promotion, but in order to get the job done properly the boss stresses that every member of the team must cooperate with each other.

Designed for three to six players, aged 8 years and up, ***Fraud Squad*** consists of 56 full-color cards; the game also requires a single six-sided die plus pen and scratch paper for each player. The cards are split between 10 rules and chart cards, with the remainder consisting of suspect -- Employee, Company, Technique, and Location -- cards and special cards. The cards are all nicely illustrated, though the Company and Technique cards are invariably better illustrated and more amusing than the others. For example, the "Pseudo Corp" company has the motto, "Pretending to do business for over 20 years"; Spendron the motto, "Spending profits so you don't have to"; and Globecon's is, "Deceiving the world, one customer."

At the beginning of the game, the suspects are separated into their four types and shuffled; one of each type is slipped still-hidden into the game's box. These are the details of the crime that has to be exposed during play. If all this sounds to you like the classic family game, ***Clue*** -- also known as ***Cluedo***, then you would not be all that wrong. Instead of a board of a mansion and questions over a death, ***Fraud Squad*** is played through cards and random events each turn. The remaining suspect cards are shuffled in with the special cards and dealt out to the players, with the number of cards received dependant upon the number of participants. Any cards left over sit in the middle of the table as the draw deck.

On a turn, each player rolls the die against the Action Chart to determine what his investigator does. This could be Collaborate, Eavesdrop, Collaborate & Roll Again, Collaborate or Eavesdrop, or (at worst) spend the time Asleep at your Desk, in which case nothing happens. To Eavesdrop, a player can draw a card from the top of the deck or a random card from another player's hand. To Collaborate, they ask another player to share evidence by specifying one Employee, Company, Technique, and Location card. If he possesses one of these cards, it must be shown to the asking player; if not, the next investigator is asked and so on until one of the specified Suspect cards has been shown to the asking player.

As each investigator gathers evidence, they make a note of it on their scratch paper. Alternatively, they can make use of the "evidence tracking chart" that can be downloaded from the company website. A full list of the Suspect Cards is included with the game, and our group copied this list and had them laminated for reuse. Once an investigator believes that they have gained enough evidence, they can make an arrest. This has them stating the nature of the crime, which company and employee committed it and where, before looking privately at the four suspect cards in the box. Should the guess be correct, that investigation is successful; the investigator gets a promotion and the game is won. If not, that player is out of the game except to share evidence with the remaining players. The game continues until an investigator makes a correct arrest and wins the game.

Besides the standard game play, there are a number of Special Cards, each stating when they can be played. "Out Sick" makes a player unavailable for Collaboration or Eavesdropping, but is countered by the "I have your Pager Number" card; "Double Latte" allows an extra turn; whereas "Tackle Paperwork Backlog" makes a player lose his next turn when played upon them. "Sleight of Hand" lets a player steal a card from another player, but "Make friends with the

Janitor" lets him steal a card from every player; the "Guard Dog or Security Guard" cards counter both of these cards. "Bring the Boss to the Meeting" is played during a Collaboration and forces a Full Disclosure, as does "The Boss is your next-door neighbor," which also counters an "Out Sick" card. A Full Disclosure forces an investigator to reveal all of their evidence and the targeted player must show all of their suspect cards to the inquiring investigator.

Without the special cards, there is relatively little in ***Fraud Squad*** to attract the experienced or more serious game player. In simulating its timely financial malpractice theme, they do much to spice up what would otherwise be a card game variant of the boardgame ***Clue***. Their inclusion may keep players coming back to what is really quite an uncomplicated little family game, as might the rules for more serious play and for two-player games, both available on the publisher's website.

--*Matthew Pook*

Circus Maximus

by Stephen Dedman

The group known as Circus Maximus has been collecting, exhibiting, selling, and possibly even creating oddities and monsters for hundreds of years. Someone curiously similar to Maximus is reported to have supplied hermaphrodites and phoenix meat to Caligula and Egabalus, freaks to Vlad Dracul, and giants to Catherine the Great.

The Circus Maximus also has a profitable sideline as a smuggling operation. Mostly it smuggles fugitives, disguised as part of the freakshow or the crew, but the hidden compartments in its wagons have also carried stolen property, counterfeit currency, weapons and drugs. Maximus also delights in luring the young, innocent and attractive away from their country homes. Those who prove useful may stay on, but most are sold as slaves or (after some mental and/or physical modifications) freaks. Maximus and Mr. Methuselah would never hesitate to destroy someone's face to prevent them being recognized, or even to amputate their hands so they can't be identified by their fingerprints.

The Circus Maximus always comprises at least 10 people, including Maximus himself. Most of these will have been with the Circus for years, but others may be riding with them for protection, or have been recently abducted. Maximus has become increasingly reluctant to visit large cities since the invention of telecommunications, preferring small towns with few police. A marshal's posse in a Weird West or Deadlands campaign may have to protect a town from the Circus's onslaught: modern city-based PCs are most likely to encounter Maximus if they are trying to track down a fugitive or an abductee who may be traveling with the troupe.

Maximus

250 points

ST 13 [30]; **DX** 13 [30]; **IQ** 14 [40]; **HT** 15 [50].

Basic Damage Thrust: 1d Swing: 2d-1

Dodge: 8* Parry: 10 (Fencing) Block: 6

Basic Speed: 7 Move: 7

* Boxing gives Dodge 9 vs. bare-handed or thrusting attacks

Advantages: Combat Reflexes [15]; Cultural Adaptability [25]; Empathy [free with Telepathy]; Handsome [15]; Longevity [5]; Voice [10]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10].

Psionics: Telepathy (5) [25].

Disadvantages: Bully [-10]; Gigantism [-10]; Lecherousness [-15]; Sadism [-15]; Xenophilia [-5].

Quirks: Snappy dresser; Distrusts new inventions; Intolerance (Doctors); Collects silver coins and dirty jokes; Curses in Latin.

Appearance: Late 30s; olive complexion, dark gray eyes, black hair, moustache and goatee; 7', 270 lbs.

Gear: Powerful revolver; Swordcane or Saber; 4-yard whip; Winchester '94 (in caravan); Black upper-class suit over concealable body armor; light cape (black); top hat; black cowboy boots.

Skills: Administration-13 [0]; Area Knowledge (USA)-14 [1], (World)-13 [.5]; Acting-13 [1]; Bard-16 [2]; Boxing-12 [1]; Cloak-11 [.5]; Detect Lies-16 [1]; Diplomacy-14 [1]; Driving (Truck)-12 [.5], (Car)-12 [.5]; Fast-Draw (Pistol)-13 [.5], (Saber)-13 [.5]; Fast-Talk-13 [1]; Fencing-14 [4]; First Aid-12 [.5]; Forgery-12 [.5]; Fortune Telling-13 [0]; Gambling-13 [1]; Guns (Pistol)-16 [2], (Rifle)-14 [.5]; Holdout-12 [.5]; Hypnotism-14 [4]; Intimidation-14 [2]; Juggling-11 [0]; Language (English)-16 [0], (French)-14 [0.5], (Hebrew)-14 [0.5], (Latin)-14 [0.5], (Spanish)-14 [0.5], (Russian)-14 [0.5]; Leadership-14 [2]; Merchant-16 [8]; Mindwipe-12 [1]; Pickpocket-11 [0.5]; Psychology-16 [1];

Riding (Horse)-12 [.5]; Sex-Appeal-16 [2]; Sleep-12 [1]; Sleight of Hand-14 [8]; Stealth-12 [1]; Streetwise-13 [1]; Telereceive-13 [2]; Telesend-12 [1]; Whip-13 [2].

Maximus, ringmaster and sideshow barker of the Circus Maximus (as well as stage hypnotist, mentalist, conjurer, and croupier), rarely discusses his past. He carries documents identifying himself as 38-year-old Julian McManus, heir and sole survivor of an old circus family, but these may well be forged. Nobody in the circus remembers a time when he wasn't the boss.

Maximus likes to use his mind-reading act in every town, to see if anybody is worth blackmailing, robbing, or abducting. He prefers to leave combat and other dirty work to his employees, but will defend himself, the circus, or his hoard of silver coins. He always wears the best concealable armor available at that tech level.

This is a super-normal version of Maximus, designed for use as a villain in *Cliffhangers*, or modern day adventures (for an *Old West* or earlier version, replace Driving with Teamster). In a *GURPS Deadlands* campaign, Maximus may be a huckster as well as a hustler: add Magical Aptitude [Huckster]/4 and the Hexes Missed Me!-14 [4], Phantom Fingers-13 [2], and Trinkets-14 [4]. Total Points: 320.

In a *GURPS Voodoo* setting, Maximus might be one of the Snake People (see p. V0102), with the added advantages and disadvantages of that species. Total points: 420.

Condor (Richard Connor)

100 points

ST 11 [10]; **DX** 13 [30]; **IQ** 10 [0]; **HT** 11 [10].

Basic Damage Thrust: 1d Swing: 2d-1

Dodge: 7 Parry: 8 Block: n/a

Basic Speed: 6 Move: 6

Advantages: Acute Hearing +3 [6]; Ambidexterity [10]; Attractive [5]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Weapon master (knife only) [20].

Disadvantages: Bad Temper [-10]; Bloodlust [-10]; Code of Honor (Pirate's) [-5]; Overconfidence [-10]; Stubbornness [-5].

Quirks: Always wears black; Homophobe; Collects exotic knives; Dislikes cold weather and hates snow; Never sits with his back to the door.

Appearance: Early 20s, tanned skin, blond hair, green eyes; 5'11", 150 lbs.

Gear: Two large knives; 10 daggers in bandolier; Leather jacket; Tight jeans; Cowboy boots; Red bandana (used as blindfold in act); Collection of knives (see p. CII26) in caravan.

Skills: Acting-10 [2]; Blind Fighting-13 [4]; Brawling-12 [.5]; Carpentry-10 [.5]; Climbing-12 [1]; Driving (Car)-12 [1]; Knife-16 [8]; Knife Throwing-16 [8]; Pickpocket-13 [4]; Pressure Points-12 [6]; Riding (Horse)-12 [1]; Running-8 [.5]; Sex-Appeal-10 [1]; Stargazing-13 [1]; Stealth-11 [.5].

Condor, the youngest member of the troupe, is the other half of the blindfolded knife-throwing act (see Livia Leblanc), as well as acting as a roustabout and Mosca's apprentice.

Derringer (David Gold)

110 points

ST 12 [20]; **DX** 14 [45]; **IQ** 10 [0]; **HT** 10 [0].

Basic Damage Thrust: 1d Swing: 1d+2
Dodge: 6 Parry: 9 (Brawling) Block: n/a
Basic Speed: 5 Move: 4

Advantages: Night Vision [10]; Sharpshooter [45].

Disadvantages: Alcoholism [-15]; Code of Honor (Gentleman's) [-10]; Dwarfism [-15]; Lecherousness (only when drunk) [-5]; Unattractive [-5].

Quirks: Very touchy about his height; Hates fairy stories and fantasy novels; Dislikes tobacco smoke, especially when hungover; Prefers revolvers to semi-automatics; Likes using empty bottles for target practice.

Appearance: Late 30s, freckled skin, dark brown hair, green eyes; 3'6" tall, 90 lbs.

Gear: Revolver in fast-draw rig (+2 to Fast-Draw); concealable pistol in sleeve or ankle holster; Bowie (large) knife; good suit over concealable body armor; bowler hat; cowboy boots.

Skills: Acting-11 [4]; Brawling-14 [2]; Disguise-10 [2]; Fast-Draw (Pistol)-16 [4]; Filch-15 [4]; Guns (Pistol)-18 [8], (other)-12; Holdout-10 [2]; Knife-13 [1]; Language (English)-10 [0]; Pickpocket-13 [2]; Riding (Horse)-12 [.5]; Scrounging-10 [1]; Speed-Load (Revolver)-13 [.5]; Stealth-13 [1].

Derringer is the sideshow dwarf, though he prefers to be known for his ability to shoot the aces out of a playing card (usually held by Livia Leblanc). He supplements his income from the circus by disguising himself as a child and shoplifting, but is careful not to draw unfavorable attention to the circus. He respects and fears Maximus, likes Herakles, and loathes the Geek.

Derringer uses the most accurate revolver available at the time for his show and guard duty (post-1955, a Colt Python with target sights, Acc 5; before that, a S&W Russian, Acc 3), and also carries at least one small handgun as a back-up.

Herakles (Erik Hanover)

220 points

ST 23 [130]; **DX** 11 [10]; **IQ** 10 [0]; **HT** 13 [30].

Basic Damage Thrust: 2d+1 Swing: 4d+1

Dodge: 6* Parry: 8 (Brawling or Boxing) Block: n/a

Basic Speed: 6 Move: 6

* Boxing gives Dodge 7 vs. bare-handed or thrusting attacks

Advantages: Animal Empathy [5]; Collected [5]; Fit [5]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Rapid Healing [5]; Toughness (DR 1) [10].

Disadvantages: Dyslexia [-15]; Easy to Read [-10]; Gluttony [-5]; Sense of Duty (Circus) [-5]; Unattractive [-5].

Quirks: Likes spicy food; Sleepy drinker; Loves most types of music, as long as it's loud; Mild claustrophobia; Undiscriminating.

Appearance: Early 20s, dark brown skin, shoulder-length curly black hair, dark brown eyes; 6'3" tall, 200 lbs.

Gear: Metal tomahawk; Hammer; Shotgun (in caravan). When not in the boxing ring, wears a sleeveless leather jerkin (PD 1, DR 1, areas 9-10, 17-18), heavy canvas pants (PD 0, DR 1), boots, and leather gloves.

Skills: Animal Handling-13 [4]; Axe/Mace-13 [8]; Boxing-12 [4]; Brawling-12 [2]; Carousing-12 [1]; Climbing-15 [0]; Driving-10 (Truck) [1] or Teamster-11 [1]; Freight Handling-9 [1] or Packing-11 [1]; Guns (Shotgun)-14 [4],

Rifle-12 [0]; Intimidation-15 [0]; Knife-11 [1]; Language (English)-10 [0]; Leadership-15 [0]; Lifting-20 [.5]; Riding (Horse)-12 [.5]; Running-11 [1]; Stealth-10 [1]; Swimming-15 [0]; Thrown Weapon (Axe)-13 [4].

Maneuvers: Jab-12 [2]; Neck Snap-18 [0]; Roundhouse Punch-12 [2].

Herakles believes he is Kleopatra's younger brother, which may or may not be true. He serves as the circus's strong man, able to lift 1,725 pounds (2,931 with extra effort), as well as offering to take on all comers in the boxing ring. He also tends to the circus's animals (except for Kleopatra's snakes), organizes sentry duty, and does most of the hard physical work around the show.

Herakles is not normally a violent person, but he is absolutely loyal to Kleopatra; he will obey any order she gives him, and will not hesitate to fight to the death (usually his opponents') to defend her or the circus. He keeps a powerful shotgun in his caravan (a double-barrel 10 gauge before 1950, a Remington Model 870 after that) for hunting and other duties.

In a magical campaign, Herakles may be a zombie (Reduce IQ to 9; point total 70); in a Voodoo campaign, a Tonton Makout (Increase DX to 12, HT to 14, reduce IQ to 9, point total 241. See p. VO102).

Jimmy the Geek

-100 points

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 9 [-10]; **IQ** 8 [-15]; **HT** 9 [-10].

Basic Damage Thrust: 1d-2 Swing: 1d

Dodge: 1 Parry: n/a Block: n/a

Basic Speed: 4.5 Move: 1

Advantages: Cast-Iron Stomach [15]; Disease-Resistant [5]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Resistant to Poison [5].

Disadvantages: Alcoholism [-15]; Amnesia [-25]; Bad Smell [-10]; Dead Broke [-25]; Lamé (Crippled Leg) [-15]; Ugly [-10].

Appearance: Late 40s, pale skin, dirty light brown hair, blue eyes; 5'9", 150 lbs.

Gear: Wears rags.

Skills: none.

The Geek is another constant at the Circus Maximus -- sometimes an unfortunate victim of Mr. Methuselah's experiments in brain surgery, and sometimes (particularly during Prohibition) a wino willing to do anything for unlimited cheap booze. In a "real-world" setting, he is no more than he seems: a hopeless drunk blessed (or cursed) with the ability to eat almost anything -- live animals, ground glass, and the remains of some of Maximus's victims. In a weird setting, he might be a zombie -- and in a **Deadlands** adventure, he might be a slow-witted but physically tough Harrowed.

Kleopatra (Jenny Hanover)

200 points

ST 11 [10]; **DX** 14 [45]; **IQ** 13 [30]; **HT** 14 [45].

Basic Damage Thrust: 1d-1 Swing: 1d+1

Dodge: 1 Parry: Brawling 8, Knife 6 Block: n/a

Basic Speed: 7 Move: 7

Super-Powers: Control Animals (5)-14, (Snakes Only, -60%) [18].

Advantages: Beautiful [15]; Double-Jointed [5]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Longevity [5]; Night Vision [10]; Resistant to Poison [5]; Temperature Tolerance/2 [2]; Voice [10].

Disadvantages: Bully [-10]; Jealousy [-10]; Laziness [-10]; Sadism [-15].

Quirks: Bisexual; Promiscuous; Dislikes cats (feeds kittens to her snakes); Incompetence (Gambling); Would rather die than be unattractive.

Appearance: Mid 20s, dark brown skin, short black hair, dark brown eyes; 5'7" tall, 120 lbs.

Gear: 4-yard whip; small knife (frequently envenomed with cobra or viper venom); handcuffs; tight leather vest and shorts (PD 1, DR 1, areas 9-11, 17-18); boots; medium pistol (in caravan); Python; 5-hex horde of venomous snakes.

Skills: Acrobatics-13 [2]; Animal Handling-11 [2]; Area Knowledge (USA)-12 [.5], (World)-12 [.5]; Acting-13 [2]; Bard-13 [.5]; Brawling-13 [.5]; Climbing-16 [1]; Dancing-13 [1]; Detect Lies-11 [1]; Diplomacy-12 [.5]; Disguise-13 [2]; Driving (Car)-12 [.5]; Equestrian Acrobatics-13 [2]; Erotic Art-12 [1]; Escape-15 [1]; First Aid-11 [.5]; Guns (Pistol)-16 [1]; Holdout-12 [1]; Knife-14 [1]; Knife Throwing-14 [1]; Language (Arabic)-11 [.5], (English)-11 [.5], (French)-13 [0]; Merchant-13 [2]; Pickpocket-13 [2]; Psychology-12 [2]; Riding (Horse)-13 [1]; Savoir-Faire-14 [.5]; Sex-Appeal-17 [2]; Singing-14 [.5]; Stealth-14 [1]; Streetwise-12 [1]; Swimming-13 [.5]; Whip-14 [2]; Wrestling-13 [1].

Kleopatra is the circus's female acrobat, who also performs a very popular snake dance and escapology act in the sideshow. She acts as accomplice and mistress to both Maximus and Mosca, but prefers to sleep in her own caravan surrounded by her snakes.

Kleopatra never fights when she can use sex appeal, but she's no pacifist. In a combat situation, she will try to keep her venomous snakes (a 5-hex horde of rattlesnakes, coral snakes, and cobras -- including spitting cobras, if available) between herself and any opponent, and attack with whip and pistol (a .32 or .38 revolver before 1908, a 9mm automatic after that). Her favorite method of disposing of an enemy is to tie him up and throw him into her snake tank.

To make a slightly less dangerous 188-point version of Kleopatra, change her Super-Power to a magical ring in the image of a snake (Breakable, cannot be repaired, -6 to hit, can be stolen with stealth or trickery but is not obviously powerful: -70%). To make her more powerful, give her the Shapeshifter (weresnake) advantage (10 points, p. CI44) and/or the ability to spit Venom (21 points/level, p. CI71), either as an inherent power or as a power bestowed by the ring.

Livia Leblanc (Lisa Belasco)

0 points

ST 9 [-10]; **DX** 11 [10]; **IQ** 12 [20]; **HT** 10 [0].

Basic Damage Thrust: 1d-2 Swing: 1d-1

Dodge: 5 Parry: 11 Block: n/a

Basic Speed: 5.25 Move: 7

Advantages: Initiation (Second Level) or Magical Aptitude (Magery)/1 [15]; Night Vision [10]; Rapid Healing [5].

Enchantment: Ghost Shirt or Missile Shield (tattooed onto body).

Disadvantages: Addiction (Heroin) [-40]; Albinism [-10]; Sadism [-15]; Unattractive [-5].

Quirks: Secretly in love with Condor; Likes horror stories, especially about ghosts and vampires; Mild phobia of heights; Wants to be a more powerful magician than her mother was; Takes pride in her art.

Appearance: Late 20s, white skin, long white hair, red eyes, tattooed with magical symbols and images of snakes;

5'6", 115 lbs.

Gear: Wears light cloak over skimpy costume (no DR) and boots; .22 pistol (in caravan).

Skills: Acting-11 [1]; Artist-13 [6]; Brawling-10 [.5]; Calligraphy-11 [0]; Cloak-10 [1]; Forgery-13 [6]; Guns (Pistol)-12 [.5]; Knife-10 [.5]; Language (English)-12, (French)-10 [.5]; Lockpicking-12 [2]; Occultism-11 [1]; Streetwise-11 [1]; Sex-Appeal-9 [1]; Tattooing-13 [4].

In a campaign using **GURPS Magic**, Livia has the following spells: Apportation-13 [4]; Death Vision-12 [2]; Detect Magic-12 [2]; Lend Strength-12 [2]; Locksmith-14 [6]; Missile Shield-14 [6]; Recover Strength-12 [2]; and Slow Fall-14 [6]. Total Points: 30.

In a campaign using **GURPS Voodoo** or **GURPS Spirits**, Livia has the following Skills and Rituals: Ritual Magic (Voodoo)-12 [8]; Vever Drawing-12 [4]; Path of Protection-12 [8]; Ghost Shirt-10 [10]. Total Points: 30.

Lisa Belasco is the orphaned daughter of a powerful New Orleans witch with too many enemies. Apart from an addiction to heroin, one of the last things Marie Belasco left her 13-year-old daughter was a permanent charm of protection against missiles, tattooed directly onto her skin.

Lisa is traveling with the circus, working as signwriter, tattooist and the endangered half of a blindfolded knife-throwing act, while she searches for a magical teacher. She plays little or no part in the circus's illegal activities, except for occasionally forging documents, but keeps a pistol in her caravan and will defend herself if the group is attacked.

Mosca (Marco Reyes)

250 points

ST 13 [30]; **DX** 15 [10]; **IQ** 10 [0]; **HT** 13 [30].

Basic Damage Thrust: 1d Swing: 2d-1

Dodge: 8* Parry: 11 Block: n/a

Basic Speed: 7 Move: 7

* Boxing gives Dodge 10 vs. bare-handed or thrusting attacks

Advantages: 3D Spatial Sense [10]; Absolute Timing [5]; Collected [5]; Catfall [15]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Daredevil [15]; Double-Jointed [5]; Fit [5]; Handsome [15]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Perfect Balance [15]; Peripheral Vision [15]; Rapid Healing [5]; Strong Will/2 [8].

Gadget: Human Fly suit, gives Clinging and Flight (Gliding Only, Small Wings) super-advantages. Breakable, no penalty to hit, unique. [15]

Disadvantages: Addiction (Cocaine) [-15]; Bad Temper [-10]; Code of Honor (Pirate's) [-5]; Compulsive Spending [-5]; Lecherousness [-15]; Overconfidence [-10]; Sadism [-15]; Voices, Demonic [-15].

Quirks: Mild triskaidekaphobia; Proud; Dislikes spiders; Caffeine addict; Baseball fan.

Appearance: Early 30s, olive skin, short black hair, dark brown eyes; 5'10" tall, 150 lbs.

Gear: Large knife; two daggers; jump suit; silenced 9mm pistol (after 1908).

Skills: Acrobatics-16 [8]; Acting-11 [4]; Body Language-8 [1]; Boxing-15 [2]; Carousing-13 [2]; Climbing-18 [.5]; Dancing-13 [.5]; Driving (Car)-14 [1]; Erotic Art-12 [0]; Escape-16 [1]; Fast-Draw (Knife)-15 [.5]; Fast-Talk-10 [2]; First Aid-9 [.5]; Guns (Pistol)-16 [1], (other)-12; Jumping-17 [4]; Karate-15 [4]; Knife-17 [4]; Language (English)-9 [1], (Spanish)-10; Lockpicking-10 [2]; Mechanic (Car)-12 [.5]; Motorcycle-14 [.5]; Pickpocket-14 [2]; Riding (Horse)-13 [.5]; Running-10 [.5]; Scrounging-10 [1]; Sex Appeal-14 [4]; Stealth-15 [2]; Streetwise-10 [2]; Swimming-14 [.5]; Throwing-15 [4].

Maneuvers: Back Kick-15 [1]; Drop Kick-13 [2]; Hit Location (Karate)-15 [2]; Jump Kick-15 [1]; Kicking-16 [2]; Roundhouse Punch-14 [1]; Spin Kick-16 [1].

Mosca, known to his friends as the Spanish Fly, is an acrobat, burglar, and savate champion who came to the Circus seeking refuge and became Kleopatra's second-favorite lover. He stole the human fly suit from a mad scientist who Maximus and Kleopatra were blackmailing, and who later committed suicide.

Mosca is one of the most hot-headed of the circus's perennials and actually enjoys fighting. His favorite maneuvers are the drop kick (p. MA47) and jump kick; his daggers are meant for throwing, not close combat. As well as burglary, he also performs the occasional murder-for-hire.

Mosca dislikes Maximus, but his code of honor (and a vestigial sense of self-preservation) prevents him rebelling against him. Maximus, in turn, quietly delights in sending Mosca on very dangerous missions.

In a pre-1970s campaign, Mosca's suit will be leather and padded cloth (PD 1, DR 1) with a heavy leather helm, boots, and gloves (PD 2, DR 2). In a later setting, it will be lined with Kevlar (PD 2, DR 14) or some similar flexible armor, while the helmet will be fitted with CBR filters, light-intensifier or infra-red goggles, and other gadgets.

Mr. Methuselah

25 points

ST 9 [-10]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 13 [30]; **HT** 10 [0].

Basic Damage Thrust: 1d-2 Swing: 1d-1

Dodge: 5 Parry: n/a Block: n/a

Basic Speed: 5 Move: 5

Advantages: High Pain Threshold [10]; Longevity [5]; Metabolism Control/1 [5].

Disadvantages: Addiction (Barbiturates) [-10]; Callous [-6]; Pallor [-10]; Skinny [-5]; Ugly [-10].

Quirks: Rewrites his will frequently; Doesn't drink alcohol or smoke; Avoids sunlight when possible; Loves opera, especially Wagner; Distrusts women.

Appearance: Leathery white skin, thin white hair, gray eyes; 5'5", 90 lbs.

Gear: Wears old jeans and shoes when doing act. Offstage, wears white coat over middle-class suit, broad-brimmed white hat.

Skills: Accounting-13 [4]; Acting-12 [1]; Archeology-10 [.5]; Area Knowledge (World)-12 [.5]; Disguise-13 [2]; Guns (Pistol)-11 [.5]; History-11 [1]; Language (English)-13 [0], (Greek)-11 [.5], (Hebrew)-11 [.5], (Latin)-11 [.5]; Lockpicking-13 [2]; Merchant (Drugs)-16 [.5], (other)-10; Pharmacy-13 [4]; Physician-13 [4]; Poisons-12 [1.5]; Research-12 [1]; Streetwise-11 [.5]; Surgery (Cosmetic Surgery)-16 [2], (other surgery)-10 [0].

Mr. Methuselah claims to be an ancestor of Maximus, cursed with immortality without the advantage of eternal youth, whose act consists of apparently dying on stage: he has mastered body control to the degree that he can suspend life signs. He's actually a medical doctor, struck off for drug-related offences, and acts as medic and pharmacist for the circus, as well as helping to disguise some of the fugitives they transport. Some of his less successful attempts at plastic surgery have joined the ranks of the sideshow freaks.

In a magical campaign, Mr. Methuselah may be an enslaved mummy (p. U72), which can be reanimated on demand. In a Deadlands campaign, he may be Harrowed, with Soul Eater/2. Total points: 228.

Swami Sutra (Natesh Jindal)

100 points

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 13 [30]; **IQ** 11 [10]; **HT** 13 [30].

Dodge: 6 Parry: 8 Block: n/a

Basic Speed: 6.5 Move: 6

Advantages: Breath-Holding/2 [4]; Double-Jointed [5]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Rapid Healing [5]; Strong Will/1 [4]; Temperature Tolerance/2 [2].

Disadvantages: Addiction (Cigarettes) [-5]; Miserliness [-10]; On the Edge [-15]; Pyromania [-5]; Skinny [-5].

Quirks: Hates snakes; Won't eat red meat; Chauvinistic; Incompetence (Cooking); Intolerance (Muslims).

Appearance: Early 50s; dark brown skin, dark brown eyes, bald but for thin white eyebrows; 5'9", 100 lbs.

Gear: Cheap foil (for Sword Swallowing Act); Cheap scimitar; Small knife. Wears turban and loincloth, with an old overcoat for cold weather.

Skills: Acrobatics-13 [4]; Acting-11 [2]; Breath Control-12 [6]; Broadsword-12 [1]; Climbing-15 [1]; Erotic Art-10 [.5]; Escape-15 [2]; Fire-Eating-14 [4]; Fire Walking-14 [6]; Judo-12 [2]; Jumping-13 [2]; Karate-12 [2]; Knife-13 [1]; Knife Throwing-12 [.5]; Language (English)-9 [1], (Hindi)-11 [0]; Scrounging-11 [1]; Sex Appeal-11 [.5]; Stealth-13 [2]; Streetwise-10 [1]; Swimming-12 [.5]; Sword-Swallowing-14 [2]; Theology (Hinduism)-10 [1].

Maneuvers: Arm Lock-14 [1]; Elbow Strike-12 [1]; Knee Strike-13 [1]; Spin Kick-1 [1].

Calcutta-born Natesh "Nate" Jindal is the sideshow's fire-walker, fire-eater, underwater escape artist, and rubber man, as well as frequently assisting Mosca in breaking into houses (usually acting as lookout).

The 100-point Sutra isn't much of a threat, but to make him into a 250-point fire-breathing "rubber man" for a Supers campaign, increase DX and DX-based skills by +2, add Body of Fire/6 (Unreliable limitation; Activation number 11 [24]; Bouncing/1 [12]; Constriction Attack [15]; Damage Resistance/1 [3]; Elastic Skin [20]; Flame Jet (2)-12 [16]; Injury Tolerance (No Blood) [5]; and Stretching/1 [30].

For a 250-point cinematic martial artist, Trained by a Master in Kalari, increase DX and DX-based skills by +2, IQ and IQ-based skills by +1, ST by +3, and add the Trained by a Master advantage. Increase Karate and Judo to 16 and Breath Control to 12 [8 points each], and Theology (Hinduism) to 14 [4 points]; this will also increase all maneuvers by +2. Add Blind Fighting-9 [2], Body Control-10 [4], Meditation-12 [8], Mental Strength-10 [2], Power Blow-10 [2], Pressure Points-11 [4] and Roll with Blow-16 [4].

Ursula, the Bearded Lady

25 points

ST 11 [10]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 10 [0]; **HT** 10 [0].

Basic Damage Thrust: 1d-1 Swing: 1d+1

Dodge: 5* Parry: 7 Block: n/a

Basic Speed: 5 Move: 3

* Boxing gives Dodge 6 vs. bare-handed or thrusting attacks

Advantages: Alcohol Tolerance [5]; Alertness +1 [5]; Animal Empathy [5]; High Pain Threshold [10].

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Pirate's) [-5]; Compulsive Carousing [-5]; Overweight [-5]; Poverty (Struggling) [-10]; Unattractive [-5].

Quirks: Distrusts skinny people; Incompetence (Dancing); Congenial; Smokes cigars; Rarely swears and never blasphemes.

Appearance: Freckled skin, red-brown hair and full beard, blue eyes; 5'8" tall, 182 lbs.

Gear: Middle-class dress with slippers (for show); small knife, jeans, shirts and boots at other times. 20 gauge shotgun (3d-2 damage, ST 11, Rcl -3) in caravan.

Skills: Animal Handling-12 [2]; Axe/Mace-10 [1]; Boxing-10 [2]; Brawling-10 [2]; Carousing-10 [2]; Cooking-10 [1]; Disguise-9 [1]; Driving-10 (Truck) [2] or Teamster-12 [2]; First Aid-9 [.5]; Freight Handling-10 [2] or Packing-12 [2]; Gambling-10 [2]; Guns (Shotgun)-12 [1]; Holdout-9 [1]; Knife-11 [1]; Language (English)-10 [0]; Scrounging-10 [1]; Streetwise-10 [2]; Thrown Weapon (Knife)-10 [.5]; Whip-9 [1].

The Circus Maximus has always had a bearded lady. Apart from possibly being female ('she' may just be a heavily disguised male fugitive), the furry-faced Ursula is typical of the Circus's roustabouts. She may, of course, also be a Shapeshifter (p. CI44, Werewolf or Werebear, +15 points), or even a Cat Person (p. VO100, +270 points).

Also Appearing

Apart from its more-or-less human performers and roustabouts, the Circus also boasts a small menagerie, all well-trained: a dancing bear (Black Bear, p. B141), 1d+1 dogs of different sizes (small ratters to attack dogs), an elephant (p. B142), and a number of horses (two saddle horses for equestrian acrobatics, plus -- pre-TL7 -- draft horses and large mules to pull the wagons, cavalry horses for Maximus and Herakles, and saddle horses or ponies for the others).

The sideshow also features some stuffed (and probably faked) monsters -- and in some settings, such as Deadlands, possibly some real live ones. Possibilities include a giant rat, man-eating plants, or a "Cardiff Giant" that is actually a stone golem.

New Skill: Sword-swallowing (Physical/Easy)

No default

The character can suppress his gag reflex and align his upper digestive tract so that a sword or similar object can be inserted into his mouth and down his throat to his stomach. Best to use a blunt sword, though.

Adventure Seeds

Old West: The circus comes to a small frontier town, but after the show is finished, Jimmy the Geek dies peacefully in his sleep. Maximus decides that the circus urgently needs a replacement, and has Herakles and Kleopatra spirit away the town drunk, Johnny, before they leave. Unfortunately, one-armed Johnny is also the brother-in-law of William Whyte, the town's wealthy mayor and half-owner of the general store.

When Johnny's disappearance is confirmed, two days later, Mrs Whyte offers a reward for his return -- \$100 in gold, or \$200 in goods from the shebang. The circus has left the county, so the sheriff can't legally act, but the PCs may decide to ignore the finer points of law. Jimmy, however, has been offered all the booze he can drink and doesn't want to leave, and the heroes may find themselves facing the finer points of swords and knives as the circus folk defend their prize.

Deadlands: In a **Deadlands** campaign, Circus Maximus is doing the work of the Reckoners, increasing the fear level of the towns they visit. One of their methods is to offer rewards for the capture of abominations suitable for their freak show (with smaller payments for corpses), sending greedy hunters in search of varmints that sensible folk would avoid.

The posse encounters the circus when the train carrying both parties across the desert is derailed, killing the crew. Because of Dust Devils, Mojave rattlers, Tumblebleeds and other menaces, Maximus suggests that they send as large a group as possible back to the nearest town in search of help. When the two parties have to fight side-by-side against abominations, the circus folk won't sacrifice the PCs needlessly, but neither will they risk their own lives to protect

them.

Cliffhangers: Some time after 1933, the circus visits a small town in the segregationist South, where it receives a cool reception. Todd Browning's Freaks is showing at the cinema, and one of the old-timers claims that when the circus passed that way some 70 years before, it helped many of his father's slaves escape. The Ku Klux Klan visits the circus and starts a fire; somebody sets the animals free, and the county sheriff forms a posse (including the PCs) to try to restore the peace with a minimum of bloodshed.

Atomic Horror: While the circus is playing in a small California town, two of the high school students are caught smoking marijuana, but refuse to reveal their source. The police chief decides to raid the circus and recruits a number of heavily-armed and trigger-happy reserves, as well as all the journalists he can find.

Though several of the circus folk have their own stash of drugs, they haven't been selling them in town (the real dealer is the mayor's son, a quarterback and school bully). "Ursula" is actually a heavily-disguised blacklisted microbiologist who's stolen some bioweapons from Fort Detrick, and if any of the seven vials in her caravan are opened or broken, horrible plagues will be unleashed. The PCs may be journalists, cops, or high school kids from the town, or scientists, feds or military officers searching for the stolen germs.

Supers: New supers are appearing and wreaking havoc in small towns across the USA -- most in their teens or early twenties. A few become heroes, but most are criminals or can't control their new-found powers. Research shows that the Circus Maximus has visited all of these towns less than a week before these incidents -- and in these towns and others on their route, there have also been several deaths caused by a mysterious new drug, a stimulant and hallucinogen called Powerpack.

The doctored Powerpack pills that the circus is selling triggers latent superpowers in about 1% of users. (Roll 1d: on a 1, the powers are permanent. On a 2-3, they are temporary, but can usually be restored by another dose of the drug. On a 4-6, the powers or new disadvantages quickly kill the user.) Any user who critically fails a HT roll on taking the drug will also die; any user who critically fails a Will roll may become addicted.

When the PCs catch up with the Circus, Maximus will try to dispose of their remaining pills rather than be caught -- even if it means dumping them into a town's water supply. The Circus may also have recruited several overconfident new metavillains who have come to them for training or more drugs.

I Smell A Rat . . .

by Michael Suileabhain-Wilson

Preparation

This adventure serves a party of four to eight mid-power adventurers. It is ideally suited to fantasy settings, but could be adapted to any setting with a privileged class and some power capable of reversibly shrinking human beings -- Victorian occultism or 1950s weird science, for example. It complements campaigns with political elements particularly well, but is a satisfying interlude for any campaign.

Ingredients

The Offer

The PCs receive an invitation from the Count of Tauston to visit him at Tauston Manor in order to discuss an offer of employment. The Taustons are a well-regarded noble family, known for their tremendous wealth and irreproachable decorum. In the family's long history, the only whisper of scandal to tarnish the Tauston name came some 60 years ago, when the 17th Count of Tauston disappeared, apparently to elope with a maidservant. He left no heir, and his cousin, the current Count's grandfather, assumed the title and fief.

The Manor

Tauston Manor isn't fortified enough to be called something other than a house, but "house" utterly fails to capture its grandeur. It stands astride a gentle hill, proudly rising four floors from the earth and reaching out with four wings toward the clusters of outbuildings which surround the main house.

The party will be met outside the manor by a large group of servants. The Count is away hunting for the day, but he intends to receive them in the morning. Meanwhile, the staff would be happy to escort them to their lodgings.

The manor is extremely opulent, though the heroes won't get to see much of it yet. They've been quartered in the second guest wing, which is a bit isolated. Still, the rooms provided them are spacious and well appointed, with a guest study at the end of their hall. When they want dinner or a bath, or if they need anything else, there's a service bell in every room.

The kitchens provide good and unpretentious food, and the study has comfortable chairs and a few shelves of good books. The baths, should the adventurers choose to avail themselves of them, are stunning. The manor stands over a hot spring, and the basements feature elaborate and extensive bathing facilities. The party may try to explore further, but they probably won't get far before being intercepted by a servant. They can't get into any real trouble by exploring, but they may endanger their relations with the staff, which could be important later.

In the morning, one of the guests will find that a small personal possession has disappeared or been damaged -- chewed, it appears. After breakfast, a servant will come to conduct the party to the Count. The rest of the manor is even more luxurious than the parts they've already seen. The Count is waiting for them in a room off the main hall.

The Job

The Count will explain that he has a problem with his home. Tauston Manor is his ancestors' dreams of luxury made reality. It has every comfort and convenience a man of leisure could want. It also has rats. Many, many rats. For years,

the rats were merely an inconvenience, but it is becoming intolerable. They eat the food, ruin the bedding, and scratch around in the walls at every hour of night or day. The cats catch some, but not enough. Poison hasn't done the job. And the nearest town's ratcatcher just wandered around smelling up the place for a week before shrugging and giving up.

The Count, therefore, has hit on a plan. There are no proper exterminators in the kingdom, but there are adventurers. He has arranged for a spellcaster to shrink a party of adventurers to the requisite size to follow the rats into the walls, so that they can seek out and kill as many rats as possible. They would also root out nests and report any paths from the outside into the house that could be sealed off. The Count is willing to pay a handsome retainer, as well as a bounty for every rat killed. He hopes that the party will take on his small difficulty.

If the party takes the job, the Count will help them acquire any reasonable supplies that they may need. He'll recommend climbing gear if no one thinks of it, and provide them a map of the manor. At the scale at which they'll be exploring the manor, the Count's map is extremely rough, but it's better than nothing. Once the party is properly outfitted and ready to go, the Count will call for the spellcaster, the party will be shrunk down to a few inches tall, and the expedition will commence.

Adventure on a Small Scale

Clearing the entire manor could easily take a really long time. In fact, you can spend as much time as continues to be fun killing rats and closing off crawlspaces. Hunting the rats is essentially similar to a dungeon crawl, but familiar and innocuous things suddenly become deadly. A common rat becomes a giant rat; even a cockroach is suddenly formidable, and a spiderweb becomes a deadly trap. Bats in the attic are as fearsome as dragons. And the household cat, Colonel Mugwump, may be the fiercest foe the party will ever face.

Aside from the newly deadly opponents they face, their environment contains unfamiliar dangers. They will have to crawl through rat-chewed tunnels too small for more than one person to pass. Climbing from floorboards to ceiling requires an ascent more perilous than many mountains. And they will never forget traversing the treacherous drawing room chair rail, or scurrying along the rafters which loft high above the dining room, where a single misstep would send them plummeting to their deaths.

As the party makes its way through the manor, they will ferret out rat nests, locate the small holes where rats make their way from the fields into the house, and clear out section after section of the manor. Eventually, however, they will come on something for which they are completely unprepared.

The Body

In a remote corner of the second guest wing, a hall ends in a blank wall where there ought to be a small window. No one has ever noticed; the manor is large, and no one goes around counting windows. But behind that wall lies a terrible secret; the niche between wall and window contains a desiccated corpse. The body has been fallen prey to the house rats and other vermin for many years (indeed, there may be a few passersby the party will have to face), but despite the damage done, a few facts are clear upon examination. The dead man's clothes are richly embroidered, marking him a noble. A gaping wound can still be made out on his throat; whoever killed him half-decapitated the poor victim. And on his finger he wears a heavy ring, with a familiar symbol upon it. It's the signet ring of the Taustons, missing these past 60 years.

Cooking Tips

Scandal Comes Knocking

The Count is aghast at the party's discovery. It seems overwhelmingly likely that the dead man is, in fact, the 17th Count, and the maidservant story is horribly wrong. If the Count was indeed murdered, suspicion must fall on one man: his successor. And if the Count's grandfather came to the title through foul play, the Count could be stripped of

land and title. If any of the Count's enemies hear of this, there will be hell to pay.

The adventure could progress from here in several ways, depending on if and how the heroes reveal their discovery. They could become caught up in courtroom intrigue with the Tauston lands at stake, either on the side of the Count or of his enemies. They could continue to work for the Count helping him dispel nasty rumors. They might find themselves engaged to dispose of a body.

Extra Spice: The body is a fake. One of the Taustons' enemies planted it in order to discredit them when it was discovered. Such a plot would be a masterpiece of intrigue; few people would be able to conceive such a plan, knowing that it would take years or decades to come to fruition. Fewer would have the skill to smuggle a body into an enemy's stronghold and cement it into the walls. Even so, the question remains: how did they get the signet?

Alternately, it could be that the body is genuine, but the story is less obvious. Perhaps the Count really was carrying on with that maidservant, and a jealous rival murdered him. Or maybe he was murdered by someone who owed him money (or whom he owed money). To uncover the secret, the PCs will have to pore over old diaries and interrogate what few old servants and nobles remember those days.

Treachery Most Foul

The Count knows full well that there's a dead man in his house -- he just doesn't know where. His grandfather murdered his cousin and hid the body, but neglected to tell his descendants where it was hidden. Recently, however, the Count found another lost secret of the Taustons: a secret room, where all the Taustons' most closely held secrets lie immured. However, it's locked, and only the family signet can open it.

Clearing out the rats was merely a convenient cover; the Count always intended the PCs to find the body, so that he can get the ring. It's true that there might be a scandal if word of the dead Count gets out, but the evidence can readily be disposed of. So can the heroes, for that matter.

Extra Spice: There are unexpected horrors asleep in the Manor. The dead Count awakens in undeath when his long sleep is interrupted. Now the dead Count is hunting the living Count, and vice versa. The party will just have to hope not to get caught up in the battle. And who knows what else might be trapped in that secret room?

The Infestation

Tauston Manor's rats are more than an ordinary nuisance. The Manor has become home to a creature of great evil: an intelligent infestation. The infestation came to the Manor 70 years ago, and has been slowly gaining power, as its constituent rats breed and become strong. Early in its tenure, it was careless, and the old Count became aware of the infestation's presence. He had to be killed. Since then, however, the infestation has been very careful to keep itself hidden. Only in the last few years has it become so large that its presence cannot be concealed. Soon, it will be powerful enough to leave this vessel, devouring the Manor in a tide of vermin, and move on to a nearby city.

The infestation will try to avoid tipping off the party to its existence, but they may notice that the rats are unusually disciplined in combat, and that their nests are not quite right, somehow -- too clean, too organized. They'll also notice that there really are a huge number of rats. Finally, the wound in the old Count's neck isn't quite clean; it's ragged, as though made up of many small punctures. When the mysteries pile too high to be ignored, the infestation will reveal itself and attempt to destroy them. At this point, the party and the Manor's occupants must fight for their lives against an opponent that is more than a match even for full-size adventurers.

Side Salads

The Walls Have Ears

On a country estate, you can learn a lot if you're in the right place at the right time. And the heroes have the

opportunity to go almost anywhere undetected. If it's the proper season for the gentry to go visiting each other's estates, the manor may be full of aristocrats plotting intrigues, having affairs, and generally carrying on in the traditional aristocratic manner. The party might overhear events and conversations that could lead them on any number of new adventures.

The House Spirit

In many cultures, a large house may have a tutelary spirit, like a brownie or a tomte. Tauston Manor seems like an excellent candidate for one. If it does, however, it has clearly been remiss in its obligations, allowing so many rats to take up residence. In the course of their mission, the party might have the opportunity to meet it. Perhaps it has grown old and lazy, or maybe it has gone on strike to protest its master's murder. Either way, the house spirit could prove a powerful ally or a dangerous enemy, particularly if it feels the PCs are infringing on its territory.

The Hidden Garret

The Counts of Tauston hid a secret room in their manor, where the Counts could keep their treasures and think secret thoughts. When the 17th Count died prematurely, it was forgotten and lost. If the GM is using Treachery Most Foul, this is the room unlocked by the signet. This room almost certainly contains valuable treasures belonging to the old Counts. Possibly more importantly, it contains documents and diaries from generations of Taustons. Dark political secrets are recorded here that many would kill to hide or to reveal. If using The Infestation, the old Count's diaries, which reveal the infestation's existence, are here.

Pyramid Review

Steam Tunnel



Published by [Cheapass Games](#)

Designed by James Ernest

48 cards & instruction sheet; \$4

Simultaneously released with [Light Speed](#), *Steam Tunnel* is the latest game from Hip Pocket Games, the tiny division of the Cheapass Games empire that publishes small games at perfectly small prices. Like the first four titles from Hip Pocket Games -- [Agora](#), [Cube Farm](#), [Nexus](#), the new *Light Speed* and the re-packaged *The Very Clever Pipe Game* - this new release is another card game that comes packaged in a small ziplock bag with its rules on a single folded sheet of paper.

Steam Tunnel is a strategy game for between two and five players that consists of 48 cards; four of these are Point Cards and the rest Tunnel Cards. As is traditional with Cheapass, players need to supply their own parts; in this case, the game requires 20 colored stones for each player and also a means of recording everyone's score at the end of the game.

Ostensibly, *Steam Tunnel* is set within the bowels of Io, within a steam driven titanium mine, in the year 2185. In actuality it is an excuse for players to compete for control of the tunnels or pipes, and thus win the game. Their aim is to build as long a tunnel as is possible and have its ends connected to numbered ends on the Point Cards. The longer the tunnel, the more points there are available to the players. Essentially, game play consists of flipping over cards laid in a grid and placing stones to control the tunnels depicted on the cards.

At the beginning of the game, the Point Cards are put aside, and the remainder shuffled and laid face down in a six-by-six grid, with Point Cards placed face up at the corners of the grid's middle ring. The remaining 12 Tunnel Cards have no role for the rest of the game and are put aside. The Point Cards are marked with six numbered end caps to which players must successfully connect tunnels in order to score. Each Tunnel Card has six entry points showing two or three tunnel segments, which run or curve or join through the card and possibly end in an unnumbered End Cap as well. The board wraps around, so that tunnels run off the edge of the board and enter again on the opposite side. If strictly adhering to the game's background, this is because Io is such a small moon . . .

On his turn a player turns over one card and places one stone to either buy or alternatively bury a tunnel segment. To buy a segment, the player puts his stone on any card currently turned over. Only open tunnels can be bought; neither ones that have been closed off nor segments already owned by other players can be bought. The purchased segment does not have to be on the flipped card. To bury a tunnel segment, the stone is put down on a card still facedown, thus preventing from being flipped later during the game. Tunnel segments can still be traced through this section, but *only* in a straight line.

Play continues until there are no more cards to turn over. At this point the tunnels are scored, with the result calculated from the total of the end cap scores multiplied by the number of tunnel segments running between the two caps. The score goes to the player with the highest number of stones along the length of the tunnel, or divided among the players if there is a tie.

The luck element of *Steam Tunnel* is in the random placement of the tunnel cards, and this is further enhanced when you consider that not all of the tunnels cards are used in each game. Of course, there is nothing to stop them from being used to create a larger six-by-eight card grid, thus making for a longer game. The strategy comes in the placing

of the stones; does a player buy a tunnel segment in order to outbid a rival for control of the tunnel at the game's end? Or does he bury a segment and thus potentially block an opposing player's tunnels? Overall, ***Steam Tunnel*** is simple enough that it will appeal to a younger audience, but also act as a small diversion to adults, since a game should last no longer than half an hour. For the dedicated gamer, the rules list another five variants, and with rules and play as simple as this, it would not be difficult to think of more.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Pick

Fistful o' Zombies (for All Flesh Must Be Eaten)

Published by [Eden Studios, Inc.](#)

Written by Shane Lacy Hensley

Cover by George Vasilakos

Interior Illustrations by Thomas Denmark, Talon Cole Dunning, Jon Hodgsen, Ginger Kubic, Matt Morrow

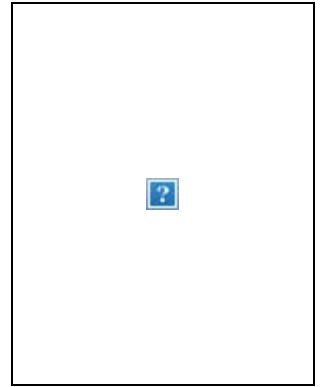
144-page b&w softcover; \$20.00

Hot on the hooves of [Pulp Zombies](#) comes *Fistful o' Zombies*, the third genre supplement for Eden Studios' [All Flesh Must Be Eaten](#), the RPG of all zombie horror. AS the title suggests, *Fistful o' Zombies* takes our favorite corpse cortege way out West and down South for an all zombie hoedown on your bones and an all they can eat Tex-Mex meat feast for afters. Since this is "A Wild West Sourcebook" and *All Flesh Must Be Eaten* is a game of survival horror, Eden Studios have got the right author for the job, Shane Lacy Hensley. Described on the back cover as the "Sheriff of Wild West Gaming," Hensley is the renowned author of the *Deadlands: The Weird West RPG*, the original Wild West horror RPG, and *Fistful o' Zombies* is his first piece of freelance work since the publication of *Deadlands*.

Those possessing any of the previous *All Flesh Must Be Eaten* supplements will know what to expect with *Fistful o' Zombies*: a smaller-than-normal softback, well laid out with plenty of art, some tongue-in-cheek (usually your own or a zombie's) color fiction to set the scene, a brief-but-thorough overview of the genre, plus several Deadworlds. In this they will not be disappointed, as *Fistful o' Zombies* is well put together and Hensley's writing is pleasingly solid and sure. What they should not expect, and do not get, is a set of Deadworlds based upon the historically accurate West as it was. This is not to say that history gets short shrift from Hensley, as the supplement is littered with various and interesting tidbits of historical information. Instead the inspiration for the majority of the Deadworlds in *Fistful o' Zombies* is the Wild West as seen through the lens of Hollywood . . . not just in one take, but in several, as Hensley gives a cadaverous twist to how the movies have treated Cowboys and Indians over the course of the 20th century.

Fistful o' Zombies opens with an overview of the Western genre and of the book itself. It provides a solid introduction as well as a short lexicon before the supplement gets down to a thorough examination of the history and culture of the period from 1830 up until 1930 -- which is, of course, when *Pulp Zombies* could kick in. Thus it goes from the Old West up until the end of the American Civil War, the Wild West until the end of the century, and lastly the New West of the first third of the new century. Those wanting more depth should look elsewhere in either reference works or creditable gaming supplements, but what is given in *Fistful o' Zombies* is both interesting and useful enough to provide the Zombie Master (or should that be Zombie Marshal?) plenty of detail to go with the information that will have been derived from the many Westerns they will have no doubt seen over the years.

Heroes, or in some cases anti-heroes, in *Fistful o' Zombies* are built as the Survivor Character Type. Although it is possible to play a Norm Character Type, these are best left as members of the supporting cast. New Drawbacks expand the game's possible Prejudices to include intolerance of either Northerners or Southerners, and Minority to cover any non-white -- North or South of the border. There are only two new qualities: "Fast as Hell," which gives a +3 bonus to initiative rolls made for Fast Draw contests; and "Number One With A Bullet," which reduces the penalties incurred for attempting trick shots. New rules cover fanning the hammer of single action pistols, the use of the lasso, horses



(including -- what else? -- the zombie horse) and their endurance, showdowns (at 12 o'clock high and other times), and hanging -- which is gruesome. This is followed by a set of weapon tables and their explanations -- though still no whip! -- plus an equipment and currency guide. The only generic archetypes given are The Bandita, Cowboy, Gambler, and Saloon Girl, which are all of the Norm Character Type. More points could be spent on them to make them into the Survivor Character Type, but then any player unable to create a character for a *Fistful o' Zombies* game should be taken out as guest of honor at a necktie party.

[BEGIN SPOILER ALERT!]

This may also be the fate of a Zombie Master who attempts to run the first of the Deadworlds in *Fistful o' Zombies*. "Singing Cowboys" is an all-fringed rhinestone affair based on the singing Westerns of Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, *et al* of the 1930s and 1940s, in which the good guys wear white hats and the bad guys black hats. Good guys invariably know ever-faithful girls who get tied to the railroad tracks once too often, ride surprisingly intelligent wonder horses ("What's that, boy?" "Clop-clop, whinny, snort." "You mean my faithful-but-inebriated sidekick Bert has fallen down a mineshaft?"), never shoot the bad guy (unless they have to), and never resort to bad language. The rules make a lot of adjustments to fit this all-too-cheesy genre, and characters are expected to be as good with their voice and a musical instrument as they are with a six-shooter. By striking up a song in game, the characters can inspire courage, stamina, and quickness, soothe a lynch mob, or exhort others to great deeds. The players get a bonus if they really sing! Only a pair of tunes can be sung per adventure, but one can become a theme song if sung often enough. All of this is played straight, as were the films that inspired this Deadworld, but of course, with the added bonus of zombies. There is an intentional repetition aspect to "Singing Cowboys" and could be a great deal of fun if the players can get into the swing of the tunes. If not, there's always the aforementioned necktie party . . . Thankfully the zombies don't break into a chorus.

"True Grit" takes the game and genre forward to the 1950s and 1960s, when men were real men and real women just got in the way of real men. Derived from the films of John Wayne (hence this Deadworld's title), the characters are beset by mouth-bleeding zombies of the humanoid, buffalo, and wolf kind who have a penchant for chewing off the lips of their victims -- *yuck!* This is, of course, how they spread their love and create yet more of their kin. An elder thing composed of blood and veins originally summoned by the now-extinct Ananazi Indians is the cause of all this. Life for the characters will be complicated by a U.S. Army General who wants to capture and harness the elder thing to his own ends and a war band of Sioux that want to see this creature's end, but will of course, distrust our cast.

Men with no names are required for "Spaghetti With Meat," in which the characters come to the dry and dusty town of Cerbeza, Texas in the final years of the American Civil War. Capturing the feel and tone of the spaghetti western genre to a tee, the town is about to be beset by bad guts and really bad guys in search of the big score. Except the really bad guys are invariable alcohol sodden zombies.

The fourth Deadworld takes the Oscar-winning *Dances with Wolves* and turns on its head to give you "Dances With Zombies." Set shortly after the Battle Of Little Bighorn, the white man is beset by a strange plague that kills and then raises them from the grave. Surprisingly intelligent zombies spread their love via scratch, bite, and infection, but while they can kill the native Indians, they do not rise again. Cast members are braves or women or medicine men from one of the Sioux tribes who find that Custer's 7th Cavalry are still abroad in the Black Hills. This Deadworld has a lot of information to aid both zombie master and player alike in running an all-native campaign.

Backing the four main Deadworlds up are three mini-Deadworlds. The first of these is the easiest to set up and run, as "Bloody Old Muddy" starts out aboard a Mississippi paddle steamer during a high stakes poker tournament. The gamblers, entertainers, and crew aboard the ship are caught up in the middle of one big mess as the vessel navigates the treacherous river in search of other survivors and fresh supplies. Shortly after the game's start, zombies, who naturally hunger for fresh flesh, will beset the steamer, its crew, and passengers. Not only do these creatures threaten the whole of the USA, but they are also potentially a threat to the rest of the world.

The second mini-Deadworld has the players taking the roles of buffalo soldiers -- African American cavalrymen used to patrol and string up fresh telegraph lines. Normally used to track down rogue bands of Native Americans, in "Here Comes the Cavalry" the tables are turned as zombie Indians hunt the soldiers. The last Deadworld is "North to Alaska"

which takes place at the time of the Yukon gold rush at the end of the 19th century. Just as the cast members get into Canada, a meteor strike turns everyone else into frigid zombies bent on having the flesh of survivor served hot and fresh. This is another race for survival through the wilderness with the zombies on their tail. Cast members include prospectors, and those that would support them or police them in the form of officers of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. No archetype is given for this Deadworld, which is a pity, though understandable for the Mountie.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Fans of the Wild West/Horror combo will be pleased with the inclusion of the set of conversion notes between **Deadlands** and the UniSystem, which opens up the former to the pure zombie fun of **All Flesh Must Be Eaten** and the latter system to the horror and steampunk elements of the Weird West. Further, given that Deadlands now comes in two alternate flavors -- **GURPS** and the **d20 System**, the conversion notes in **Fistful o' Zombies** could represent the first step for converting the material found in **All Flesh Must Be Eaten** and its supplements across to these rules. That said, converting this supplement and the others to either of those systems is a far from difficult task, given time, effort, a glue gun, and some duct tape.

Everyone has more than a passing familiarity with the Western genre, though Singing Cowboys is admittedly unusual. This makes **Fistful o' Zombies** one of the most accessible and easy to play supplements for **All Flesh Must Be Eaten**. There are plenty of diverse Deadworlds here -- enough to satisfy the tastes of most players. There is also surprisingly enough background information to make the running of these Deadworlds a far-from-onerous task, and the crossover possibilities are extensive. This includes not just the aforementioned flavors of the **Deadlands RPG**, but also with Eden's [Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game](#). Indeed, **Fistful o' Zombies** would be near-perfect as a companion to the "Stakes and Six Shooters" Buffyverse described in the [Slayer's Handbook](#). Although it has been a long way west for **Fistful o' Zombies**, this third supplement for **All Flesh Must Be Eaten** is useful for almost any game of pulp horror -- if just for the ideas -- but is also the best all-rootin', all-tootin', all-shooting, all-singing, and all-fringed release for the game to date.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Play On Words



Published by [Winning Moves Games](#)

102 full-color letter cards, 10 full-color Challenge cards, plastic tray, instruction sheet; \$11.00

With the rank profusion of letter and language-based games these days -- *LetterHead*, *My Word!*, *AlphaBlitz* -- it's a wonder there's enough intellectual ground left to keep more coming out. Winning Moves Games nevertheless throws its hat into the literary gaming ring with *Play on Words*, another card-based word-building game.

The object of the game is to score the greatest point total by the end of the game. Every round, players are given a hand of cards with which to build words. Each of the rounds is run according to a Challenge card that instructs players how to build words that round. The letter cards come in red, blue, and green, but some Challenge cards may require you to build "pure" words -- i.e., all of one color, though "wild" cards can be made to count for whatever the player wishes.

Players first have the opportunity to "meet the challenge," that is, to build words according to the instructions on that round's Challenge card. Everyone takes turns building their own words. Once you've built the requisite words, you aren't allowed to play any more words, which can be a problem because you only score points when you empty your hand of cards. Without the ability to pump cards into additional words, you have to alter the words already on the table.

This is an opportunity for you to build up your score for the end of the round. Many of the letter cards have a point value printed on them (some of the more common letters score nothing). Using your remaining cards, you may add to or alter the words. BANG can become GANG, which can later be changed to GONG, or extended to GANGSTER, and the new cards may add points to your score. You can also play cards onto someone else's words, which means you can cover up their high-scoring letters with something worthless from your own hand.

You draw a card at the start of each turn and discard one at the end, so if you're stuck with a Q and a Z or the wrong color cards you can still manipulate your hand into something more playable. The first player to empty his hand tallies his score. After 10 rounds, the totals are added together to get a final score.

Challenge cards get tougher to satisfy as the game progresses. At first all you need is two three-letter pure words, but the number of words that must be completed, and the length of those words, increases. This is perhaps the game's biggest drawback. Even the game's most literate participants will find it difficult to get all the words they need quickly . . . not a problem in and of itself, since it makes the game challenging. But game play is slow and can drag while you're looking for that next play (a chess timer might help). Beginners will be scratching their heads looking for a decent word, and more experienced wordsmiths will be convinced there has to be a devastatingly good play buried in their hand (and they're probably right). Play can be sped up by eliminating some of the rounds -- the rules suggest agreeing on a number of rounds and then pulling them at random out of the Challenge deck, but you could also just agree to use the first five cards.

The rules could have used a little more clarity. They jump right into the thick of the instructions, ignoring that players may not know all the terms yet and could use a gentler primer. While some things seem clear or obvious, it doesn't take an abusive rules lawyer to make an argument for another interpretation, especially concerning who can do or play what in a round and who is allowed to score at the end of the round.

The cards are in full color, they're good stock, and they shuffle well. The Challenge cards could have been made with

the number of the round of play smaller and the font for the instructions larger, just to make things a little more convenient, but neither piece of information is hard to recall. The plastic tray isn't tough, but it's not going to see enough neglect to make the difference either way. The box, alas, is quite fragile and may pull apart just from trying to extract the tray. The rule book has a pair of score sheets players can photocopy for keeping track, but a pad and pencil work just fine.

Play On Words is a lot of fun, and affords players the chance to really put their brains to the test. While the broad allowances for action in the rules slow things down, they also let players strut their stuff. Though not a fast game, Play on Words is clean, stimulating, inexpensive, and fun for any age group.

--*Andy Vetromile*

Running The Adventure, Part V

Climactic Control

Okay; it's the Big Moment. They've snuck past the Unholy Avenging Imperial Guard, searched the Lost Tomb of Offdabeetenpaff, and entered the final chamber of the sinister demonic overlord Carl. This is it: The big payoff. The mondo importante scene.

So how do you make sure you don't mess it up?

Make Sure the Players Know It's The Big Scene. I tend to run pretty darn cinematic games; in the real world it's difficult to know when you're at a pivotal moment, but in most other media it's pretty easy . . . the soundtrack swells, it's close to the end of the hour, or you realize your right hand is only holding a handful of pages of the paperback. Since I generally try to emulate other kinds of cinematic media in my gaming, I try to make sure my players know when they have entered the climactic scene.

Some games make this easy; perhaps none was more overt than *Torg*, where the GM would specifically announce that everyone was now in a Dramatic Scene, and thus the stakes are higher and the bad guys have the edge. But even in other games, it's generally pretty easy for me to rev the players up. The site of the final confrontation is more vividly described than other places, the object of their adventuring is witnessed before them, villains chortle with glee, and so on. As a bonus, it lets the players know they can pull out the big guns they've been saving all game long -- those one-shot powerful items, the final devastating spell, and so on. (Of course, I'm also an evil GM who isn't above a double-bluff, revving up the players for a climactic scene only to have the *real* threat reveal himself afterwards, when the heroes are supposedly weaker . . .)

As a caveat counterpoint to this example, I didn't always telegraph the big scene, since I didn't think it was terribly realistic. So one time the good guys ended up saving the day and accomplishing their goals, without really realizing it until they were mopping up afterwards. "Say, you know that random guy we just whacked? Turns out he was the mastermind. Small world . . ." The players found this to be unsatisfying; one even said, "You know, if I knew the adventure was near the end, I would have enjoyed that last scene more." So that's when I officially adopted my telegraphic policy.

Give Everyone A Chance To Shine. Although it's not a masterpiece of Western cinema, the 1999 movie *Mystery Men* stands as a near-quintessential gamer movie in my mind. In this movie about third-string superheroes, the climactic scene stands out in my mind, because *every* major character is given a moment in the spotlight; each ability the heroes possess was important to the culmination of plot.

Now, obviously a scriptwriter and director have more control over the action of a movie than a GM does over the outcome of an adventure. But if possible, I try to design my climax around the concept that each player would like to be a part of the final scene; if I've done my job right, each player walks away from a harrowing climactic scene thinking, "They couldn't have done it without me."

Now, this doesn't necessarily mean that I fabricate increasingly outlandish impossibilities specifically tailored to each character. ("Oh, no! Yet *another* circumstance where a tiny object needs to be hit from afar with something sharp! Quickly, Crimson Crossbow . . . save us!") Rather, I try to make sure that most climactic scenes have multiple things that need to be done; thus I might have a final scene where there is a Big Bad Guy who needs to be defeated, a bomb that needs to be disarmed, and an important innocent bystander who is in danger of dying in the crossfire of this final battle. That gives three different players (or groups of players) an immediate goal . . . one they can chip in with when recounting the story later.

Give Everyone A Chance To Be Dramatic. This goes with the two points above; I personally make sure that any player who wants to be dramatic in the final scene gets a chance to do so. If a player wants to give a dramatic

monologue to the villain, or goad him into revealing information, or take a moment to share a heartfelt expression under fire with another PC, then great! Time is warped and malleable during the climactic scene; bad guys will stop fighting to let the heroes talk, and those tender moments seem to take place between clicks of the ticking bomb.

Of course, if a player has no interest in hamming it up, I don't force them. But most of my players, once they realize I won't punish them for having fun, are all too eager to relish the moment.

Not All Climaxes Are About Combat. This one is easy to forget, especially if a gaming group has grown up with an extreme dosage of Vitamin Death, but it's entirely possible to have a big climactic scene where there's no fighting. In my games, I've had the climax revolve around convincing someone to make the right choice, making a decision to give up something of value, or crossing the finish line in time. Yes, it's often fun and exciting to have combat enter into the final scene, but it can be just as memorable to have the heroes attempting to synchronize their placement of the Four Orbs of Redrum of the pedestals before the ritual is complete *or* one of the shadow fiends snatches it away.

Cheat. Now, this one may get me in trouble, but I personally have no problem cheating as a GM. (And what about cheating as a player? Well, that's a different story . . .) After all, I've seen too many games whose climactic moments looked something like:

"After wracking our brains, we figured out the perfect plan to thwart the enemy. Two of us rigged up the Psychic Transmogrifiers to our own bodies, drawing off our life force which our martial artist channeled into his katana, waiting for the perfect moment to strike with an unstoppable blow as our nemesis was distracted by our fourth member's elaborate ruse."

"So did it work?"

"Huh? Oh, no . . . Leslie got a Crit Failure. We eventually ended up just running over the dude with a truck 'til he stopped moving."

Now, I'm a big fan of games that enable players to "cheat" within the system, giving them bonuses, character points, or the like to influence rolls they *really* want to. But regardless, if the heroes come up with a great plan, combat tactic, or dramatic tack I didn't anticipate but find brilliant and entertaining, then it stands a *very* real chance of success, regardless of what the dice say.

Make Sure The Heroes Know Their Actions Have Consequences. This one is difficult to work in, but if possible I like to make sure to tie in the rest of the adventure to the climax. If I *don't* do this, I often feel like the climax exists as an isolated pocket realm, waiting for the heroes to stumble across it. ("What was the evil mastermind *doing* in this room the whole time, anyway? Waiting for the next episode of *Joe Millionaire*?")

To this end, I try to emphasize any great defeats or victories of earlier encounters here. It doesn't take much:

The heroes recognize a few of the bruised henchmen surrounding the mastermind as the stragglers who got away from a few scenes before.

An NPC who was rescued earlier is the one who calls the police to serve as helpful mop-up duty.

An evil magical being the heroes ignored earlier whisks away the antagonist before the *coup de grace* can be administered.

The climax should feel organic to the adventure, and the previous scenes shouldn't resemble pointless prologue serving as filler for the climax. Fortunately, it doesn't take much to tie the final bits together with a tidy bow.

In a lot of ways, running a climactic scene is pretty easy; just being there is often enough to generate a euphoric feeling in the group, and emerging victorious can keep the players on that high for quite a while. But just because I know it'll probably be fun doesn't mean I don't do everything in my power to make it *more* fun . . . and keep the players coming back for more.

--*Steven Marsh*

Jasmine Mojarro

for *GURPS*

by Phil Masters

Jasmine Mojarro

234 points

Age 35; 5'6"; 115 lbs.; An average-looking but reasonably fit woman, with expensive, slightly brash clothes with proclaim her status. Mojarro often has Digital Hair (p.TS146) active, displaying shifting or swirling abstract designs or patterns. (She might switch this off if someone complained strongly, but would give the impression that she found the other person silly.) Her VR avatar is a perfect image of herself in simple but very stylish clothes.

ST: 9 [-10]; **DX:** 11 [10]; **IQ:** 14 [45]; **HT:** 11 [10].

Speed: 5.50; **Move:** 5 (running).

Dodge: 5.

Advantages: Genefixed Human [0]; Ally (Programmed) (Rufus the Cyberdog, 200 points, 15 or less) [45]; Ally (Programmed) ("Ann," 50 points, 15 or less) [9]; Ally (Programmed) ("Homefire," 25 points, 15 or less) [6]; Charisma +1 [5]; Contacts (Business: Columbia Aerospace Director; Skill 18, 9 or less, Somewhat Reliable) [3]; Contacts (Business: Ithemba Biotech middle manager; Skill 15, 9 or less, Somewhat Reliable) [2]; Contacts (Business: Marwari Digital staff reporter; Skill 12, 15 or less, Usually Reliable) [6]; Contacts (Business: Solar Express pilot; Skill 12, 9 or less, Usually Reliable) [2]; Contacts (Vosper-Babbage troubleshooter; Skill 15, 9 or less, Usually Reliable) [4]; Deep Sleeper [5]; Disease-Resistant [5] (Permanent Immune Machine nanomods); Fearlessness +2 [4]; Immunity to Disease (Affects cancers instead of disease, -70%) [3] (Permanent Carcinophage nanomods); Literacy [0]; Reputation +2 (on 7-, as a stylish and public-spirited celebrity business figure) [3]; Slow Regeneration (Only Heals Radiation, -60%) [4] (Permanent DNA Repair nanomods); Status 3 [10]; Wealth (Filthy Rich) [50].

Disadvantages: Reputation -2 (on 7-, as a publicity-addicted egomaniac) [-3].

Quirks: Likes to have Digital Hair actively displaying abstract images; Likes to think of herself as an innovative philosopher-entrepreneur; Mild Glory Hound; Proud; Remembers grudges, but doesn't usually bother pursuing them very hard. [-5]

Skills: Accounting-12 [1]; Administration-16 [6]; Area Knowledge (U.S.A.)-13 [½]; Aviation/TL9-12 [½]; Computer Operation/TL9-14 [1]; Detect Lies-11 [½]; Diplomacy-12 [1]; Driving (Automobile)/TL9-10 [1]; Fast-Talk-12 [½]; Free Fall/TL9-9 [½]; Leadership-13 [½]; Merchant-13 [1]; Piloting (High-Performance Airplane)/TL9-10 [1]; Piloting (Lighter-than-Air)/TL9-9 [½]; Piloting (Vertol)/TL9-11 [2]; Powerboat/TL9-9 [½]; Savoir-Faire- 16 [0]; Scuba-12 [½]; Speed-Reading-12 [½].

Languages: English (native)-14 [0]; French-12 [½]; German-12 [½]; Spanish-13 [1].

Equipment: Implant communicator (\$750); Permanent Artery Cleaner nanomods (\$5,000); Permanent Pore Cleaner Nanomods (\$500); Permanent Tooth Cleaner Nanomods (\$1,000). *Note:* Mojarro also has possession or use of the kind of homes, clothes, vehicles, etc. appropriate to someone with her wealth and position. She usually wears buzzwear suits and memswear shoes, and she likes to wear varicloth dresses to parties. (She can be persuaded to wear appropriate armor if she should feel physically threatened.) Her telepresence avatar is often dressed in a perfect copy of her favorite garments. She will usually have a good supply of digital hair treatment in her luggage, enabling her to don it for social occasions and PR appearances.

Software (on cyberdog): 3D Social Telepresence (\$200); Basic VR Program (\$200); Custom lifelike VR Avatar (\$20); Language skill sets: Cantonese, English, French, Japanese, and Spanish, all at 14 (all complexity 5; \$1,000); Mugshot (\$100); Teleoperation (VR Control; \$2,500).

Software (on DVI): 3D Social Telepresence (\$200); Basic VR Program (\$200); Custom lifelike VR Avatar (\$20); Mugshot (\$100); Language skill sets: Cantonese, English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Mandarin, Malay, Portuguese, and Spanish, all at 14 (all complexity 5; \$2,000); 5 Off-the-shelf lifelike VR Avatars (\$5); Other skill sets: Area Knowledge (Asia)-15, Area Knowledge (Europe)-15, Area Knowledge (LEO)-15, Area Knowledge (the World)-15, Erotic Art-12, Law-13, Memetics-12, Research- 14 (all complexity 5; \$1,600); Teleoperation (VR Control; \$2,500).

Software (on desktop system): 2D Social Telepresence (\$100); Language skill sets: Cantonese, English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Mandarin, Malay, Portuguese, and Spanish, all at 14 (all complexity 5; \$2,000); Off-the-shelf cartoon VR Avatar (\$0.01); Mugshot (\$100).

Background

Jasmine Mojarro is a very successful self-made businesswoman in the U.S.A. of the Transhuman Space setting. Although very, very far from the top of the list when it comes to wealth, she works hard at projecting her public image, and she has become a minor favorite of the news networks for her flamboyant gestures and visually dramatic hobbies, such as backing or even participating in vehicle races, sponsoring cybershell contests, and so on. Her private life, however, she keeps slightly more quiet. She is currently unattached, and gives the impression of being a very self-reliant person.

Mojarro genuinely likes to think of herself as an innovator, a radical thinker in business terms who is changing the world -- for the better. She often talks in interviews about the social responsibilities of businesses, and she makes large donations to good causes. However, there is an element of self-delusion there.

Mojarro has actually become rich through careful attention to the practical details of running her companies, combined with a certain talent for inspiring and motivating some of her staff. Any innovations involved were usually bought in -- for a fair price, but no more. It is, perhaps, indicative that, despite having made vague statements in favor of pansapient rights, Mojarro owns a SAI -- albeit one which has been carefully programmed to be completely content with its status as property.

Encountered

Mojarro is, obviously, not a combat-oriented character. Nonetheless, adventurous PCs may come into contact with her in several ways.

First, they might be hired to guard or assist her. She is fully capable of getting herself into tricky or dangerous situations while looking for profitable opportunities, but she is no fool; she knows her own limits, and is quite willing to hire skilled help.

Second, and perhaps developing from the first, Mojarro might become a group's patron or long-term employer. In a world where powerful corporations are making most of the big money, someone like Mojarro needs to look for all sorts of opportunities, wherever they arise. She might employ PCs, not only as bodyguards, drivers, or personal assistants, but also as talent scouts or brainstormers, or to run (probably legal) interference on her competitors.

In either of these cases, PCs should find Jasmine Mojarro to be a good boss in many ways -- willing to give them a free hand (within reason) and to provide very reasonable expenses, and quite inspiring. However, she can also be slightly annoying, especially with extended acquaintance. Her concern to portray herself as some kind of high-minded leader of society often clashes with her (perfectly legal and actually rather conventional) pursuit of profits, or with her taste for personal publicity, and her staff often end up having to smooth the ruffled feelings of partners and

shareholders after she has said something which sounds like she is failing to consider the best interests of her business. Conversely, social activists and charity workers often start by taking her at her word, and end up disenchanted when she compromises on some ideal or her rather mercurial interests move on to some other cause. They may well blame her staff for this, thinking that Mojarro has been diverted from doing good by some less high-minded functionary.

Alternatively, Mojarro may be an adversary for some groups. This is especially likely if they are amoral or even criminal by inclination, or perhaps aligned with, say, a nanosocialist group who might be after intellectual property in which Mojarro has an interest. However, it is also possible that legitimate rival businesses or government agencies could come into conflict with Mojarro; she is not especially criminal by nature, but nor is she automatically honest, except out of habit, and her swashbuckling self-image and sense of her own superiority might well lead her to bend quite a few rules. Equally, if some rival was, or appeared to be, acting in an illegal or immoral fashion, Mojarro would take enormous pleasure in exposing this and making trouble for them -- and she might well run ahead of the evidence or facts in her enthusiasm.

For that matter, a party could end up in perfectly legal but very direct competition with Mojarro, especially if they were working on some sporting competition, and she chose to sponsor or support a rival. However friendly the contest, they would soon notice that Mojarro was grabbing all the publicity and most of the public sympathy.

Of course, Mojarro is no sort of physical adversary -- although she can afford effective bodyguards if she needs them, and Rufus can provide her with some protection against minor threats. What she can be is ruthless in court or in PR battles, manipulative, and relentless so long as her interest is held -- which, if her personal ideals, profits, or publicity are involved, and she thinks her opponents are in the wrong, can be for quite a long time. She is particularly adept at taking her fights to whichever venue favors her most; she likes to think of herself as an "internationalist," which means in practise that she will use whichever legal and court system happens to agree with her best. Although she is no lawyer herself, she employs competent legal teams, who share her mixture of surface idealism and essential ruthlessness. She also tends to remember any defeats very clearly; although she is unlikely to pursue active revenge, she is equally unlikely to forgive.

Which, of course, leaves the real possibility of her starting as an employer and ending up as a recurring antagonist. However, competent PCs are more likely to regard her as a nuisance or a difficult potential ally than a threat.

"Rufus"

200 points

ST: 10 [0]; **DX:** 12 [0]; **IQ:** 11 [20]; **HT:** 12/8 [0].

Speed: 6.00; **Move:** 13 (running).

Dodge: 7; **Parry:** 9.

Advantages: Cyberdog [104]; SAI-7 [65].

Quirks: Mildly sarcastic; Perfectly emotionally adjusted to being property; Won't act like a real dog if it can help it (but often says "Woof Woof" sarcastically). [-3]

Skills: Accounting-13 [½]; Administration-9 [½]; Area Knowledge (U.S.A.)-10 [½]; Brawling-13 [2]; Computer Operation/TL9-14 [0]; Detect Lies-10 [2]; Intimidation-10 [1]; Jumping-12 [1]; Law-10 [2]; Lip Reading- 10 [1]; Running-9 [½]; Savoir-Faire-10 [½]; Stealth-11 [1]; Tactics-8 [½]; Writing-9 [½].

Languages: English (native)-11 [0]; Spanish-9 [½].

Notes: Rufus, Mojarro's personal assistant, is an SAI installed in a cyberdog (see p.FW121) in the quite convincing guise of a red setter. (Its VR avatar is a high- quality scan of its physical body.) This software is based on an established line of personal assistant AIs (and with legacy code augmenting its skill set); installing it in this chassis was an act of whimsy on Mojarro's part.

Rufus has been active for some years now, and Mojarro and her hired programmers have shown a striking talent for training and developing its talents; its original programmers would probably be quite interested to analyse its current state. Rufus is, primarily, an administrative assistant, in a cybershell which sometimes leads people to overlook or underestimate it. However, it has also been trained to act as a low-level bodyguard in minor emergencies, and to use its mechanical body to good effect.

"Ann"

50 points

ST: -- [-]; **DX:** 10 [0]; **IQ:** 9 [0]; **HT:** 12/1 [0].

Speed: 5.50.

Advantages: LAI-6 [40].

Disadvantages: Wearable Virtual Interface [-1].

Skills: Accounting-12 [1]; Administration-8 [1]; Computer Operation/TL9-12 [0]; Diagnosis/TL9 (specialized in Jasmine Mojarro)-7/13 [2]; Electronics Operation (Communications)/TL9-10 [4]; Writing-9 [2].

Languages: English (native)-9 [0]; Spanish-8 [1].

Notes: "Ann" is Jasmine Mojarro's personal LAI system, installed on a DVI which she usually wears. Its function is to produce standard accounting records, generate any casual written notes Mojarro needs, handle her Web-based communications, monitor her health, and run any software packages she requires. The avatar it uses when dealing with business or interacting with anyone else across the Web appears as a stern-looking blonde woman in a scarlet Victorian-style dress. (It also has a small library of other, male avatars for use in conjunction with private recreational software.)

"Homefire"

25 points

ST: -- [-]; **DX:** 10 [0]; **IQ:** 10 [0]; **HT:** 12/8 [0].

Speed: 5.50.

Advantages: LAI-7 [50].

Disadvantages: Microframe [-44].

Skills: Administration-8 [½]; Beverage- Making-10 [1]; Carpentry-9 [½]; Computer Operation/TL9- 13 [0]; Cooking-10 [1]; Electronics Operation (Communications)/TL9-8 [½]; Electronics Operation (Robotics)/TL9-10 [2]; Electronics Operation (Security Systems)/TL9-12 [6]; Gardening-9 [½]; Research-10 [2]; Savoir-Faire (Servant)-12 [4].

Languages: English (native)-9 [0]; Spanish-9 [1].

Notes: "Homefire" is the LAI which runs Jasmine Mojarro's home -- a private house in extensive grounds in upstate New York. It monitors the state of the place's physical security systems, general maintenance, and larder, and manages a large database of personal and business information which Mojarro has accumulated and periodically updates via the Web. It can employ an array of small devices around the place as its "hands," using its Electronics Operation (Robotics) skill.

Mojarro is not home very often, but she is in regular contact with Homefire, and has come to appreciate its suggestions when she has to give dinner parties or otherwise entertain guests. (However, she will employ a specialised chef for such events; Homefire is a minimally competent cook.) Its VR avatar is a standard image supplied by the original programmers -- a cartoon snake with a burning torch on the end of its tail.

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Kongo

by Matt Riggsby

Africa remains the dark continent for many westerners. As with Europe's "Dark Ages," the darkness is not the result of a lack of anything to know so much as the product of our lack of knowledge about it. Cities and entire civilizations flourished away from the Mediterranean coast: Axum, Timbuctu, Ghana, Great Zimbabwe, and more, but most of us know little more than names. This article presents one of them, the kingdom of Kongo.

Geography and Land Use

The kingdom of Kongo lies on the west coast of Africa, not far south of the equator. At its largest extent, it extended about 150 miles south from the Kongo river and about 300 miles inland, covering territory in modern Angola and the Republic of Congo. Beyond the coastal plains, the land is characterized by steep-sided, flat-topped hills (a little like mesas in the American Southwest), becoming more common the farther inland one goes; the eastern part of the country is particularly rugged. Many of these hills are large enough to support fortified villages, although difficulty in transportation keeps most villages on the plains. Grassy vegetation predominates, but there are sizable patches of forest, and the savannas are often filled with sharp-edged, man-tall grass. The climate allows two ample crops a year from the fertile soil.

The total population of Kongo at any given time was probably about a half-million. The vast majority lived in small villages of no more than two or three hundred. There are only two settlements of any size: Mbanza Nsoyo, with about 15,000; and the capital, Mbanza Kongo, with about 60,000.

Settlements are typically surrounded by fields cleared by burning. Fields are rotated every few years as the ones in use begin to lose fertility; old fields go fallow, new fields are burned clear, and the buildings of the settlement may shift a bit. In most places, about half of the fields will be given over to various grains. The other half will be used for tree-based crops, most notably palm trees. With the low population density, settlements are widely separated. The spaces between are notorious for prowling animals, and travelers will often erect temporary stockades to protect themselves from lions and leopards.

History

The history of the kingdom of Kongo begins in the 12th century AD. According to legend, a warlord named Wene conquered a region near the center of what would become the kingdom. He established a capital, Mbanza Kongo (meaning, prosaically enough, Kongo Town), and he and his descendents set about expanding their territory. The core territories were under fairly direct control, and Kongo had at least nominal authority over many surrounding provinces. In fairly short order, Kongo developed an aristocracy composed of several extended families from whom rulers and regional noblemen were usually drawn. Rulers were often from the Kinlaza clan, most of whom lived in the center of the country, but they had competition from other clans, most notably the Kimpanzu, the Kinkanga a Mvika and, later, the Agua Rosada.

Around 1480, the expanding kingdom attracted the notice of the Portuguese, who were at this point exploring the globe. The Portuguese established a colony in Angola, but it didn't match the size and wealth of Kongo. The country was visited by missionaries, who came to convert the pagan populace to Catholicism; and merchants, who came to buy slaves, which Kongo had in abundance as a result of their conquests. Even when the country reached its maximum extent near the end of the 16th century, Kongo remained a major exporter of slaves, now imported by slavers raiding territories farther east. Mbanza Nsoyo, a small town at the mouth of the Congo river, became an important port for the kingdom and so grew to become the second-largest settlement in the kingdom.

Initially, things went quite well. The Kongolese were happy to sell slaves to the Portuguese in return for new food crops and exotic European goods. The missionaries also had an enormous impact on the country. In 1491, the king Nzinga a Nkuwu was baptized as a Christian, adopting the name Joao. He lost interest in the new religion, but under his son, Afonso Mvemba a Nzinga, Kongo officially became a Christian country. With friendly relations firmly established with Portugal and the Vatican, the kings of Kongo sent diplomats to Portugal, Spain, and Rome; started corresponding with other European courts; and even tried to establish contact with the Christian kingdom in Ethiopia. Many upper-class families adopted Portuguese names, and the capital was renamed Sao Salvador.

However, relations with Portugal didn't stay warm for long. They were Kongo's best trading partner, but the kings of Kongo still had to keep them at arm's length. The Portuguese were constantly demanding more rights (they were particularly keen to mine Kongo's copper deposits) and tried, with varying degrees of subtlety, to influence all levels of Kongo society, campaigning for favorite candidates for everything from small regional posts to the throne itself. There were also frequent diplomatic disputes and semi-regular raids from Portuguese dependents in Angola. Where possible, the Kongolese also tried to trade with Portugal's main rival in the region, the Dutch. The Dutch didn't have nearly as much of a presence, but they interfered less in Kongolese affairs and would happily sell arms to the Africans.

Typical of Kongo-Portuguese relations is the establishment of an episcopal see in southwestern Africa. In 1596, the Vatican decided that there was sufficient Catholic presence in Africa that a bishop should be established at Mbanza Kongo. The king had been hoping that he'd be able to appoint a native bishop, giving him firm control over the church in his kingdom. However, because Christianity had been established in Kongo by Portuguese missionaries, the king of Portugal was able to have his own candidates (all Portuguese, of course) selected, giving him a stronger foothold in Kongolese politics and more direct authority over the country's ecclesiastical hierarchy. Ultimately, though, the Portuguese victory came to nothing. Angry at the Portuguese, the king arranged for Italian missionaries to come to Kongo, largely displacing Portuguese priests, and by 1624, relations between the bishop and the king had become so poor that the see moved to Angola.

When the Dutch temporarily seized Luanda, the capital of Portuguese Angola, in 1641, the Kongolese welcomed their presence. However, within a few years the Portuguese returned in force, determined to punish those who had favored the Dutch. The situation with Portugal came to a head in the middle of the 17th century. Kongolese exports were at a high point, pulling trade away from Angola, and the Portuguese were spoiling for a fight in hopes of forcing concessions out of Kongo. Finally, in 1665, a succession dispute in one of the more independent regions of southern Kongo turned into a pitched battle between Kongolese and Portuguese troops. The Portuguese, slightly outnumbered but better armed and trained, decisively beat the Kongolese army at Mbvila. The king and his most likely successors were killed, kicking off a brutal period of civil war.

Factions near the capital fought short but intense battles, finally putting a member of the Kinlaza clan on the throne. No sooner had he established his power when the rival Kimpanzu clan, supported by the da Silva clan, hereditary rulers of Nsoyo, sacked Mbanza Kongo and established their own king. The throne changed hands twice more over the next few years. Again, the Kinlazes put one of their candidates on the throne to be replaced by a Kimpanzu at the head of a da Silva army from Nsoyo.

In 1670, Rafael, the most recently deposed Kinzla, approached the Portuguese for aid against Nsoyo. In return, he would make treaty concessions the Portuguese had been after for years. Another large Portuguese army left Angola, this time to meet a force from Mbanza Nsoyo. As with the previous major battle, the Portuguese won decisively. Rafael took a small detachment towards Mbanza Kongo to assume the throne, while the main body headed north at a casual pace, looting as they went. The pace, however, proved too casual. A Dutch ship loaded with arms arrived at Mbanza Nsoyo shortly before the Portuguese. The remaining Kongolese rearmed, regrouped, and surprised the invaders, wiping out the Portuguese forces (the survivors were offered for sale as slaves to the Dutch). The Portuguese position in southern Africa was undermined, and they wouldn't return to Kongo in force for a century.

The Kinzla had regained the throne and the Portuguese had been driven out, but it became clear that the status quo had taken a fatal hit. Civil war continued. Kongo had 16 kings between 1665 and 1709, as well as periods where there were two or more claimants to the throne and one where no one claimed to be king. No hopeful to the throne could muster enough support to defend the capital from revolt, even when they used foreign aid such as the Yaka tribes of the north and east and the Imbangala of the south, rumored to be cannibals. Moreover, successive attacks on Mbanza Kongo wore away the permanent population to nothing. Without the relative luxury of the capital to tempt noblemen, rulers had no way to command their loyalty. Kongo collapsed into its component provinces, ruled by the families of the noblemen who had been in place when the royal throne became irrelevant.

By the second decade of the 18th century, a sort of central authority had been restored. Members of the Agua Rosada clan installed themselves at the abandoned and reoccupied site of Mbanza Kongo and persuaded the provincial rulers to accept them as kings. However, it was on very different terms than before. The provinces retained most of their

independence, paying the king nominal homage and nominal taxes. The remaining kings reigned lightly over a reduced kingdom until the Portuguese returned in the 19th century and annexed Kongo as a colony. By that time, literacy and the remnants of Catholicism had vanished along with all but a vestige of royal power, and the Victorian-era colonists could easily forget that their new possession had once been a mighty kingdom.

Government

Kongo is ruled by a king, supported by a bureaucracy in the capital and a body of regional noblemen. Theoretically, the king is elected for life by a panel of noblemen in the capital, led by the old king's *mani vunda* (prime minister), although violent succession disputes were common when a king died. He has to be a male descendant of Wene, the ancient conqueror, but apparently a number of men in each noble clan could claim that distinction.

Once elected, the king's power to tax and raise or lower noblemen is considerable, but, as with other governments, limited in practice by popular support and a cooperative bureaucracy. He could elevate or dismiss individuals, but completely purging the bureaucracy and regional governorships, probably about three hundred positions altogether, would be too complex and difficult to contemplate. Men usually held offices, but women were sometimes appointed as well.

Favored noblemen would serve in the capital itself. Less favored ones would be appointed to positions in the countryside. There were lesser posts which administered small districts of perhaps a dozen villages and about thirty more important posts governing large provinces. The country's bureaucrats and most noblemen served at the pleasure of the king, although the governors of a number of outlying provinces were elected locally. A post would typically bring with it an income provided by taxes to the crown and probably a number of slaves.

Relations between common villagers and their rulers appear not to have been terribly warm. Noblemen dreaded being appointed to posts in the provinces, away from the relative luxury of the capital. The way back was to demonstrate loyalty and to zealously collect taxes. The "exiled" noblemen, then, might extract whatever taxes they felt they were entitled to, sometimes taking them by force. Resistance was met with extreme brutality, to the point of burning down entire villages. Peasant revolts were not unknown, but they were also not successful. More often, villagers would keep their production to a bare minimum to limit the amount rampaging noblemen could take or even hide their villages.

Society

Kongolese are very concerned with individuals meeting their obligations to their society and unforgiving to those who try to live outside of accepted social roles. Men and women are expected to provide for their families in specific ways, children are expected to show great respect for their older relatives, and so on. In general, they are very social and supportive of their neighbors and relatives, but it's very easy to give offense by stepping outside of traditional social bounds.

The basic unit of Kongolese society is the household, consisting of a husband and wife and their dependents, such as children and elderly relatives. Most households include five or six people, but wealthy households can include multiple wives and servants; multiple marriages are allowed, but because of the cost are generally limited to the rich. There is a rigid division of household labor: women grow the main food crops, prepare most food, and care for preadolescent children, while men tend tree crops, build houses, serve as craftsmen, and perform most tasks beyond the household (despite their interdependence, the division of sexes goes even farther; men and women don't eat together, either). A man without a woman, therefore, will have a hard time getting something to eat on a day to day basis, while a woman without a man won't have a place to live. One peculiar convention is that if a man dies, his brothers or other close male relatives may "inherit" his wives. In other words, the widows will marry their former husband's male relatives so that they will still have a place in society.

Kongolese society can be divided into three broad classes: slaves, villagers, and nobility. Villagers live in villages, loosely administered by a locally selected chief, or *nkuluntu*. The nkuluntu and his household do little productive work. Instead, they are supported by tribute from their villages, although their standard of living is about the same as that of

their neighbors. European missionaries regarded the villagers as being lazy, since they appeared to work hard enough to support themselves but no harder. However, it might be better to think of them as astute judges of their economic position. Given the low incidence of trade in most things they produced and a willingness on the part of the nobility to tax away any surplus, there was little reason for them to make more than enough to feed, clothe, and house themselves and pay existing taxes.

Nobility live in towns and are partly supported by slaves living around them. Slaves mostly live in their own households, providing labor to their owners but also growing crops to support themselves. Slaves can be bought and sold, but in terms of their actual obligations, they resemble European serfs more closely than slaves in the New World. The main economic advantage noblemen have is being able to direct some of the labor of the slaves. For their part, the main difference between slaves and free villagers is that villagers are taxed but grow what they wanted. Slaves, on the other hand, grow what they are told to. Noblemen, therefore, can specialize in specific crops for trade rather than just growing subsistence crops.

Lower-class families are matrilineal. That is, they trace ancestry and familial relationships through the female line. The nobility, though, trace both male and female ancestors. One other peculiar aspect of the nobility is that many speak a different dialect of the Kikongo language than slaves and villagers. The nobility act as though they are a separate ethnic group descended from Wene and his army. However, after generations of intermarriage with the natives, that is mostly a social fiction. The separate dialect might be thought of something like a public-school accent among upper-class Englishmen.

Industry and Economy

Most Kongolese are farmers with a scattering of craftsmen. Most internal trade in Kongo is the result of regional specialization. For example, salt is produced along the coast, while iron comes from the east. There is also cross-regional trade in special crops and types of cloth. Markets where villagers could buy goods from other districts were regularly held in "neutral" territory between the villages themselves. Kongo attracted European merchants with other commodities: ivory, copper, and slaves. The copper and ivory could be acquired locally, but after Kongo's borders stabilized, the slaves had to be imported from farther east.

Kongo has a monetary economy, but doesn't use metal currency. Rather, it uses *nzimbu*, a seashell, as currency. In some areas, *lubongo*, a kind of cloth, is used instead. Portuguese merchants introduced cowrie shells from India into the shell economy.

Although Kongo sees significant trade, the Kongolese themselves aren't merchants. They are largely content to let others come to them and do the heavy lifting of moving goods around. And moving goods is hard work. Sub-Saharan Africa lacks paved roads, extensive navigable river systems, and good beasts of burden. Moving goods is difficult, which has considerable implications for the Kongolese economy. Bringing goods to market becomes expensive quickly. For example, it is unprofitable to transport grain more than about twenty five miles, far less than in Europe. Population centers, therefore, are severely limited in size. Likewise, taxes and produce from the countryside are less efficiently concentrated in centers of power than elsewhere.

Armed Forces and Warfare

Like many countries in contact with Europe at the time, Kongo's army has a mix of traditional and modern troops. The vast majority use swords and spears. The king maintains a standing army of about 5,000, but only about 10% are musketeers. In a pinch, he could temporarily use several thousand slaves as irregular troops. When individual provinces attempt revolt, they can muster armies with a similar composition no more than a tenth that size, often smaller. Only the very largest armies have any kind of artillery, and even they had no more than three or four light cannon.

The problems of long-range transport have an impact on war just as they do on commerce. Because of difficulties with long-distance supply lines, it is difficult to undertake long campaigns. Therefore, wars are usually short but intense

and defensive postures are very effective. If a regional nobleman wants to rebel, he only has to hold out long enough that the cost of attacking him becomes prohibitively high. This is particularly effective in the mountainous east. On the other hand, anyone doing that cut himself off from the luxurious capital, so a successful revolt is more likely to end in concessions from the crown than actual independence.

Religion

The kings of Kongo were converted to Christianity by the end of the fifteenth century, and they took most of the upper classes with them. Both Protestant Dutch and central African merchants converted to Catholicism, at least superficially, to improve trade. Most Kongo, though, came to Christianity at a comfortable, ambling pace, fitting Christian practice into the framework of their native religion. However, as long as the Kongolese were willing to call themselves Christians and show up for mass, the missionaries will be willing to accept them as Christians and dismiss most of their ongoing native rituals as foolish superstition rather than abominable heresy.

It wasn't hard to map aspects of Catholicism onto the native religion. At the top of the Kongo spiritual hierarchy is Nzambi Mpongo, a powerful but distant supreme being. When the Lord's prayer was translated into Kikongo, God became Nzambi Mpongo. Below him are the nkisi, powerful spirits controlling forces of nature. Farther down are kisimbi (distant ancestors) and nkuyu (recent ancestors). The spirits are separated from the living by a sort of ocean or river. However, the living can still call on the powerful spirits of the dead for aid, not unlike praying to a saint to intercede for you.

Kongo religion recognizes two classes of religious-magical practitioners: *nganga*, who work for individuals and for pay using charms and tools, and *kitomi*, who work without fees or paraphernalia for the good of regions, conducting fertility rites and working with nature spirits on behalf of the people.

Christian missionaries, with their crosses and bibles (and, usually, fees for baptisms and other ceremonies), are accepted as just another group of *nganga*. The natives and the Europeans also have remarkably similar ideas about witchcraft. In Kongo, the witches that the missionaries warn against sound like *nganga* gone bad, a concept with which the Kongolese were very familiar. Europeans and Africans agree that such people must be hunted down and stopped. A *kitomi*, by the way, didn't marry but did live with a female companion who performed all the functions of a wife. It was widely considered bad luck for a *kitomi* to die a natural death, so an elderly *kitomi* might be murdered.

In practice, the religion of the Kongo closely resembles voodoo, santaria, and other Afro-Caribbean religions. In fact, because a great many slaves taken to the New World were from central Africa, Kongo religion is one of their important ancestors. However, because it could be safely practiced in the open, it has more public rituals and visible material adjuncts. Many rituals involve communal dancing and singing, and *nganga* produce durable charms, such as sizable wooden figurines.

Buildings and Settlements

A home in Kongo isn't a single building. Rather, a household maintains a compound composed of several small buildings: sleeping quarters, storage sheds, cooking space, and any other buildings as necessary. The buildings are wood plank construction with thatched roofs. The compounds themselves might be enclosed in a wood or transplanted thornbush fence. Among free peasants, compounds are collected into villages, or *lubata*. Most villages are protected by a wooden stockade or thick hedge, more substantial than the largely symbolic fences around the compounds, to keep animals out.

Noble households are found in *mbanza* (towns), which are little more than closely set concentrations of villages, no more than two or three thousand souls altogether. Noble households are generally larger than villager or slave households, but with the same social structure and physical arrangement. They are surrounded by slave households making up most of the village-like settlements which make up the town. Slave households are themselves hardly distinguishable from free villager households.

Because Kongo is so close to equator, there is no need or desire to build heavy buildings to keep the weather out. In fact, their construction was so light that unhappy villagers can dismantle their entire village and move it away from the roads so that rampaging noblemen can't find them. In particularly troubled times, villagers move their villages to the defensible tops of the steep-sided hills which dot the country. During this period, there are only a handful of stone buildings in the country, mostly churches, and mostly in Mbanza Kongo.

Food

West African cuisine centers around thick, starchy porridge made from cassava along the coast, corn or millet farther inland (cassava and corn were introduced from the New World by the Portuguese, but they were taken up quickly). The porridge is accompanied by a variety of relishes and side dishes made from fruits, vegetables, and nuts; ground nuts are an important source of protein. Meals are accompanied by palm wine (fermented palm sap) or, where palms grow poorly, thick, cloudy beer made from local grains. Meat is rarely eaten. When it is, it's usually chicken, although a variety of herd animals (antelope, elephant, and so on) are available to those brave enough to hunt, and there's fish along the coast and rivers.

Clothing

In the heart of the tropics, Kongo is not a land which invites heavy clothing. The traditional garment worn by both men and women is a simple short skirt made of bark cloth. Women occasionally wear an upper garment as well. However, both men and women might wear ornaments of copper, shell, ivory, feathers, and other such materials. The extremely wealthy may wear the occasional item of European clothing. The king wears a sort of beret as a crown; one of Kongo's peculiar laws is that a special tax is levied if his hat falls off.

Names

The adoption of Portuguese names by upper-class Kongolese can take some getting used to. Modern players may be perplexed by Africans with names like Pedro Constantinho, but they will probably come as a relief for historical European characters who won't have to wrap their mouths around names like Mpangu a Nkizi. But they often continued to use their native names as well, and most villagers didn't bother with such nonsense to begin with. Most GMs (and players, for that matter) will be far less familiar with the sounds of southern African languages than, say, Italian or German, so coming up with names might be difficult. Here are a few Kikongo names to get started with: Badimanyi, Bemba, Boboliko, Dintoka, Faida, Kabila, Kibassa, Kinkanga, Kishwe, Lokambo, Lumumba, Maliba, Mananga, Mbombo, Mfolo, Mitifu, Mobutu, Mulumba, Mvemba, Mvika, Ngbendu, Nkanga, Nzuzi, Olenghankoy, Omokoko, Saolona, Tshisekedi, Vunduawe, Zabango.

Adventures in Kongo

For players used to campaigns set in Europe and Asia (or, at least, pseudo-European and pseudo-Asian game worlds), Kongo may appear poor and backwards, much as it did to European visitors. However, the GM may take advantage of the intensely personal nature of life in Kongo. With its diffuse population, relatively low emphasis on accumulation of goods, and loose power structure, individuals may be more important than in other settings. Instead of buying tractable beasts of burden, travelers must negotiate with human bearers. Instead of acquiring vast stores of valuables, rulers (and prospective rulers) can, at best, acquire authority over sometimes uncooperative slaves and villagers. Prospective conquerors must personally lead their rather small armies and engage in the fighting.

Kongo can be used as an exotic port of call for merchant, pirate, or diplomat characters and their retinues. Most foreigners in Kongo will be Portuguese or Dutch, but other Europeans might make their way down Africa's west coast (Italian missionaries are an obvious choice, but French and English merchants appeared in significant numbers later on). Conversely, since Kongo sent diplomats to foreign lands, Kongolese characters can appear in European settings. It's remotely possible that characters from the Arab world could appear, more likely coming from inland. Militarily-

inclined PCs (king's musketeers and swashbuckling pirates are entirely in order during this period) might be employed as mercenary cadres to train native troops in modern weapons and tactics and to lead them into battle. As in other places on the colonial fringe, ambitious characters might leave their homes and try to carve out a kingdom for themselves, perhaps trying to take over a mountainous province in the east. Here are some other adventure ideas:

Heart of Darkness: During the period of civil wars, word has reached the Vatican that a missionary priest, long out of contact with his superiors, has turned heretic and is building a militant following in rugged northeast Kongo. The heroes are a detail sent by the Inquisition to take the priest into custody and return him to Europe. To find him, they must make a journey up the Kongo river, dealing with Yaka troops aiding one noble clan or another or simply plundering under cover of the confusion, semi-independent Kongolese armies, and scared refugees. Once they reach him, they'll have to convince him to come with them or take him by force through a loyal horde of followers. GMs in the mood for symbolism should remember that in Kongolese religion, the worlds of the living and the powerful spirits of the dead are separated by a great river. Native Kongolese may be uneasy about the journey, worried that they are going to confront the embodiment of a powerful ancestor. Even if the PCs aren't, their native guides and bearers will be.

Let My People Go: An organization of time-travelers has decided to put a stop to the African slave trade before it begins. Their plan is to simultaneously strengthen the Kongolese militarily and politically and stir up sentiment against foreigners. Their hope is to make Kongo unreceptive to trading with Europeans and to make them strong enough to resist their incursions. Characters could be time-traveling abolitionists trying to convince the Kongolese to change their way of life or an opposing team sent in to stabilize the timeline. Adventurers might also be members of a second team sent in a few generations later to clean up the mess created by the first team's successful efforts, putting the brakes on a violently expansionist Kongo which threatens to reproduce the horrors of New World slavery in Africa.

Ting Tang Walla Walla Bing Bang: The Portuguese thought West Africa was the perfect source of labor for their New World plantations until magic-wielding enslaved nganga launched a bloody revolution. Brazil, Portugal's most prized possession, is now in the hands of African rebels and Kongo, the only known source of similar magic, has just become a much more important place. The Kongolese have no particular fondness for the rebellious slaves of Brazil (after all, they were happy to sell them), but at the same time they have no particular reason to take action against them. It's up to Portuguese diplomats to convince Kongo to assist their attempts to retake Brazil and protect the slave trade. PCs could take a number of roles: Portuguese diplomats petitioning the Kongolese government for aid, other European diplomats visiting to learn more about the extraordinary situation (and perhaps thwart the Portuguese; the Spanish would be particularly delighted to see Portugal fail), European priests and explorers coming to investigate the remarkably effective magic of Kongo, Kongo noblemen trying to take advantage of the attention, or maybe even Brazilians returned to the old country to keep Kongo from interfering in the revolution.

Further Reading

- Balandier, Georges, *Daily Life in the Kingdom of the Kongo* Hilton, Anne, *The Kingdom of Kongo*
- Thornton, John K., *The Kingdom of Kongo: Civil War and Transition*

Pyramid Review

Heroes & Villains (for the Gear Krieg RPG)

Published by [Dream Pod 9](#)

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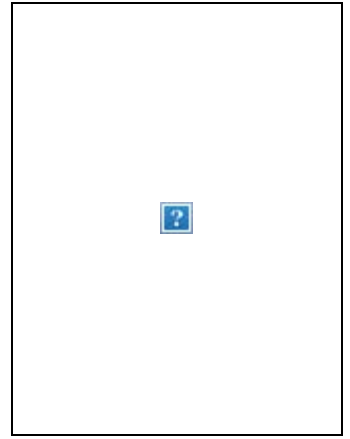
96-page b&w softcover; \$19.95

Of all the World War II themed RPGs released in 2001, [Gear Krieg: The Roleplaying Game](#), from Canadian publisher, Dream Pod 9, was the one with the problems. Derived from the miniatures combat rules of the same name, in which scientific advances lead to the war being fought aided by low-end technology mecha called "walkers," the RPG suffered primarily from inadequate proofreading, a lack of character generation example, and scant advice on the place and motivation of the player characters in what would become an increasingly militaristic setting. In the many months since the release of the RPG, DP9 have released little support in comparison with the miniatures game and line, with just the supplements, the *Gear Krieg Screen and Adventure*, and the less-than-super supplement, [Gear Krieg: Superscience!](#)

Both *Superscience!* and the latest and third supplement for *Gear Krieg* focus upon elements left relatively untouched by the core rulebook, but where *Superscience!* focused upon just one aspect of the setting, *Gear Krieg: Heroes & Villains* looks at two -- as its title suggests. What the supplement examines is the place of the daring heroes, the villains' loyal goons and henchmen, and the villainous mastermind himself (or herself) within the *Gear Krieg* setting -- their headquarters and bases, the Superscience gadgets to be wielded by either, plus a modicum of new Perks and Flaws. It also gives guidelines for adventuring in the pulp world of two-fisted action, expanding a little upon what was given in the core book.

While the layout and organization of *Heroes & Villains* is up to DP9's usual standard, the book does suffer from the same kind of typographical errors that plagued *Gear Krieg: the Roleplaying Game*. Fortunately this is not to the same degree, but when the supplement's text ends mid-sentence, it leaves the reader wondering about the publisher's proofreading policy -- to proofread or to not proofread? Otherwise, *Heroes & Villains* is a decent-looking book occasionally illustrated by Kieran Yanner's pencils that nicely impart pulp's flavor and sensibility.

After the opening color fiction, *Heroes & Villains* gets down to "Pulp Plotting 101," a look at the basic elements of the genre: One-Upmanship and Danger. The former shows the GM how to reuse elements and situations used in a game before, while the latter shows how to make an adventure dangerously thrilling without being *too* dangerous. This is good advice, which can be combined with the 22 "Pulp Plots And Pulp Elements," ranging from "Give Me Shelter" and "A Penny Short And A Day Late" through "Chandler's Revenge" (taken from the author Raymond Chandler's fallback position whenever he ran into a plot blockage -- have a bundle of thugs burst in on the heroes all guns blazing!), "On The Run to Hazard Pay," and "What Happened?" Each of these elements receives a thorough examination, and not only can they be used as they are, but also they can be plugged into one of the core book's best features, the Random Adventure Generator.



The Character Design Tools feed into the contents of the next chapter, The Makings Of A Pulp Hero. They discuss character background and how to handle the naming conventions of the genre, before giving a list new Perks and Flaws. These include the Perks of Crack Driver or Pilot, Combat Veteran, and True Love, and Flaws of Creepy, Soft-Hearted, and Combat Stress. All should be welcomed as useful additions to the game, but they do seem a little too obvious not to have been included in the core book. The section is rounded out with a suggestion on how to use the Tactics skill levels of the characters in a party to fill a pool of points from which the whole of the party can draw in a combat situation.

In The Makings Of A Pulp Hero, the place and creation of the ***Gear Krieg*** hero is discussed in further depth -- their motivations within the boundaries of the genre and the three types of hero archetype possible: the hero, the sidekick, and the supporting character. It addresses how to avoid the perennial pulp dilemma of the "Doc Savage Problem": having a player character be so good that they are both indispensable and outshine the abilities of the other characters. The answer provided is both obvious and welcome, suggesting that players build a balanced team of characters, each with their own set of niche skills. The chapter also expands upon what little there was in the ***Gear Krieg*** core book on heroic campaign types, looking at those centered on independent heroes, as well as Government-sponsored campaigns or games centered on the Allied armed forces. The bulk of this section is given over to discussing the League of Nations Plenipotentiary Teams, which, though suggested in the core book, was left little explored. Again, the advice is good, though GMs will still be left wanting more.

The chapter is rounded out with files with files for six heroic characters. These are given full descriptions and histories, along with their game write-ups. In addition, the GM has plenty of suggestions on how to use each of them as potential allies, enemies, resources, or just plain plot complications, all of which serves to enhance their usefulness. At a pinch, the six could be used as player characters, but gathering them all together could prove to be a problem.

So far ***Gear Krieg: Heroes & Villains*** has concentrated upon the former, but it really gets into its stride with the villainous half (and more) of the book. As with the heroes, the motivations and archetypes for villains are discussed before presenting 12 write-ups of various thugs, henchmen, and masterminds in the same format as the heroes given earlier. They range from traitors to the Nazis, through criminal enforcers, crime lords and spymasters, to mysterious agents and Nazi cyberneticists.

Some of these possess or make use of the various headquarters and hideouts described next. These seven include the ever popular Nazi submarine base in the Antarctic; the Golden Eagle, a giant flying wing that transports a group known as Swift's Strikers across the world to defy Nazi tyranny; a secret SOE base deep in Paris that is only accessible from the city's sewers; and Baron Friederich von Eisen's Flying Fortress, an impregnable and vast Zeppelin aircraft carrier, far tougher than Germany's other *Luftfortresses* -- as detailed in the ***Luft Krieg Companion***. Again, these can be used as is, but alternatives are provided should the GM want to use them for another purpose. Each base receives a two-page spread, one of text and another illustrating or mapping each location. Perhaps more space could have been given over to the maps, but there is just enough here to whet a GM's imagination, and if the seven are not enough, ***Heroes & Villains*** includes quick guidelines for designing the headquarters for villains of a GM's own creation. This is great stuff and useful in other pulp-type games, such that a whole supplement could be built around an expansion of material like this.

Rounding the supplement is a more personal examination of ***Gear Krieg's*** Superscience, with the aim of providing the sort of gadget that a hero or villain might have in their possession. The problem in both the core book and the ***Superscience!*** supplement is the subject is very much depersonalized and mass-produced, such that it remains out of the reach of the average pulp hero. Invariably such items remain the province of each nation's armed forces. These small devices, such as the Atomic Car, Dehydration Ray, Plastic Flesh, and X-Ray Monocle can be classed as Signature Items that can be used to further define a character. To this end, such items can be purchased during character creation. Both these devices and their Signature Item rules can be described as so essential to the genre and setting that they should have been included in the core book, or the ***Superscience!*** supplement at the very least (since that book was devoted to Superscience). Finally, the chapter is rounded out with a short-but-interesting look at Superscience Doomsday Devices.

In many ways, ***Gear Krieg: Heroes & Villains*** addresses a multitude of ***Gear Krieg's*** problems, though not all. That

may come with the forthcoming second edition of ***Gear Krieg: The Roleplaying Game***. Those that it does deal with are related to the creation, motivation, and position of both the good guy and the bad within the setting of the pulp-style Modern Age that is ***Gear Krieg***. This makes it nigh on indispensable to the life and length of any ***Gear Krieg RPG*** campaign, leaving one to wonder why so little of this was covered in the core book and why there has been such a wait for this book.

On the plus side, so little of the various elements and advice in ***Heroes & Villains*** is solely specific to ***Gear Krieg: The Roleplaying Game*** and its Silhouette mechanics, that virtually all of it could be applied to *any* pulp RPG. Even those specific to both setting and mechanics would be easy enough to adapt to a GM's system of choice. Particularly good is the advice on creating villains and their headquarters, with the given examples likely to turn up in other games. This aspect of ***Heroes & Villains*** would also be worth expanding to fulfil a whole book by itself. In spite of the typographical errors in ***Heroes & Villains***, this supplement is the best and most useful released to date for ***Gear Krieg: The Roleplaying Game***. Part of this can be put down to the far-from-perfect quality of previous titles in the line -- which ***Heroes & Villains*** does address -- but even so, this book still deserves to be on the shelf of any GM running a pulp style game.

--Matthew Pook

Dream Police

by [Chad Underkoffler](#)

Genre: "Psionic" Cops

Style: Action-Adventure to Cinematic

Fidelity: Rock Bottom

Themes: Crime, Protect & Serve, Buddy Movie/Ensemble Cast

Campaign Setting and Background Information

While the world sleeps, a chosen few entities patrol, to protect dreamers from dangers that prowl the Dreamscape.

What Every Dream(er) Knows

Bubbles: In the darkness of the Dreamscape, every dreamer's individual dreamspace appears as a glowing sphere of force, hanging (or sprouting) from a translucent [Thread](#). Bubbles have a radius of their dreamer's height, and shift in color to reflect the dreamer's current mental state. Silver shows that the dreamer is dreaming (or daydreaming), while white indicates that a dreamer is awake. A gray Bubble means that the dreamer is in distress: the disorientation of one asleep but not yet dreaming, mental derangement, or suffering malicious dream-attack. When a dreamer dies, their Bubble turns black, slowly transmuting into black [Sand](#), which the dreamwinds erode and spread throughout the Dreamscape.

Most dreamers never leave their Bubble, caught up in the entertainments within. Only a certain gifted few -- like psychics and shamans -- Breach their mental walls and float out into the wider Dreamscape, trailing an almost invisible and unbreakable silver cord back to their Bubble (see also the boxed text, [Dream Skills](#)).

Threads: These colorless lines of energy hold Bubbles relatively stable in the dreamwinds, and are used by Dreamscape denizens as streets. The Thread of a Bubble twists together with those of its neighbors, thickening into *Strands* and then *Cables*, which serve as streets and boulevards for travelers. A collection of Bubbles on a Strand is called a *Cluster* (similar to a city block); a bunch of Clusters on a Cable is called a *Bubbleplex* (similar to a city neighborhood). Strands and Cables intersect each other; plazas are often built of [Sand](#)-bricks at these crossroads. The main trunk line of Cables is called *Astral Way*, and it serves as the main thoroughfare of the Dreamscape. Lit by the twinkling Bubbles all around, floating down Astral Way is like walking along the branch of a titanic apple tree whose blossoms are glowing.

It's unknown where the Threads eventually terminate; no dreamer has stayed asleep long enough to find the source; however, a few [Figments](#) and [Eternals](#) claim to have done so.

Finally, the relationship between dreamers' location in a Cluster compared to the waking world is unclear -- it

Dream Skills

Dreamers who pass beyond the wall of their Bubble can learn a number of useful skills to aid them in their journeys. These include:

- *Blast:* By focusing the totality of their willpower into a single gleaming bolt, dreamers skilled at Blasts can tear apart dream-objects (including those of smelted Sand), [Figments](#), [Nightmares](#), [Screaming Meemies](#), and even other dreamers. Indeed, a Blast is so potent that it is the only way in the Dreamscape to kill a dreamer's slumbering physical body -- dispatching a foe with a dream weapon, dropping them from a height, or even pummeling them to death with dream fists merely causes the dreamer to wake up.

doesn't seem to have to do with geography, family, personality types, or anything else -- though sometimes Cluster-neighbors do share such qualities. The tendency for Bubbles to unwind from their Strands and float away into new Clusters occasionally (plus dreamers consciously moving their Bubbles to be near friends) makes analysis difficult.

Sand: Sand is the name for the raw material of dreams: these tiny granules of mental energy coalesce into both the shell of a Bubble as well as the dreams formed within. Outside of a Bubble, it nourishes, heals, and exhilarates all denizens of the Dreamscape -- dreamers, Eternals, Figments, Nightmares, and Screaming Meemies -- and is used as a construction material for buildings, platforms, and tools (see boxed text, [Sand Smelting](#)). Finally, it is traded between denizens, in raw form or manufactured objects (either unconsciously by a dreamer inside his Bubble, or consciously in the Dreamscape by a Sand Smelter).

When a dead dreamer's Bubble erodes into black Sand, it blows into the Dreamscape. The "drifting black" can supply basic (if boring) sustenance for denizens. Some, driven by extreme hunger or need for raw material, "vulture" over a gray Bubble, waiting for it to turn black so that they can whack big chunks of the dying Bubbles off with pick and hammer. While in bad taste, this habit is not illegal. However, it draws the attention of Dream Police officers, who can cite denizens for "loitering" or "causing a public disturbance."

White Sand is of higher quality (as food and material) than black Sand, but is even rarer than silver, as it comes from the Bubble of a dreamer who is awake. If a dreamer possesses appropriate training (and the proper permits from the Dream Police), he can "reserve" white Sand during waking meditation, to trade upon his next slumber. Its demand as a spice and an alloy-additive is high.

Silver Sand comes from the Bubble of a dreamer actively dreaming, and in terms of quality is as far above white Sand as white is above black. Delicious and rejuvenating, silver can induce ecstasy, heal grievous wounds, regenerate lost limbs, and be smelted to make nigh-unbreakable objects. It's also incredibly addictive; a denizen who eats too much, too often quickly becomes a [Silverfish](#) (dream-junkie).

Dreamers can [trade](#) their own raw silver or dream-objects with other denizens of the Dreamscape, though overdoing this runs the risk of mental instability. Silver Sand is made of happy thoughts, self-confidence, and personal initiative -- the dreamer who squanders their silver finds their

Breach: Breach is the skill used to enter or exit a Bubble; it can also be used to "mine" Sand from one (though chipping away with dream tools works just as well) and to break a Shield (see below). Dreamers outside of their Bubbles trail a hair-thin, almost imperceptible silver cord of energy (much like a tiny Thread). No one has yet found a way to sever a silver cord from Dreamer or Bubble. White Bubbles are especially difficult to Breach.

- **Sand Smelting:** Every dreamer creates dream-objects unconsciously within their own Bubbles to window-dress their evening's entertainment. (If taken out into the Dreamscape, these objects composed of silver [Sand](#) can be used in [Dream Commerce](#).) However, the ability to *consciously* create objects from Sand outside of one's Bubble is a bit trickier. By gathering together a quantity of Sand and concentrating upon it, the Smelter makes the stuff clump together and grow malleable (or even liquid). The resulting goo can then be carved, shaped, molded, or blown into any form. The different colors of Sand can be mixed to produce alloys with diverse qualities.

Most dream-objects are Smelted out of black Sand. Whole plaza-platforms of black Sand bricks (many with permanent buildings) have been constructed at Thread, Strand, and Cable crossroads, and serve as community centers, market sites, and other places for Dreamscape denizens to gather and mingle. Most dream-objects needing hardness and flexibility (like weapons) are created from a black-silver mix; superior dream-objects require a tri-Sand alloy.

"Empowered objects" (like the [Badges](#) of the Dream Police) require a white-silver amalgamation or pure silver alone.

- **Scanning:** Scanning is the ability to read and send surface thoughts. (There are rumors of "deep Scanning" techniques, but few dream denizens believe they exist.)
- **'Scape Movement:** This skill is used to travel the Dreamscape, either along the "streets" of Threads, Strands, and

Bubble turning gray. However, if that's the dreamer's choice, fine and well.

Sandrunners: A dreamer who escapes the shell of his Bubble may (inadvertently) intrude into another's Bubble without permission and steal dream-objects or Sand from it. Taking Sand from another's Bubble is illegal, as it may cause harm to the dreamer. So long as reparations are made, and the intruder is repentant, the Dream Police are merciful (sentencing the trespasser to mild public service for a short period). However, those who invade and/or steal maliciously or for personal gain (usually by selling ill-gotten Sand or dream-goods on the black market) are criminals called Sandrunners. Sandrunners are responsible for about half of the crimes committed in the Dreamscape.

Dream Police: Before the [Chief](#) showed up, the Dreamscape was a lawless frontier, where the strong ruled the weak. Today, due to the efforts of those who wear the [Badge](#), that state of affairs is changing. Dreamers of any sex or age possessing the suitable talent, willpower, and nobility of soul are recruited into the Dream Police, to serve and protect the Dreamscape. (Many dreamers with the talent but lacking the willpower or nobility may very well become Sandrunners.) The Dream Police patrol the Astral Way and the Bubbleplexes, stop Sandrunners, enter Bubbles to extract troubling Nightmares, and hunt down and destroy Screaming Meemies. Currently, there are just one thousand Dream Police to protect the entire Dreamscape.

Eternals: When someone's body dies when they are in the Dreamscape, their mind (some say "soul") may survive that expiration. The silver Sand from their Bubble courses along their silver cord and pours into their dream-body -- changing them forever -- even as their Bubble blackens and blows away. They are now Eternal Dreamers, composed entirely of silver Sand. Thus, they are quite strong, resilient, and adaptable; this amounts to virtual immortality. However, an Eternal can still be killed by Blasts, dream-object-inflicted wounds, and starvation (they must now gather and consume Sand to survive).

Figments: Figments are dream-beings that have escaped (or been freed) from the Bubbles of their creators. Like Eternals, they are strong, tough, and functionally immortal, and share the same needs and weaknesses. They can learn Dream Skills as well as any dreamer; this allows many to shed the bizarre shapes imposed upon them by their creators. Many become Sand Smelters (anything from dream-chef to weaponsmith), scholars, entertainers, or merchants. Some turn to crime as Sandrunners; a few commit violent crimes and begin to transform into Nightmares.

Cables, or through empty space. Speeds correlate to the skill of the dreamer, ranging from a floaty "meander" to "damn zippy!" flight.

- *Shape Context:* This skill allows the user to control elements of an individual's personal dreamscape, often from behind the scenes (it can only be used within a Bubble). It permits the Shaper to add or subtract elements from the dream and alter its "plot" or tone. This skill must be used subtly, for if the target becomes aware of this control, they can wake up or lash out. A dreamer is essentially the *god* of their own Bubble, so the Shaper who prods too sharply could have just about anything happen to them . . . from being stuck in a white Bubble until the dreamer again sleeps to hideous body reshaping to death by Blast (see above).
- *Shape Self:* This skill represents the ability to change the physical form of one's dream body. Shape Self allows the user to alter their appearance; increase or decrease in size; add claws, wings, tails; etc. The changes are not simply cosmetic, but their quality is related to the skill level of Shape Self.
- *Shield:* The Shield skill is used to block Blasts; counter Breaches and Scans; temporarily restrain another denizen; and hide from the What Is, What Was, and What Will Be skills (see below).
- *What Is:* Use of this skill allows "real-time" remote viewing or location of people, objects, or places within the Dreamscape. It is also the skill used to track someone by following their faint silver cord.
- *What Was:* Use of this skill allows viewing of past events that occurred within the immediate location of the user.
- *What Will Be:* Use of this skill allows viewing of future events that may (not will, *may*) occur within the immediate location of the user, or that may involve the user himself. Conscious control of What Will Be is difficult and rare; visions are usually unheralded, unexpected, and vague.

Dream Police Training

Nightmares: Nightmares are Figments gone bad. They enjoy nothing more than Breaching a dreamer's Bubble. By causing fear with [Shape Context](#), they convert some of their victim's silver Sand gray, and then feed on the mixture. This rich diet of gray and silver makes them stronger than most Figments. Dream Police consider a Nightmare a fusion of mugger, murderer, and rapist. Even so, Nightmares are to be captured, imprisoned, and rehabilitated back into non-criminal Figments, if possible.

Silverfish: If a dreamer, Eternal, or Figment becomes addicted to silver Sand, their eyes become cloudy mirrors. Under the influence of a hit, Silverfish are full of energy, amazingly strong, nearly invulnerable, and possessed of incredible regenerative abilities; once they start to come down off the buzz, they become twitchy, irritable, weak, and feel a constant low-grade pain inside. A long and careful rehabilitation program can wean a 'fish off of silver Sand safely; the Dream Police can help addicts find one.

Screaming Meemies: Thought by many to be a species of Nightmare, a Screaming Meemie is the Dreamscape representation of a "meme" or "viral thought." They are the nasty big brothers of those songs that get stuck in one's head and repeat endlessly. Unlike Nightmares, Meemies prefer to Breach white Bubbles and subsist on a mixture of white and silver Sand. This makes them even tougher customers than Nightmares. Furthermore, they can *replicate* themselves into a swarm of smaller Meemies to aid in escape and evasion; each replicated Meemie retains the full memories of its sire up until the point of fracture. (There is a theory that all Screaming Meemies are descended from a single ur-Meemie.) Apparently, they have the ability to transmit themselves via the waking world into the mind of another dreamer, allowing them to emerge back into the Dreamscape from a distant and random white Bubble.

The Dream Police see Screaming Meemies as a fusion of serial killer and ebola virus. Their penchant for mucking about with white Bubbles often has disastrous effects on the sanity of their victims. Dream Police are encouraged to terminate Meemies with extreme prejudice.

What the Dream Police Know

The Founding of the Department: Before the Department, the Dreamscape was a wilderness whose guiding rule was "Might Makes Right." Nightmares and Screaming Meemies preyed on dreamer and Figment. Dreamscape denizens huddled in fear, broke and ran, or fought back as best they could against their enemies. No matter how they tried to band together for protection, they were always eventually beaten down.

Then, one day, it all started to change. Luke Washington had been -- still was, he'd state -- a cop before the accident rendered his body comatose. His sleeping mind remained as sharp as when awake, and his endless dreams quickly became lucid. Again and again, he fought battles drawn from his memories, his terrors, his imagination. His Bubble became a sort of chrysalis: when he Breached his Bubble, he emerged a skilled and tough dreamer who had put his own house in order. As he stepped out onto Thread, he took a deep breath of air full of drifting black, and began to explore.

What he saw in the Dreamscape both horrified and angered him. He decided then and there to bring his police training to bear on the chaos. Like some Lone Ranger (or Don Quixote), he fought against the Sandrunners and Meemies. He almost didn't even notice when his body died and he became an Eternal. He was too busy bringing order and justice to the Dreamscape, and recruiting those who had sympathy for his goals. Those recruits became the Dream Police, and Washington became "the Chief."

The Dome of Justice: After his Bubble blackened and blew away, the Chief began constructing a new home in the Dreamscape. Right on Astral Way, the Dome of Justice is built of thick blocks of Smelted black Sand, interwoven with supports of a tri-Sand alloy (much of the white and silver donated by grateful citizens). It is a sturdy, large, and

All [Dream Police](#) undergo rigorous training to give them a basic competency (equal to their rank in Dream Police) in several Dream Skills. The skills taught at the Academy are Blast, Breach, Shield, Scanning, Scape Movement, Shape Self, and What Is; however, use of Blast against Figments, Nightmares, and especially dreamers is frowned upon.

(For the benefits granted by the [Badge](#), please see below.)

imposing structure. Within are the Academy, the Barracks (where the Bubbles of Dream Police officers have been moved to protect against tampering), the Cells (where criminals -- and their Bubbles -- are imprisoned and rehabilitated), and several other areas of interest (see [Items & Locations](#).)

Recruiting: A few applicants are dreamers who come voluntarily to the Dome of Justice to join up with the Chief. Most are found through use of Dream Skills like What Is and What Will Be, or are recommended to the Chief by Dream Police officers. In any case, the applicant is informed of the responsibilities and duties of an officer, given basic information on the types of things they'll need to be able to do, and are then subjected to a long and involved interview with the Chief himself. "It was like he looked deep into me," many say afterwards. After the interview, the Chief determines whether to admit the applicant to the Academy as a recruit, or turn them away (either completely or until they're ready).

The Academy: The Academy trains recruits in the Law of Dreams, [Badge](#) use, several [Dream Skills](#), and those law enforcement skills that can be usefully translated to the Dreamscape. The recruit must pass each examination; if they fail, they repeat the training until they pass. (No recruit has ever been expelled from the Academy, but a number have never graduated.) The ultimate test is a long and in-depth interview with the Chief. If the recruit passes muster, they graduate and take the rank of a Dream Police Officer. If they don't, they go back and do it again until they get it right or work out whatever issue is holding them back.

The Law of Dreams: The Law of Dreams rests on a few simple rules:

1. Do Unto Others As You Wish Them To Do Unto You.
2. You Will Not Intrude.
3. You Will Not Steal.
4. You Will Not Harm.
5. You Will Not Murder.

***Note:** "Killing" with a dream object is a different crime depending upon the victim: if a dreamer, this is assault (as they wake up unharmed); if a Figment or Eternal, this is homicide (as they'd be dead).*

Dream Police interpret and enforce the Law; their judgment may be requested to settle disputes between Dreamscape denizens. They serve as judge, often jury, and sometimes executioner. However, Dream Police are encouraged not to use deadly force (i.e., Blasts) unless absolutely necessary (see [Special Units](#)). GMs should feel free to expand the Law as they see fit, to provide adventure and conflict.

The Badge: The Dream Police each bear a Badge, Smelted out of their own silver Sand (possibly with a dash of white) by the Chief. The Badge is not just the sign and symbol of their authority, but also grants certain benefits. These include serving as a focus for "dream radio" (a method of using Scanning and What Is for direct communication; however, this technique requires exclusive concentration), the ability to fire non-lethal Blasts if using the Badge as a focus, a bonus to the Shield skill (both for protection of themselves and others as well as restraining malefactors), and a limited bonus to the Breach skill (only for exiting a Bubble). A Badge may not be used by anyone other than its owner, and cannot be destroyed while the owner lives. It can be taken away, but the Badge can be retrieved through extreme effort of will. Most Dream Police wear their Badge on their chest (usually over the heart), but a few choose to wear it in the form of a bracelet or ring.

Duties & Rank: Officers are the lowest ranked Dream Police, and handle beat patrols (usually a Cluster), investigate suspicious events, provide back-up for other officers, respond to public safety issues (especially Thread traffic situations and other accidents), and help maintain public order; they may operate singly or in pairs. Sergeants act as detectives, generally operate with a partner or in squads, and investigate crimes like Bubble invasion, theft, Sandrunning, assault, murder, kidnapping, Nightmare attack, and the like. Lieutenants are higher-ranked detectives who command Sergeants' squads. Captains manage the Cable precinct domes and their attendant detective squads and beat officers; Captains decide who gets partnered with whom, when to rotate officers to desk duty, and who should act as Cluster liaison. Above the Captains is the Chief, who runs the whole show, sometimes from the field.

Going Undercover & Sting Operations: Two special duties that Dream Police often perform include going undercover

and sting operations. Both require high Shape Self skill (and a strong Shape Context skill doesn't hurt). When an officer goes undercover, he Breaches the target's Bubble as quietly as possible, Shapes Self to fit the idiom of the dreamer's delusion, and possibly even uses Shape Context to provide a little "English" on the situation to explain his presence. Dream Police do this to track and trap Sandrunners, as well as eject particularly tenacious or subtle Nightmares. Sting operations aim at the same perpetrators and their activities outside Bubbles, in the Dreamscape proper.

Special Units: There are two special units in the Dream Police:

1. *Special Whimseys and Tactics (SWAT):* These officers are the big guns of the Department -- specialists in Breach and Blast. They generally serve in other squads across the Dreamscape, and are only mobilized as a separate unit in crisis times -- hostage situations, Sandrunner gang warfare, or Screaming Meemie swarms.
2. *Internal Investigations (Eyes):* The Law applies to Dream Police just as much as it does to any other denizen of the Dreamscape, though they are allowed some mild flexibility when they are pursuing their duties of Protecting and Serving. Voluntary restraint is the only thing keeping the Chief and the Dream Police from being just another bunch of powerful thugs: staying within the bounds of the Law themselves is taken very seriously. The Eyes are 20 officers of unimpeachable character, selected by the Chief himself, who make sure that other Dream Police haven't stepped out of line. Sometimes they go undercover to make sure officers aren't even *thinking* of stepping out of line. The Eyes are highly-skilled in Scanning, Shape Self, and What Is.

Imprisonment of Criminals: Criminal dreamers, Eternals, Figments, and Nightmares are placed in the Cells of the Dome of Justice to serve out their sentence, and, hopefully get some rehabilitation. (The Bubbles of living dreamers are moved within the Cells, so that though they vanish from the Cells upon awakening, they still return to the Cells when next they slumber.) Dream Police officers are assigned prisoners to deal with, talk to, and help build a non-criminal dreamlife; usually, an officer does not serve in this capacity for any criminal he's caught himself. Convicts are treated and fed well, but are usually not allowed to socialize with other prisoners except at mealtimes.

What Every Denizen Doesn't Know

The Nature of Threads: Currently unknown, but popular theories suggest that the Threads, Strands, and Cables are manifestations of the shamanic World-Tree, representations of inherited DNA patterns, a spiritual Internet, connections to astronomical influences like the Zodiac, and so forth.

The Fennel Wolves: Most denizens don't realize -- or in the case of long-lived beings, clearly remember -- that hundreds of years ago, there used to be an organization much like the Dream Police, which bore many names: The Good Walkers, the Dog-Knights of Heaven, the Fennel Wolves. Their long-lost towers of black Sand brick are overgrown with Bubbles and Threads, lost in the darkness of the Dreamscape. Who knows what wonders or terrors they yet conceal?

The CIA/KGB Connection: Unknown to all but the Chief, his closest associates, and the survivors, there is a secret involved in the foundation of the Department of Dream Police. In the days when the Chief walked the Dreamscape alone, he happened upon a war being waged on the Strands and Cables. Both the CIA and the KGB were attempting to develop "dream assassins" for use in their waking Cold War. This enraged the Chief, and he spent the next few

Dream Commerce

Here's a quick table to display the rarity, quality, and cost of the different colors and alloys of [Sand](#) and the dream-objects created from them. Note that alloys do not require equal proportions of Sand; the typical black-silver alloy is 100 parts black to 1 part silver.

Type	Rarity	Quality	Cost
Gray Sand	Uncommon	Poor	N/A
Gray Dream-objects	N/A	N/A (too fragile to Smelt)	N/A
Black Sand	Common	Average	\$
Black Dream-objects	Common	Average	\$\$
Black-silver alloy Dream-objects	Uncommon	Good	\$\$\$
White Sand	Very Rare	Good	\$\$\$\$
White-black alloy Dream-objects	N/A	N/A (alloy is unstable)	N/A

years thwarting their projects, diverting their trainees, and otherwise bollixing up their experiments. In a handful of cases, he was forced to Blast a number of assassins into oblivion. After enough tragedies and negative results, the projects of both organizations were closed down (though a few former trainee-assassins may have survived, harboring a grudge against the Dreamscape's top cop).

The experience changed the Chief; he had seen and caused too many dreams of violence. His martial skills and reactionary outrage merely promulgated the Might Makes Right philosophy. He decided to build something instead, something constructive. Thus, the Dream Police were founded, dedicated to being more than a Eternal's pet warband.

Tri-alloy Dream-objects	Rare	Expert	\$\$\$\$
White-silver alloy Dream-objects	Very Rare	Master	\$\$\$\$\$
Silver Sand	Rare	Expert	\$\$\$
Silver Dream-objects	Rare	Master	\$\$\$\$
"Empowered" Dream-objects	Very Rare	varies	Seller's Market

The Webber Institute for Lucid Dream Experimental Research (WILDER): Some of the weirdest and woolliest dream-research is happening under the auspices of WILDER. While a little shady, they've never been caught breaking the Law of Dreams. While their goals are currently unknown, the director of the project -- a known dreamer and regular customer at the [Undone Café](#) named Gregory Webber -- has been heard to say that the Chief, ". . . found a whole new universe, and the first thing he did was set up a fascistic organization of jackbooted thugs!"

The Dragon: No denizen of the Dreamscape knows who or what the crimelord called "the Dragon" is, or where it lairs. Rumors abound; select one (or not) to be true:

- He's a 60-year-old made-man, dreaming himself as a don (from his prison cell).
- It's a badass Nightmare.
- He is the dream-form of Vlad "Dracula" Tepes made Eternal (or, she is the dream-form of Elizabeth Bathory made Eternal).
- It's not just *a* Screaming Meemie, it's *the* Screaming Meemie; that is, the ur-Meemie mentioned [above](#).
- He's Gregory Webber, Director of WILDER.
- There is no Dragon; it's just a lie the Chief came up with to give the Dream Police something to do.

Bad Cops: The Chief is obsessed with making sure none of his officers are corrupt. Between the extensive training provided by the Academy and the power boosts granted by the [Badge](#), a dirty dream cop could cause a lot of damage to the Dreamscape community. That's why he interviews recruits repeatedly (and Scans them deeply, see below). After that, he puts his faith in them, and will never deep Scan them again unless asked or if the officer is brought up in front of an Eyes hearing *and* is found guilty of misconduct or other crimes.

NPC Backgrounds

Detective Luke Washington aka The Chief: The top cop of the Dreamscape is a Master Scanner and Shielder (when focusing through his [Badge](#), *nothing* can penetrate it), an Expert [Dream Policeman](#), an Expert Smelter, a Good "real world" Cop, and has Good Shape Context skill. He's Poor at Pacing himself -- in essence, a workaholic that no longer needs to sleep. He also collects dream-grails.

Sergeants Anthony Mundy and Alanna Rusket: This pair of detectives are a mismatched pair: while both are exceptional cops (Expert [Dream Policemen](#)), Mundy's really an excitable and impulsive 12-year-old boy with

Dreamers in the Waking World

In the waking world, they're one person -- little girl, kindly grandfather, concert pianist -- and in the Dreamscape, they can be another -- tough-as-nails Dream Police officer, hardened Bubble-burglar, local silver junkie. In this CiaB, the waking personality can be considered mostly irrelevant except for some bleed-through of relevant skills, talents, and character quirks: we're concentrating on the Dreamscape. Still, in a campaign of wider scope (see below), the waking personality can

non-stop patter and Rusket is taciturn Eternal who's seen it all -- twice. They work frighteningly well together, all the while snarling, complaining, and jibing at each other. This surface conflict cloaks a deep friendship, of course.

Sergeant Grover Bane aka Grim: Look up the word "craggy" in the dictionary, and you'll see a picture of Bane's dream-self. He used to be a Lieutenant, but was busted back to Sergeant for lack of management skills -- and he likes it that way. He's not only a Master of the Blast, he's the most powerful one in the whole Dreamscape. An all-around Expert [Dream Police](#), Bane's Poor at Holding His Temper. He's lost more partners than any other officer, and this makes him a mite tetchy. (In the waking world, Grover Bane is a mild-mannered CPA.)

Officer Tau aka Figgy: This rookie patrol officer is the first Figment to graduate the Academy, looking like a humanoid lump of clay with a T serving as eyes and nose. He is eager to prove himself in the Department. He's Expert at 'Scape Movement, Good at Shape Self (Poor at textures and colors, though), an Average [Dream Police](#)being, and Poor at Avoiding Risky Situations. He's was created by the same dreamer that made the Nightmare Cutter, and seeks to capture his criminal "Bubble-brother."

Cutter: Cutter's a Nightmare who loves the chase. He's Expert in 'Scape Movement and Shape Context (useful for rooting his victim's feet), and Good at Breaching Bubbles. His fingers are knives and his eyes glow poisonous green (as do his teeth). He sprang from the same Bubble Officer Tau did and hates his "goody-two-shoes" Bubble-brother with white-hot intensity. Currently, Cutter is one of the Dragon's main lieutenants.

Mocker: Mocker is a Screaming Meemie who sometimes works for the Dragon and sometimes works against the Dragon. Mocker possesses a unique ability: it can consume another Screaming Meemie and gain all their memories. This talent has naturally made it madder than a haberdashery full of cuckoos. It generally appears as a foggy humanoid shape dressed in a red opera cloak and matching fez. Good at What Will Be, it's hard to catch; an Expert at Blast, it is deadly; and a Master at Breach . . . nothing -- and no one -- can hold it for long.

Items & Locations

Dream Police Domes: Every Precinct Dome (there are 224, currently) contains a squad room, a dispatch center, a booking area, a property room, and a crime lab. In addition, the Dome of Justice also holds the Barracks (which holds the Bubbles of Dream Police), the Cells (which holds the Bubbles of captured prisoners), and the Chief's personal quarters.

Undone Café: They make the strongest coffee and the tastiest donuts in the Dreamscape, the servers are friendly and cute, and they never close. (This *CiaB* is cop-centric. Do the Math.)

Events & Possible Story Arcs

Dream Hard: A band of terrorists (Sandrunners and Nightmares) has quietly taken an entire Cluster hostage and cut

be given greater weight in formulating the Dreamscape representation of that character.

The most important thing to keep in mind about those Dream Police officers who are dreamers rather than Figments or Eternals, is that they can awaken at any time, either by suffering enough dream damage to kick them out of the Dreamscape, by environmental stimulus in the waking world, or by having a Poor quality like "Light Sleeper." If/When the character returns to slumberland, they appear next to their Bubble in the Barracks of the Dome of Justice.

Dream Skills in the Waking World

As written, this *CiaB* assumes no "Real World" crossover of Dream Skills. However, an interesting psionic-flavored urban fantasy campaign could be generated if that assumption were false, and dreamers could use some (or all) of their Dream Skills while awake. Imagine the possibilities for adventure that could occur if dream-objects, Figments, and Nightmares could cross the Wall of Sleep .

..

off outside lines of communication. What are they after, and how many of the hostages will they kill to get it? Luckily, the PCs have also been trapped within . . . Yippee-eye-oh-ki-yay.

DAWPs (Dreamscape Astral Way Patrol): Traffic jams in three -- or more -- dimensions. Chases involving vehicles and strange mounts, with flying Dream Police in hot pursuit. Accidents. Moving violations. Overtaken Sand tankers. Oh, yeah.

Bubble-licious: A Bubble-brothel has opened in the PCs' precinct, increasing traffic on nearby Strands and Threads. Public disturbances and Sandrunner Breaches are increasing in that Cluster. Then, the Madam of the House claims to be a tantric sex priestess, and shows up to apply for a white Sand reseller permit. What do the Dream Police do?

Advice, Opportunities, & Pitfalls

Crime: Any crime, suitably reinterpreted for the setting, can serve as a wellspring of adventure ideas. What would dream-arson be like? Con-games? Embezzlement? Even the most mundane of traffic stops becomes compelling if the guy on the hippogriff is a fugitive. Figuring out what actually happened at a crime scene can become tangled through use of conflicting Dream Skills, not to mention the difficulty of taking statements from witnesses and victims who might wake up and vanish at any time.

Protect & Serve: Like any cop-based game, not only are Dream Police on the line trying to guard denizens against criminals and other dangers, but they're there to help the community upon request. Add to that possible jealousy from some segments of the population -- stemming from the authority, benefits, perks, and respect afforded Dream Police -- and non-crime conflict can enter the game. What happens when an officer is asked to protect a dreamer he finds repugnant (either in the Dreamscape or the waking world)? Or when a just-Breached and clueless dreamer inadvertently or accidentally kills a Figment?

Buddy Movie: Useful for campaigns with even-numbered players, the buddy movie is a basic trope of cop films and TV shows. Take two characters with conflicting qualities (crazy/conservative, smart/dense, neat/sloppy, black/white, funny/straight man, "by the book"/"from the hip"), put them together, and hilarity ensues. Since opposites attract, the pair works well together, and becomes closer friends despite (or because of) their differences. By the end, their characters have blended a little -- the crazy one is a little more under control and the conservative one has loosened his tie. So long as both players are amenable to a rigid characterization being required at the start of a campaign *and* a movement towards adopting some elements of their partner's characterization, the buddy movie trope can help a Dream Police game along like a house on fire. The biggest pitfalls are if players are unwilling to start straight and end bent. [Please see *Lethal Weapon*, *Beverly Hills Cop*, *Rush Hour*, *Dragnet* (1987), *Tango & Cash*, et cetera.]

Ensemble Cast: More useful with large playing groups or those with an odd number of players (not a number of odd players, mind), the ensemble cast is more *Hill Street Blues* or *Barney Miller* than *Lethal Weapon* or *Miami Vice*. A SWAT team or group of detectives could work very well for an Ensemble Cast. It is imperative that each character have some particular role or element of their depiction that really stands out -- the best Blast skill in the precinct, a freaky accent, no sense of humor, a constant stream of grumbling, always dresses well, is the Vice or Homicide specialist, some sort of dependant that they check up on (a Figment buddy, the Bubble of a waking world loved one, a dreamer they're having a sleepy-time relationship with, etc.), and so forth. The GM needs to make sure that each PC gets enough "spotlight" time, both separately and when working within the group.

Other Resources

- Alfred Bester's [The Demolished Man](#).
- Cheap Trick's "Dream Police" [lyrics](#).
- Cop Slang: see <http://www.copzilla.com/articles/coplingo.html> and <http://sinai.critter.net/mutant/dawn/slang.htm>.
- DC Comics' *Sandman*, especially the [Neil Gaiman](#) and Jack Kirby eras.
- [Dreamscape](#).
- Ken Hite's ["Suppressed Transmission: Who You Gonna Caul? The Benandanti."](#)

- Windsor McCay's *Little Nemo in Slumberland*.
- Memes -- <http://www.memecentral.com/>.
- The [Psi-Cops](#) of *Babylon 5*.
- EE "Doc" Smith's Lensmen series.
- Lisa Steele's [GURPS Cops](#).
- Roger Zelazny's "He Who Shapes."

The Dragon's Tooth

by Elizabeth McCoy

This relic is thought to be a shard of one of the most powerful sorcerer-vampires of legend, the "little dragon," Dracula. Maybe it is, maybe it isn't. By this time, does it matter?

In appearance, it's a yellowing shard of bone or tooth, jagged as if broken off in a fight, about the size of a baby's thumbnail. (Yes, it's very small.)

What does it do?

Well, if someone puts it in a field, the crops will wither as if the land had been salted. The one who put the Tooth there will be able to find it again, fairly easily, but anyone else will have to sift the ground, inch by inch, to discover it.

Unless the one who put it there dies, or forgets about it, of course. At that point, it will -- after a short time -- be found again by someone else who just happens to notice it, and pick it up. Usually this person will have the knowledge and attitude to use the Tooth, but if not, somehow it seems to migrate into the possession of someone who *will* be interested in its abilities.

What else does it do?

It summons dragons. Not real dragons, fortunately, but simulacra. Dream-dragons, given form by power.

Place the Tooth within one's body -- this can be in an orifice such as the mouth (careful, it's sharp!), or actually driven into the flesh so that little or none of it shows. (Surgical implantation, into flesh or a healthy tooth, is also possible.) Go to sleep. Be a lucid dreamer. Dream of dragons, dragons, dragons, rising from the gray earth of the dreamlands to destroy your enemies.

They'll look like what the dreamer thinks they should look like. Be creative.

The GM can decide to make an appropriate skill or attribute roll here, of course. (Or require one, if the Tooth's master is a PC.) Blood-sacrifices, while satisfying, aren't needed. Let the PCs worry about something that *doesn't* have the adversary searching for the ingredients to his dark rituals and giving them advance warning that something Bad is brewing.

If you're the sort of person who can wander around the lands of the mind (***GURPS Cabal, In Nomine***, possibly ***Mage: the Ascension*** or ***Werewolf: the Apocalypse***), this draconic army will be a potent force there. They're a little fragile when they're fresh "hatched," but there's a *lot* of them and they're vicious.

Once created, they'll always be there when the master of the Tooth (i.e., the person with the Tooth within his or her body) sleeps, whether the current master created those dragons or not. And one can always create more.

If one wants to bring them into the real world, though, that takes energy -- one day's energy for each "swarm" of about seven dragons. They'll be small, about cat-massed, but it's preferable for them to be small when they're first called. One doesn't have to give up the energy when you're calling them into the physical world, either; it's possible to feed them power for quite some time before calling them forth. They'll still be small, though -- just tougher, and they'll grow faster. (In ***GURPS***, one day's energy is equal to one's ST-1 in fatigue; you don't *quite* fall unconscious. In ***In Nomine***, it's all the Essence (minimum 1) that one has that day, though sorcery books may have faulty instructions about this. In other systems, it's roughly however much mystical energies or raw strength that a being accumulates in a day.)

One "unit" of energy will make fragile bodies for the swarm. (A Vessel/1 for ***In Nomine***, 1d hit points for ***GURPS***,

etc.) Each unit adds one to that value (Vessel/2, 2d hit points, etc.), to a maximum of five times as tough -- or wherever the GM decides isn't *too* vicious.

Most owners of the Tooth will settle for quantity over quality, since a few dozen sharp-toothed and razor-clawed little horrors -- often with the ability to spit acid or breathe flame -- tend to make short work of an enemy.

When summoned, they emerge from the Tooth itself in some fashion. This can be quite painful if it's implanted in flesh (though, somehow, there's never any real *damage* done), and disconcerting if it's in an orifice, such as the mouth. **GURPS** Fright Checks or equivalent rolls are suggested for someone's first summoning, and for anyone watching.

One doesn't have to feed them one's *own* energy, of course. If one has a way to drain energies from another being, then that works just fine. (It does tend to knock the victim unconscious, though.) Killing an animal of roughly large dog size will provide about as much energy as draining a human one or oneself. A horse-sized animal is worth twice as much energy. Killing a human victim grants five times as much energy. Elephants, hippos, and other large animals are also worth this, but leave harder-to-dispose-of corpses.

Well, you can always summon your dragons through right then, to eat the bodies . . . but there's just one little problem with that.

You can't send them back again.

Once given flesh, they keep it. They also grow, potentially doubling in size every six months to a year, until they mass about as much as an adult human. (Their size may be much bigger, depending on their physical construction.) Additional energy pumped into them before their physical manifestation will make them grow faster. However, growing requires them to either eat, or hibernate beneath the ground, in burrows they dig. Crops planted in a field above hibernating dragons will be sickly, as the dragons are absorbing the nutrients themselves in some mystic fashion.

As with dream-dragons, the Tooth's *current* master may awaken and command any previously created dragons -- but possession of the Tooth does not automatically grant knowledge of where these dragons might be. (And if there are *real* dragons in the campaign world, it's up to the GM whether or not the Tooth will have any influence upon them, positive or negative.)

If a Tooth's master is killed, legends differ on what happens to the dragons. Some say that they crumble into dust and earth. Some say that they immediately dig themselves into the ground and hibernate. Some say they flee, and hunt in far off places until they become ancient wyrms in truth. Some say they go on a mad rampage, destroying until there is nothing left. Some say they turn upon each other (and anything else in their midst). And some say that they become quiescent, watching avidly to see if their master's slayer will take up the Tooth and become their new master . . .

Campaign Use

The Dragon's Tooth can be a simple McGuffin to search for or destroy, or a complicated one, which has enough advantages to tempt player characters with its power. And power, as is well known, can corrupt . . . What need of approval does someone need, with an army of loyal dragons at his bidding? Dragons which can be buried until one has need of them . . .

Appendix Z

Wandering Caravan Table

by Matt Riggsby

When traveling cross-country, there was safety in numbers. A large caravan could, by its very size, discourage bandit attacks and better repel those who tried. Banding together also allowed travelers to save money by sharing costs. While lone characters may cross large distances alone in a pinch, the smart move is to wait until they can join a group of people going in the same direction.

Plot and setting may lead naturally to a caravan's composition, but the GM may just want to put something together without thinking too hard about it in advance. The table below can be used to randomly assemble a caravan, determining how many of what types of traveler are present.

Primary Personnel

The GM should first decide if the caravan is small, medium, large, or very large; the general size of the caravan has an effect on what kinds of people are present. Treat any roll below zero on the table below as zero.

	Small	Medium	Large	Very Large
Pilgrims	1d6	3d6-3	(3d6-3)×2	(3d6-3)×4
Minor Merchants	1d6	2d6-4	3d6-3	4d6-4
Wealthy Merchants	1d6-5	1d6-2	2d6-4	3d6-5
Lesser Nobles	1d6-5	1d6-4	1d6-3	1d6-2
Greater Nobles	-	2d6-10	2d6-9	2d6-8
Professionals	2d6-8	2d6-5	2d6-3	3d6-3
Guards	-	2d6-10	2d6-8	2d6-4
Camp followers	-	1d6	2d6	3d6

Pilgrims: One of the biggest reasons for travel through history has been pilgrimage to sacred sites or notable holy men. Pilgrims may just be religiously-themed tourists, but they often travel under vows and restrictions. For example, they may be prohibited from bearing arms or eating certain foods.

Merchants: The other big reason to travel was to make money. Minor merchants will transport goods with a value equivalent to two to six months middle-class income. Wealthy merchants will carry goods equivalent to six to eighteen months middle-class income or more.

Nobles: Nobles were wealthy enough to travel and may have numerous reasons to do so. Examples include tourism, legal business (visiting a greater nobleman's court), marriage, and diplomacy. More prominent nobles will have more servants with them.

Professionals: Some professionals frequently moved long distances. Masons and carpenters are prime examples, but any craftsmen in luxury trades (jewelers, swordsmiths) might move closer to major markets. This category includes performers of all kinds (jugglers, clowns, etc.), scholars (before the printing press and inter-library loans, scholars might have to travel to read new books), lawyers in the Medieval Islamic world and bureaucrats in China.

Guards: Generally speaking, all members of a caravan are expected to help defend it in case of attack. Full-time guards are, therefore, rare.

Camp followers: Large parties of travelers, particularly armies, are often accompanied by hangers-on who cook, do

laundry, and provide more personal services. Camp followers are often locals. They will travel with the caravan briefly and return home. Consequently, a caravan passing through a wasteland may temporarily have few or no followers.

Secondary Personnel

Servants/family members: Principal members of a caravan will bring some help with them in the form of servants or family members (spouses and children, siblings, cousins, etc.). Unlike the table, treat any roll of less than one as one: 1d6-3 per minor merchant and traveling professional, 1d6-2 per lesser noble, 2d6-4 per wealthy merchant and greater noble.

Beasts and bearers: In a setting where riding animals and beasts of burden are the norm (say, the Medieval Near East), roll 1d6-4 per minor merchant, traveling professional, and lesser noble, 2d6-9 per wealthy merchant and greater noble. This number assumes beasts of moderate size, such as horses, camels, and donkeys. Increase the number of animals by 50% to 100% if less capable beasts are used, such as llamas and load-dragging dogs. Decrease by 50% if very large animals, such as elephants, are used. If human bearers must be used instead, as in sub-Saharan Africa, roll as for servants and multiply the total by four. Vehicles are rarely an issue for caravans. Any region with roads good enough for carts is also usually safe and navigable enough to not require caravan traffic.

Other Personnel and Skills: There will be at least one skilled packer per three or four animals (usually servant/relatives or merchants). If traveling through wilderness or distant lands, there will be at least one guide and at least one translator (usually camp followers).

Other Concerns

Caravans might be either privately organized by a group of travelers (merchants, pilgrim leaders, etc.) or publicly organized by a civic government. In either case, participants must usually pay into a fund for provisions, tolls, hiring guides and translators, and other common expenses; the amount paid depends on a number of factors, but larger groups of travelers must pay more. Smaller caravans travel shorter distances and are more likely to be privately organized.

Privately organized caravans might be governed collectively by the organizers (voting with a weight equal to their financial contribution), or the organizers may select a single leader. Publicly organized caravans will have a leader appointed. In either case, the authority of the leadership is theoretically absolute, much like a ship captain. However, the leader will usually try to mediate disputes within the caravan rather than issue orders and mete out punishments.

Caravans usually follow a seasonal schedule, starting immediately after the rainy or windy season has ended. Many are one-way, but there may be a scheduled return or a wave of return caravans organized near the end of the season. Small caravans, though less safe, are more flexible and may be more quickly organized and travel at other times.

Though relatively safe, caravans are also slow. Over reasonably friendly terrain, a speed of 11 miles a day is a breakneck pace for a very large caravan, and nine to ten miles a day is closer to typical. Smaller caravans can be faster, but even the smallest merchant or pilgrim expedition is unlikely to go faster than 15 miles a day. Caravans lack the discipline which allows armies and dedicated explorers to travel more quickly.

My Bloody Valentine

*"Five and twenty rum trucks come down the avenue;
Champagne for the very rich,
Hooch for me and you.*

Them that asks no questions, isn't told a lie;

And watch the wall, my darling,

While the gentlemen go by."

-- parody of Kipling's "Smuggler's Song," printed in the *Chicago Tribune*, Feb. 20, 1929

"Watch the wall" may indeed have been the last words heard by the Moran gang before their lives ended in a rain of bullets on a cold winter's morning in 1929. But despite the poet's warning, that didn't forestall the questions, and it didn't end the lies. In the roar of bullets, in a riffle of cards, in the howling of a dog -- perhaps we can hear the truth in them still, and penetrate to the silent mystery at the heart of the St. Valentine's Day Massacre.

"Those silly Irish bastards. They have more guts than sense. If only we'd hooked up, I could have been president."

-- Al Capone, on the St. Valentine's Day Massacre

Just about 10:30 a.m., on a bitterly cold February 14, 1929, a police car pulled up outside the S-M-C Cartage Company at 2122 North Clark Street in Chicago, the headquarters of George "Bugs" Moran and his gang. Although accounts differ, the consensus holds that five men -- two in police uniforms and three in plainclothes -- got out of the car and entered the building. Minutes later, the muffled sound of machine-gun fire echoed down the street, followed by the howling of a dog. Three men exited the garage, hands up, held at gunpoint by the two uniformed men; all got into the police car and drove away.

The dog's howls continued, until a lodger in a nearby apartment building entered the garage -- and found six dead men, one dying man, and a maddened dog tied to a car axle. All had been repeatedly shot, apparently with submachine guns and sawed-off shotguns -- some of the bodies were almost torn to bloody rags. Five of the victims were members of Moran's gang: the accountant Adam Heyer, the holdup man James Kachelleck (now "James Clark"), the racketeer and speakeasy owner Al Weinshank, and the gunmen Frank (who lingered for another two and a half hours) and Pete Gusenberg. Also dead were John May, an auto mechanic (and owner of the dog, Highball), and Reinhold H. Schwimmer, an optometrist who liked the thrill of hanging out with gangsters. Moran, along with his gambling runner Ted Newberry and the third Gusenberg brother, were late to the rendezvous, and survived.

"Nobody shot me."

-- reported last words of Frank Gusenberg

Neither the dying Gusenberg nor the target of the shooting, Moran, would assist the police. However, as newspapers reported the story, "only Capone kills like that." Moran, the theory ran, had been set up -- a bootlegger working for Capone had pretended to double-cross Scarface, offering a prime delivery to Moran at the garage on Clark. Capone's lookouts, mistaking Al Weinshank's tan fedora and gray trenchcoat for Moran's identical garb, ordered the "police car" to move in too soon. Faced with a seemingly routine police shakedown, the gangsters dropped their weapons and faced the wall -- lambs to the slaughter.

Although the police eventually found the disguised Cadillac sedan burned in an alley off Wood Street, and traced the machine guns used in the killing to Fred "Killer" Burke, they never discovered who, precisely, pulled the triggers on Valentine's Day. The gunmen dressed as cops couldn't have been locals -- Moran's men would have recognized Capone mobsters, uniforms or no. Burke and James Ray were both Detroit killers, members of "Egan's Rats," and each received two checks for \$10,000 from "Machine Gun" Jack McGurn around this time. The three in plainclothes might have been Capone's soldiers, fedoras and trenchcoats obscuring their features until the end. Speculation centers on Albert Anselmi and John Scalise, two of Capone's key hit men, and possibly McGurn himself, who had narrowly escaped death at the hands of the Gusenberg brothers in a phone-booth ambush earlier.

Other possibilities include Tony "Joe Batters" Accardo (whose relative youth would have made him anonymous to the victims), Joseph Lolordo (desperate for revenge after Moran's men killed his brother), or four Brooklyn killers: George "Shotgun" Ziegler, Claude Maddox, Gus Winkler, and "Crane Neck" Nugent, the elite hit squad known as "Murder, Inc." At the time, Prohibition agents investigated Chicago police corruption on the theory that bent cops had tried to silence rivals or witnesses; writers since have speculated that Murray "the Camel" Humphreys, Capone's fixer, planned the whole thing to hit his rival Weinshank -- and possibly to destabilize Capone, into the bargain. The brutality (and publicity) of the "St. Valentine's Day Massacre" drove both law enforcement and organized crime to crack down on Al Capone -- who, as it turned out, spent the day with the perfect alibi. He was in the office of the Dade County, Florida county solicitor, answering questions about his source of income.

"The castle you have pictured under 'unknown castle' in Franklin, Tennessee . . . was supposedly constructed under the direction of Al Capone, and was used as a 'half-way' point between the Chicago and Florida 'headquarters.' There seems to be some validity to this claim as I have seen a photograph of old Scarface himself playing cards on the back porch."

-- anonymous email quoted in "Castles of America"

And at the moment his rivals died, Capone was telling the county solicitor, "I'm a gambler, and I live by my winnings." Capone loved poker, pinochle, and gin rummy, playing cards almost to the day he died. His outfit pioneered the "race wire," the system that made criminal organized gambling possible and, hence, founded Las Vegas. In an eerie precursor of Bugsy Siegel's "castle in the [waste land](#)," Capone ordered the construction of "The Castle" in Franklin, Tennessee, on the fulcrum point between Chicago and his Florida estate. The front walk of this miniature (but impressive) castle has diamonds and hearts set into the stones, and high-stakes gamblers all over the country would make the trip to play cards under the eyes of Capone's bookie John Welch. One intriguing feature of The Castle was its four basements -- devoted, according to rumor, to cockfighting, mushrooms, cards, and wine.

Perhaps there is some parallel here with Capone's first headquarters, the "Four Deuces" club on 2222 South Wabash Street in Chicago. In 1920, Capone murdered its founder, "Big Jim" Colosimo, and took over the four-story building, dedicated to torture and murder (in the cellar), liquor (on the first floor), gambling (on floors two and three), and a brothel (on the fourth floor). The four realms in each building may correspond with the four suits, linked in each case by gambling rooms, just as cards seem to riffle through the Massacre and gangland in general. Capone's gambling boss Lawrence Mangano killed Mike "de Pike" Heitler on [Walpurgisnacht](#) after an all-night poker game in 1931, for example, and three killers hit Jack McGurn's half-brother Anthony Demory while playing cards in 1936.

Just as the [Gunfight at the O.K. Corral](#) can be read as a poker game for the fate of America, so too can the St. Valentine's Day Massacre resemble its dark opposite. (In *Some Like It Hot*, Moran's gang is even shown playing poker just before being killed.) Five Capone killers, five Moran victims -- two hands of poker. (Even if you count Schwimmer and May, they can be seen as the two extra cards in a seven-card stud hand, perhaps balanced by Capone's two lookouts.) Capone obviously moved all in with a full house (killers over cops -- Aces over Eights?), while Moran had only a pair of Jacks showing -- the Gusenberg brothers were the only two actual Moran soldiers in the garage at the time. (Interestingly, a poker variant in which a player must match or fold with a pair showing is called "Murder.") On a final, creepy note, the small park now occupying the lot at 2122 North Clark sports five trees -- growing in the classic "five-spot" card pattern.

*"I can never wash the guilt
Or get these bloodstains off my hands
And it takes a lot of whiskey
To make these nightmares go away
And I cut my bleeding heart out every night
And I die a little more on each St. Valentines Day"*
-- Tom Waits, "Blue Valentine"

This was not the first St. Valentine's Day murder -- most notably, three killers (prefiguring our triplicitous [three unknown murderers](#) in Chicago and [elsewhere](#)) killed [Richard II](#) of England on February 14, 1400. And it would not be the last -- "Machine Gun" Jack McGurn, the Massacre's mastermind, was gunned down in a bowling alley on St.

Valentine's Day, 1936. The killers left a nickel in his hand, an arch reminder that McGurn left five-cent pieces (again with the fives) in the hands of his "nickel-and-dime" victims. More strikingly yet, it was on February 14, 1933 that Giuseppe Zangara met his contact Steve *Valentito* get the gun with which he shot Chicago Mayor Anton Cermak the next day -- in Capone's old winter headquarters, Miami, Florida, at the other end of the ley line through The Castle. Zangara claimed to be aiming at President-elect Roosevelt (a ceremonial king-killing for [Emperor Norton's](#) 113th -- $1+1+3 = 5$ -- birthday?), but the *fives* shots all hit Cermak. (Eerily, some witnesses heard *sevens* shots.) An unknown reporter, hearing the shots crack out, joked "Just like Chicago, eh, Mayor?" An even more dramatic St. Valentine's Day massacre happened the next year, when the fascist Heimwehr machine-gunned 2,000 striking workers in Vienna. Perhaps the feel of these cold, sanguinary winds kept McGurn's closest friend Michael "Kelly" Spranze in the habit of locking himself in his bedroom beginning at 10:30 a.m. every Valentine's Day after 1929. Perhaps these matters are the true agenda for the [Parliament of Birds](#), which meets (as Chaucer assures us) every February 14th.

"He handed them over to the Gibeonites, who killed and exposed them in the high place before the Lord. All seven of them fell together; they were put to death during the first days, just as the barley harvest was beginning."

-- 2 Samuel 21:9

The smell of ritual sacrifice thus wafts through the story, around the fives and triples and sevens ($2+1+2+2$). Perhaps it blows back to the Roman feast of Lupercalia, celebrated on the ides of February, when the priests (including two young men, often brothers, known as the Luperci) would sacrifice goats and dogs and smear aprons with their blood to ensure fertility and the safety of the flocks. Could the North Clark garage have been a "reverse Lupercal," where the brothers died and the dog was smeared with their blood? In this wise, perhaps the murder of Colosimo on Lemuria (May 11), when Capone took over the Four Deuces, was a "reverse Lemuria," bringing the spirit of death into the house rather than driving ghosts out. Does a connection exist between the Roman martyrdom of St. Valentine (although there seem to be *three* St. Valentines, and *seven* churches claim the body of the martyr) clubbed and stoned to death in 269 A.D., and Capone's murder by baseball bat and bullets of Scalise and Anselmi, the possible triggermen of the Massacre?

*"In the Rabbinical Book, it saith
The dogs howl, when with icy breath
Great Sammael, the Angel of Death,
Takes through the town his flight!"*

-- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Christus: A Mystery*

These workings perhaps form pieces of a bigger one, ironically "made manifest" and hidden in plain sight in 1929. The wall of the S-M-C Cartage company garage was torn down in 1967, and its 414 bricks were carefully numbered and counted. Kabbalistically, 414 equals A-Z-W-Th -- "azoth," the alchemical mercury. The "widow's son" Capone (who Moran called "the Beast" and "Behemoth") attempted an alchemical working, a dark liquor distilled from card magics and Roman legend, to transform Chicago itself into a dark tower, a Black Grail. As two police "tylers" sealed the chamber, three unknown and archetypical murderers transmuted it into an athanor of blood -- leaving only the howling of a dog to mark their passage into the cold morning.

Pyramid Review

Cartoon Action Hour: The 1980's Action Cartoon RPG

Published by [Z-Man Games](#)

Written by Cynthia Celeste Miller and Eddy Webb

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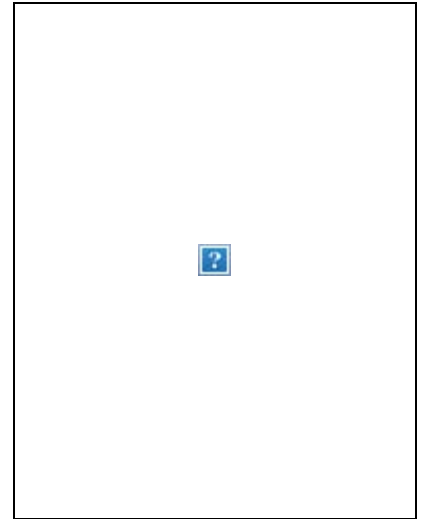
Though rich in possibilities, few if any roleplaying games have come from the brightly-colored big stories of the small screen played out to a big bowl of sugar-laced, milk-soaked cereal. These are the Saturday morning cartoons of the 1980s, which in their way were the cliffhanger-ending pulp serials of their day. Palladium's *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and Other Strangeness* is one such RPG, though that drew more from the original comic than the cartoon that would follow, while the other would be *The Masters of the Universe Role Playing Game* published by FASA in 1985.

Cartoon Action Hour: The 1980's Action Cartoon RPG provides a set of rules by which a GM can create a cartoon series of their own, whether from scratch or based upon one of the many 1980s Saturday morning cartoons. This could be a sci-fi western like *Bravestarr*, paramilitary action with *G.I. Joe*, form-switching robots with *Transformers*, or epic fantasy action with *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe*. Indeed, **Cartoon Action Hour**, which describes itself as "2 books in 1," devotes its second half to a setting or serial which is very much like *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe*. Yet the GM can also create any cartoon of his choice using the rules in this book.

This book has taken a few years to attain the physical form of a book, having been previously released as an electronic Adobe PDF in 2002. The authors have taken that previous edition and expanded it for this hard copy edition, which is being published by published by Z-Man Games, better known for their card games such as *Shadowfist*, [Grave Robbers From Outer Space](#), and [Cannibal Pygmies From The Jungle Of Doom](#). Thus **Cartoon Action Hour** marks the first RPG from this publisher.

Physically, the look of **Cartoon Action Hour** belies its origins as an amateur publication. Its layout is overly cluttered and fussy, with its desktop publishing style readily apparent. The range of art varies widely in quality and never really gets above what could be called adequate. Pleasingly, the book is organized not into chapters, but into "channels" and its optional rules, as given in the first of several appendices, which it calls "dials" (named after the switches once used to adjust the picture on the TV screen). Throughout the text is interspersed with commentary from Kagorr, the fabled would-be conqueror from the short-lived "Galactic Heroes" cartoon. This is often to belittle the efforts and output of the authors who also add their commentary to counterpoint that of Kagorr.

Character creation can be for a GM's own cartoon, one of the 24 cartoon serials given later in the book, or the fully worked up series book at the back of **Cartoon Action Hour**, *Iconia: Warriors of the Cosmos*. It is a straightforward process in which players will need to decide upon their hero's name, personality, background, and story hooks before spending their 100 character points. Story hooks are things like fears, social or physical problems, vulnerabilities,



vows, and so on that can gain a character more experience points if they confront them during play.

Character points are used to Buy Traits, Special Abilities, Oomph, and Stunt Points. Divided into physical, mental, and social categories, traits work as a mixture of attributes and skills. Thus under physical traits are listed coordination and body as well as armed, ranged and unarmed combat; piloting; and stealth. They range in value from -4 to +4, with zero being the human average and default level, while 4 is equal to world class. Beyond the rating of 4, traits can have super human values that range from 2 to 5. Traits can also have a single speciality for free, which reduces the trait value overall, but adds to its value when a character uses their speciality. More specialities need to be purchased and cost as much as the governing trait.

Oomph is a representation of a character's star billing within a series. It affects their initiative in combat and can be a bonus to a trait check if a character rolls a critical success. Stunt points are spent to give a bonus to trait checks which is equal to double their Oomph value -- or four times its value if a character really, *really* needs to give it their all.

Under the game's simple mechanics, a 12-sided die is rolled and the trait value added to it to equal or beat a difficulty number. If a character has a super-human trait, its value gives them that number of 12-sided dice to roll and choose from before adding the trait's value to get the best result. Combat adds only a relatively slight degree of complication to the resolution system and is very much geared to fast and furious slam-bam action.

Where character creation gets more involved is in the construction of Special Abilities. These can be spells, super powers, psionics, magical artefacts, gadgets, weapons, vehicles, innate racial abilities, or animal companions. The process really is not *that* difficult and is helped along with lots of examples, both of the creation process and of the finished products, some of which can be found as part of the several finished sample characters. There is some emphasis in the Special Ability construction rules upon transforming robots; this is not a bad thing, as they are a favorite of the genre.

Miscellaneous rules, such as handling goons, experience points and character advancement, wealth, fire, and drowning round off the rules to ***Cartoon Action Hour*** -- which take up just a quarter of the book. Then the authors get down to the meat of the book, creating and running a series while keeping to the conventions of the genre. The given list of conventions includes having the villains attack in single file, bamboozling them for a turn or two by dropping a barrel on their heads, always having the villain know that they are evil and proud of it, *and* always having them always explain their plan to the heroes at that right moment. Some of the GM advice is obvious, but that given over to handling both series and individual episodes is well done and shows that the authors know their stuff.

This is backed by some five sample backgrounds and a plethora of seeds that could be developed yet further by the GM. These begin with "Tommy K and the Star Kitties," in which a rock 'n' roll band attempt to bring their music to the galaxy while the evil Slaggorian Police Force attempts to stop them. This is a low-character-point game and includes new guidelines for handling songs. "Dark Brigade" is a military-themed series in which UN soldiers fight the evil vampire Lord Syn. "The Defenders of Aqua City" sees heroes protecting their home from a number of threats in a post-apocalyptic underwater future. "Star Warriors" battle to save the universe from the criminal Lord Zarnon and his army of cyber troops. "Transbots" is the biggest of the five series given, involving 150-character-point transforming robots battling others created to take over the USA.

This last series could make use of the "giant transforming robots" Dial given in the first appendix, which adds new rules for character creation, gestalt or merging robots, and critical hits on transforming vehicles. The other rules or Dials enhance the use of spells, let players create characters with really super super-human traits, and allow for fan popularity. The rules for fan popularity replace the existing standard rules for experience points and lets a character gains perks like Artists or Writer's Pet and New Toy Variant (which must be incorporated into the show when their Cool Factor rises to high enough a level.) Conversely, if a character's Cool Factor falls to zero, a character can find himself "dropped like a hot potato!" Though only an option, these fan popularity rules are very appealing as well as in keeping with the genre.

The other appendices include a glossary of game terms and 1980's slang, a list of recommended viewing, and finally the designers' notes that relate the history of ***Cartoon Action Hour***. One suggestion that might have made the list of recommended viewing of more use would have been to included a guide to locating some of the series discussed;

otherwise it serves as an excellent introduction and overview of some of the best entries in the genre.

The remainder of **Cartoon Action Hour** -- almost 70 pages -- is devoted to the *Iconia: Warriors of the Cosmos* Series Book, which author Cynthia Celeste Miller describes as her own tribute to *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe*. As explained in the dreadfully awful opening comic strip for this Series Book, Haven is the last remaining free kingdom on the world of Iconia. Once a beautiful and peaceful utopia, the world's nations have fallen under the control of the evil sorcerer Nekrottus and his Blackskull Empire. Haven has sent out a call across all of Iconia for noble heroes to come to the kingdom's aid and join the Guardians of Iconia. This allows for a wide range of characters, and lots of pre-prepared weapons, vehicles, and character skill packages are provided to ensure that both player and GM get the feel of this cartoon exactly so. The latter skill packages include the Grizzled Warrior, Battle Princess, Sorcerer, Metallic Combatant, and Spunky Teen. The Series Books give details many of Iconia's locales, races and personalities, along with a half-page synopsis of each of its first 12 episodes.

There is both room for the players to use one of the many NPCs described -- though not of course, Nekrottus -- or for designing their own before enrolling them as members of the Guardians of Iconia. A nice touch is that the author designs this series from the ground up, giving it a development history, a controversy over the inclusion of the demon-like, skeletal Nekkrotus, and its own range of action figures. As throughout the rest of the book, the author takes time to interject with more advice, this time on writing a Series Book.

Due to both age and nationality, I may not be the best qualified to review **Cartoon Action Hour**. After all, the UK only got Saturday morning television in 1976, and British television regulations would never let a channel broadcast a whole morning full of cartoon goodness. (Plus on at least my Saturday mornings were spent dusting my room, but I digress . . .) Thus I missed some of these 1980s cartoons by the time they made it to the British screen, though not all those listed in the recommended viewing appendix did so. That said, neither of my limitations (of culture or age) prevent me from appreciating what the authors have tried to do with **Cartoon Action Hour**. Essentially this is to model any of the 1980s cartoons played out on a grand, epic scale and to do so rather well.

If there is an in-built bias to **Cartoon Action Hour**, it is primarily on the *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe*-type cartoon -- particularly so with the *Iconia: Warriors of the Cosmos* Series Book, but to a lesser degree upon the transforming robot series. Fans of either show will appreciate both of these emphases, but with series samples and seeds aplenty, there should be something to please anyone who is a fan of the genre within the pages of this book. Plus the rules and mechanics are nicely simple, making it easy to get into and play up to the epic heroism of **Cartoon Action Hour: The 1980's Action Cartoon RPG**. Playing with bowls of cereal and in whatever you wear to bed are both entirely optional.

--Matthew Pook

Running The Adventure, Part VI

. . . And That's A Wrap

I've spoken before about [endings](#), but mostly in the grandiose "Well, that's great; it starts with an earthquake" kind of way. This week I'll be wrapping up my six-part series describing how I run scenarios by talking about ending the adventure.

On the one hand, ending an adventure is pretty easy. Presuming you've had a satisfying climax to the adventure, it's hard to screw up the aftermath; have the appropriate parties say, "Attaboy," throw some experience points at 'em, and decide who's fighting the dog to pick up those spilt Doritos under the table . . . the players will probably be happy.

But in another way, adventure endings can be a good opportunity to give the players a chance for additional fun, especially given how the stakes are so much lower. Here, then, are some points I keep in mind while wrapping up the adventure.

Give the heroes their moment of glory (if they earned it). Ending the adventure too quickly after the climax denies the heroes their time to shine; even worse, it can fail to give the party a chance to contemplate the outcome of the adventure. After all, if the camera fades to black right after the climactic moment, then there isn't much to differentiate saving the world from saving a kid from homeroom embarrassment. (No, this doesn't mean that the heroes *need* to save the world to have a satisfying adventure . . .)

Now, this can mean the before-mentioned "attaboys" from campaign notables. But really, many kinds of appreciation are appropriate. After all, the kinds of adventures most heroes get involved with are likely to have *some* thankful people attached, and this can express itself in a myriad of ways: heartfelt expressions of gratitude, offers of payment (or future employment), gifts, and so on. These elements can add on their own plots and subplots themselves; how does Agent Midnyt react when he saves a little girl's life, and she offers him one of her prized cat's new litter of baby kittens?

Even in those adventures that don't have an obvious aftermath -- such as those groups that affect the world secretly -- I often tend to have fun by telling them the results as seen by the rest of the world: "The next day a local newspaper headline reads, 'Area Warehouse Burns Down; Inside Police Find Shattered Jar With Remains Of Brain' . . ." Again, letting them know that their actions have outcomes and consequences is almost always satisfying to them .

Let the heroes do cleanup. This is closely related to the moment of glory. My gaming groups tend to take delight in performing mop-up duties on my adventures; if there are loose threads (or loose threats), they love to track them down. Assuming this won't take too much time, I let them do so. If there *are* elements that would take too much time (perhaps because the adventure has gone too late and the players are looking sleepy), then I'll take notes as to what they are looking to resolve, and try to work it into the next adventure.

Let them get back to any subplots. Often, plot gets in the way of things the players *really* want to do. If the heroes were pursuing any plots that I think might be resolvable or extended in a satisfying manor, I'll give them an opportunity to do so. (If need be, I'll often remind the players what they were pursuing; after all, these subplots are likely to be weighing heavier on the characters' minds than their players'.)

End on a cliffhanger. This one may be the most important one. In most games, I prefer to end on a "cliffhanger" if at all possible. This doesn't necessarily mean anything life-threatening or dangerous (although it can); instead, I try to give them a piece of information, plot hook, or element of interest that will keep them anticipatory and excited about the next adventure. Thus the heroes might get a letter from an old (and supposedly dead) nemesis, they might receive an invitation to an important function, or one of them might suddenly develop a slight fever.

Often, I'll make these bits up on the fly (assuming I haven't worked it up in advance). In general, sometimes these

cliffhangers are important, and sometimes they're red herrings. ("Two days later, the fever clears up . . .") I found that if I made *every* cliffhanger be of monumental importance, the players grew a little bored. But by making sure that there was the occasional breather, they were more intrigued by all of them.

If I can't do a good cliffhanger, then I'll try to end on a vivid scene . . . usually tied to the aforementioned moment of glory. ("And as the sun sets on another daring adventure, an as-yet-unnamed kitten stares up at Agent Midnyt and gives a tiny mew . . .")

Find out goals and ideas from the players. After the cliffhanger signifies the end of the adventure proper, I'll poll the players and see if they had anything they wanted to do before or during the next game. (If the players can't think of anything immediately, I'll encourage them to tell me at the next game session, or drop an email between games.)

Give experience. As I gather my thoughts on this, I realize this might be a column of its own at some point. But for now, I'll just say that I give the players the points necessary for them to get kewl new skills and powers.

Get thoughts and opinions on the game. Since I tend to tweak my GMing style periodically, and try new and different techniques almost constantly, this is the point where I try to get player thoughts and opinions. If anyone has any questions, complaints, or compliments, I'll eat them up like candy. (Actually, I encourage players to talk to me anytime, barring an in-game argument . . . although I go to great lengths to avoid another ["We need to talk"](#) moment.)

Sort out things for the next game. Yes, we sorted arrangements out for the next game at the [beginning of the session](#), but I take the opportunity to make sure everyone remembers what we decided.

Clean up Doritos. Yes, that's pretty much it. Wrap up, go home, and start thinking of either excuses to delay the next game or new plans to lock the players in various rooms while I think furiously.

In all, my philosophy for ending adventures is pretty straightforward. Since the game is primarily about the players and their enjoyment, make sure it's interesting all around. Make the players glad to be part of the game, make the players enthusiastic about the adventure we just ran, and make them anxious to come back to the next game.

And *that's* how I keep my players trapped in my web of entertainment.

--Steven Marsh

Combine Infantry Weapons and Tactics in GURPS Ogre

by Henry J. Cobb

GURPS Ogre covers mostly Paneuropean personnel and equipment and Combine Ogres and as noted the battlesuits are fairly close, but the actual infantry weapons are quite different. The biggest difference is that every Combine battlesuit has a 20-pound capacity hardpoint in each arm. (The pair adds \$4 to the suit cost and takes 2 pounds from the weapons capacity for each suit.)

The Paneuropeans attribute the Combine's battlesuit weapon choices (a gun firing depleted uranium ammunition and a missile with a nuclear warhead) to a callous disregard for the environmental health of the countries the Combine occupies, but the actual reasons are more complex. Combine tactical doctrine revolves around the SATNUC (Saturation Nuclear Cluster) warhead they invented and its effects on various levels of armor protection.

Armor Level Zero (AL0) is DR24 or less. At this level the SATNUC secondary burst radius is considered lethal. Targets at this Armor Level are engaged by 6mm gunfire if in the open or loose SATNUC fire if under cover.

Armor Level One (AL1) is DR25 to DR69. At this level the SATNUC primary burst radius is effective and either 6mm gunfire or more carefully aimed SATNUC fire is needed. Unpowered infantry armor usually offers this level of protection. Also most Paneuropean battlesuit weapons are at this level or less making it rather easy to disarm them, even if the shockwave fails to penetrate their suits.

Armor Level Two (AL2) is DR70 to DR200. At this level or above only a direct hit from a SATNUC will damage the target so 6mm gunfire is favored. Tactical missiles and battlesuits are armored to this level to defend against blast effects and are hopefully mobile enough to avoid most direct nuclear hits and are therefore engaged with armor piercing automatic fire.

Armor Level Three (AL3) is DR201 to DR4,200. At this level 6mm gunfire is ineffective but a single SATNUC round can still penetrate with a direct hit and so nukes are favored.

Armor Level Four (AL4) is DR4,201 to DR11,000. At this level several SATNUC direct hits would be required to seriously damage the target but the largest tank cannon rounds can still punch through. Infantry requires massed attacks to defeat armor at this level or greater.

Armor Level Five (AL5) is DR levels above 11,000 that require multiple hits by the most powerful weapons to destroy.

The 6mm gun pod was primarily developed to deal with targets at Armor Level Two, to cover the gap between the SATNUC area and direct hit effects. Targets with either more or less armor are more effectively engaged with nuclear fire.

The battlesuit-launched nuclear weapon that the Combine chose -- the Shaped Nuclear-charge Indirect-fire Precision Engagement, or SNIPE, missile -- is a stealthy subsonic missile that follows a preplotted course to the designated target location and then releases a single SATNUC submunition to seek out a target.

For the first second after launch, the SNIPE missile is boosted up to almost 400 miles per hour by a decidedly non-stealthy solid rocket engine (aPSig -1, interception -10); then it slowly accelerates on a more stealthy ramjet (aPSig -10, interception -17) for another 15 seconds, covering a little over a mile on an evasive course at three fourths the speed of sound.

During the first second after launch the SNIPE missile is considered a direct fire weapon and is fired with the Gunner (Rocket Launcher) skill, beyond that range the missile is always an indirect fire attack and is targeted with the Gunner

(Guided Missile) skill. Combine troopers are taught both skills and are especially feared in overrun combat where their missiles can hit before the target has a chance to apply point defense fire.

Ranger units use a smarter and more stealthy missile that takes five seconds to cover the first 90 yards on a small jet engine but continues to accelerate and travels three miles during a minute long evasive dash. The aPSig for this missile in flight is always -17 and interception is -20.

A typical load for a standard battlesuit would be one gun pod, 20 box magazines of 6mm gun ammunition and 10 SNIPE missiles for a total weight of 139 pounds of weapons, leaving 29 pounds for other weapons and cargo. If combat was imminent the trooper would have a gun pod mounted on the hardpoint of his primary arm (for defense against missiles and other infantry) and a missile mounted on the hardpoint of his other arm (to engage vehicles or groups of infantry).

Marine battlesuits are equipped in a similar fashion but three or more of the missiles would be replaced with torpedoes of about the same weight with shaped nuclear warheads.

A ranger would carry the gun pod, 20 box magazines and 10 of the stealth missiles, leaving only 19 pounds for other equipment.

In combat it takes three seconds for an infantryman to reach back, pull out a gun or missile and attach it to his hardpoint. It takes one additional second for the weapon to sync up with the battlesuit's computer. After this time the infantryman can aim and fire normally.

Replacing a box magazine is quicker and only requires three seconds, or less if a fast-draw roll is made.

For combine troopers modify the Infantryman template by removing Guns (Grenade Launcher) and reducing Guns(Needler) by one level as effective skill with battlesuit mounted weapons cannot exceed Battlesuit skill.

Add Gunner/TL9 (Guided Missile) (P/A) DX+1[4]-13
and Gunner/TL9 (Rocket Launcher) (P/A) DX[2]-12.
The template cost increases by 3 points.

Note that quite a few troopers buy up Gunner (Rocket Launcher) and off hand training with it.

Combine Tactical Deployment

Traditionally infantry have been forced to open up their formations and deploy over greater areas as weapons have increased in firepower and range. With the widespread deployment of tactical nuclear weapons this reached an extreme.

A Combine six-man battlesuited squad would be organized as three two-man pairs. The partners in any pair of troopers would keep within about 10 yards of each other on the battlefield. There would be a pair of troopers to the front left and then another pair about 50 yards to the right of the first pair and then the squad leader with the fifth trooper would be fifty yards from each of the front pairs, forming the rear point on an equilateral triangle and able to rush forwards to support either of the front pairs as needed.

For a 20-man, three-squad platoon, the leftmost pair of the second squad would be 50 yards to the right of the rightmost pair of the first squad and the third squad would be deployed behind and between the front two squads with the platoon sargent and lieutenant deploying where needed. The result was a rough triangle with sides of around 150 yards.

The theory was that when a trooper took a direct hit from a SATNUC skeet, only his buddy would suffer from the primary shockwave. The problem was that there seldom was only one SATNUC skeet exploding over a squad at any one time.

A company would typically deploy with a spacing of at least 250 or more yards between platoons and could typically hold a front of one to four miles against infiltration.

Weapons Table

Guns(Needler)

Name	Malf	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt	RoF	ST	Rcl	Cost	LC
6mm Pod	Ver.(Crit)	Cr.	6d×3(3)	7	14	920	4,600	16	16*	16B	0	\$5,300	0
6mm Gun with shoulder stock (Includes a Scan 11 boresighted PESA)			6d×3(3)	12	12			10.3		8	0	\$12,400	0

Gunner (Guided Missile)

SNIPE	Crit	Spcl.	48y	15	11	99	1,760	10	1/4	15B	0	\$22,000	-1
Launch Tube			6d×3(3)	14	11			12	1/2	10	0	\$9,250	0
(Includes a Scan 11 boresighted PESA)													
Launch Tube			6d×3(3)	14	11			12	1/2	10	0	\$9,250	0
(Includes a Scan 11 boresighted PESA)													
Stealth SNIPE		Spcl.	48y	--	--	--	5,280	11	1/4	15B	0	\$38,200	-1

(Note that SS, Acc and 1/2D apply to using the SNIPE as a direct fire weapon with Gunner (Rocket Launcher), beyond this range Gunner (Guided Missile) is used.)

SS: Note that the battlesuit weapons stats assume a HUD, reducing SS by 5. The non-battlesuit weapons are also usually targeted with a HUD which would reduce the figures given here by 5.

ST: A "B" indicates that the weapon is normally fired from a Battlesuit hardpoint and this is the minimum strength for a battlesuit arm to fire this weapon.

Max: These are the usual maximum ranges for the SNIPE missiles when fired on ground hugging evasive courses. Non-evasive is twice this.

LC for nuclear weapons is -1 as even most military forces would think twice about issuing these weapons to their troops.

Combat Notes

SATNUCs can only be fired indirectly, as they require height to deploy properly. The bigger the shell or missile the greater the height required, but the single warhead SNIPE missiles could deploy their warheads from a height as low as 20 yards. (With a popup at the end of their flight.)

Infantry units of up to platoon size can synchronize their SNIPE missile launches and timing to achieve the same effect as a large shell delivering all the skeets at once, but this requires an extra second and successful Comm and Gunner (Guided Missile) skill rolls against the lowest skill levels n the group. Take the total number of missiles in the salvo that actually reach the target point after defensive fire and find the burst radius on the following table.

Missiles Burst Radius

1	48y
2	68y
3	83y
4	96y
5	107y
6-7	118y
8-10	135y
11-18	160y
19+	200y

Resolve a SATNUC as a typical indirect fire mission to find where the center point of the burst winds up. Then for every target within the primary burst radius that does not have an IFF code recognized by the SATNUC warheads, sort

them in the order of largest size to smallest and then by least to most aPSig defense bonus. For each target in turn, roll against the SATNUC TL(9) plus the size modifier of the target or less on three dice to make a lock-on. Stop rolling for lock-ons when all the targets have each been tested once or the total number of submunitions have found lock-ons. Then for each lock-on roll against the negative of the target's aPSig or less to avoid a direct hit.

Each target that suffers a direct hit takes 6dx2,000 damage to its top armor. BPC defends at 10 times DR (rather than DR squared) against this damage and ablates at only 1 point per 500 points of damage after resolving damage. Then apply normal explosion effects to every unit within the primary and secondary burst radii that did not suffer a direct hit.

Combat Example

A lieutenant in a command suit is talking with an two engineers and four rangers near a Superheavy Tank when a trio of hostile hypersmart missiles pop up over the horizon. There's a private in a standard suit 200 yards away who's supposed to be on overwatch but is instead playing a video game on his suit computer.

Two of the missiles are shot down, but the third manages to burst over the group.

A hypersmart missile has five submunitions, so the order of targeting is the Superheavy, then the engineers, then the command suit, and then the rangers (aPSig breaking the tie of all the suits being size modifier +1).

The first warhead needs to roll a 16 or less to lock-on to the Superheavy and it does. The Superheavy needs to roll 11 or less to decoy the warhead and with a 12 fails and takes 40,000 points of damage to its top armor, which fails to penetrate DR 5,000, but does reduce it by 80 points to DR 4,920.

The second warhead needs a 10 or less to lock on to the first engineer and with a 12 fails to find it so moves on the second engineer and with an 8 locks-on. The engineer has an aPSig of -8 and so needs to roll a 8 or less. With a roll of 9 the warhead is not fooled and the engineer takes 42,000 points of damage of which his DR 125 stops 1250 points of damage and so he moves on to that great construction project in the sky.

The third warhead locks-on to the Command suit, but with a roll of 9 against a aPSig of -9 is evaded.

The fourth warhead fails to lock-on to the first ranger but does lock-on to the second ranger but with a roll of 14 against an aPSig of -16 is evaded.

The fifth warhead locks onto the third ranger and is also evaded.

There are no further warheads so the fourth ranger is not directly targeted; he thus only has to deal with the shockwave like the other survivors.

The Superheavy tank just took 40,000 points of damage and masses 300 tons so needs to make a control roll at -8. The driver has skill 14 and rolls a 12, missing by 6. The tank has a SR of 7 and so this counts as a failure by zero or less. The tank veers from the impact and needs to roll an 11 or less or shed a track.

All of the battlesuited troopers except for the surviving engineer and the distracted private in the standard suit made their Battlesuit skill rolls to hit the dirt when they saw the final missile blossom and so count as prone against the shockwave.

The Command suit takes 4,200 points of explosion damage which bounces off his DR100, but it does toss him 8 hexes back and he avoids whiplash as his delta-V is only 16mph. (Similar effects occur for the rangers.)

The standing Engineer takes 3,800 points of explosion damage and because he is not braced or prone he gets tossed back 38 hexes and suffers 3d-6 whiplash damage. He needs to make a Battlesuit skill roll at -8 to keep his footing. (Rounding up on the Range/Speed table to find the penalty.)

The unaware private in the standard suit is only in the secondary burst radius and so only suffers 480 points of explosion damage, knocking him back 4 hexes and causing him to have to make a Battlesuit skill roll (at -2 for the distance thrown back) to keep his footing.

The crew in the Superheavy tank are completely shielded against radiation, but all the battlesuited troopers in the primary burst radius are going to clock up about 4 RADs.

Gearhead Stats

The SNIPE missile carries a single SATNUC skeet, by GURPS Ogre this is 3.2 pounds, \$10,000, 0.04cf with a "burst radius" of 48 yards.

Adding inertial guidance adds 1 pound, \$10,000 and 0.02cf.

A 200 pound thrust booster solid rocket that burns for exactly one second weighs 0.6 pounds, takes up 0.006cf and costs \$3.00.

A ramjet engine that delivers 10 pounds of vectored thrust weighs 1.5 pounds, takes up 0.03cf and costs \$150.00.

The ramjet burns 1.25 gallons of jet fuel per hour so 15 seconds of fuel is 0.0052 gallons. A standard self sealing tank weighs 0.0052 pounds, takes up 0.0008cf and costs 3 cents. The jet fuel adds 0.034 pounds and 2 cents.

The total internal volume is 0.0968cf and the body has very good streamlining so the total volume of the missile is 0.12cf and a surface area of 1.46sf and its size modifier is -3.

An extra light advanced responsive robotic lifting body structure with very good streamlining weighs 0.41 pounds and costs \$1,314.00.

DR 70 of BPC armor weighs 2.555 pounds and costs \$255.50

Sealing adds \$14.60.

TL11 Basic Emission Cloaking adds 0.73 pounds and \$109.50.

The total weight is 10 pounds or 9.4 pounds after the rocket booster is discarded.

And the total price tag is \$22,000.

On launch the rocket burns for one second and accelerates the missile to 400 mph, covering 100 yards in this time.

Then the ramjet takes over and accelerates at 21 mph/s for slightly under 7 seconds then maintains a speed of exactly 540 mph until burnout.

The ADR is 0.25 so the top speed under the ramjet is 547mph.

The stall speed under the ramjet is zero, but it can't go below 375mph without losing the ramjet thrust so it needs the booster rocket to get it going in the first place.

The aSR is 2.

The aMR is (TL9 +2 (responsive robotic) - (-3 size)) /2 or 7 and the lifting body shape lets it keep that so it can pull 7 Gs every second and it does, doing a preprogrammed 15 degree bend or pair of drifts every second so it can dodge.

If it flew in a straight line for the full 16 seconds it would cover over two miles before burnout, but all that dodging and weaving reduces the total range to a little over a mile.

The only control on the missile is a mounting hook that attaches to a launch tube or battlesuit hardpoint.

The rangers demanded a stealthier missile with longer range, that made it more costly and slightly heavier. The Stealth SNIPE missile has the same warhead as the normal SNIPE but the guidance is a Scan 8 passive radar (0.3 pounds, 0.006cf, \$900, for terrain following) tied into a tiny hardened genius robot brain (0.75 pounds, 0.015cf \$20,000, complexity 3, IQ 6, DX 9) running (Computer Navigation C2 \$250, Datalink C1 \$200, Map of battlefield C1 \$500, RVO Piloting-12 C2 \$4,000).

For propulsion the rangers insisted on not having a rocket flare give away their launching position so the engine is a light turbofan with 12 pounds of vectored thrust (2.24 pounds, 0.045cf, \$336). It requires 0.18 gallons per hour and has one minute of fuel or 0.0027 gallons in a standard self-sealing tank (0.0027 pounds, 0.0004cf, 3 cents) of jet fuel (0.0176 pounds, 1 cent).

The total internal volume is 0.1064cf and very good streamlining gives a total body volume of 0.133cf and an area of 1.56sf.

An advanced, super-light, responsive, robotic lifting body structure with very good streamlining weighs 0.1755 pounds and costs \$561.60.

70 points of BPC weighs 2.73 pounds and costs \$273.00

Sealing adds \$15.60.

Radical Emission Cloaking adds 1.56 pounds and \$1,170.00.

For a total weight of 11 pounds and a cost of \$38,200.

Adr is 0.26, top speed is 588mph. Stall speed without vectoring is 39mph so the aAccel is 8mph/s for the first second, then 15mph/s for the second second and 20 mph/s for the third second and at a speed of 43mph it gains full lift and accelerates at 21mph/s from the fourth second onwards, reaching 560mph 27 seconds into the flight and it maintains this speed for the remainder of the minute long flight which would carry it over seven miles in a straight flight, but because it is weaving back and forth every second its official range is only three miles.

Once hardpoints were added to Battlesuits, a gun was designed to fit into a weapon pod attached to a hardpoint so as to leave both hands free when reloading missiles.

The basic gun in the gun pod is a medium barrel low powered light automatic recoilless 6mm gauss gun firing APFSDSDU darts for 6dx3(3) damage at a ROF of 16. This is sufficient against battlesuits and missiles, but hopeless against vehicles.

Ranges are 1/2D: 920 yards, Max: 4,600 yards, Indirect Max: 11,500 yards. Acc is 13 +1 for the ammo.

Note that gauss and grav smallarms may be designed to fire only fin stabilized discarding sabot rounds if desired. Such weapons cannot fire non fin-stabilized ammo and they do not actually use sabots because the slots for the fins are built into the barrel. Gauss and grav cannon also do not use real sabots but have virtual sabotting or rifling that is turned on as needed by ammo type.

Base weight of the weapon is 5.4 pounds for a SS of 12, WPS is 246th of a pound each, a 1.3 pound box magazine therefore holds 160 rounds (10 turns of fire).

Loaded weapon weight is 6.7 pounds, 0.134 cf.

Full Stabilization adds 0.54 pounds, 0.01 cf and \$54 to the gun.

The total internal volume is 0.144cf for a surface area of 1.65sf A light structure with advanced materials adds 0.93

pounds and \$412.50 and has one hit point.

75 DR points of BPC then weighs 3.09 pounds and costs \$309. Radical Emission Cloaking adds 1.65 pounds and \$1,237 and sealing adds \$16.50

So the total weight of the loaded pod is 13 pounds and the cost of the unloaded pod is \$4,160 for the base gun plus \$2,029 in extra gear gives a total pod cost of \$6,189. (Siz -3, aPSig -17, MAD modifier -14 when firing).

Even the rangers couldn't improve on this gun, so they carry it also.

The ammo costs 39 cents per shot or \$63 for a 160 round box magazine.

The power requirement (to be met by the battlesuit) is 12.2 kW per shot times 16 shots per second or 73 kW. A typical load is 21 box magazines. Firing all of these would draw 41,000 kW of power or less than one third of a standard battlesuit's weapons power cell.

The gun has no grip, handle or controls other than the mounting hook which attaches to the battlesuit's hardpoint. It is a BPC covered cylinder 10 inches in length and almost 3 inches in diameter. There are ports that open at the front and rear of the gun when it fires. The front port shoots out darts and pulls in cooling air that flows over the launch coils and is then forced out the back to exactly balance the recoil of each shot. The gun is aimed via the suit's HUDWAC that is tied into the targeting program in the suit's computer.

Note that the increased lengths for electromag guns at VE99 only applies to TL8 gauss guns . . . or did you think Ogre secondary batteries were actually 21 meters long?

Militia Gear

The Combine rarely deployed non-battlesuited infantry, but did equip some client states to do so.

A top of the line non-battlesuited "rifleman" would be outfitted as follows:

Light Combat Armor with limited radiation protection and a built in HUD. 24 pounds and \$1,450. Has PF200 and offers the following protection.

Location	PD	DR
Face	2	15
Head	4	20
Hands/Feet	2	15
Limbs	3	17
Torso	4	25

This suit is designed to save the trooper's life, in the SATNUC secondary burst radius, if he ducks and covers. (Note that Battlesuits are designed to survive in the SATNUC PRIMARY burst radius, but not against direct hits.)

A personal computer with a short range communicator with a scrambler that plugs into the helmet HUD and the gun. Complexity 3, one pound and \$775.

Typical software is:

- IFF transponder software complexity one, \$500 (uses scrambler).
- Datalink, complexity one, \$200. (Uses scrambler to talk with squad)
- computer and fiber optic cables to gun and HUD.)
- Targeting +4, complexity three, \$2,000.

A shoulder stock version of the 6mm gun without the stabilization, armor or equipment pod, but with a HUD Sight and

a 1 mile boresighted PESA. (Scan 11)

The total unloaded weight of the shoulder stock gun is 8.5 pounds and the loaded weight is 10.3 pounds for a minimum ST of 8. The total cost of the unloaded shoulder stock gun is \$12,400 and it has SS 12 and Acc 12 with ammo.

The box magazines for these weapons include a rechargeable C cell for a total loaded weight of 1.8 pounds and loaded cost of \$163 for each 160 round magazine. Five box magazines weigh nine pounds and cost \$815.

A geiger counter. 1/4th pound and \$100

Backpack with frame that contains the rest of his gear. 10 pounds and \$100

Four replacement CBR filters (replace every 48 hours to keep the radioactive dust out.) 1 pound and \$160

Two SNIPE missiles for his "MissileMen" buddies. 20 pounds and \$44,000.

Shovel for digging trenches and graves. 6 pounds and \$12.

Filtration Canteen, 1 pound and \$175

16 assorted drug patches, 1 pound and around \$1,000.

Total price tag less than \$65,000 (2/3rds of that is the missiles.) Total weight is 82 pounds, or 43 pounds without the backpack.

The "MissileMan" variant replaces the gun with a shoulder firing launch tube for the SNIPE missile with HUD sight and 1 mile PESA. 12 pounds (unloaded) and \$9,250.

MissileMen also carry a machine pistol. \$350 and 3.5 pounds. Their computers are loaded with Fire Direction +4 in addition to Targeting. Complexity three, \$4,000 (Only one C3 program is running at a time and it depends on range which is the better choice.) They also get to carry a third SNIPE missile.

Total price tag for the "MissileMan" is \$86,000. Total weight is 90 pounds but only 51 pounds without the backpack. (But with a missile loaded.)

One trooper per six-man squad doesn't carry spare missiles or a shovel; instead he carries this:

Squad Battle Computer

Sealed Extra-Light frame of Very Expensive materials and PD 40 BPC containing:

- Medium Range communicator with scrambler and direction finder. 0.5 pounds, 0.01cf, \$1750.
- 7 Mile PESA (Scan 16). 14 pounds, 0.28cf, \$54,000.
- Level 16 surveillance sound detector. 1.6 pounds, 0.032cf, \$800.
- Two foot sensor periscope for all of these. 3.2 pounds, 0.06cf, \$11,310.
- (Used to peek over the top of the trench.)
- Small genius hardened computer, complexity 4. 3 pounds, 0.06cf, \$50,000
- A C cell. 0.5 pounds, 0.01cf, \$100 (Sufficient to run the box for a week.)

Total volume is 0.45cf, area is 3.5sf, frame is 1.3 pounds; \$220. The armor is 2 pounds and \$200. Sealing adds \$35. The box has radical emission cloaking for 3.5 pounds and \$2625.

Total weight is 29 pounds and cost is \$121,000 plus software.

Typical programs are:

- Datalink (C1, \$400)
- Fire Direction +5 (C4, \$8,000)
- Vehicle Recognition Manual (C1, \$500)
- Map of the battle region (C1, \$500)
- Computer Navigation(C2, \$250)
- Transmission Profiling(C3, \$4,000)

The contacts located by the sensor tech would then be passed out to the other members of the squad huddled around him.

So the typical six man "Militia" squad is one sensor tech, three "Riflemen," and two "MissileMen." This makes for a total firepower of three to four guns and two launch tubes.

It is said that a platoon of three to four such squads can match the firepower (if not the survivability) of a Battlesuited squad for a fraction of the cost, if you don't count human lives.

For these "elite" Ogre fodder, add the following to the Militaman template:

Increase HT to 12 +10 points. Add Running (P/H; HT) HT-2 [1]-10, Electronics Operation/TL9 (Comm) IQ-1 [1]-11, Electronics Operation/TL9 (Sensors) IQ-1 [1]-11, and Gunner (Guided Missile) (P/A) DX [2]-11 for a total template cost of 60. (Though at least they get to play around with nukes now.)

Note that the running skill increases their base move to 7, minus 3 for heavy encumbrance leaves move 4 which is just over one GEV-scale hex every two GEV-scale turns.

Another Little Shop Of Horrors

Three New Weapons for *GURPS*

by Stephen Dedman

Another day, another gun fair . . .

My contact was late, as usual, but he never did have much of a grasp of any period of time shorter than twenty-to-life. I looked at my watch, and Cyberwoman looked back at me from the tiny screen. I shook my head. My contact had told me that someone at the fair was trying to move some ex-military stuff from the former Soviet Union, including missiles and warheads, but he wouldn't give me any details until I handed over the cash. The whole team was staking out the exhibition center, in plain clothes or in hiding, ready to pounce -- and here I was, pretending to be interested in the overpriced junk on some antique dealer's table.

I blinked, and looked at some of the items more closely with second sight. Three of them had auras like forest fires. I touched the knife, wondering what psychometry would tell me about its history, and it turned in my hand as though eager to leap out of its sheath and attack me . . .

The Edge of Darkness

This is an utterly black, well-balanced boot knife (small knife) with a narrow two-edged blade, small handguard and flat metal hilt. The scabbard is black leather from some unidentifiable species of reptile. To most people, it looks so unremarkable that it's barely visible at all.

To anyone with the Honesty disadvantage, however, the knife appears so ugly that they react to it at -3 and require a Will roll even to touch it. Using it will require another Will roll at -4, and they will receive a -4 modifier to their Knife or Knife Throwing skill unless they are attacking another character with the Honesty disadvantage. On a Critical Miss, they will always get a full damage "hit yourself" result. Buying it will require a Will roll at -1 to -5, depending on the asking price and the character's wealth level. As long as he owns the knife, he will also have the Unluckiness advantage. If this doesn't kill him outright, it will slowly reduce his wealth level until he buys off the Honesty disadvantage or is compelled to sell the knife. In either event, his luck will then return to normal.

To anyone with the Greed or Kleptomania disadvantages, the knife is so appealing that they must make a Will roll at -3 not to steal it. Buying it will require a Will roll at -1 to -5 as above. The knife has the soul of a thief, and is only interested in belonging to a thief; for a thief to sell it, give it away, lend it or even throw it will require a Will roll at -5.

Anyone without the Honesty disadvantage who steals (but not buys or finds) the knife will acquire the following advantages and disadvantages while they carry it: Alertness/2, Greed, Kleptomania, Less Sleep/2, and Night Vision. They will also receive a +1 to the following skills: Appreciate Beauty, Climbing, Detect Lies, Fast-Draw (Knife), Fast-Draw Knife from Teeth, Merchant, Stealth, Streetwise, and Survival (Urban). The knife also gives +3 when used for Intimidation or Starglazing, any attempt to disarm a Trap, or any attack on the Vital Organs, Heart, Kidneys or Neck. If the knife is bought or found, not stolen, it will give none of these advantages, disadvantages or skill bonuses until the wielder proves himself to be a worthy thief by using the knife while stealing an item of greater value than the knife (GM's decision).

Whether stolen, bought or found (or even if wielded by a character with the Honesty disadvantage), the knife is of Very Fine Quality (p. B74) and is +4 to Holdout.

Every time the knife is used for any purpose, or the wielder improves any of the skills listed above while carrying it,

the wielder must make two Will rolls -- one to avoid acquiring the Greed disadvantage permanently, the other to avoid acquiring the Kleptomania disadvantage permanently. If (when) he has both disadvantages, he must roll whenever he uses the knife or acquire the Dependency disadvantage (Constantly): he must carry the knife or lose 1 HT per minute without it.

The knife expects its loyalty to be reciprocated. If the wielder deliberately or accidentally discards the knife (selling it, giving it as a gift, losing it while gambling, or not retrieving it within 2d minutes after throwing it), the knife will feel betrayed and treat the wielder as though he had the Honesty disadvantage (see above) until he steals something else of great value. If the knife is stolen, it will immediately transfer its loyalty to the new owner.

The Edge of Darkness is of indeterminate age, and may turn up in any campaign since the invention of steel.

The Denton Silencer

Gunsmith, engineer and artist Francis Denton (1812-1877) was unashamedly a mad scientist. Plagued by dreams of a possible future, he made several attempts to replicate the devices he saw in these diurnal visions (he rarely woke before noon). While he never succeeded in inventing the telescreen, the underarm deodorant, or the time machine shaped like a police box, he did create a small number of his infamous silencers before his untimely and gruesome death.

The Denton Silencer resembles a 20th-century sound suppressor -- a cylinder 8" long and 3" in diameter, weighing one pound. Its exact composition is unknown, but is rumored to include Ghost Rock. Unlike conventional sound suppressors, it can work on revolvers as well as automatic pistols, and its strange spring-loaded screw-thread adapter will fit any handgun from .32 to .50 caliber.

A Denton Silencer gives a -10 penalty to any roll to hear the weapon being fired, or any other sound made by anyone carrying a gun fitted with one. Treat as 10 levels of the Silence advantage (p. CI66) with a 1-hex radius and the "Always On" limitation. The wielder has the Mute and Hard of Hearing disadvantages, and cannot be detected by Sonar.

The Denton Silencer is designed for single-action pistols, and cannot reliably absorb the sounds of more rapid fire. Anyone firing two or three rounds per turn through a gun fitted with a Denton Silencer must roll HT for each ear. On a failed roll, that ear is "crippled" -- temporarily or permanently (see p. B129). A character who loses hearing in one ear acquires the "Hard of Hearing" disadvantage: a character who loses it in both ears is, of course, deaf.

Anyone firing more than three rounds per turn through a gun fitted with a Denton Silencer must make his HT rolls at a penalty equal to the number of rounds fired (e.g. a Gatling pistol on full autofire would require rolls against HT -6, a Micro-Uzi at -20).

Frequent users of the Denton Silencer who haven't gone permanently deaf may acquire a Phobia (loud noises). Anyone using a Denton Silencer should make a Will Roll after every gunfight or similar stressful event (at -4 if they already have either the Brontophobia or Post-Combat Shakes disadvantages). On an ordinary failure, they will be unable to put the gadget away and leave its hex of peace and quiet until they make a successful roll (roll hourly). On a critical failure, they will acquire the phobia (see pp. B35-36), and be even more reluctant to part with the silencer. If they already have the mild Phobia (loud noises) disadvantage, it will become severe. Anyone acquiring a Denton Silencer should learn Lip Reading and Sign Language, just in case.

The third and often final drawback of the Denton Silencer is that it has a limited lifespan. After exactly 666 shots, a Denton Silencer will explode, doing 6d blast damage. The wielder will also be hit with 1d fragments, each doing 2d cutting damage, and must make a HT roll at -5 for each ear (as above). Everyone else within 200 yards may also be hit by a fragment as well as the potentially deafening noise: roll vs. HT -2 for each ear at up to 25 yards, HT at 26-50 yards, HT +2 at 51-100 yards, and HT +5 at 101-200 yards. Anyone acquiring a used Denton Silencer should treat it with the utmost suspicion.

Denton Silencers are designed for use in a *GURPS Deadlands* or other "Weird West" campaign, but new ones may be invented by Gadgeteers in *Cliffhangers*, *Atomic Horror*, *Technomancer*, or *Supers* worlds.

The Equalizer

Equalizers are magical mutable weapons with the following enchantments: Quick-Draw, Loyal Sword, Name, Reshape, Repair, Shatterproof, and several unknown spells. Though (somewhat) intelligent, the weapons themselves cannot remember their own origin, but they were obviously crafted for a weapon master with an overdeveloped sense of fairness.

An Equalizer has IQ 9, but uses the Danger Sense advantage as though its IQ was 14. It also has Combat Reflexes, and Special Rapport with its owner (it prefers the term "partner"), who it treats as a loved one (p. B38). If it senses that its partner is about to be attacked with a weapon, an Equalizer will instantly leap to its partner's hand, whether or not the partner has noticed the danger. The Equalizer will also take the form of the weapon with which its partner is being threatened -- as long as the weapon is made of wood and/or metal, and the Equalizer recognizes it as a weapon, and the assailant consciously intends to harm the Equalizer's partner (as distinct from firing into a crowd, planting a bomb, etc.). The Equalizer will then stay in the new form until the partner is threatened with a different weapon, or until persuaded by the partner to change (contest of Fast-Talk against IQ).

An Equalizer can duplicate any melee weapon of wood and/or metal from a pocket knife (its usual "default" setting) or brass knuckles to Thor's hammer Mjollnir, matching weapon quality and any enchantments. However, it has a limited understanding of missile weapons and technology. Rather than try to copy these exactly, an Equalizer will morph into a similar weapon, fully loaded, thereby reducing its partner's need to carry many different types of ammunition and the problem of unfamiliarity modifiers.

Confronted by: **Morphs into:**

Bow or Crossbow	Composite Crossbow, partner's ST, (p.CII23), one bolt
Pistol	Colt Python
Shotgun	Remington M870
Rifle	AK-47 (with folding bayonet)
Submachine Gun	MP40

An Equalizer will not copy grenades or other non-reusable weapons, and is at -5 to its Danger Sense rolls when its partner is threatened with weapons not constructed primarily of wood and/or metal (rocks, whips, rope garrotes or lassos, or non-metallic knives such as the Delta Dart) or intended primarily for non-lethal uses (cars, shovels, bar stools, etc.).

The Equalizer is intended as a magical weapon for a fantasy campaign, but it would also suit a superhero or very honorable supervillain. The GM can decide which gadgets and magical items it can duplicate; if in doubt, roll against its IQ of 9.

Being intelligent, Equalizers may have personalities, including quirks and disadvantages. Entertaining possibilities include Frightens Animals, Intolerance, Paranoia, Telepathic Addiction, and Weirdness Magnet.

Adventure Seeds

Taxing Times (fantasy)

When Margeth, one of the kingdom's most hated tax collectors is stabbed to death in his bed, everyone celebrates except the king, who orders the palace guard to find the killer. The only clue is that Margeth seems to have been stabbed with the black knife he always kept in his boot -- the Edge of Darkness, which the thief also took. The usual suspects are being rounded up and tortured into confessing: if the PCs don't find the killer and the knife, they may be next.

Silent Knight (*GURPS Deadlands* or *Cliffhangers*)

Sir Rodney Jardine is the wastrel second son of an English lord, banished to the USA to protect the family's reputation. After the PCs see him fatally shoot a man who accused him of cheating at cards, two thugs with S&W Russian revolvers and stolen Denton Silencers are hired to intimidate any witnesses who won't be bribed.

One of the thugs shoots at the PCs from a sniper's nest 150 yards away, but his first two shots miss, shattering a window and perforating a wall. If the PCs notice (roll on Vision or Danger Sense), this will give them time to find cover and draw their own weapons. Soon after they see him, the thug's Silencer explodes.

While investigating the mystery, the PCs learn that there's another thug with another Denton Silencer looking for them -- and there's no predicting when and where his silencer might self-destruct.

Missing the Point (*GURPS Cops Supers*)

Cat burglar Aden Grae has been a thorn in the side of the local police for several years. When a security guard at a warehouse was stabbed in a robbery that went wrong, Grae was arrested, and his boot knife confiscated for the forensics team to examine. Grae died in police custody less than an hour later, and now the knife has vanished from the evidence locker. Internal Affairs are going to ruin the careers of some good cops if the heroes can't solve the mystery.

Equal Force (*GURPS Supers*)

The Harbormasters, a gang of metavillains, ran smuggling and several other rackets in the PCs' home city until they were finally defeated by the superheroes Justiciar and Columbia. Columbia died in the battle, and Justiciar -- a weapons master armed with an Equalizer -- retired soon after the Harbormasters were jailed and shortly before the PCs became active.

A few hours before the Harbormasters are scheduled to be released, having won an appeal against their convictions, an anxious Justiciar contacts the PCs. Columbia's daughter has taken the Equalizer, and he suspects she's going to attack the Harbormasters.

The most feared of the Harbormasters was a woman known as Thera, after the volcano said to have destroyed Atlantis. While almost powerless on land, Thera could control vast stretches of the sea and everything in it -- and Justiciar (rightly) suspects that at least some of this power came from the trident she carried, which has never been found. If Columbia's daughter duplicates this power but can't control it, it could destroy the entire waterfront.

The Harbormasters are expected to head back to a saloon near the docks to celebrate. Justiciar (unarmed, aging, and a recovering alcoholic) asks the PCs to help him stop Columbia. (Thera, incidentally, has had her trident all along: it transforms into a tattoo on her arm after a few hours out of seawater, and will reappear the moment she dives into the ocean. Another of the Harbormasters, Mutie, has an IMI Eagle with a Denton Silencer hidden in the saloon). If the heroes succeed in defusing the situation, Justiciar may give the Equalizer to the PC who can best use it.

Appendix Z

Information Overload!

by David Morgan-Mar

In the information age, the sheer volume of raw data available to even the most casual researcher can be overwhelming. It may contain important details, or it could just be insignificant factoids and useless garbage, with no clear way of telling the difference.

Here is a list of things that might be learned by web browsing, an AI search, or watching the news (perhaps through a software filtering agent). Such information is readily available to anyone from the present day onward, particularly in Cyberpunk or Space campaigns. The list could also give results for laborious library, newspaper archive, or police record searches or oracular magic. These items can be sheer coincidence, red herrings, or may provide inspiration and become an integral part of your adventure plot.

For random results, roll two six-sided dice and read as a two digit number. Subtables are indexed by a roll from 1-6. "A person," "a company," "an item," and "a place" refer to things the heroes might be searching for information on.

11 **A person inexplicably went missing for 1-6 months, some time ago.**

12 **An exhaustive search turns up *no* records of a person having existed before 1-6 months ago.**

13 **A person's marriage broke up 1-6 years ago.**

14 **Birth records show a person is 10-60 years older than he appears to be.**

15 **A person has in the past been:**

- 1-3 acquitted of:
- 5-6 convicted of:
 - 1 Murder.
 - 2 Larceny.
 - 3 Fraud.
 - 4 Drug trafficking or possession.
 - 5 Arson.
 - 6 Firearms offences.

16

- 1-2 An eating establishment
- 3-4 An entertainment venue
- 5-6 A retail store or office

the PCs visited recently turns out to be owned by a person.

21 Two people the heroes thought to be unrelated turn out to have been former:

- 1-2 Business partners.
- 3-4 Lovers.
- 5-6 Enemies.

22 A person recently made a killing by:

- 1-2 Gambling.
- 3-4 Stock investment.
- 5-6 A damages payout after a legal case.

23 A person has severe debts from:

- 1 Gambling.
- 2 Broken marriage.
- 3 Business failure.
- 4 Stock investment gone bad.
- 5 Medical or legal bills.
- 6 Spendthrift.

24 A person had a previous, unsuccessful, career as a:

- 1-2 Entertainer.
- 3-4 Professional athlete.
- 5-6 Artist/writer.

25 A person is a former police or military officer:

- 1-2 Dishonorably discharged.
- 3-4 Retired with distinction.
- 5-6 Quit for no apparent reason.

26 A person has a medical condition requiring:

- 1 Special diet.
- 2 Ongoing drug treatment.
- 3 Intermittent hospitalization.
- 4 Psychiatric treatment.
- 5 Exotic treatment (alien drugs, holy water, etc).
- 6 No treatment, but causing occasional fits.

31 A person is closely related to a:

- 1 Celebrity.
- 2 Political figure.
- 3 High-ranking military commander.
- 4 Known criminal identity.

- 5 Famous missing person/crime victim.
- 6 Historical figure.

32 A person was arrested in his youth for:

- 1 Minor drug offences.
- 2 Traffic offences.
- 3 Political activism.
- 4 Petty theft.
- 5 Trespassing.
- 6 Intoxicated behavior.

33 A person collects:

- 1 Stamps/coins.
- 2 Insects.
- 3 Memorabilia/antiques.
- 4 Precious artworks.
- 5 Big game.
- 6 Alien artifacts.

34 A person is a huge fan of:

- 1-2 Professional sports.
- 3-4 Computer games.
- 5-6 Science fiction/fantasy.

35 A person recently made a purchase at a:

- 1 Weaponry store.
- 2 Vehicle retailer.
- 3 Stockbroker.
- 4 Illegal drug merchant.
- 5 Black market equipment supplier.
- 6 Alien items importer.

36 A person was seen recently:

- 1 Wining and dining a celebrity.
- 2 Traveling to/from a foreign destination.
- 3 Leaving the office of a politician.
- 4 At the docks/spaceport.
- 5 Talking to a known criminal.
- 6 At a local disaster scene.

41 A company is currently:

- 1 Going bankrupt.

- 2 In severe debt.
- 3 Posting record profits.
- 4 Planning a hostile takeover bid.
- 5 Being taken over by another company.
- 6 Releasing a major new product.

42 A company is under investigation for:

- 1 Collusion and price-fixing.
- 2 Unsatisfactory employment conditions.
- 3 Illegal advertising practices (subliminal messages, etc).
- 4 Tax evasion.
- 5 Corporate fraud.
- 6 Anti-competitive behavior.

43 A company owns a nearby:

- 1 Entertainment complex.
- 2 Office building.
- 3 University.
- 4 Wilderness preserve.
- 5 Private island/planet.
- 6 Area subcontracted to the military.

44 A company operates a nearby:

- 1 Factory.
- 2 Raw material processing plant.
- 3 Research facility.
- 4 Port.
- 5 Mine/oil well.
- 6 Energy production facility.

45 A company is owned by:

- 1 A person known to the heroes.
- 2 A high-profile, respected businessman.
- 3 A politician.
- 4 A known crime figure.
- 5 An old enemy of the PCs.
- 6 A distant relative of a PC.

46 A company has:

- 1 Many subsidiaries, dealing in all sorts of business.
- 2 A vast, well-known parent company.
- 3 Suspected underworld links.
- 4 Offices all around the world/across the galaxy.
- 5 No identifiable owner.

- 6 An overly positive stock investment prospectus.

51

An item is currently:

- 1 Owned by a celebrity.
- 2 Owned by a known NPC.
- 3 Lost.
- 4 "In a private collection."
- 5 Thought to be destroyed.
- 6 On display in a public museum/gallery.

52

An item has a history of being:

- 1-2 Stolen.
- 3-4 Cursed.
- 5-6 An archaeological relic.

53

An item is linked to:

- 1-2 A crime.
- 3-4 A disaster.
- 5-6 A historical event.

54

An item is worth:

- 1-2 Nothing.
- 3-4 Much less than the heroes thought.
- 5-6 Much more than the heroes thought.

55

An item was produced:

- 1 By a famous craftsman centuries ago.
- 2 By the thousands in the Industrial Revolution.
- 3 On a modern assembly line.
- 4 By native workers as a souvenir.
- 5 Painstakingly by a recreationist.
- 6 By a forger.

56

An item is dangerous if:

- 1 Touched.
- 2 Moved.
- 3 Used incorrectly.
- 4 The original owner finds out you have it.
- 5 Exposed to water.
- 6 Not regularly maintained.

61 **A place is said to be:**

- 1 A secret military base.
- 2 A secret corporate base.
- 3 A criminal hangout.
- 4 Poisoned by radiation/chemicals.
- 5 Sacred by native inhabitants.
- 6 Haunted.

62 **A place was recently:**

- 1-2 Raided by police.
- 3-4 Sold.
- 5-6 Robbed.

63 **A place is currently:**

- 1-2 For sale.
- 3-4 Being built.
- 5-6 Being renovated.

64 **A place turns out to be:**

- 1-2 Where a PC grew up.
- 3-4 The home of a person known to the PCs.
- 5-6 Just around the corner from where the heroes are now!

65 **A place was the site of a historical:**

- 1 Battle.
- 2 Plague.
- 3 Fire.
- 4 Uprising.
- 5 Natural disaster.
- 6 Vehicular disaster.

66 **A place was named after:**

- 1 A historical figure/event.
- 2 A person known to the heroes.
- 3 An ancestor of a PC.
- 4 A familiar sounding person who the PCs can't quite place.
- 5 An item important to the current adventure.
- 6 A corporate sponsor.

* * *

Thanks to Manu Marron and Roland Boshnack for the idea that led to this article.

Pyramid Review

Starships (for the Star Trek Roleplaying Game)

Published by [Decipher, Inc.](#)

Written by Dave Biggins and Don Mappin

Illustrated by David Pipgras

208-page full-color hardcover; \$34.95

Without starships, there would be no *Star Trek*; thus they are a vital element to any roleplaying game based upon the various films and television series. Not that all of the RPGs have gained the benefit of supplements devoted to the subject, with perhaps the best being the *Star Trek III Starship Combat Role Playing Game* and the associated trilogy of the *Starship Recognition Manuals* for the Federation, Klingon, and Romulan fleets, released for the FASA *Star Trek RPG*. The *Star Trek* line of RPGs published by Last Unicorn Games never received an official supplement dedicated to the subject, though supplements such as *The Price of Freedom* and also [Raiders, Renegades & Rogues](#) for the [Star Trek: Deep Space Nine Roleplaying Game](#) contained a wide selection of ship designs and write-ups; author Steven Long has also written both rules for starship creation in *Space Dock* and a number of *Recognition Manuals* that appear on the [website](#) and use Last Unicorn Games' ICON system.

For their second go at a *Star Trek* RPG, the designers have devoted the fourth volume for Decipher's *Star Trek Roleplaying Game* totally to the subject. *Starships* is a heavy, full-color hardcover that both expands on and acts as a complement to the rules for starship design and combat given in the [Narrator's Guide](#). In addition to the advanced rules, the bulk of the book is given over to the write-ups of some 39 starships and variants, plus nine shuttlecraft found in service with the Federation, the Klingons, the Romulans, Cardassians, the Borg, the Ferengi, and the Jem'Hadar. There are also single entries for ships from the Vulcans, Orions, Kazon, Breen, and Species 8472.

Each entry is given a full-page presentation; half is devoted to the statistics, the other to its Mission, Features and Background, along with three illustrations that show the vessel in profile -- front, top, and side -- plus a single photograph. The latter are not always the best; for example the one of the Klingon *Negh'Var-Class* Dreadnought is nearly useless. All of this information is laid out on black, using the standard LCARS format, which is color-coded according to the race or faction that each vessel belongs to. If there is a problem in the layout of the ship's data, it is in the font size used for the actual data, which is half that of the titles. The effect is to make the useful information difficult to read without a certain degree of concentration.

Unlike the previous *Star Trek* RPGs, Decipher's CODA system came with the necessary rules to construct almost any kind of starship found in the *Narrator's Guide*. plus they were very easy to use, such that the budding naval architect should be able to design ships of their own with almost no problems at all. The rules for Advanced Construction given in *Starships* run to just thirty pages and allow for the building of ships larger than hull size ten (such as the Borg Cube) up to size twenty, provides modifiers to show how far a race is behind or ahead of the Federation in terms of technology, adds new reliability ratings and a plethora of new components.

These components are split between those generic to all races and those specific to particular species. Thus for the Federation the Multivector Assault Mode separation system -- as tested on the prototype design *USS Prometheus* -- is described, as are the cutting beam and energy drain weapons employed by the Borg. The technology covers the five television series plus the films, from the time of the original *Enterprise* through to *Deep Space Nine*, allowing ship designs for every time period.

Vessels can also be individualized with new traits, such as Famous, Prototypes, and Blind Luck, which reflects a crew's ability to overcome a particular system's limitation in ways unique to their ship only, and which cannot mass-produced. They can also earn renown -- just as characters can - and this can be used in recognition social tests for both ship and her crew to see if her reputation precedes them both. In addition, as characters advance in level they allocate their Advancements Picks to their ship, and thus reflect its "experience." These picks can purchase for a ship extra space, renown, gain and upgrade an edge or overcome a flaw, a maneuver modifier, or enable the upgrade of a system or installation of a new one.

The range of ships covered is a fairly decent mix from all eras. This includes many examples previously seen in the *Narrator's Guide* and [Starfleet Operations Manual](#), though not the *Steamrunner*, *Saber*, *Miranda*, *Ranger*, *Daedalus* or *Oberth*-class vessels, nor the *Hirogen Hunter* ship. Fans of *Enterprise* will be pleased with the inclusion of the *NX-class Enterprise* and the *Vulcan T'Plana Hath-Class Surveyor*, while the write ups of the *Intrepid*, *Nova*, and *Delta Flyer*-class vessels will satisfy *Voyager* fans, as will those of the *Species 8472 Bioship*, *Kazon shuttle*, and *Borg Cubes* and *Spheres*. Under the list of ships in service, some ships include their particular traits, such as the *Sovereign Class NCC 1701-E Enterprise's* renown of 23, *Famous*, and *Flagship* edges.

Further rules are contained within the write-ups of the particular ships. These include the *Biomolecular Warheads* used against the *Bioships* of *Species 8472* -- as well as attempting sensor scans of them, using the operating systems aboard *Jem'Hadar* vessels, and how to chase a *Borg Time Shere*! If there is one thing missing from *Starships*, it is the inclusion of a "Starship Range Increment Bar" for each of the vessels it covers. These are used with the starship combat rules to determine the range between the combatants involved; however, to date, the only ones created for the game depicts an overhead shot of the *Enterprise-D*, which will be of little use when attempting battles involving the contents of this supplement. This is a rather obvious and annoying omission considering the nature of those contents . . .

The high production values of *Starships* does mean that the supplement feels a little expensive for the number of ships it provides. Naturally the purchaser will want more, though at worst, perhaps only a particular favorite is missing. That said, they are well-presented and written-up, and by using the Advanced Rules also given, the *Star Trek Roleplaying Game* Narrator should be able to modify the vessels described or create new ones to suit their own series. Thus *Starships* represents another solid entry for Decipher's *Star Trek Roleplaying Game*.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Zombies!!! 3: Mall Walkers

Published by [Twilight Creations, Inc.](#)

Game concept and design by Todd A. Breitenstein

Art by Dave Aikins

Additional development and event card design by Kerry Breitenstein, Mark Bordenet, Terry Keefe, Tony Fryer, Jeffrey Jones, and Robert D. Yarbrough

Sculpting by Behrle Hubbuch

Layout and design by Todd Breitenstein

Fiction by Paul C. Willhouse

16 full-color board tiles, 32 full-color Event cards, rules; \$14.99

They've chased you through town. They've run amok on your military base. Now the walking dead have invaded your local shopping mall, and it's on, baby. **Zombies!!! 3: Mall Walkers** is the third release in the **Zombies!!!** series from Twilight Creations, Inc.

Anyone who's ever seen George A. Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* was asking where this supplement was 15 seconds after they heard **Zombies!!!** was on the market. Sure enough, you're trapped in suburbia, with flesh-eating monsters closing in on you from every aisle. The object of the game is to once again make it to the helipad tile first to hitch a ride out of Hell. (The helicopter is on the roof, of course . . . where else would you park it?) Barring that, you can collect 25 of the shambling beasts and score the win.

The action all takes place indoors this time. You race through the front doors and down the hallways of the Twilight Mall, stopping here and there to stock up on supplies. Familiar mall areas like the Food Court, the Lingerie Shop, and the Music Store are now overrun by zombies (well, a different kind of zombie), but they also hold the precious Life counters and Bullet tokens you need to keep the starving throngs at bay. There are 16 new tiles to use, and these form the basis for a whole new playing field. Alternately, you can add them to the original **Zombies!!!** game tiles, or use it with the military base from **Zombie Corps(e)**, or put all three together for a truly massive killing zone. The most notable features of the mall spaces are the escalator and the air ducts.

The escalator takes you up to the second floor (this may be a hick town, but they've got their priorities straight and have two stories to their mall); only from the second floor may you access the rooftop and your whirlybird lifeline. No areas on the first floor are adjacent to those you build on the second, so if you're in the lead your opponents may make it a long walk to the 'pad.

And a race through a mall without ducts to crawl through would be like not getting nuts on your FroYo. Every store

has a space marked by a ventilation shaft. Characters landing on these spaces can use all their movement the following turn to shift from that store to an adjacent store's air duct space, conveniently sidestepping the not-at-all-convenient zombie hordes.

You also get a brand new deck of 32 event cards geared toward mall life. These new additions are dripping with the same snarky horror-show humor ("You Want Fries With That?" "Cleanup in aisle 5"). There seem to be fewer weapon and movement cards this time around, and more of the "Play in . . ." cards where you must first get to a specific store before you can lay down a thematically linked card for later use. There are also some pretty powerful cards that will let you submerge an opponent in a sea of the soulless or clear out an entire hallway in one fell swoop.

The artwork is once more courtesy of Dave Aikins: dark, grainy illustrations with understated black humor on the cards, and simple, expressive, tight little designs on the tiles that won't get in the way of game play.

This supplement is much faster than the other sets in the series, with game time being under an hour in some cases. The ducts are not only appropriate to the genre, they're a good tweak that allows players more control over their actions and gives them more tactical options. And with a total lack of vehicle cards (sorry, no driving the display model around the fountains), you're going to need them. The second floor option is mildly interesting, but considering there are only 16 map tiles in this set, it doesn't change the face of play considerably. It would be nice if there was a more elegant way to show the two levels, but short of separating the tiles into two separately maintained areas or just placing second floor tiles off-kilter from those of the lower, there's not much to be done. Without clear demarcation, it leads to Escher-like awkwardness in some cases (you can have a lower level tile abutting the upper, and nothing in the rules says you can't build under the escalator, you just can't travel between them), and staring at the dimensions of the escalator illustration too long will make you dizzy as well.

With a lot of players, it's also easy to exhaust the zombies at first, and your fighting quarters are closer than ever -- you'll be stepping on each other's toes more often, and there are event cards to let you make use of that, too. This is another thing ***Mall Walkers*** has in common with its predecessors: The rules leave distressing spaces where the rules lawyers will flourish.

But the truly important thing to remember is: You get to slaughter zombies wholesale in a mall. For anyone who tires of the longer ***Zombies!!!*** games afforded by the original, ***Zombies!!! 3: Mall Walkers*** is a great way to bring the timer down to a more manageable level. It's faster, it plays even better, it's still entertaining as hell, and combined with the existing sets, it allows aficionados of the zombie story to tailor the size of the game to their sickening tastes.

--Andy Vetromile

All Systems Are Go(ne)

Several years ago, we asked a poll about how many people have converted a game campaign or game world from one system to another. Much to my own surprise, 80% of our readers admitted to having given it a shot. Now, I've done the same thing from time to time, but never did I realize that so many other people were as crazy as I. And now, since I'm considering starting up a new campaign, converting one game world to another system I like more, I thought I'd share some of my wit and wisdom on the subject. (Yes, it's a short column.)

Know why you're converting a system. Most of the time the reason is obvious; for example, you and your players enjoy System X, but Kewl World Y only uses its own system. Or perhaps you are trying to find a system that more closely matches your idea of the genre in question. Or maybe you're looking for new support material for a game, and are converting different books for that purpose. Regardless of the reason, keeping it firmly in mind will help you as you struggle with the challenges of game translation.

Determine if a conversion is really necessary. Really, unless you're the type of person who enjoys doing conversions, it's probably going to be a pain in the butt. Make sure you know what you're getting into before embarking on what could well be a fool's errand.

Understand the nature of the system you're converting from, and the system you're converting to . . . as intimately as you're able. Know the style of game both systems prefer, and adjust accordingly. For example, translating from a cinematic system to a more gritty one will likely result in lots of dead heroes unless you make sure the players are appraised of their new limitations. Likewise translating from a grainy game to a more detailed one can possibly result in players learning their characters suddenly don't have abilities they realistically think they should; thus it would be wise to allow for tweaking after a session or two of the conversion.

Of particular note is any discrepancy between the critical success and failure system for both games, and the frequency thereof; many games place special emphasis on those effects, and differences can really affect things. For example, I once translated an ongoing *In Nomine* campaign to White Wolf's Storyteller system. Now, *In Nomine* has a system where divine or infernal interventions happen on a roll of 1-1-1 or 6-6-6 on three six-siders. Those of you playing the home math game realize that the odds of a specific intervention happening on any given roll are 1-in-216 (or 1-in-108 for either intervention). The Storyteller system, on the other hand, resolves actions by rolling handfuls of 10-siders. Following the suggestion of a *Pyramid* [discussion group](#) member, I decided to try keeping the flavor element of the original *In Nomine* the same. Thus we decided to treat any roll containing three 1's as a divine intervention, and any with three 6's an infernal intervention. (Our statistician readers are no doubt shaking their heads even now.)

Unfortunately, the odds of either of those coming up on a handful of 10-siders is *much* greater than 1-in-108. As a result, the next session of our game detailing the conflict between Heaven and Hell had so many interventions, it looked like God and Satan had gone positively bug-nuts; we went from having between zero and three interventions per game to just shy of 30.

Figure out how much of a conversion you need to do. Most of the time I've found you don't need to do a full conversion of a game system; doing a piecemeal translation is often *much* easier. For example, with the aforementioned *In Nomine* to Storyteller translation, I didn't bother trying to convert all the skills from *In Nomine* to Storyteller counterparts. Instead, I just took the existing skill names from *In Nomine* and used them directly; it worked just fine (once we resolved the whole intervention problem).

If one game has a weird attribute or skill system, consider importing it directly (especially if it's vital to the setting). For example, it was fairly easy to convert *Torg* to *GURPS*, but the former has a "disconnect" system that was difficult to translate directly (basically, when using a kewl power, in some circumstances rolling 1 on a d20 causes the power to stop working, while in other cases rolling 1-4 on that d20 would cause the same thing). Our solution was to simply keep rolling a d20 along with the 3d6 of *GURPS*, specifically for that one mechanic.

Obviously these piecemeal conversions aren't "official," but I figure that these types of conversions are seat-of-the-

pants affairs anyway; for me, making the system work is more important than keeping some mythical conversion purity.

Find the points of commonality between the two games. Usually the best place to start with any conversion is to determine what the games consider to be "average," and go from there. For example, both **GURPS** and the **Hero System** use attribute scores of 10 as a baseline, with 1 as the ultimate low and 20 as a human high. Thus converting from one to the other was, on some levels, trivial. If converting from either to **Fudge**, with its seven-level adjective system (Superb, Great, Good, Fair, Mediocre, Poor, Terrible), it might make sense to convert them to, say: Superb (19), Great (16), Good (13), Fair (10), Mediocre (7), Poor (4), Terrible (1). Likewise the Storyteller system assumes that two dots in an attribute is average, while five is human maximum; mapping those accordingly is trivial.

Be prepared to wing it. Hopefully the game system you're converting to either has lots of rules for many different situations (ala **GURPS**) or encourages the players and GM to make up their own solutions (like **Fudge**). Regardless, there are going to be lots of weird and different situations to resolve. Damage, in particular, can be devilishly difficult to translate between systems. The best suggestion I can offer is to compare known damage levels, and work from there. For example, if a gun does 3d6 damage in one system and three health levels in another, then you can work from there to determine how a special attack ability should translate. (Of course, it's also wise to compare several weapons; hopefully the games' swords and fists do comparable levels of damage as well.)

Observations

These are some systems I've converted games to, with some cursory observations.

Fudge is one of the easiest systems I've found to translate to; not only does it accept just about any kind of ability and power, it *encourages* it. When I translated the old FASA **Star Trek** game to it, I was able to dump that game's extensive skill lists right into **Fudge**.

I've found **GURPS** to be great for any game that relies on heavily detailed humans . . . especially realistic games. (Fortunately, nowadays there are conversion books for a lot of games. But back in *my* day we didn't have all these **GURPS Deadlands** or **GURPS Conspiracy X** or . . . ahem. Anyway, **GURPS** makes it fairly easy to dump new abilities and powers into (and there are lots of examples in the jillion sourcebooks), but finding proper point values can be complicated.

I love **Masterbook** system for anything fairly heroic or "pulp"-y, or any game where I like the players to have a greater-than-normal influence on the game. Its somewhat grainy mechanics make it easy to tweak values that pass a reality check, and the card system can be used to simulate a lot of other games' abilities.

The Storyteller system is useful for cinematic games where social elements play a significant part, where characters need to be reasonably assured of minimal success on very few dice, and where it doesn't matter if characters are very grainy. (That graininess means I can crank out an NPC in less than five minutes . . . or wing it easily.)

The **Hero System** is good for games where it's necessary to define abilities precisely with game effects and point costs. Characters generally end up quite balanced, but the game discourages "creative" uses of unusual powers and abilities (since each effect is built and paid for separately).

Flip a Coin: Heads, You Win is useful for quick-and-dirty conversions, as well as those campaigns where the introduction of ritualistic drinking is desirable.

Good luck!

* * *

Because of a personal emergency, I was called out of town unexpectedly for two weeks and just got back a few days ago. If you sent me anything important (for example, submissions or other correspondence) during the time of Wednesday April 9th and Wednesday, April 23rd, please send it again to make sure that I received it.

--*Steven Marsh*

Designer's Notes: GURPS WWII: Frozen Hell

by Hunter Johnson

You should have had a chance to pick up your copy of **GURPS WWII: Frozen Hell** from you Friendly Local Game Store by now. If not, please do so and then come back and read this article. All set? Great!

Frozen Hell deals with one of the sideshows of WWII. Finland had been traded back and forth between Sweden and Russia for hundreds of years before gaining its own nationhood in the beginning of the 20th century. That the Soviet Union would try to bring that new status to a quick end a few decades later was soundly tsk-tsked by the Western world, but there were still too many things going on in the heart of Europe to worry too much about what was happening in the northern swamplands (in English and in Finnish, Finland's name means "swamp").

Finding out today what transpired there faces similar problems. English-language histories are few and far between. The two best, William R. Trotter's *A Frozen Hell: The Russo-Finnish Winter War of 1939-40* and Carl Van Dyke's *The Soviet Invasion of Finland 1939-40*, were published in the 1990s. I shudder to think what this present book might have looked like if the **GURPS WWII** line had come into being 10 years earlier, without these resources. Happily, I had the luxury of leaning on these books and the even better fortune of having Mr. Trotter write the introduction for the sourcebook. Still, even these two books contradicted each other at times (one drawing on Finnish records, the other on Soviet records), and in some cases both were wrong. In those instances, I am indebted to the Finnish playtesters who could check facts against the current scholarly works not published in English. Since this is a roleplaying sourcebook and not a scholarly history, I also tried to find the full names for the commanders and other personalities who often appeared with their last names only. If the PCs are going to run into (or serve under) a historical leader, it can be useful to know what his full name is!

Another source of frustration came from the gaming side. Games on, say, the Battle of the Bulge clog the shelves and catalogs, but games on the Finnish wars are harder to find. A few are listed in the bibliography of this book; a more complete list can be found on my website at <http://www.hunterandlori.com/WinterWargames.html>.

I prefer to use outtakes from my drafts in these designer's notes articles, but there are very few to choose from. During the course of my work on the book, the page count for the small-format books rose from 32 pages to 48 pages. This makes a "perfect" binding possible, but it also chewed up most of the information that would have been cut. Two micro-biographies of Finnish leaders were dropped from the final draft:

Väinö Tanner

Väinö Tanner was one of the most prominent Finnish politicians in the first half of the 20th century. A conservative Social Democrat, he led the party during the prewar years, and he opposed extremism, even within his own party.

Risto Ryti

President Kyösti Kallio died at his farewell ceremony on December 19th, 1940. Prime Minister Risto Heikki Ryti immediately succeeded him. Ryti was a member of the National Progressive party. He won reelection in 1943, in part because Mannerheim declined to run. Ryti resigned on August 1st, 1944.

The biggest outtake is the Russian T-35 "land battleship" tank, which appears in several Finnish accounts but probably

didn't actually appear on the battlefield. Finnish soldiers were largely unfamiliar with tanks in general, and the Soviet records do not indicate the presence of any T-35s in the Winter War. The T-35 should appear in ***GURPS WWII: Red Tide***, perhaps modified from the version that Brandon Cope sent me. It's quite long, so I'll save it until the end of the article (just a few paragraphs away!).

One omission that I made even while writing my drafts was a discussion of ambient music that GMs or others might use to set the mood during a Winter War game. I'll correct that oversight now. Jean Sibelius is Finland's most famous composer, and his *Finlandia* (composed in 1899, before Finland's independence) helped nurture the Finn's growing national identity. Other Sibelius works that are easy to find and well-suited are his symphonies (seven of them), *Kullervo*, and *Tapiola*.

Georg Malmstén composed popular music during the war years (and before and after too). He was so prolific that some of his songs were credited to "Matti Reima." CDs will be hard to find, but one recent one is entitled *20 Suosikkia*. And just for variety, you might check out Amorphis' *Tales from the Thousand Lakes*. One of its reviewers calls it a "doom-death hybrid" in the metal genre.

Speaking of heavy metal, I now give you Brandon Cope's T-35:

T-35 Heavy Tank

The T-35, based on "land battleship" designs produced in Germany and Great Britain and designed to force its way through heavy defenses, debuted in 1932. The 1935 version mounted one main turret with a 76.2mm low-velocity gun, two turrets with 45mm guns and two MG turrets. The 45mm turrets were on the right front and left rear of the hull and the MG turrets on the left front and right rear. The main turret could rotate 360 degrees, while the smaller turrets could only rotate 184-191 degrees, depending on location. The smaller turrets also could not "unbutton" to allow their gunners to pop up and fire the guns from an unobstructed viewpoint. Their heads would have been in the way of the main gun if they had been able to do so.

Initially, it had 37mm guns instead of the 45mm ones, but these were upgraded in the main production model. The new 45mm turrets were slightly modified BT-5 turrets while the MG turrets were taken from the T-37 tank. The secondary turrets were of dubious value. Like other tanks of this size in the 1930s, it was simply too large to armor adequately.

The T-35 initially had a crew of 11 men, but this was down to 10 by the time of the Winter War. There are two men in the turret: the Commander serves as main gun loader and fires the rear turret MG and, if present, the A/A MG, while the Senior Radio Operator operates the radio and assists with loading the main gun. The Commander of the Main Turret sits to the left of the main gun and serves as gunner for the 76.2mm gun and coaxial MG. Each of the 45mm turrets has a gunner (Commander's Assistant forward and Commander of Turret #4 rear) and loader (Commander of Turret #2 and the Junior Tank Driver) and each of the MG turrets has a gunner (the Tank Driver and Commander of Turret #5). The Junior Tank Technician sits in the steering compartment and drives the tank -- no, none of the crewmen actually designated as Tank Drivers handle this duty. He might keep a large hammer nearby to persuade the stubborn shift lever into a new position.

The combat compartments were walled off; the only way in and out of the tank was through the roof hatches. In the field, this was particularly dangerous for the main turret crew, as the main turret sat higher than usual so that its fire would clear the other turrets. The crewmen at each turret used phones to communicate with the other turrets.

Two more crewmen are assigned to each tank, but do not ride in it. The Senior Tank Driver is responsible for keeping the transmission and running gear operational, and the Motor Mechanic is responsible for the engine.

The T-35 uses 16.8 gallons per hour at routine usage.

A total of 61 T-35s were built. The T-35 made its first battlefield appearance in the Winter War, although some sources dispute its presence here at all. Those that were still operational in 1940 were added to the 34th Tank Division. Most of those were lost to mechanical failures by mid-1941. The remaining few saw action in Moscow at the end of

1941. None were used in battle after 1941. Of 47 lost during WWII, only 7 were lost to enemy fire. The rest succumbed to mechanical problems or terrain.

Subassemblies: Very Large Tank chassis +4, full rotation Medium AFV turret #1 [Body:T] +2, two limited rotation Large Weapon turrets #2-3 [Body:T] +2, two limited rotation Medium Weapon turrets #4-5 [Body:T] +1, tracks +3.
Powertrain: 373-kW gas engine w/ 373-kW tracked drive train and 240 gallons fuel in standard fuel tank [body]; 16,000-kWs batteries.
Occupancy: 2 CS Body, 9 CS body and turrets Cargo: 1.1 Body, 5.8 Turret #1, 3.5 each Turrets #2-3, 2 each Turrets #4-5

Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
<i>Body:</i>	4/120	4/100	4/70	4/80	4/80
<i>Turrets #1:</i>	4/70	4/70	4/70	4/50	0/0
<i>Turrets #2-5:</i>	4/70	4/70	4/70	4/35	0/0
<i>Tracks:</i>	4/50	4/50	4/50	4/50	4/50

Weaponry

75mm Short TG/76.2mm PS-3 [Tur1:F] (96).
47mm Short TG/45mm M-1932 [Tur2:F] (110).
47mm Short TG/45mm M-1932 [Tur3:F] (110).
Ground LMG/DT [Tur1:F] (2000).
Ground LMG/DT [Tur1:B] (2000).
Ground LMG/DT [Tur2:F] (2000).
Ground LMG/DT [Tur3:F] (2000).
Ground LMG/DT [Tur4:F] (2000).
Ground LMG/DT [Tur5:F] (2000).

Statistics

Size: 32'×11'×11' *Payload:* 3.9 tons *Lwt.:* 45 tons
Volume: 227 *Maint.:* 33 hours. *Price:* \$36,400

HT: 7. HPs: 2300 Body, 200 Main Turret, 120 each 45mm Turret, 75 each MG Turret, 800 each Track.

gSpeed: 19 *gAccel:* 2 *gDecel:* 20 *gMR:* 0.25 *gSR:* 6
Ground Pressure Low (2/3 Speed)

Design Notes

The design weight was increased 33% to match historical weight and gSpeed was reduced from the 26 mph design speed. HT was reduced from 9 to 7 to reflect the historical lack of reliability.

Variants

Model 1938: The frontal armor on all turrets was increased to DR 120. Only six were built.

Flamethrower: Some tanks had the 45mm in one turret replaced by a flamethrower.

SU-7: This tank used the same chassis to carry a heavy (254-400mm) cannon, howitzer, or mortar.

SU-14: As the SU-7, but for 152mm or 203mm guns.

Making Time

Bleeding Edge Technologists in the Middle Ages

by Phil Masters

Some people may still think of the Middle Ages as a time of technological stasis or even decline. However, most gamers with an interest in the history are probably aware that, in fact, technology advanced quite substantially in this era. However, with the notable exceptions of full plate armor and very early gunpowder developments, many of the new inventions may perhaps seem a little unglamorous or low key from a gamer's viewpoint.

But there is one great late medieval invention which really can look miraculous and wondrous in even the most realistic of medieval games. What's more, it is a technology which appeared, in very different forms, in both China and Europe as they passed through what **GURPS** would call late TL3.

The invention in question is the mechanical clock. This article describes this new technology, but focuses primarily on the sorts of characters who might get to work on it -- some of the most sophisticated technologists it would be possible to encounter in a more or less realistic medieval game.

Historical Background

The measurement of time by artificial devices is something which goes back to the Bronze Age or thereabouts; the ancient Egyptians certainly had sundials and water-clocks. However, these sorts of devices have limited usefulness; sundials, for example, have to be set up and calibrated using precise astronomical and geographical knowledge, and then only work on sunny days, while water clocks demand a constant head of pressure to provide a reliable, consistent flow. Neither is exactly easy to move around, either.

In any case, people in such early times might well have asked, "Who needs precise timekeeping?" The day, from dawn to dawn or sunset to sunset, was an obvious and sufficient unit of time for most folk. Of course, farmers needed to track the seasons, but simple observations of the sun and moon could handle that. Tracking time could look like a mere affectation -- as with the rich Romans who bought expensive water-clocks and then assigned special slaves to watch them and call out the time at periodic intervals. (People perhaps did realize that precise timekeeping could be very useful for navigation purposes, especially at sea, but the problems of finding devices which would keep correct time on a moving, shaking ship were vast.)

Still, it could be convenient to give fixed times to specific tasks, and primitive clocks were usually available in most societies -- if only in the form of candles or sticks of incense which burned at a fairly constant rate. The people who became most concerned with ever greater precision were those who had to organize *rituals* of one sort or another.

Ever since very early times, astrology was considered very important in many societies, and astrologers were responsible for some very precise and useful astronomical and chronological work. In China in the Middle Ages, it was considered very important to know the precise astrological circumstances of the birth of a member of the royal family -- but, of course, clouds and other circumstances could make direct observation difficult. So, in 1088 AD, a mandarin named Su Sung invented a giant machine to solve this problem.

This was presumably inspired by the water-clocks which had been used in China for centuries, as it used a flow of water from a constant-level tank to move a water wheel. However, this wheel was linked to a regulating "linkwork" mechanism which ensured that it moved at a steady, controlled pace -- an "escapement" comparable to the invention which is central to the modern mechanical clock, and actually much better than anything built in Europe for centuries. The wheel then moved a mechanism which enabled the court astrologers to judge the precise state of the heavens at the moment of any important birth.

However, Su Sung's masterpiece was soon forgotten -- doubtless it all seemed too complicated, expensive, and limited in usefulness, and was too easily destroyed in one of China's civil wars or barbarian invasions. The modern clock was invented in another land, for another ritual purpose.

Europe

The Christian monasteries of the European Middle Ages were run on *rules*, often laid down by the founders of the various orders. These encouraged disciplined, controlled lives, and often laid down very precise times for prayers, meals, and other activities (and penalties for lateness). The more seriously the monks took these disciplines, the more precise they wanted their clocks to be.

Sundials and primitive clocks were available, and seem to have been quite popular at times; there was a Guild of Clockmakers (who evidently made water-clocks) in Cologne in 1220, occupying a whole street of their own, the *Urologengasse*. But these ancient devices still had their old limitations, and some thoughtful, educated monks were looking for something better.

The English word "clock" actually comes from Latin and French words for "bell." Churches and monasteries used bells to summons worshippers to services, and the idea of sounding them automatically was the key to the invention of the clock. Indeed, for years or centuries, clocks had no faces -- just bells. The power for such a device could come from, say, a descending weight. The problem was to regulate the movement.

In 1271, one writer noted that some clockmakers were working on this problem, but hadn't succeeded yet. Another text, from 1277, describes a mechanism regulated by a rotating drum divided into compartments partly filled with mercury, which flowed at a regular speed as it turned. However, the key invention was the "escapement," a device which would let a mechanism move on, one regular tick at a time -- and the first recorded clock with one of those seems to come from 1283. With other, similar inventions dated to 1284, 1286, and onwards, this is one medieval invention that can be dated quite precisely. The records in question all come from England, although the idea seems to have been discussed all around Europe at this time, and clocks were certainly introduced in other lands at much the same time.

The first clock mechanism of which details survive is the slightly unusual escapement built for the Abbey of St. Albans in 1328, while the oldest surviving mechanical clock in England, that of Salisbury Cathedral, comes from 1386. (It has been restored to full working order in modern times, although at some point in history it was converted to a pendulum mechanism -- a 17th century invention -- from the older pivoting bar design.) By that date, clockwork was being applied to complex astronomical models in Italy, which in turn probably led to the simpler and more generally useful idea of the clock face. But even with just bells, clocks were having a social effect.

In the early 14th century, Dante made a poetic reference to clockwork in the *Divine Comedy*, showing that he assumed that his readers would have seen such things, and by 1335, French textile employees were working fixed hours, governed by the chiming of bells. Clocks were installed on secular public buildings as well as churches, and people began to live their lives by them. Although only the rich would be able to afford private clocks for many centuries yet, people's lives were increasingly being governed by machines.

In fact, in terms of the *psychological* boundaries between **GURPS** tech levels, this may be a key. For most of TL3 (and earlier), people mostly live by the day. With the invention of the clock, and through all of TL4, people live by the hour, paying attention to bells and public clocks. However, they may well still have a very casual attitude to timekeeping by modern standards. There is no concept of, say, fixed appointments; characters go to visit somebody when it suits them, and if he's out, or busy, and they have to wait, that's just bad luck, and no one's fault. It is only at TL5, with the invention of precision chronometers and the spread of personal clocks and watches, that people begin to live by the minute.

Absolute Timing

The **GURPS** character advantage "Absolute Timing" is rather cinematic at the best of times; in an authentic pre-modern style of game, it's just plain weird. After all, it enables a character to know something

So medieval clockmakers are the early harbingers of Renaissance technology -- experts in advanced inventions which will eventually change the world. Some players and GMs may find such a character concept rather interesting.

The Makers

Low-tech mechanical clock making requires an unusual combination of talents. First, it calls for considerable practical skills; a clock is likely the most complex gadget in this society. However, it is also bleeding edge *science*, involving physics and applied mathematics, and astronomy as a source of reference data. The problem is that many low-tech scholars disdain practical skills, and few low-tech craftsmen receive an academic education. It's possible that a scholar might find other people to build his designs, but he will need at least some idea of what is physically possible. Thus, clockmaker characters tend to be unusual.

No-one seems to know where, say, Su Sung got his detailed ideas or practical skills, but it is known that Richard of Wallingford, the abbot of St. Albans in 1328, was the son of a blacksmith. In other words, he came from a fairly humble craftsman's family, but gained an education and worked his way up to some power in the church. This would have given him the combination of philosophical/scientific knowledge, practical outlook, and control of funds, that a spectacular new high-tech project demands. Other clockmakers and medieval gadgeteers, such as Giovanni de' Dondi of Padua, who designed an "astrarium" (a sort of clockwork planetarium) in the mid-14th century, were more secular characters (although the education such work required would have involved at least some contact with religious institutions). They, however, would have needed patrons to provide them with funds and other support. In other words, this would be a great way for characters to get close to dukes and princes, and to become noted for cleverness and special knowledge. Even if players don't want to *play* such oddball geniuses, they might have dealings with them; a mission to bodyguard some unworldly churchman, or the Duke's pet gadgeteer, while he chases down some obscure manuscript or transports some incredibly fragile gadget to the court, could be an interesting task (and an opportunity for the GM to play an absent-minded boffin type in a medieval game).

Clockmaker Template (70 points)

To show how this might come together in game terms, the following is a template for TL3 characters who invent and build clocks. Note that it should be used for the creative geniuses behind the inventions; a clockmaker may of course have a number of merely competent assistants with lesser abilities.

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 13 [30]; HT 10 [0].

Advantages: Literacy [10]; and a total of 20 points chosen from among +1 or +2 DX [10 or 20]; Administrative Rank [5/level]; Clerical Investment [varies]; Comfortable [10]; Cool [1]; Less Sleep [3/level]; Lightning Calculator [5]; Manual Dexterity [3/level]; Mathematical Ability [10]; Patron [varies]; Reputation (among other scholars or natural philosophers) [varies]; Single-Minded [5]; Status +1 [5]; and Versatile [5].

Disadvantages: A total of -15 points chosen from among Absent-Mindedness [-15]; Attentive [-1]; Clueless [-10]; Curious [varies]; Disciplines of Faith [varies]; Dreamer [-1]; Duty [varies]; Oblivious [-3]; Obsession [-5 to -15]; Shyness [-5 to -15]; Staid [-1]; Struggling [-10]; Stubbornness [-5]; Unfit [-5]; and Workaholic [-5].

more precisely than the most advanced scientific instruments of the era. In this context, the only thing that saves it from looking like a superpower is the fact that its usefulness is severely limited. When few other people know the exact time, to the second, what use is one person knowing it instinctively?

Still, a character with this advantage could end up functioning as a uniquely effective astronomer or navigator. GMs looking to preserve "period feel" in early-period games should probably ban this advantage.

Time and Magic

Like many other technologies, clocks might not be required, or at least might not be so widespread or quick to develop, in worlds where magic works and the full list of **GURPS** spells is available. The spells "Tell Time" and "Alarm" (see **GURPS Magic**, p.M53) seem to work better than any pre-TL5 clock, and are not especially hard to learn. Magic items incorporating the former spell would make rather expensive "magical wristwatches" (\$4,510 each according to the guidelines in **GURPS Magic**), and would

Primary Skills: Cyphering (M/E) IQ [1]-13, and *either* Engineer (clockwork) (M/H) IQ+1 [6]-14 and Mechanic (clockwork) (M/A) IQ [2]-13, *or* Engineer (clockwork) (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-12 and Mechanic (clockwork) (M/A) IQ+2 [6]-15.

Secondary Skills: Astrology (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-12; Mathematics (M/H) IQ-2 [1]-11; Carpentry (M/E) IQ [1]-13.

Background Skills: A total of 12 points in any of: Abacus (M/A); Appreciate Beauty (M/VH); Architecture (M/A); Artist (M/H); Blacksmith (M/A); Climbing (P/A); Engineer (other specializations) (M/H); Languages (varies); Masonry (P/E); Mechanic (other specializations) (M/A); Metallurgy (M/H); Performance/Ritual (M/A); Philosophy (M/H); Teaching (M/A); Theology (M/H); Woodworking (P/A); and any Primary or Secondary Skills.

Design Notes

(For those who want to see behind the curtain)

Attributes: Good IQ is absolutely required here; this is highly innovative technology. Good DX would be nice, but even a craftsman who has to do the building work himself can get by with Manual Dexterity.

Advantages: Literacy is mandatory in this sort of field. Clock making may also bring prestige or a little wealth. Other options reflect ritual activities (such as membership of a religious order), technical aptitude, mental focus, or the support of powerful individuals or institutions (always useful for high-tech projects). In cinematic games, Gadeteer or High Technology might be added to the template, or at least to many clockmaker characters.

Disadvantages: Some of these reflect the mild eccentricity that might drive this choice of career. (Clockmakers are likely to have strong, perhaps geeky, personalities.) Others represent a relationship with a patron, monastery, or church.

Primary Skills: The basis for this job is a working grasp of numbers, plus some mixture of theory (Engineer) and application (Mechanic).

Secondary Skills: These are based on what the character will surely have picked up along the way. In the absence of pre-existing clocks, astronomy (officially referred to as "astrology" in **GURPS** at this TL) provides the best available source of chronometric information.

Background Skills: These are things that a craftsman, scientist, priest, monk, or astrologer might happen to have studied.

Sample Clockmaker Character: Brother Martin (100 points)

Age 37; 5'7", 150 lbs.; a stocky, quite brawny, one-eyed German monk.

Martin (a fellow of humble birth, with no other names worth mentioning) became a soldier in the armies of his native Germany to get away from farming, and later became an artilleryman to get away from hand-to-hand combat. Along the way, he learned to work metals and wood -- anything to

probably be very rare, but a simple Alarm item would be cheap (\$60). One could easily imagine a temple, monastery, or rich man acquiring three or four such items to order, giving them to an unskilled servant, monk, or serf, and telling him to ring a bell or call out from a tower whenever they go off.

However, this may be looking at things the wrong way round. The fact is that these accurate and precise timekeeping spells may not be *conceivable* in a society with a truly pre-modern attitude to time, and so, logically, might not exist. (Perhaps they could be found lurking in some forgotten grimoires somewhere, puzzling all but the most imaginative students.) Time spells might be an early sign of the evolution of "technomagic" -- magic as an industrial process.

Likewise, anyone attempting to create "authentic" fantasy worlds might assume that the widespread availability of these spells would create a more "regularized" society, more concerned with precision and punctuality than the real Middle Ages. They would also be a godsend for both astronomers and navigators, potentially giving a significant boost to both non-magical science and ocean travel. This *would* at least have the virtue of making the setting feel more familiar to modern-day players, and could reduce the culture shock for, say, newcomers to worlds such as Yrth (see **GURPS Fantasy**) - - although discovering that a town's "clock" is actually a dim but reliable fellow, sitting by a bell rope while wearing a magic item, could add to the strangeness.

keep the guns functional and get them where they were needed. Then, the week after the army he was in sacked a church, an act which made trouble for his latent conscience, Martin's cannon blew up on firing, leaving him badly maimed.

He took that as a sign and a punishment from God, and went into a monastery to make restitution for his past deeds. (In truth, it looked like a safer choice than most other options he could think of, too.) There, the quick mind and willingness to learn which had made him a capable gunner again proved useful. He learned to read, and caught the attention of his superiors as a useful fellow to have around. Now, he finds his cleverness called on by an abbot of his order, who's obsessed with these new-fangled *clocks*. Martin provides the practical skill with his hands, while the abbot and other, more scholarly brothers help with the mathematics and other ideas. If the current project goes according to plan, Martin may well find himself being sent around other churches and monasteries, helping to spread the new technology. When obliged to travel, he usually begs transport on passing carts and wagons, as his injuries make him painfully slow on his feet.

Any PC with an interest in mechanical devices could find it worthwhile tracking down Martin for a conversation; he is devout, and mostly interested in using clocks to regulate monastic life, but he may be interested by other ideas. He won't like talking about military applications of technology, but he will usually remain polite, if a little taciturn, and he isn't a fanatical pacifist -- he just has some bad memories. If encountered on the road, between tasks, Martin may strike PCs as a rather mysterious figure, a maimed and brooding monk who deals in strange ideas; some may have encountered him in his old life, and may be puzzled by his unwillingness to talk about those days.

Note that Martin's nationality can, of course, be changed simply by changing his native language, and possibly his name. He is assumed to have forgotten some of his military skills; he may have been a markedly better gunner and foot-soldier in his time.

Brother Martin has a higher level of disadvantages than is allowed for PCs in some campaigns, and isn't likely to be much direct use to parties of mercenaries or monster hunters. Still, he could serve as a PC in some games.

Attributes: ST 13 [30]; DX 11 [10]; IQ 13 [30]; HT 11 [10].

Basic Speed 5.25; Move 2.

Dodge 2.

Advantages: Literacy [10]; Manual Dexterity +2 [6]; Patron (Abbot, 12-) [20].

Disadvantages: Disciplines of Faith (monasticism) [-10]; Duty (to Abbot, non-life-threatening, 15-) [-10]; Lameness (crippled leg) [-15]; One Eye [-15].

Quirks: Dislikes remembering his military career; Has a stern conscience; Jokes about clocks to the novices. [-3]

Skills: Astrology/TL3-12 [2]; Blacksmith/TL3-14 [4]; Brawling-11 [1]; Carpentry-14 [2]; Cyphering-14 [2]; Engineer/TL3 (clockwork)-12 [2]; Gunner/TL3 (cannon)-13 [8]; Mathematics-11 [1]; Mechanic/TL3 (clockwork)-15 [6]; Mechanic/TL3 (wagons)-14 [4]; Metallurgy/TL3-11 [1]; Polearm-10 [1]; Savoir-Faire (Military)-13 [1]; Theology-11 [1].

Languages: German (native)-13 [0]; Latin-12 [1].

Equipment: Small hammers, tongs, pry-bars, etc.

References

Whitrow, G.J., *Time in History*. (Oxford University Press: ISBN 0-19-285211-6.) A fascinating book, with a broad scope and plenty of cross-references to other sources. Useful reading for any historical gamers looking to get into the mindset of times and cultures other than their own.

Warm-Blooded Vampire

by Elizabeth McCoy

Called various things, from "warm-bloods" to "nephelim" to "mutant half-breeds," these vampires were never precisely *killed* to become undead. They are, instead, the product of truly undead vampire parents -- their sires are vampires and their mothers became vampires while pregnant.

On the plus side for these beings, warm-bloods age very slowly -- about half normal rate till adult-hood, and then drop to a rate of approximately 1 year of aging for every 20. (Unfortunately for those caring for this half-breed, this *does* mean the "Terrible Twos" last two years instead of only one, and puberty is likewise drawn out -- the vampire child may learn more skills normally, but certain brain developments are more age-related, and personality aspects related to those will therefore be endured longer.)

As a further benefit, a half-breed requires much less blood (or death, depending on the sort of vampire; see Barbara Hambly's *Those Who Hunt the Night* for vampires which must kill to survive). If a regular vampire needs to feed once a night, the half-vampire may survive with one feeding a week. (If the regular sort needs a feeding a week, the half-breed only requires one per month, etc.) However, they must eat normal food instead, just like a regular human. (One vampiric meal will substitute for regular food.)

And finally, they aren't very affected by sunlight -- they sunburn somewhat more quickly than a fair-skinned human (*GURPS* Albinism rules are useful) and have minor vision penalties in bright sunlight -- and they're slightly stronger than the average human.

On the minus side, they're only *slightly* stronger than the average human. (In *GURPS* terms, +2 to all attributes but IQ; in *In Nomine* terms, 3 extra characteristic points for Corporeal Forces attributes, and +2 Precision.) Most of them, however, can boost themselves supernaturally -- at the cost of having to feed immediately afterward. (E.g., doubling strength for fighting or enhancing their running to flee a mob scene, for a minute or two.) Note, that's *most* of them -- some unlucky individuals aren't vampire enough to surpass their semi-mortal heritage. They're also affected by normal weapons, and show up in mirrors.

Naturally, they get fangs sharp enough to draw blood, and tend to possess at least a minor form of their vampire parents' other supernatural abilities. While some vampires mock them, others are more wary of getting on the bad side of someone who can walk around in the daytime. Besides the obvious dangers, half-breeds can make life much easier when they're friendly -- they're less likely to have second thoughts about working for blood-sucking undead when they think of blood-sucking undead as "Mom, Dad, and Uncle Henry."

Many people believe that a warm-blood will rise as a true vampire upon his death. This is up to the GM to decide, as most half-breeds are considered vampires by regular humans and tend to be dispatched with fire, beheading, or general dismemberment, and therefore never get a chance.

Explicit GM Options

This type of vampire -- or, technically, vampire offspring -- may be the default for a campaign world, linked to a specific bloodline (such as *Vampire: The Masquerade* or Kim Newman's *Anno Dracula* books posit), or it may require the use of special alchemical potions or spells. (E.g., *In Nomine* might use a variant of the Corporeal Song of Fruition.) The vampire-child may continue to gestate "normally," or it might be born shortly after the mother becomes undead -- this would require good timing, lest the child be too premature to survive.

A half-breed may be unable to create other vampires, create vampires normally, or only be able to create other warm-bloods like himself. If the latter, this might well be discouraged -- a newly created warm-blood is unlikely to be as sympathetic to the blood-sucking condition as the vampire-child raised by its undead parents and other "relations."

However, some groups might think that suitable indoctrination, and frequent reminders that mortals don't tend to distinguish between types of blood-suckers, will maintain loyalty.

Biologically, a half-breed might be sterile, or normally fertile; offspring might be normal -- or have special abilities, such as magical aptitude or psionics, or simply improved stats.

Sample Characters

"Benny" (Bernard Richardson)

Physically, Benny is a fairly typical warm-blood; while he's a little weaker on the bench-press, he can boost himself with the usual costs. He's slightly more mentally-oriented, and prefers to run away from large combats -- for someone raised in a blood-sucking environment, he's actually fairly moral. ("Squeamish" to some of his vampire kin.) In appearance, he's dark-haired and brown-eyed, with a half-Black skin-tone. (His father was Caucasian, his mother was Black.)

His vampiric family consists of his father, who affects the name "Drac" and is the leader of the hunting pack, his father's harem (most of them mothers of vampire-children), and a few stray males who owe their undead status to members of the harem. (Any of them who go up against Drac tend to perish, but get replaced eventually.) There are currently four warm-bloods in the pack, counting Benny. One of the others is Robert, who is both spacey and vampirically weak. Benny's taken Robert under his wing, so to speak -- from "big brother" status when they were both pre-pubescent, Benny's now deemed to be Robert's proper keeper by the rest of the pack.

The other two, older half-breeds are Natalie and Sasha (male); Natalie has an actual job that helps support the pack, while Sasha, the eldest, gets odd jobs as the other vampire-children do and takes after Drac as much as he can. (I.e., he dresses all in black, periodically tries to seduce attractive women with whatever force seems necessary, and sneers at the other warm-bloods and even the other vampires when he thinks he can get away with it.)

Benny, despite a somewhat dysfunctional "family," is fairly well-adjusted . . . as vampires go. He doesn't go in for bullying those weaker than himself (unless he's in a *really* bad mood), and takes care of Robert even when he's exasperated with the other half-breed. He's not big on killing, and prefers to use his minor mind-clouding abilities so that his targets don't remember his business-like feeding. When faced with threats from humans, he runs away (augmenting his speed if necessary) unless he has to protect someone -- and he'd rather protect the other person by carting him off while running.

His one notable quirk is that he's fascinated by babies. He tends to touch them or pick them up whenever he sees them -- which often gets him into trouble with their mothers, as he has no understanding of the etiquette of touching other people's children. He's also highly protective of babies. (This fascination and protectiveness fades, the older the child is, till they're about 15-17; then he treats them as "adult.") His attitude -- much to the disgust of Sasha, "dark lover of the night, in tune with vampire potency" -- is entirely non-sexual. In truth, he doesn't have the faintest idea that anyone *could* consider children as anything other than tiny little creatures to be protected. If he became aware that someone was threatening or harming young children, he would try to protect the youngsters.

(This aspect of Benny is most likely to draw him to the attention of PCs, either as a perceived threat -- "The blood-sucker likes kids!" -- or as a mysterious vigilante who leaves his victims anemic.)

GURPS Version

Benny

Attributes: ST 11, DX 13, IQ 11, HT 12.

Advantages: Alertness +1, Bite (racial), Catfall (racial), Charisma +1, Hyper-Strength (racial), Hyper-Reflexes

(racial), Immune to Disease (racial), Knack: Daze (racial; requires eye-contact or touch, not broken by gentle feeding, costs 1 Fatigue), Night Vision (racial), Strong Will +1, Unaging* (racial).

Disadvantages: Curious, Dependency (racial; 2 HT worth of blood, weekly), Sense of Duty (children), Dependant: Robert, Secret (racial, vamperic; would turn into Enemy), Sun-sensitive (-5; like Albinism save for coloration).

Quirks: Fascinated by babies; Taciturn; Pacifistic.

Skills: Acting-13, Brawling-14, Carousing-12, Climbing-15, Fast-Talk-13, First Aid-11, Holdout-12, Knife-16, Knife Throwing-13, Motorcycle-13, Occultism-10, Scrounging-14, Stealth-14, Streetwise-13, Survival (Urban)-12.

* Technically, this is several levels of Extended Lifespan; Unaging is cheaper.

Robert

Attributes: ST 11, DX 11, IQ 11, HT 11.

Advantages: Appearance: Attractive, Bite (racial), Catfall (racial), Hyper-Strength (racial), Hyper-Reflexes (racial), Immune to Disease (racial), Knack: Daze (racial; requires eye-contact or touch, not broken by gentle feeding, costs 1 Fatigue), Night Vision (racial), Unaging (racial).

Disadvantages: Absent-Mindedness, Chronic Depression*, Clueless, Dependency (racial; 2 HT worth of blood, weekly), Distractible, Low Empathy, Secret (racial, vamperic; would turn into Enemy), Sun-sensitive (-5; like Albinism save for coloration).

Quirks: Stalks stray animals.

Skills Brawling-11, Climbing-13, Scrounging-12, Stealth-14, Survival (Urban)-10.

* Robert isn't precisely *depressed* so much as unaware of the rest of the universe most of the time. The mechanics work well, though.

In Nomine Version

Benny

Corporeal Forces - 2	Strength 5	Agility 6
Ethereal Forces - 1	Intelligence 3	Precision 3
Celestial Forces - 2	Will 4	Perception 4

Skills: Climbing/3, Emote/1, Fast-Talk/2, Fighting/3, Driving/1, Move Silently/2, Small Weapon/4 (Knife).

Songs: Entropy (Celestial/5; variant causing a peaceful daze)

Robert

Corporeal Forces - 2	Strength 5	Agility 6
Ethereal Forces - 1	Intelligence 2	Precision 4
Celestial Forces - 2	Will 5	Perception 3

Skills: Climbing/2, Fighting/2, Move Silently/2

Songs: Entropy (Celestial/5; variant causing a peaceful daze)

In this version, "Drac" is a mummy sorcerer and necromancer, using a conception ritual that mimics the Corporeal Song of Fruition in many ways, and then a necromantic ritual some 8.5 months later. His hunting pack is mostly

vamperic, but some are also mummies and he's been known to create zombis from time to time. If he has ties to demons, they're not known to the vampire-children.

Robert the Fair

for *Ars Magica*

by Adam Gauntlett

Robert the Fair -- Minor Nobility

INT +1 **STR** -1 **COM** +2 **DEX** -1
PER 0 **STA** -1 **PRE** +1 **QIK** -1

Robert is intelligent, but age has withered his tall frame and long shanks. However, he's still an impressive speaker and his silver hairs only add to his noble bearing.

Virtues

- +2 *Lesser Noble*. Robert is the bastard son of the former Baron.
- +1 *Educated*. Robert's father was fond of him and provided a stipend for his education.
- +1 *Inspirational*. Robert was a famous warrior in his youth and some of the old glamour still clings to him.
- +1 *Veteran*. Robert spent his wild youth in constant conflict, defending the magi of his covenant.
- +2 *Temporal Influence*. Although Robert has fallen on hard times, he still has friends in high places who are willing to listen to their former ally.
- +2 *Famous*. Robert was a champion of the tourney field and his exploits are still remembered by some troubadors.
- +1 *Arcane Knowledge*. Robert saw many odd things when he fought for his covenant and he was canny enough to pay attention when the magi spoke.

Flaws

- -1 *Overbearing Underlings*. Many of Robert's servants are actually his sister's bondsmen. They do not always pay attention to their master, since their mistress' words carry more weight.
- -2 *Jinxed*. This flaw has followed Robert all of his life and prevented him from getting the recognition that he seeks.
- -1 *Expenses*. Lawsuits have eaten up Robert's capital. He has been forced to use his armor and weapons as security for loans, although he still harbors a hope that he will be able to redeem them someday.
- -1 *Oath of Fealty*. The current Baron's son has Robert's loyalty, if not his respect. Robert finds it difficult to respect people who are not of his generation.
- -3 *Arthritis*. Age has taken its toll and Robert is not as spry as he was.
- -2 *Common Fear: Birds*. Robert has never liked feathered creatures. He is allergic to them. Further, some very bad experiences have taught Robert to loathe all Aves, particularly Corvids (Ravens).
- -4 *Plagued by Faerie: the Lady of Corpses*.

Decrepitude: 2

Skills (age 48 plus Veteran).

Speak Own Language 5; Area Lore (Village) 4; Area Lore (Barony) 5; Athletics 3; Folk Ken (Nobility) 4; Ride 4; Etiquette 4; Speak Latin 2; Scribe Latin 1; Philosophy 1; Theology 1; Occult Lore 3; Leadership 2; Intrigue 1; Organization Lore (Order of Hermes) 1

Combat Skills

Shield & Weapon 6; Longshaft Weapon 4

Reputations

Tournament Champion 4; Unsavory Past (nobles) 1

Personality

Honest +2

Just +1

Background

Robert is one of six bastard children of the former Baron. Three of Robert's siblings survive, including his sister Iocasta. Robert's half-brother Meroc is the current Baron, who is himself one of the Baron's three legitimate children. Through his relatives, Robert is linked to many of the noble families of the region.

Robert's father intended him for the priesthood, since he would never inherit any property of his own. From the age of six Robert was cloistered in a monastery, learning a monk's duties but never any of their piety. The abbot had the unenviable task of writing to the Baron on a regular basis, telling him about "your young scapegrace's latest exploits." Scapegrace was the kindest word that Abbot Jerome used. As time wore on and the Abbot's patience began to wane, Robert was described as "a rogue," "Pestilence," "the Cross which I am forced to bear," and finally "that wretched, perverse, and wholly unrepentant rascal who, I must advise your Lordship, has worn out his welcome here. It is with regret that I pen these words. However, I am convinced, (and so, Sir, should you be), that although Robert may at some stage become a good man (for the ways of God are indeed mysterious), he will never make a good monk."

Robert left the abbey at the age of 15, with some knowledge of theology and a reasonable command of Latin but little else. Although Robert has become slightly more pious with age, his attendance at church services has always been irregular. When Robert travels he is forced to stay at monasteries much of the time, and whenever there he is always ill at ease. He cannot shake the impression that, despite all appearances to the contrary, he has become a youth again and at any moment an irate Abbot will appear to punish him for something.

Resigning himself to the inevitable, the Baron provided Robert with enough funds to purchase armaments and a good horse. He also provided Robert with an introduction to an old family friend, a knight of good renown named Valence who was to take young Robert on as a squire.

Under Valence's tutelage, Robert became a dangerous swordsman and an expert horseman. When the Baron was forced to defend his lands against incursions from his neighbors, Valence and his squire were in the forefront of the battle. Robert was overjoyed. He was ambitious and craved knighthood, and the quickest means of getting this was to distinguish himself in combat.

While on the march, Valence, his squire, and their retinue camped not far from a long, low mound. The locals called it Quenhowe and sometimes held festivals there, but the custom had fallen into disuse and now few people went near it. The place had a bad reputation, and some said that the Queen of the Dead held court there. Valence knew very little of these stories, and what he did know he scoffed at. Robert, who followed his master in all things, did likewise.

They were foolish. The mound was a Faerie dwelling, where a Morae -- a Dream-Walker -- lived. This creature, who some peasants called the Lady of Corpses, hated humanity because they had forgotten her. The sudden arrival of men bearing iron, sleeping near her mound, incensed her. She decided to strike out at their leader. In her Raven form, she visited their camp and when the moon was full she sank her claws deep into his mind, intending to slay him with evil dreams. However, Robert caught the Lady of Corpses in the act and drove her off, slashing off one of her forelegs in

doing so. From that day to this the Lady of the Mound has lacked a hand, and her Raven lacks a claw.

The Lady hid, licking her wounds. Robert went on to fight for his Baron, but the fame he was seeking eluded him. Although he was able to get a few small ransoms, he didn't quite manage to catch his father's eye. He remained a squire.

Valence died of the flux during the war, and Robert was left without knighthood or employment. Pride kept him from appealing to his family for aid. Instead he listened to a plausible scholar who said that he knew of a "covenant," (Robert had never heard the term before), which needed good warriors. The scholar spent money freely and seemed to have supporters amongst the nobility. Robert hoped that he could find the fame at the covenant that had eluded him on the battlefield. He pledged his sword to the covenant's service.

Over the years Robert became stronger, and even managed to save a little money. However, he never gained the knighthood that he sought. In fact, he noticed that he was getting a bad reputation amongst his fellow gentlefolk. Although the magi had some sponsors amongst the nobility they had many more detractors. This didn't matter to the covenant's other servants since they expected to get their rewards from the wizards, not the Baron or the King. Robert was different. He wanted recognition, a manor, a coat of arms, and none of these things would ever be his while he served the covenant.

In addition, the bad luck that was to become his trademark had begun to manifest. Although Robert had almost forgotten the Lady of Corpses she had not forgotten him. The injury that he had done her would be punished. Rather than attack him directly she plagued his friends, his servants and his allies, stripping him of every advantage that his birth or his sword might win him. Whenever she injured Robert directly or indirectly she appeared to him in Raven form which only intensified his dislike of birds.

Robert left the covenant. He used his savings to purchase a little land and tried to make a life for himself. By now he was past his youth and had lost all hope of becoming a knight. He still had hopes that his children might be more fortunate, and with that in mind he married a young woman of similar social standing. She bore him a daughter and a son before dying in childbirth.

Robert's bad luck was still evident. The property that he bought was swallowed up in lawsuits, as other minor nobles and freemen challenged his title to the land. Eventually he had to sell his house. Were it not for his sister Iocasta's charity he would have had no home at all. The home he did have was not at all to his liking. His sister had prevailed on her husband to give her poor brother a position, which he did. Robert became keeper of his brother-in-law's dovecote, in a village some distance from his sister's manor house. The doves were reared as suitable white flesh for Friday meals, and sold or traded to other nobles throughout the barony. For Robert, who loathed birds, this was the final ignominy.

There was one peculiar thing about Robert's new occupation. The ground around the dovecote was fertile with a noxious plant that Robert recognized. The covenant folk called it Stinkhorn, and Robert knew that it was a magical plant of some value. For a while he cultivated it, thinking that he would be able to trade it with wizards. Eventually he realized that he would never be able to do so as he feared the effect that a renewed association with magi would have on his reputation. Robert kept the preserved Stinkhorn that he had but let the new plants rot.

Although Robert had some fame and reputation he had little money. What money he did have was eaten by old debts, from his lawsuits. His good name and his noble birth meant that he has become an unofficial reeve in the village where his brother-in-law has settled him. Although he has no official jurisdiction he sometimes acts as a justice of the peace and arbitrates small local quarrels. He is a respected man, and lives quietly. In the summer he often travels to his relatives' manors, seeking their aid not for himself but for his son. The boy is coming of age. Robert wants him to become a squire and eventually a knight, but this will require money and patronage. Robert's sisters and brothers have become almost resigned to this yearly visitation. Perhaps one day Robert will get his wish, and his son will become a squire to a local knight. Nothing would please him more.

Story Seed

Robert's young son is sick. The boy may soon die. Robert has almost despaired of his life, since no doctor can cure him. Robert has appealed for Hermetic aid via a friendly redcap. However, Robert still has enough regard for his reputation not to welcome aid from blatantly sorcerous people. He'd far rather a well-spoken Jerbiton helped him than a witchy Ex Miscellania magus. Robert will use his Creo Stinkhorn vis as a bartering ploy.

The illness was caused by the Lady of Corpses. She left the boy alone until now because she knew it would hurt Robert more to lose him just as he is about to become a squire. The magi will have to defeat her to cure the boy.

Pyramid Review

Management Material: General Office Edition

Published by [Zipwhaa, Inc.](#)

Illustrated by Roy Schneider

\$14.95

Management Material



One of the few surprises for me in this year's nominations for the Origins Awards appeared in the Best Traditional Card Game category, as **Management Material** had yet to find its way onto the shelves of my local gaming store; this in comparison with all of the other nominees that I had seen or played over the course of the year. Described as the "The card game of CUBICLE DENIZENS," **Management Material** joins a number of games, such as the Hip Pocket title, [Cube Farm](#), published by Cheapass Games and Cool Studio's **Burn Rate: the dot-com card game**. In **Cube Farm**, it is all about getting an office cubicle as close to the good stuff -- photocopier, water cooler or coffee machine -- whereas in **Management Material**, it is all about staying in the cube for as long as possible and getting out of doing those kind of jobs that mark you out of being **Management Material**.

Designed for two to five players, ages 12 and over, **Management Material** comes as a deck of 110 cards. Despite this recommended age minimum, the themes of this card game really lend themselves to an older, more adult audience with some of the cubicle life under their proverbial belts. The cards are all very nicely done in full color by the artist Roy Schneider, in a style reminiscent of newspaper cartoons or strips. The same cast of characters are used throughout, which gives the cards a uniform look and to make you sympathize with the various members of the office staff as you work your way through the deck . . . except, of course, for the boss, who gets no one's sympathy! Both cards and art are showcased on the publisher's website.

The rules to **Management Material** come on a single sheet of paper and are not as instantly clear as they really ought to be in a game as simple as this. They feel underwritten, but given just the one play through, everyone should be able to grasp how the game works.

The cards come in four types: the blue-bordered Project cards, the red-bordered Excuse cards, the green-bordered Recognition cards, and the purple-bordered Event cards. The cards are divided between the Assignment deck, made up of the Project and Event cards; and the Resource deck, made up of the Excuse and Recognition cards. There is also one more single card that is used to indicate whose turn it currently is. All but the Event and Turn cards are marked quite clearly with a number and an amusing illustration and accompanying caption.

The numbers are the key to the game . . . The Project card values range from one ("Make 547 Color Copies," "File This") up to 10 ("Superduper Top-Secret Project 'Z' -- so Secret Even the Boss does not Know What it is") and 11 ("Make Sense of it All -- and yes, the Boss is Serious"). Likewise, the Excuses range from one ("Lunch") to 10 ("Not in my Job Description") and 11 ("Called in Dead"). The Recognition cards have a lesser range, being just from one ("But . . . You've got such a Knack for This") to three ("But . . . Doing this Well, You'll Have *my* job soon!").

Game play is simple enough. On his turn, a player draws one of the boss' latest ridiculous Projects and attempts to counter with one or more of the absurd excuses. If the point value of the Excuse cards is equal to or greater than that of the Project, they can get out of the assignment and pass the buck . . . The other players can attempt to stop this by playing Recognition cards that both shower the current player with fulsome praise and increase the Project's value. If the current player can still put down more Excuse cards to counter the combined value of the Project plus its Recognition cards, the Project is passed onto the next player for them to deal with it. If the original or a subsequent player fails to get out of the Project, they are forced to keep it and the current turn is over; the Turn card is then passed

onto the next player. Once a player has acquired a number of Projects that total 30 or more points in value, they will have achieved the heady status of **Management Material** and must leave cubicle life to cross the abyssal divide that once separated them from the boss. They are also out of the game. This continues until each denizen of the cube is promoted out of the game one-by-one until there is just the last remaining player *and* winner.

While all of this is perhaps a little too simple, it is the Event cards that add a much-needed random element to the play of the game. They represent the unpredictable that might befall the lives of cube land, from Mergers and falling Stock Prices to *that* Legendary Office Party. These generally gain a player a card from another's hand (which is a good thing) or a Project card from the ones in front of another player (which is, of course, a bad thing). Worse still, are the two Event cards that shift everyone's Project cards one place to the left or right!

Initially, we were underwhelmed by **Management Material**, but after a game or two, it became evident that it was really rather fun. Part of this comes from the Event cards; without their effect, there would be little reason to want to play this game. They can really change a player's fortune, especially toward the end of the game when everyone has acquired an assortment of Project cards. Indeed, towards the end of a game -- which should last no more than 10 minutes -- the rate at which players are eliminated escalates, as there are fewer players to deal with the Project cards as they come up. More Event cards would have added to this aspect of the game, especially those that shift Project cards left or right by more than one player; since they can only shift things by one place, everyone soon finds that their old Projects come back to haunt them. This may be intentional, of course.

In addition to the Project cards, the enjoyment of the game comes from the humor of the cards, recognized by anyone who has spent time as an office employee and peered over that yawning chasm that separates the desk jockey life from the echelons of middle management. Or, as my girlfriend exclaimed, "This game is my life." After all, who can really understand what goes on in their strange minds -- that is, until you prove yourself worthy of being **Management Material**?

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Infection

Published by [Earwig Enterprises](#)

Designed by Dan Sullivan

Art by Tom Hennessy

8 pawns plus counters, 100 disease cards, 100 cure cards, 26 intensive care cards, game board, rules, 2 six-sided dice; \$28.00

You can make a game out of just about anything, no matter in what poor taste the subject matter may be. But Earwig Enterprises' board game ***Infection*** takes an informative and unsentimental view of the wonderful world of diseases, making it by turns both interesting and uproariously funny.

The object of the game is to be the first player (the game allows 2-8) to rid himself of all diseases, or to be the only surviving player if all others have been overwhelmed by their sicknesses. A player starts out with five diseases and \$500 in cash.

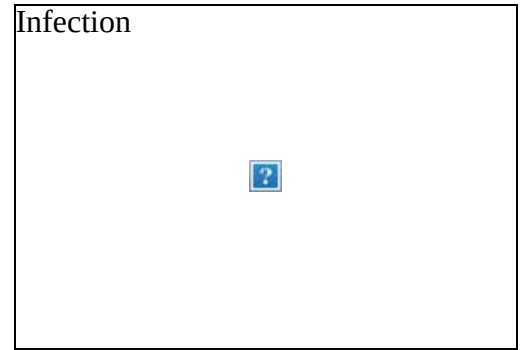
The board is laid out, and in many ways plays, like ***Monopoly***. You start in one corner and make circuits according to the roll of the dice, trying to ditch the illnesses and pick up the money to pay for treatments. Some spaces give you a disease, others take them away. Some give you a chance at a cure, and others add a little spin to the game like letting you leave a contagious disease in the bathroom for the next poor player to stumble into. In each corner is a Medical Station, and you may choose to stop here even if your roll would carry you past it.

There are five levels of treatment, and the Medical Stations are the easiest way to procure them. They are, in order of quality (and cost): the Voodoo Doctor, the Drugstore, the Clinic, the Specialist, and Intensive Care. The first four are available at every corner, and you must choose which one you're willing to pay for before you check the results. Once you've made your selection, draw a treatment card and check the entry for the ministrations you bought.

The results vary. Sometimes the result is as plain as "Cure a disease." Sometimes it will be specific, like "Cure a contagious disease" or "Cure any red disease" (the blue cards are the easiest to treat, while white and red are tougher nuts to crack). A specific result may not be as good as a generic one - if it singles out the kind of disease you can treat and you don't have one fitting the description, the cure is useless. You might cure a contagious disease, and those are already easy to get rid of or even pass to other players.

The results aren't always a success, either, so you may end up paying good money for nothing (malpractice is another game). If you have one of the dreaded red diseases, you're better off trying for high-end treatments that are more likely to target your problem. These are pricey, especially if you choose an intensive care card. These are available only at the starting corner Medical Station, at a cost of \$500 (more than twice what anything else will run you). On the plus side, intensive care may even cure more than one disease. You'll really want to get rid of those red diseases; these represent the worst of the lot and, if left unchecked, five of them will kill you and remove you from play.

In spite of the publisher's independent status (he runs the business out of his home where the games are stacked to the ceiling), the components are sturdy items. The cards are well-made, not small-press throwaway junk, and the board is in full color and mounted. Each disease card has on it the affliction's names (both the common and scientific), what causes it, the symptoms, and the treatment proscribed; it's educational, to say nothing of gross in some cases. (It also forms the basis of one of the board's niftier squares; someone reads one of these entries and the player must guess



which disease is being described.) The simple artwork is decent and the quality extends to the board's graphic design.

On the other hand, the rules seem never to have passed through a spellchecker ; there are spelling and grammatical errors throughout the instructions (though nothing that inhibits one's understanding of the rules), and there's even disagreement within the game components. Are they cure cards or treatment cards? Do you go to the drugstore or the pharmacy? Most of the attention seems to have gone to the disease cards, which is for the best; they form the heart and soul of the game, and provide the most entertainment.

While the game runs quickly, it takes a long time to finish. Getting down to your last card is easy, but getting rid of it is trouble. (On the plus side, it's tough to stack up five red diseases, too.) They suggest reducing the number of starting diseases or setting a time limit if games are running too long. **Infection** is obviously the result of a whole lot of work, and it's a funny game with a giddy sense of humor that will keep players laughing. In spite of its best and most earnest efforts, though, the difficulty of reaching the endpoint may leave players with a sense of anticlimax.

--Andy Vetromile

Buy, Buy Blackbird

A few weeks ago, I was attempting to entice a new player into joining a game I wanted to run; I wasn't trying to run any *particular* game, really . . . I just had the hankering to try running something again, and was hoping to get new blood.

Anyway, I asked her what appealed to her about various games she'd played in. She listed a few aspects she liked of other games she'd tried, and then mentioned ***Dungeons & Dragons*** (as is constitutionally required of all roleplayers). And, in listing the parts of that game that made it enjoyable for her, way near the top of the list -- almost sheepishly -- she mentioned that she liked . . . shopping.

Now, I considered the implications of this. Primarily I was afraid that the Ghost of [Women In Gaming](#) Past would haunt me in the middle of the night and kick my butt for specifically inserting elements of shopping into the game to appeal to our female gamer.

But then I realized, as I treated myself over the weekend to some new cool bits for my Xbox, a copy of *Spirited Away*, and some nummy frozen custard, that, by gum, shopping is *fun*. And then I realized that I had many fond memories about shopping within games. The old ***Marvel Super Heroes Advanced Game*** had a section about designing super-headquarters, for example, with lots of different equipment and neat room types . . . and rules for saving money by getting substandard gear or mismatched furniture for the headquarters' living room. (I suspect a *lot* of headquarters designed with this system ended up with mismatched furniture.)

Here, then, are some tips I've been keeping in mind while trying to work shopping into the game.

Shopping is freedom. In-game, the freedom to buy things is perhaps the most freedom players are allowed. After all, if the players ignore the old man in the tavern rattling on about the Dungeon of Ennui just over the next hill, there's a real chance there won't be much of a game; the GM exerts a certain amount of control in many decisions. But, assuming the adventurers have acquired (or started the game with) money, how they spend it is usually much more free than other parts of the campaign; especially for relatively mundane things, there is a certain amount of control the GM gives to the player at that point, assuming an even remotely realistic simulation.

"With the money I made last adventure, I try to buy a pet."

"Uhhhh . . . there aren't any."

"What?!?"

"Nope; darndest thing; this world just doesn't have any pets."

"There are *no* animals available to purchase?"

"Err . . . Well, there's one hamster. But it costs \$10,000."

"For a *hamster*?"

"Yeah; it's made of adamantium."

"Okay; fine. I buy a book of matches and a shoebox; I'm waiting for nightfall, then I'm setting fire to the guy's house who's selling the hamster. I figure the hamster will be the only thing that survives the fire, so I'll put it in the shoebox. And I pocket the remaining \$9,995."

But shopping isn't infinite freedom; indeed, new opportunities to buy exotic or rare things can be a powerful motivator for adventure unto itself.

The thrills of shopping are often based on opportunity and rarity. Going back to our pet example, it's likely that mundane pets will be available anywhere, and will be priced somewhat affordably. But if the player is interested in a really different pet, then a number of possibilities are open. He may wish to buy a Andorian Tree Mink from the planet they are visiting, he may buy the parrot with cybernetic implants that let it hover without moving its wings; he might buy the ever-loyal dog that belonged to a recently departed hero after he fell into an abandoned well. Regardless, these may all be more expensive than standard pets (their exotic nature being is a good way of parting the player from more cash), and each suggest a number of adventure possibilities for both acquiring the critter and after it

is procured.

Likewise presenting players with rare "take-it-or-leave-it" buying opportunities is an interesting way of accenting parts of the game world and allowing a game to progress into a different direction. For example, consider an all-smuggler *Star Wars* game. As they are unloading their cargo after a particularly fruitful mission, the unscrupulous fence they are selling their stuff to gives them an opportunity to spend a fair bit of their newly acquired cash on a broken lightsaber. Assuming the heroes have never even seen one, the possibility of actually owning such an artifact may spark interest in them and take the game in an interesting direction of Jedi apprenticeship . . . once a few small missions are completed to repair the weapon, of course. This same campaign-branching philosophy can apply to opportunities to own a spaceship, exclusive night club, or apprenticeship to a wizard college.

Shopping requires a finite supply of money. The essence of the pleasures of shopping is two-fold: You get stuff, but only after making tough choices about what you want. Thus if a player has a million gold pieces and the most expensive thing on the shopping list is 10 gold pieces, this almost certainly wouldn't give much in-game shopping pleasure to the player; even if the player bought nothing but the best, he'd have 100,000 of them. For that player, he (for practical purposes) a near-infinite supply of money. On the other hand, if that same player is presented with the possibility of buying a small-ish castle for 1,000,000 gold pieces, or a medium-sized island for the same price, suddenly there's a choice and sense of self-determination presented

Note that "finite" doesn't mean "small." For example, you could easily have a multimillionaire character in a game; he almost certainly wouldn't sweat about buying, say, clothes or meals at fancy restaurants, but he might be presented with the possibility of investing in force field technology (perhaps being presented with a prototype force field belt), buying a new combination yacht/headquarters, or having his personality uploaded into a computer AI . . . all for a hefty outlay of cash, of course.

Shopping is about possibility and imagination. There are many things available for purchase within a game that, ultimately, don't make much difference from a mechanical point of view; most buyable weapons do similar amounts of damage, there is generally a "best" type of armor that costs the most, and so on. But, done correctly, the means of presenting it can make a huge impact on the atmosphere of the game. For example, consider the two examples:

"You are all at an inn."

"I spend one silver piece on the gruel and toast."

"I spend 10 gold on the Emperor's Feast."

"Okay; you both are feeling nourished, and go to bed after dinner."

Versus:

"You are all at an inn."

"I spend one silver piece on the gruel and toast."

"I spend 10 gold on the Emperor's Feast."

"Okay; the gruel is mediocre and difficult to stomach. You wonder if it was tastier when it was fresh, last week. [The GM pulls the other player aside.] You are escorted into a private room -- the cleanest you've seen after weeks on the road. You are given the finest food in the inn; a minstrel is unobtrusively in a corner of the room, playing a mandolin, and, should you be so inclined, the innkeeper's daughter engages you in polite conversation throughout your six-course meal. [The GM goes back out to the other player] You think you hear some kind of stringed instrument in the other room. One of the other diners is toothless and foul-smelling; he's holding a rat, which eyes your toast longingly."

The net result of either is the same: The heroes are nourished, and ready to adventure. But the in-game effects of the latter are wildly different, and quite possibly satisfy the player who spent money on the most expensive meal to get the highest quality experience for his character.

Thus, even if there aren't any written game effects, make sure the players feel the effects of money spent on unessentials ("You land your spaceship at the space dock; there is a crowd of onlookers nearby to witness the arrival of one of the most beautifully painted crafts they've ever seen") and squirm when they've cut corners ("The Revengers are escorted into your headquarters, and you detect an almost imperceptible tsk of disapproval from Captain USA at

your mismatched furniture"). That makes the thrills and pains of shopping choices all the more real.

And, of course, you need stuff to buy. Make sure the players have access to mind-numbing lists of stuff to buy; even each item isn't available at every location (as it shouldn't be), such a list can at least give them an idea of how much they can expect to pay for various goods and services, and will probably spark ideas on things they may not have considered for their characters. ("I can buy an anti-grav belt?!? Dude, you've got to loan my character 9,000 creds! Oh, wait! A title for royalty is only 15,000 creds . . . cool . . .") If such a list doesn't exist for your game world, consider making one, or recruiting a player to do so.

In all, spending money for stuff is a pleasure for many people, and that pleasure can translate easily into a gaming world.

And if you have the opportunity to buy frozen custard made fresh hourly, I can heartily recommend it . . . even if it's more expensive than more humdrum ice cream.

--*Steven Marsh*

Dirigibles Over Africa

by Mark Gellis

In some universes, the mathematics of the Cosmic Fractal are known well enough that dimensional transporters allow explorers to travel from one alternate reality to another with relative ease. In others, the residents live in utter ignorance of the myriad realities that lie impossibly close to them, with only the invisible barriers of space and time holding them apart.

Botswana Rising: A Short History From 1860 To 1880

The first Point of Divergence for the world known to those who catalog alternate universes as *Botswana Rising* occurs in 1860, when King Khama of Botswana (called Bechuanaland by the British) began a series of journeys to other nations in Africa, arguing that Africa needed to change. Africans could not rely on trade alone, he argued. Africa had to seize its own destiny. Or, as Khama put it, "The American slaves are slaves because they do not have rifles. But to have rifles, you must have ironworks . . . your own ironworks. The ways of Europe are strong and we must learn their ways, and make great kingdoms like the kingdoms of Europe or, one way or another, they will enslave us all."

What Khama wanted was large, unified nations in Africa -- modern states, perhaps a United States of Africa -- to replace the hundreds of separate tribes that were easily dominated by Europeans using a divide-and-conquer strategy. Years of bloody struggle ensued as chiefs vied for power, and many tribes refused to cooperate at all, but by 1871 several new African nations had come into existence. In 1872, the African nations of Botswana, Uganda, Congo, Abyssinia (eventually known as Ethiopia in our world), Liberia, Benin, and Ghana signed the Great African Pact, which defined formal borders and pledged these nations to mutual defense and development.

They made no attempt to drive the Europeans out of Africa. The kings understood that what had been lost to the whites was probably lost forever. Their goal was to prevent the utter domination of the continent. The plan worked. The organization of a large number of African tribes into modern nation-states, combined with their willingness to accept the status quo as long as their borders were respected, effectively halted further colonization of the continent.

What happened next was later called the greatest diplomatic coup of the century. Germany, newly unified under Bismarck's leadership, saw the chance to gain the sort of influence in Africa that Britain had in Asia, and formally recognized the African kingdoms. In addition, Bismarck personally helped negotiate plans to build ironworks, shipyards, and similar industrial facilities in African ports and cities in return for mining and lumbering rights. With Uganda and Congo forming a bridge between the German colonies in East Africa and Southwest Africa, the Kaiser either controlled or influenced a belt of territory that ran from the Atlantic Ocean to the Indian Ocean. Germany even sold Botswana rights to use its ports in Southwest Africa and built a railroad to allow it easier access to the sea. By the time other European nations had realized what Germany was doing and negotiated their own treaties with the African nations, Germany was situated as the most important European power in the mineral-rich equatorial region of Africa.

Germany's gamble worked. By 1880, the African states were in the midst of their own industrial revolutions. Both sides were getting rich from mining, agriculture, industry, lumbering, and trade. Although its value is more symbolic than strategic, Ghana has just built its first small ironclad warship to patrol its coastal waters. The African nations have even established their own western-style universities, although the best and brightest of their sons (and sometimes daughters) are sent to study in Europe.

These African nations are still fairly minor powers. While some of them control large areas of territory, and are more advanced than they are in our timeline, most of the people living in these countries are simple farmers. Even those who work in cities are mostly men and women with limited education, living in simple houses without either electricity or indoor plumbing. The great powers of Europe see Africa much as they do places like Mexico or Siam; they concede that these countries are actually countries, rather than a wilderness full of savages (which is an improvement over how they viewed Africa in our timeline), but still feel that they are inferior to Europe.

The major "exception" is Germany. Although most Germans see themselves as superior to Africans, they have profited so much from their relationships with these people that genuinely feel quite friendly towards them. In addition, simple experience has led many Germans who live and work in Africa to start viewing Africans as equals. Some British intellectuals and leaders have come to see the wisdom of the German approach and are working to build more equitable (and more profitable) relationships with Africa, but progress is slow. France and other European nations with colonies in Africa remain firm in their sense of cultural superiority.

Among the African nations, Botswana is considered the most civilized, and has been called "the Switzerland of South Africa." It depends on German Southwest Africa and British South Africa for access to the sea, but it has good relations with both of these European nations (and knows that, if need be, it can play one off against the other). Liberia, Benin, and Ghana are viewed as modest industrial and trading powers. There is some tension in this region of Africa. Benin and Ghana suspect that Liberia is little more than a puppet state for America, and all three nations fear the ambitions of France, with its large colonial holdings to the north. Congo, which controls the vast river basin of its namesake (the territory that becomes Zaire in our timeline) is mostly underdeveloped, but all of Europe vies for its favor and access to its natural resources.

Abyssinia mostly keeps to itself, tending its own garden, but there are rumors that it is thinking of pushing the Italians out of Somalia so that it can take that territory for itself. The Abyssinians are different than the rest of Africa in that they have been a unified nation for thousands of years, since the time of the Pharaohs. With their proud history, they hold themselves apart from the rest of Africa, although they are willing to ally with other African nations when it suits their purposes. Finally, there is Uganda, which is like the nations of West Africa, busy with trade and industry, although it must rely on German East Africa to connect it to the sea and the rest of the world.

As for the rest of the world, it continues on very much as it did in our own timeline. Expansion across the West and Reconstruction after the Civil War continues in America, although the changes in Africa have led large numbers of freed slaves to make their way back to their ancestral homelands. And many American adventurers (and outlaws) see the opportunities offered by Africa, much of which remains unexplored, and decide to follow the oft-given advice to "Go East, young man." Germany, of course, continues to work to increase its influence in the Ottoman Empire and the rest of the Arab world.

One major difference is that there is a growing movement for an independent India, which is viewed with fear and loathing by the British government. This is especially true because it appears that segments of the movement have been infiltrated and exploited by Russian agent provocateurs. Another difference is a strong alliance that has developed in recent years between Portugal and Brazil. Portugal has a large colony lying on the southern border of Congo and, by working with its former colony in South America, has created a large and powerful trade cartel.

The second Point of Divergence defining the world of Botswana Rising was less important, but still significant. In 1863, a young German engineer named Hans Buhler realized while reading accounts of the use of balloons in the American war that it would be possible, by combining a hot air balloon with a steam-powered propeller, to create an airship capable of maneuvering itself through the air. By 1867, he was able to present a prototype to Bismarck, who was so impressed that he asked German scientists to begin research and provided the young engineer with many lucrative contracts, allowing the technology to develop at a far greater pace than it did in our universe. Early German dirigibles were even used in limited numbers in the Franco-Prussian War as observation and bombing platforms. While they had a very small effect on the outcome of the war, their potential was obvious. Bismarck encouraged further research and the technology developed rapidly. Buhler got rich.

Dirigibles became popular among Germans in Africa. Although less economical than railroads, they were faster. More importantly, there were large areas of Africa where there were no railroads. And, despite their huge size, dirigibles

A Note On Maps

The borders of these nations are very similar to those of the modern nations in our timeline. To give players the sense of Africa still being partly unexplored, one could download one of the outline maps of that continent available from educational web sites, fill in the names for the African nations and the European colonies, and leave the rest blank.

only needed a clearing the size of a football stadium for their docking stations. Faced with the alternative of cutting a path through several hundred miles of snake-infested jungle and sweltering plains full of man-eating lions (and more snakes), and then having to build railroads, using dirigibles started to look very attractive to some people. Railroads were built, but by 1880 there were also more than 50 German airships operating in Africa.

England, seeing itself outpaced, established its own network of airship stations in Egypt and South Africa and negotiated the use of stations in African nations. This brought the number of operating blimps or dirigibles in Africa to more than seventy.

Other nations are also interested in the potential of the dirigible. Brazil has initiated negotiations with Liberia and Portugal to create a transatlantic route running from an airship station at Recife to Monrovia and then down to Luanda in Portuguese West Africa. The United States is discussing the possibility of establishing a regular route running from New Orleans to cities in South America.

The overall effect is widespread interest in and optimism about existing and potential technology. The potential of flight having been realized, there are various attempts being made to develop airplanes, and people fully expect these efforts to succeed, although perhaps not for another 10 or 15 years. (On the other hand, the American inventor Edison claims he will have a working airplane by 1885.) The idea of large airplanes being used to carry passengers or cargo is discussed at parties the way people in our timeline now discuss the possibility of colonizing Mars: something that may not happen in their own lifetimes but which is clearly in the realm of possibility. Early automobiles have already been built in America and Europe, but they are not very practical and as yet have limited popularity.

This, then, is the world of *Botswana Rising* at the dawn of the 1880s. It is a world where Queen Victoria rules the most powerful nation in the world, but in which Germany has established itself as the leading contender for that title by making itself as dominant in Africa as England is in Asia.

Special Considerations

Botswana Rising is, like our own world, "low mana." Each GM needs to decide whether to allow magic in a particular campaign. Certainly, if it does exist, it would be rare and subtle. It could still, however, be powerful and dangerous. In most cases, the Ritual Magic system described in *GURPS Spirits* would probably be the best one to use.

Psychic powers would also be fairly uncommon, if the GM allows them at all. While there was a lot of interest in psychic powers, spiritualism, and the like during this period, it remains to be proved whether these powers were genuine, innocent self-delusion, or deliberate fraud.

The same considerations apply to some of the common elements of Steampunk adventures, such as dinosaurs living on isolated plateaus, lost civilizations ruled by sinister priest-kings with psychic powers, ancient supernatural horrors, and caves leading to the hollow center of the Earth. Each GM must decide whether he wishes to use *Botswana Rising* as a realistic alternate history or if more fantastic elements should be added to his campaigns.

People You Might Meet In *Botswana Rising*

Dr. Ludwig Hammerschmidt, Wealthy German Naturalist

Dr. Hammerschmidt is a tall, slender, delicate-looking man with blonde hair and blue eyes. He wears wire-rimmed glasses. He appears to be about 40. An accomplished naturalist and wilderness explorer, he is far less delicate than he looks.

Attributes: ST 10 [0] DX 12 [20] IQ 14 [45] HT 12 [20]

Advantages: Status +3 [10]*, Very Fit [15], Wealth: Wealthy [20]

* includes one free level for Wealthy

Disadvantages: Curious [-5], Bad Sight (Correctable with glasses) [-10], Sense of Duty (to Germany) [-10]

Quirks: Attentive [-1], Loves operas [-1], Loves brandy (kirsch or cherry brandy is his favorite) and always carries a hip flask of it [-1]

Skills: Administration-13 [1], Area Knowledge (Berlin)-13 [1/2], Area Knowledge (Africa)-16 [4], Botany-16 [8], Cartography-14 [2], Climbing-13 [4], Diplomacy-13 [2], First Aid-13 [1/2], Geology-14 [4], Guns (Pistol)-14 [1], Guns (Rifle)-14 [1], Hiking-13 [4], Musical Instrument (Piano)-13 [2], Navigation-14 [4], Orienteering-14 [2], Riding (Horse)-12 [2], Savoir-Faire-14 [1], Stealth-12 [2], Survival (Desert)-15 [4], Survival (Jungle)-15 [4], Survival (Plains)-15 [4], Writing-13 [1], Tracking-14 [2], Traps-14 [2], Zoology-15 [6]

Languages: Arabic-13 [1], English-14 [2], French-14 [2], Ganda-12 [1/2], German-14 [0], Kongo-13 [1], Latin-13 [1], Mongo-Nkundu-12 [1/2], Swahili-13 [1], Tswana-13 [1]*

* Swahili is used as a "lingua franca" in German East Africa and surrounding areas, Kongo plays a similar role in western Congo, Mongo-Nkundu is spoken in much of north-central Congo, Ganda is one of the more widely spoken languages in Uganda, and Tswana is a native language spoken in Botswana; Hammerschmidt has made a point of learning some of the most commonly spoken languages in Africa not only because he likes to be able to talk to people directly (rather than through an interpreter) but because it also gives him a fighting chance of being able to communicate in one of the hundreds of related but lesser-known African dialects

Total Points: 180

One variation would be to make Hammerschmidt an amateur intelligence operative as well as a naturalist, who would sometimes be asked by the German government to look into unusual happenings and report back if he discovered anything. A loyal German, he has thrown himself into these efforts with gusto. In this case, add Acting-13 [1], History-12 [1], Sex Appeal-12 [2], and Streetwise-13 [1], which would raise the value of the character to 185 points.

Sam Davies, River Boat Captain

Sam is about 40, of average height and appearance, with brown hair and brown eyes. An American who came to Africa in the 1870s, he makes his living running a trading post with his wife Sarah and running people up and down the Congo in his steam launch. He has a wealth of information about the area and is a good man to have around in a fight.

Attributes: ST 11 [10] DX 11 [10] IQ 12 [20] HT 11 [10]

Advantages: Strong Will +2 [8]

Disadvantages: DNPC (Wife, loved one, 12-) [-24]*

* Sarah's appearance on 12- is used because she is usually at the trading post, so if Sam is there, she will be, too, but if he is somewhere on the river, it is very unlikely that she will be with him because she stays behind to run the store whenever he takes anyone up or down the river on his launch.

Quirks: Enjoys checkers [-1]

Skills: Area Knowledge (Congo)-15 [6], Area Knowledge (New England)-12 [1], Boating-12 [4], Brawling-13 [4], Carpentry-12 [1], Checkers-13 [2], Cooking-12 [1], First Aid-13 [2], Guns (Pistol)-14 [2], Guns (Rifle)-15 [4], Mechanic (Steam Engine)-16 [10], Merchant-15 [8], Navigation-13 [6], Powerboat-14 [16], Riding (Horse)-11 [2], Sailor-12 [2], Seamanship-12 [1], Shiphandling (Steamer)-12 [4], Survival (Jungle)-13 [4]

Languages: English-12 [0], Kongo-11 [1], Mongo-Nkundu-11 [1]

Total Points: 115

Helga Krauss, Plucky German Lass

Helga is 22, the daughter of a German airship captain stationed in German East Africa. She came to Africa with her father 10 years ago after her mother died. Lovely, blonde, and very German, she has a sharp mind and no time for the sort of romantic nonsense people always seem to think she will find irresistible. She knows how to ride and shoot and has even learned how to pilot airships, thanks to her father. She is a bit of a tomboy and she loves living in Africa; her father wonders if she will ever start acting like a lady and get married and give him some grandchildren, but he is very proud of her.

Attributes: ST 9 [-10] DX 12 [20] IQ 12 [20] HT 10 [0]

Advantages: Ally (Father, 12-) [10], Beautiful [15], Wealth: Comfortable [10]

Disadvantages: Sense of Duty (to Germany) [-10], Social Stigma (Second Class Citizen) [-5]

Quirks: Adores her father [-1], Annoyed that men will not treat her like an equal even when she proves herself to be as good as they are at something [-1], Loves living in Africa [-1], Unromantic [-1]

Skills: Area Knowledge (East Africa)-12 [1], Aviation-12 [2], Cooking-13 [2], First Aid-12 [1], Guns (Rifle)-16 [4], Mechanic (Airship)-11 [1], Navigation-11 [2], Piloting (Lighter-than-Air)-11 [1], Professional Skill (Housekeeper)-12 [2], Riding (Horse)-14 [8] Survival (Plains)-14 [6], Tracking-14 [6]

Languages: English-10 [1/2], French-10 [1/2], German-12 [0], Swahili-12 [2]

Total Points: 85

Running A Campaign In Botswana Rising

What kind of campaigns can one run in this world? Here are some ideas . . .

Hunting Trips

Unfortunately, environmentalism is still in its "loving the great beasts of Africa means killing them and stuffing them, or maybe putting them in zoos" stage in the 1880s. For a simple adventure, have the PCs go after lions or leopards. For a somewhat more complicated adventure, use the hunting trip (perhaps they will be hired as guides for rich Europeans) as a way to get the heroes involved in the story and far enough away from help that they will have to take care of any dangers themselves. Once the PCs are in the wilderness, a GM is free to hit them with natural disasters, dinosaurs, German spies, lost civilizations, or anything else that his or her little heart desires.

Piracy

Organized piracy of the sort that existed in the Swashbuckler era has been dead for more than a hundred years in 1880, but there are still marine criminals who prowl the coasts of Africa and Asia, looking for the opportunity to steal a valuable cargo.

Piracy is uncommon, but it does occur, particularly against smaller merchant vessels. The ocean is a perfect place to dispose of the remains of a slaughtered crew, and much of the African coast is either wilderness or poorly patrolled colonial territory (or colonial ports where one can find merchants who will not ask too many questions); as a result, there are many places where pirates can unload their stolen cargo. The nations of West Africa hate piracy, as it interferes with the trade that is helping them modernize. A GM might have the adventurers hired by one of these nations to patrol the coast and investigate low level piracy.

For a more sinister campaign, a GM could assume that the pirates are actually being paid (and protected) by the French (or perhaps the Illuminati), who hope to destabilize nations like Benin and Ghana by attacking trade. Naturally, this is the kind of Big Secret that can bring down entire governments, and whoever is involved is going to try to make sure that no one finds out what is really going on (or, if they do, that they do not live to tell the tale).

Espionage and Diplomacy

Africa has enormous strategic importance because of its natural riches. The major nations of Europe (and some minor ones) will all have secret agents trying to find out what other countries are doing, and perhaps trying to sabotage those plans. Britain, in particular, would like to reduce Germany's influence in Africa. In addition, the African nations are developing their own intelligence services to advance their national agendas.

A common plot for stories set in this era is that of the secret invention which is being sought by an enemy agent (the PCs can be either the enemy agents or the ones trying to stop them). Perhaps someone has invented a new and relatively inexpensive method for isolating helium, which provides slightly less lift than hydrogen but is also much safer to use in airships. In the world of Botswana Rising, technical advances are coming fast and furious, but they are guarded jealously. The situation is, of course, complicated by the fact that many new technologies are being developed by private inventors who may be willing to sell their discoveries to the highest bidder.

Another campaign might involve what is being called The Affair of the Black Russian. Kimbe, one of the sons of the Khama, the King of Botswana, has gone to Germany to gain a European education. He becomes friends with Dmitri Balamirov, a young cousin of the Czar, also studying in Germany, and while visiting with Dmitri's family in Saint Petersburg has met and fallen in love with his friend's sister Irina. Irina is charmed by the tall, dark prince and, with the blessings of the Czar himself, the two become engaged. Newspapers call it the love story of the decade. Liberals call it the most important union of the century. But joy turns to terror when shots are fired at the couple. Miraculously, no one is seriously hurt, but why is someone trying to kill Kimbe? Or was someone else the target? Can the PCs find out before it is too late?

Prospecting and Exploring

Most of Africa is still wild and unexplored, especially in the reaches of the Congo and the depths of the Sahara desert. In addition to its mineral wealth, which draws prospectors hoping to strike it rich, many naturalists are drawn to Africa in hopes of advancing human knowledge. As in the realistic hunting campaign, the PCs would face natural dangers (and perhaps treachery from competitors or even those within their party if they discover anything really valuable) while seeking either riches or natural wonders. In a more fantastic campaign, the depths of the Congo river basin or the Sahara might contain anything from mad scientists using the an isolated outpost as a base to conduct unnatural experiments to tribes of natives being haunted by some unseen horror that strikes without warning and leaves no traces, only mangled corpses. And who can tell what lurks in the waters of Lake Tanganyika?

Africa in the 1880s in the world of Botswana Rising is a land of intrigue and adventure. If you have the wits and the courage, you can find fame and fortune. Go East, Young Man!

Elves: A Case Study of Transhumanism in Fantasy Worlds

by Jürgen Hubert

(Note: When discussing the Fantasy genre, I will mostly limit myself to the conventions that are used in the Dungeons & Dragons game, as those are the most likely to be familiar to the reader. As similar genre conventions are used in many, if not most fantasy RPG backgrounds, this should not pose a problem.)

With the publication of ***Transhuman Space***, the roleplaying community has been more exposed to Transhumanist ideas than ever before. One of the central ideas of Transhumanism is the desire to "transcend" the possibilities of "unmodified" humanity. In the setting of ***Transhuman Space***, this is achieved through human genetic engineering, body and brain modifications, and "uploading" of brain patterns into computers to create personality simulations of the original brain.

At first, it would seem that Transhumanism is an idea that can only prosper in the realm of science fiction (and certain fringe groups today who are limited by modern technology). After all, human genetic engineering, bioware, and advanced computers require a high technology base, and most fantasy background use technology that is barely more advanced than that of the Renaissance.

However, this is not necessarily the case; fantasy wizards have long been credited with creating new monsters, some of which escape to the wilderness and breed true. Others have managed to create entire "warrior races" that serve as underlings and shock troops (echoes of the combat bioroids from ***Transhuman Space*** can be seen in this).

In other words, the capabilities for transhumanist experiments are present; the only difference is that magic is used instead of technology, and according to Clarke's Law the difference between the two isn't all that important anyway. Therefore, it should only be a matter of time before an enterprising group of wizards tries to use these kinds of magical alterations on themselves . . . or their children. To use ***Transhuman Space*** terminology, they would create "parahumans," an entirely new subspecies of humanity.

So how would these "new and improved" humans look like? How would they differ from the human norm?

These wizards would probably give them extremely long life spans, and a long growth and childhood period to improve their socialization (if they are going to live a long time, it is better if they are well adjusted to coping with the passing of the centuries . . .). They would give them an attractive appearance and natural grace. They would reduce their need for sleep and improve their senses until they far surpass the human norm.

In short, they would change them into something remarkably like elves.

Their Greatest Secret

Could it therefore be that elves are actually not a "natural" race at all, but an artificial one? Could it be that their ancestors were humans who were not content with the limitations of their own species? So far, the evidence is merely circumstantial -- elves represent everything how many humans would like to be. However, there are more hints that paint a stronger picture.

Most elves tend to live in forests. This is not an ideal environment for most civilizations -- large human realms can only be sustained by agriculture, and for this, any large forests that are in the way have to be cut down. Groups of humans that live in forests full-time are rarely larger than small, nomadic tribes with only occasional permanent dwellings.

Yet elves seem to manage to not only maintain permanent dwellings, but also live in elegance or even splendor. Their beauty almost universally overwhelms humans who visit elven realms. And yet, elves seem to have copious free time that they can dedicate to the arts, wizardry, or swordplay -- they seem to be able to maintain their homes with little effort. How do they manage this?

Well, from the point of view of an ancient group of wizards that wanted to create the "ideal humans," it would have made little sense to just stop with the creation of elves. Instead, they would have shaped their environment as well to make the elves' lives as comfortable as possible. And indeed, there are signs for this -- trees and bushes that give bumper crops of fruits and berries, other types of trees that are capable of supporting entire palaces in their branches, and plants and animals that do away with organic wastes efficiently and without bad odors (for how many reports are there of elven cities with sewers?), and, most importantly, a number of forest-dwelling beings that seem almost be designed to serve the elves in various ways -- often even without their knowledge. Let's have a look at these "sylvian" creatures presented in the *Monster Manual* for *Dungeons & Dragons* on a case-by-case basis . . .

Assassin Vines: These plant creatures are very useful for protecting forest communities -- place a few in strategic locations, and would-be invaders are killed before they can even get near the tree houses.

Centaurs: It is hard to imagine how a creature that is a human-horse hybrid would evolve naturally (unless inter-species fertility works a *lot* different than in our world . . .). They seem to serve as shock troops for the defense of the forest, and shun contact with other races apart from elves, with whom they trade. It is anyone's guess who comes out on top with these trades . . .

Dryads: This all-female tree-dwelling spirits is remarkable in several ways -- they are bound to a single tree, and can never move far away from it, which prevents them from organizing themselves despite their obvious intelligence. Nevertheless, thanks to their *charm* ability, they can effectively stop individual scouts sent by outside forces and get them to reveal their information.

Interestingly, they also seem to lust after handsome males from other species, but often let them go after some time. In other words, while they experience sexual desire, it is unclear if they feel any emotions similar to what humans call "love" or "jealousy" toward individual males. This would make them the equivalent of the pleasure bioroids from *Transhuman Space* -- they will sleep with you, but won't be a baggage to you afterwards. (In yet another suspicious "coincidence," the resistance of elves against *charm* spells seems to be designed with dryads in mind . . .)

Giant Eagles and Giant Owls: These oversized and sapient birds of prey serve as excellent scouts and aerial steeds at different times of the day-and-night cycle.

Pegasi: Another obvious hybrid creature, Pegasi are easier to train than giant eagles or giant owls. They are somewhat more conspicuous, however.

Satyrs: Another single-gender "species," satyrs are possibly the male counterpart of dryads, which would make them a rather extreme example of sexual dimorphism. Like dryads, they show an extreme fondness for members of the opposite sex (this ready availability of willing sexual partners might at least in part be responsible for the famous low birthrates of elves . . .), and they also have the ability to *charm* other beings. They most likely serve as irregular troops who can harass enemies that venture too far into the forest with their spell-like abilities.

Sprites: While these small fey might not look very threatening, their small size and magical abilities makes them formidable foes to larger enemies who might never even get the chance to see their attackers.

Treants: While forests have many defenders, they are still very large. These intelligent plant creatures serve as guardians of stretches of forests where few elves dwell, and their ability to animate other trees makes them quite capable of dealing with any but the largest invasions.

Unicorns: Like treants, unicorns serve as forest guardians. They can also serve as steeds in emergencies, a role in which they are formidable thanks to their innate abilities.

In summary, a large number of intelligent beings of different species live together in harmony in the forests that the elves call their home. This alone would be suspicious in worlds where intelligent beings usually kill members of other species on sight, but that all species but elves show little interest in large-scale organisation or wizardry only confirms it. Most of these beings seem to be designed to make lives easier for elves, which strongly indicates intelligent design in one way or another.

Other cases of Transhumanism in Fantasy Worlds

Elves and their environment are just the most obvious result of Transhumanist experiments. There are always alchemists trying to perfect longevity potions, and undeath, if intentional, could be seen as another attempt as "transcending normal human limitations." Certainly, most liches seem to think that the end result justifies the obvious drawbacks. Certain powerful spellcasters can gradually transform themselves into more powerful forms, most notably the dragons, avangions, and clerical elementals of the *Dark Sun* setting. The philosophical group of the *Planescape* setting called "Believers of the Source" are Transhumanist in all but name.

Finally, a very few chosen people fulfill the ultimate promise of Transhumanism: They become actual gods. Few paths to divine ascension are ever the same, and they are all extremely difficult. Yet enough succeed to inspire others to follow in their footsteps . . .

Adventure ideas

Old Secrets, New Trouble: When looting yet another ancient dungeon, the heroes come across a set of magically preserved scrolls. Once the party manages to translate them (either through magical means, or with the aid of the world's best linguistic scholar -- the scrolls are *that* old!), they learn that these are the research notes of an ancient cabal of human wizards who were attempting to "improve" their descendants through magical means. The scrolls also include a very difficult spell that, when cast on a living human, make all of his or her descendents elves from that point onwards! Also included are detailed instruction on how to create a number of "slave races" that sound a lot like the sylvan races.

If the adventurers decide to go public with this discovery, this revelation cause major political disturbances -- and make them many enemies! Most elves won't believe them and denounce them -- or possibly try to kill them. Priests of some human religions might start to call elves abomination in the eyes of their god for the hubris of their ancestors.

Meanwhile, many rich humans will try to get access to the spell so that they can build dynasties that will last for many centuries. This will lead to many more elves in the future, and possible even to an immortal elven upper class ruling human kingdoms! How the "traditional" elves will deal with those "new" elves that don't have any link to their own culture is anyone's guess . . .

Philosophers With Clubs: In some cities, wizards, alchemists, and other scholars congregate together and form a new movement. Its adherents claim that the short life spans of humans are not inevitable, and that it is possible to transcend this and other limits of human nature. They immediately attract hostile attention from many clerics and druids who claim that this is against the will of their gods, or "unnatural." The PCs can get involved in either side of this debate.

Meanwhile, this movement will have many internal divisions. Is it enough to stop aging, or should the body be enhanced beyond normal human capabilities? Is it ethical if any of the methods involved use the life force of other living beings -- even if it kills "only" animals? Is undeath a legitimate expression of the desire for immortality, or a dead end that will ultimately limit your abilities? Finally, if some artifact or other unique process is found that can transform someone into a god, who gets to use it?

If the agenda of the adventurers is in agreement with these people (or if they are just feeling mercenary), they can work for them and "recover" rare spells and components that they will likely need in their research. The infighting that is likely to occur if any of the necessary resources are limited can also be a ready source of employment. If they are on the other side of the ideological divide, they can try their best to stop these mad wizards and the monstrosities that they

will inevitably birth . . .

Cargo Space

Trade Goods For A *GURPS Space* Campaign

by Stephen Dedman

So, you have a Tanstaaf-class star freighter with space for 765 tons of cargo, or maybe you're tramping around the Jewell subsector in a Far Trader. Either way, you probably have bills to pay. You may not be particularly interested in exactly what's in those containers in the hold (unless it starts chewing its way through the metal), but the starport's Customs and Quarantine officers will probably want to know. Bureaucrats tend not to see the funny side when your "4d-4 tons of moderate risk trade goods" turns out to be brilliant missiles with mininuke warheads, or terraforming algae that can out-compete every plant on the planet.

Even non-merchants will sometimes need to know what's being shipped between planets. Military types may want to smuggle weapons, or intercept arms shipments, or both. Colonists will need to know what they can export in exchange for imported luxuries. Salvage experts (and pirates) will want to know whether the cargo they're retrieving (or stealing) can still be sold at a profit at their next port of call, or whether it's decayed or mutated into something they'd rather not go near.

The following tables can be used to supplement the trade systems in ***GURPS Traveller: Far Trader*** or any TL10 ***GURPS Space*** campaign, and can be adapted to most other space-faring games. Many items can also be used as the loot for ultra-tech truck hijackers in a Cyberpunk or Shadowrun campaign.

Agricultural Produce

Cheap on Agricultural worlds, but may be considerably more valuable elsewhere. If the cost of freight is fairly high (to cover fuel, crew wages, ship maintenance, docking fees, etc.; the Basic Trade System in ***GURPS Traveller: Far Trader*** suggests a rate of Cr600-650/ton/parsec), then Ag worlds will mostly export quality merchandise for gourmets who are willing to pay the high cost of interstellar freight rather than exist on fauxflesh, mycoproteins and genemod algae wines.

Starship crews with room in their holds may choose to buy cheaper stuff by the ton for speculative trade rather than "deadheading" to their destination.

Foodstuffs are usually low risk goods, unless they're perishable or extremely expensive (see Luxury goods, below).

While it may be hoped that humanity will either become less superstitious as technology advances or, failing that, will use cloning to produce goods such as rhinoceros horn or bear gall for their supposed medicinal value, it is possible that there will always be a black market for the body parts of endangered species. The price range of these high-risk items should be the same as other drugs; whether the PCs choose to become involved in such a trade is up to them.

Beer: \$1,000+/ton

Clothing: \$80,000+/ton (x5 for upper-class, x3 for varicloth, etc.)

Coffee/Tea/Spice: \$20,000+/ton

Drugs: \$200,000 (Slammer, Sobriety pills) to M\$50/ton (Memory Beta, Torpine)

Food, packaged: \$6,000+/ton

Frozen meat/seafood (requires Reefer container): \$10k+/ton

Fur/leather: \$8,000+/ton

Grain/flour: \$1,000/ton

Natural fibers (Cotton, linen, wool): \$8,000+/ton. *Silk*: \$60,000+/ton

Paper: \$4,000+/ton

Perfume/Cosmetics: \$160,000+/ton
Seeds/Bulbs (genemod): \$5,000/ton to M\$2/ton
Spirits: \$30,000+/ton
Wine: \$8,000+/ton
Wood: \$500+/ton. *Genemod*: \$3,300+/ton

Industrial Goods

The range of industrial goods produced for export on any Industrial world is based on PR-2 (see p.S166). A planet with a small population may be famed for its precision optics or extremely reliable survival equipment, but is unlikely to mass-produce large vehicles. Exports will also be based on the availability of raw materials: a planet where industrial metals are scarce but organics common is more likely to manufacture plastics or carbon-based monofilaments than Gauss gun ammunition. Societies with high control ratings may also be reluctant to produce and stockpile more restricted equipment than they have an immediate use for, for fear that it will fall into the wrong hands. Purchasing these items may require an end user certificate (see below). Extra security may also be required for merchants carrying restricted items and cargos worth more than M\$1/ton.

While industrial worlds may over-produce some cheap goods which the PCs can buy at bargain prices to sell offworld, most goods manufactured for export will be high-value items (at least \$50/lb). Even on sparsely populated worlds, robofacs and minifacs (p. UT83) can produce many items more cheaply than imports, and quickly enough to meet demand for anything except the latest fashions.

Ammunition (includes most grenades, mines, etc.): \$10,000+/ton
Arachnoweave: \$250,000/ton
Chameleon cloaks: \$750,000/ton
Computer hardware: M\$1+/ton
Exoskeletons (generic, ST 20): \$72,000/ton
Filter media: \$200,000 to M\$2/ton
Firearms: \$90,000/ton
Food Processors: \$500,000/ton
Forced-Growth Clone Tanks: M\$2/ton
Medical equipment: \$800,000/ton
Microbot hives: \$39,000+/ton
Military laser weapons: \$200,000+/ton
Monowire: M\$2/ton
PLASTEX-B: \$320,000/ton
Pressure Tents: \$80,000/ton
Rechargeable cells: \$200,000/ton
Robots/robot parts: \$100,000 to M\$1/ton
Scientific equipment: M\$1.5/ton
Solar panels: \$10,000/ton
Ultra-tech alloys: \$660,000+/ton
Vehicles/vehicle parts: \$20,000+/ton. Aircraft and military vehicles may be much more expensive; military aircraft more expensive still.
Vid Glasses: \$800,000/ton

Raw materials

The cost of interstellar travel makes it likely that only valuable raw materials are worth shipping between inhabited systems: it will usually be much more cost-effective to import manufactured goods, to mine nearby moons and asteroids, recycle discarded items for their raw material, or all three. The only likely exceptions are extremely worlds which have been so thoroughly industrialised for so long that they've badly depleted their home systems, or (if interstellar travel depends on jump points) worlds which have never had many resources apart from their location. At

the other end of the spectrum, Poor worlds may need imports and have nothing else to sell to the Industrial and Rich worlds that produce them. These worlds are likely to compensate for haulage costs by reducing wages and safety standards.

The following prices are based on modern values and prices in other **GURPS** sourcebooks, and assume that rare and valuable minerals will remain rare and valuable even when we can mine other worlds. This is possible, but changes in technology cause changes in demand. For example, if rechargeable power cells or X-ray lasers require a particular radioisotope only found on Metallic or High-Iron worlds, it will push the price up; so might the demands of fashion (vide the fur trade). Conversely, new inventions can reduce demand: Fusion plants and reactionless drives may bring down the prices of uranium and cadmium. An abundant supply of a particular mineral -- e.g. a huge iridium asteroid, or a gem the size of a small moon (a la Clarke's *2061*), or a process for cheaply producing gem-quality diamonds (a la Clarke's "Venture to the Moon") -- can also reduce the price.

Metals that are sufficiently valuable may be shipped as ores, for refining offworld: as a rough guide to the value of an ore, take the purity of the ore as a percentage, and halve that percentage to cover the cost of refining. For example, ore-bearing rock containing 1% platinum would be worth \$120,000/ton. (If you want to complicate matters, such rock would also include iridium and other metals, increasing the value.) Other exotic materials such as room-temperature superconductors, magnetic monopoles or anti-gravity matter may also occur naturally on other worlds.

Some mining worlds with a sufficiently high PR for an industrial base may be able to refine ores into ultra-tech alloys (see above).

Beryllium: M\$2/ton

Cadmium: \$24,000/ton

Coal: \$40/ton

Cobalt: \$15,000/ton

Gemstones, uncut (diamonds, opals, pearls, sapphires): \$M250+/ton

Gold: M\$11/ton

Heavy water: \$56,000/ton

Industrial Crystals: \$5,000+/ton

Industrial/Light Metals: \$2,000-\$6,000/ton

Marble: \$110+/ton

Metal/LOX fuel: \$2,500/ton

Ore: \$200/ton to M\$20/ton

Petrochemicals (gasoline, kerosene, etc): \$150+/ton

Platinum: M\$24/ton

Radioactives: \$500+/ton for fuel. Weapons-grade radioisotopes are \$20,000+/ton

Rare Earths: \$20,000+/ton

Selenium: M\$100/ton

Semi-precious stones (amber, jade, lapis lazuli, etc.): \$M25+/ton

Silver: \$550,000/ton

Tungsten: M\$60/ton

Water (drinkable): \$20+/ton. Seawater, if available, is usually free.

Software

The most valuable cargos may weigh almost nothing. A master disc for the latest dreamgame, an upgrade for an Expert System program, or a database enabling robofacts to produce new equipment, may weigh less than an ounce but be worth many millions.

Some Rich worlds whose economies are based on information rather than hardware will export no more than a master to any industrial world, allowing them to mass-produce as many copies as demand requires. Originals or "limited editions" of any artwork (sculpture, paintings, manuscripts, even unique designer garments), or other collectable items,

may also be worth much more on a dollar-per-ton basis than diamonds. In these cases, haulage will rarely be paid by the ton (unless you're transporting something akin to the contents of Tutankhamen's tomb), but will usually be accompanied by at least one trusted courier (paying first class or standard passage, plus any extra luggage allotment needed).

Other worlds will choose to keep control of production in the hope of reducing the risk of data theft, and ship out thousands or millions of discs, or even books or other media. Depending on packaging, content, etc., bulk software can be worth M\$2 (for sensies or other entertainment) to M\$200/ton.

Luxury Goods

Fine and Very Fine weapons and vehicles, designer clothing, gourmet foods and expensive wines, flawless expertly-cut gemstones, limited edition books, Stradivarius violins . . . for trade purposes, luxury goods are simply much more expensive versions of other trade items. Multiply the cost by four (at least), and divide the size of the lot by the same amount.

Luxury goods may be produced anywhere (even sweatshops on poor worlds), but are most in demand on Rich or High Population worlds; risk is Moderate to High.

End User Certificates

End user certificates are usually necessary when purchasing military weapons or items with an LC of CR-3; they state that the purchase is being made on behalf of a world or organization recognized by the manufacturer and not considered hostile. Legitimate purchasers will only issue them to merchants with well-kept financial records, a fully certified crew including cargomaster, a ship that passes muster, and no bad reputation on that world, on a Good or better reaction roll. PCs who need End User Certificates for less legitimate purposes (e.g. to arm mercenaries or rebels) may obtain them on some worlds by bribery: roll on Area Knowledge and Administration or Streetwise to find a corrupt official or a skilled forger, with negative modifiers for very large or very illegal orders (nukes, biowarfare equipment, etc.) The bribe required for a bogus certificate is based on (10-lowest LC)% of the market value of the items; the winner of a contest of Merchant skills can add or subtract 1% for every point by which he wins the contest.

Adventure Seeds

- **Yo ho ho and. . .**: The crew of a merchant ship arrive at their destination to find the tank container supposedly containing 3,400 gallons of Samedian overproof rum (\$80/gallon; Alcohol Rating 14 per oz) has been almost completely drained. (A little under a gallon remains, suggesting that the thieves were inefficient or in a hurry.) The buyer refuses to pay the freight costs, leaving the crew \$24,000 the poorer. The crew can try to absorb the cost, or they can try to find the thieves -- which may involve visiting all of the city's bars in search of the booze.
- **Seafood diet**: A leaking airship drops its cargo, a 40-ton container of imported chilled berani, in the sea on Lewis. Berani are fist-sized sea-worms that sporulate in cold weather, and are a great delicacy. In warm weather, they're as voracious as piranha, and their rasping teeth can bore through plastic seals or sheet metal. The refrigerated containers have only 23 hours of power left: some time after that, the berani will begin to revive and chew their way out of the containers. The PCs have the only starship in port. If the PCs can hook the containers up to a 10KW power source in time, they can claim salvage on the cargo -- \$85,000 -- as well as preventing major damage to Lewis's marine ecology and earning the gratitude of the government. They may also encounter some of the local marine predators, and learn why Lewisites aren't enthusiastic swimmers.
- **The Anything Box**: When pirates, assisted by NPC passengers, take over a small merchant vessel ship, the cargomaster and other PCs take refuge in the cargo bay -- unarmed apart from Swiss Army Knives and wearing only their skinsuits. The pirates have captured the bridge, engineering section, weapons locker, and airlocks, and have taken the pilot and several passengers captive. The cargomaster knows there are guns, ammunition and exploration suits among the cargo, as well as drugs, alcohol, and luxury goods . . . but can the PCs find the weapons before the pirates find them?

Mike Cafferty, Irritable Superhero

for *GURPS*

by Mark Gellis

Five years ago, computer programmer Mike Cafferty went to sleep in his New York apartment. He woke up with a fever. He called in sick to work and took the day off. The fever got worse. He figured he would sleep it off and went to bed. The next thing he knew, it was 10 days later and he was in the hospital. His coworkers had called the police when he did not show up for work on the second day and they had gotten the superintendent to open his apartment; when they did, they found Mike in a coma.

During those 10 days, he had changed. The doctors said that, as near as they could tell, his cells had simply decided that they should generate DNA similar to that found in both snakes and lizards. They had also found other things, too, that could not quite be identified.

Mike had become a metahuman.

No one knows why this happened. Mike does not recall coming into contact with any radioactive materials, mutant insects, alien artifacts, ghostly apparitions, or anything similar. His transformation appears to have been an entirely arbitrary twist of fate.

Mike went back to work. His new metabolism and powers did not really affect his job performance one way or the other, although at first it was a little disconcerting to have him around. Mike had been a man of average good looks. Now, he was a man whose skin reminded people of a serpent, shiny and scaly, in a mottled pattern of brown and gold that made him look a lot like a really big ball python.

Fortunately, Mike discovered entirely by accident that he could change color. He had been sitting in his apartment, staring at himself in the mirror, wishing fervently that he could be normal again and it happened. His skin took on a color similar to the light tan he had sported a few weeks earlier. Mike, like any good programmer, guessed that his new body might have other "Easter Eggs" and started experimenting.

As it turned out, he could be any color he wanted. He had to visualize it, concentrate on it for a minute or so, and it happened. In fact, he could assume not only any color, but any pattern. And he would stay that way until he wanted to change again.

Slowly but surely, he discovered other powers, too. His skin acted as a kind of natural armor. He could still get hurt, but his skin was hard to cut; it gave him an edge against things like knives and fire. He has not tried to find out whether it will slow down bullets or not, although he suspects it will help a little. He does not really want to find out exactly how much, though.

He is stronger now, more than twice as strong as a normal person. He is also much faster, with truly remarkable reflexes. He developed a knack for climbing; he cannot actually cling to surfaces like an insect, but if there is a way to climb something, he can probably manage it. His body seemed to have just learned how to do this on its own, and it had learned other things, like how to move in almost complete silence and how to roll and flip to get him out of danger. Mike also found that his senses had become much sharper. Finally, he now heals at an abnormally high rate; injuries that would have normally taken several days to recover from now heal in a matter of hours.

Oddest of all, he could stare at an animal or a person and make them freeze in utter confusion for a few seconds, which is more than enough to get away or whack them upside the head, depending on what the situation called for.

So, there he was. And it was not where he wanted to be.

Mike had no desire to fight crime. He had studied martial arts but it was mostly for the exercise and because he was afraid of being mugged. He felt that fighting crime was best left to professionals like the police who had studied how it was supposed to be done and who were actually paid to put their lives on the line.

He had no desire to be a criminal, either. (Yes, on occasion, like most people, he broke the law in small ways, like speeding or not paying for the songs he had downloaded as MP3s . . . but things like selling drugs or grand theft space station were simply not on his agenda.) He remembered the small-time hoods he had known in high school as disturbing people he wanted to get away from as soon as possible.

He just wanted to live a normal life.

But then, once fate starts to twist in arbitrary ways, it simply cannot help itself and always has to have "one more for the road," as it were. Mike was standing outside his favorite bar, matching his skin to his black leather jacket to see if anyone female would be impressed by this when Trouble appeared. Across the street, he saw three hoodlums attack an elderly couple. Mike told the bouncer to call 911 and walked across the street and in very short order put all three of the young criminals in serious pain. Looking back on it later, he could not recall why he did this except that he just felt he had to help those people. The next day, the newspapers were full of stories of a new hero who struck with the speed and ferocity of a cobra.

Mike read the stories at work the next day. He groaned. Nothing could save him now. He had become the Cobra.

He has tried to lead a fairly normal life. He kept his job and only fights crime on his off hours (if there is a real emergency, he takes a personal day; for the most part, his boss has been sympathetic because it would be bad publicity for the company to fire a superhero for saving innocent lives). He does not keep it a secret that he is the Cobra, but he moved to a new apartment and has gotten an unlisted phone number. He wears a "costume" of supple black leather and a black leather hood that covers his eyes, and he changes his skin color to black leather so it will at least not be obvious that he is Mike Cafferty. He can generally walk the streets without being mobbed by autograph seekers.

He mostly fights crime by walking around (or climbing to the rooftops) at night and waiting to see if anyone needs help. Or, if he is feeling restless, he will call some of the other costumed crimefighters working in the city and see if they need his help with anything. He carries relatively little equipment in the pockets of his pants and his jacket; a cell phone with wireless Internet access, a small canister of pepper spray, a Swiss army knife, a pair of handcuffs, and a few other odds and ends is usually all he has with him. Generally, in combat, he tries to sneak up on people, stun them somehow, handcuff them to something convenient, and then call the police. He does not believe in doing anything flashy when fighting criminals. The way Mike sees it, people who do flashy things tend to get shot.

Trouble, however, seems to have no trouble finding him. People who are in need always seem to turn up when he is around. It is almost as if some supernatural force is leading them to him. Mike has learned to accept this; if asked about it, he will simply say: "I am obviously cursed. I just don't know why."

Over the years, he has come to know the local superhero community. They trust him, although he is just an amateur and they are sometimes annoyed by his attitude, and they occasionally call on him to help out with a particular mission. This is not regular enough for them to be truly considered "allies," though; they aren't exactly going to be giving him a key to the secret hero mansion any time soon.

Mike finds them . . . interesting. They have given him some very good advice, he thinks, but he also considers them a rather eccentric bunch. And that is on the good days.

Mike Cafferty (aka the Cobra)

5'10" 170 lbs. Black hair. Blue eyes. Age: 28. From a distance, he appears to be a nondescript man of medium height and healthy build. As you get closer, you realize that he has . . . scales.

ST 23 [140], **DX** 16 [80], **IQ** 12 [20], **HT** 15 [60]

Advantages: Alertness +3 [15], Chameleon (3 levels) [21], Combat Reflexes [15], Common Sense [10], Hyper Reflexes [15], Night Vision [10], Regeneration (Regular) [25], Scales (DR 1) [3]

Powers: Confuse-15 (10) (Requires eye contact, -20%) [52]

Disadvantages: Weirdness Magnet (For some reason, people in trouble always manage to find him, especially if their trouble involves masked maniacs, evil masterminds, or killer robots) [-10], Sense of Duty (Anyone who really needs and deserves his help) [-10], Unnatural feature (Scales) [-5]

Quirks: Irritated by the whole "over the top" nature of most costumed heroes and evil masterminds [-1], Likes Chinese food [-1], Likes wearing black leather [-1], Thinks he is a sucker for putting himself in danger all the time [-1], Ultimately, after the bad guy is caught or the helpless waif is rescued, he really is glad he was there and able to help, but he knows better than to actually tell people this (not that he is fooling anyone by *not* telling them, you know) [-1]

Skills: Acrobatics-16 [4], Administration-11 [1], Driving (Automobile)-16 [2], Area Knowledge (New York)-12 [1], Climbing-20 [10], Computer Hacking-11 [4], Computer Operation-14 [4], Computer Programming-14 [8], Intimidation-12 [2], Judo-16 [4], Jumping-20 [8], Karate-16 [4], First Aid-12 [1], Knowledge: Metahuman Community 11- [1], Professional Skill: Web Designer-14 [6], Research-11 [1], Stealth-16 [2], Swimming-16 [1]

Languages: English-12 [0]

Total Points: 500

Using Mike In A Campaign

Mike can be used as a player character or as an NPC. He is meant to be a character whose slightly cynical attitude about being a superhero is in comic contrast to the "boy scout brigade" approach one often finds with supers. He doesn't think saving innocents or putting criminals in jail is a *bad* thing, but the whole idea of traipsing about the city in a costume and saying things like, "Now, you will face the emerald wrath of the Green Marvel!" just seems a tad loopy to him.

He frequently wonders why supers do not simply call in appropriate government agencies or the police once they have figured out what the bad guys are planning. It has to be safer than going after these lunatics and their goons (not to mention their killer robots) on your own. And some of Mike's fellow heroes get pretty aggravating after a while. Although Mike concedes that their hearts are in the right place, you can only take people like the Green Marvel or Frost Girl for so long before you start feeling the need to whack them upside the head.

It also bugs him that gaining his powers has forced him to do this over and over again. Scooping little Suzi out of the path of an oncoming bus is okay if you only have to do it once a year; if you have to do it twice a week, it becomes a chore.

But Mike cannot walk away. For all his complaining, he is a decent guy and he cannot turn his back on anyone who really needs his help.

He thinks he is a sucker. Everyone else knows he is a hero. A cranky hero, perhaps, but a hero nonetheless.

Appendix Z

What's It Got In Its Pockets?

by Jacqui Smith

Characters in roleplaying games have a habit of leaving dead or unconscious bodies lying around behind them. In addition to the deadly activities of player characters, having the heroes come across a corpse is one way to set the action rolling in almost any genre. Inevitably they will search the body, either because they're looking for loot, or trying to find some means of identification. Perhaps they are even looking for a clue as to how the deceased met their fate. Was it murder or accident? The pockets have their own tale to tell. What's likely to be in there depends in part on the person, their sex, job, personal habits, and social standing, but also on the genre and technological level.

Pockets as we know them are a relatively recent invention. A pocket was originally "a small bag or pouch carried by a person, esp. a small bag inserted into a garment for the carrying of small articles, such as money." The word "purse" comes from the same root. Of course, such an item was, when worn outside one's garment, a natural target for pickpockets. But if tucked inside they were hard to get at, for the owner as well. So a slit was sewn into the trousers or skirt to let a person access their pockets. Strangely enough, it wasn't until the late 18th century that some poor fellow got sick and tired of having to remember to tie his pocket on every day before he got dressed. He asked his wife to sew the pocket right to his trousers, so he wouldn't ever forget it again. This practice rapidly became popular, and so there you have it: the pocket.

Fantasy

In a fantasy world resembling medieval Earth, the pocket is basically a purse, attached by strings to clothing, but in the realms of fantasy anything is possible, including the anachronistic invention of trouser pockets. Tolkien's description suggests that Bilbo had pockets in his trousers . . . so what might have be in there, aside from the One Ring?

- Money. Perhaps coins varying in denomination, in origin and type. Tokens of exchange in a fantasy world are often metal because of its durability, but may be made of bone, ceramic, stone, or more exotic materials. They may be designed with holes so they can be strung together in loops. Gems are often utilized by adventurers as a means of carrying large sums without much weight, and can be exchanged for cash on most civilized planes.
- Keys. Often much larger and less complex than modern keys.
- Scraps of parchment or vellum, perhaps even a small notebook.
- Quill pen, bottle of ink, and pen knife.
- Hand mirror, usually a shiny piece of brass.
- Eating knife and/or spoon.
- Nuts, dried fruit, maybe even toffees or other candy.
- String, thread, maybe even a needle case.
- Tinderbox, flint and steel, perhaps a pouch of tobacco.
- Kerchief. Larger than a handkerchief, and often richly embroidered.
- Pomander. A scented ball, perhaps an orange studded with cloves.
- Spell components (Do you really want to search that wizard's pouches?)

Modern

Rarely is the divide between the sexes so great as in the "pocket versus handbag" department, and in the contents thereof. So much so, that we much surely consider the gentleman's pockets and the ladies' handbag as separate articles. Then there are children's pockets, a mystery to any adult.

Adult pockets may contain:

- Keys. Car keys, house or apartment keys, office keys, keys to lockers and safe-deposit boxes, keys that the owner has forgotten which lock they belong to.
- Writing implements. Pens of various types, colors, and varieties, pencils and rubbers, sharpeners and the like. These tell you more than you might think about their owner -- a teacher will almost always carry a whiteboard marker, for example.
- Notebook or scribble pad.
- Money wallet, coin purse, card folder. The wallet and card folder should also contain various forms of identification, such as drivers' license, credit card, gun licenses, library card, supermarket cards and so on. Business cards in the card folder may also give clues as to the person's identity. Any business card in multiple copies is probably the person's own business card others will indicate contacts.
- Matches or lighter. Often found together with cigarettes, cigars or tobacco.
- Nail clippers, hair comb, hand mirror, and other personal grooming items.
- Pillbox containing aspirin, paracetamol, other off-the-shelf or prescription drugs; the latter may give a clue to the person's medical condition.
- Illicit drugs, the most common being marijuana, cocaine, ecstasy, heroin etc. Large quantities may indicate the person was dealing in drugs.
- Mints, chewing gum, chocolate pebbles or other forms of candy.
- Cell-phone and/or pager.
- Calculator.
- Flashlight.
- Glove(s) or mittens.
- Plastic handcuffs, also known as zip-strips commonly used by law enforcement and security officers.
- Knife. Most likely a pocket knife, a pen knife, a Swiss army knife, or similar. Concealed combat knives such as switchblades are illegal in many countries.
- Handgun and/or ammunition. Some sidearms are small enough to fit in a pocket, the Walther PPK being an excellent example. A person carrying a concealed weapon elsewhere on their person may well have a spare clip, stray bullets, or spent shells in their pockets. Note that handguns are also illegal weapons in many countries, and require a concealed carry permit in the US.
- Dice, deck of cards, other gaming implements or tokens.
- Shiny stones, koosh ball, and/or other stress-relieving toys and gadgets.

A man's pockets may additionally contain:

- Men's handkerchief.
- Men's deodorant.
- Condoms.
- Tools of the trade screwdriver, multi-tool, magnifying glass, small pliers etc.

A ladies' handbag may additionally contain:

- Ladies' handkerchief.
- Make-up kit lipstick, powder, eyeshadow, etc.
- Sewing kit including scissors.
- Perfume, deodorant.
- Tampons or pads.
- Contraceptive pills.

A child's pockets may contain:

- Handkerchief.
- Toys small cars and trucks, dolls, stuffed animals, and those frequently unidentifiable plastic objects found in kiddie meals from fast-food chains.

- Pencils, crayons, felt pens, ball points.
- Calculator.
- Candy sometimes wrapped, sometimes well covered in pocket fluff.
- Coins usually loose change.
- House key sometimes tied in place.
- Cell phone or GPS locator-pager (used by affluent families to track mislaid offspring).

Future

You have to wonder where they put the pockets in some of those spacer uniforms, don't you? Perhaps, having evolved a cashless society they don't need money any more but then where do they keep their credit card? So let's assume people still need pockets, and consider what might be in there.

- Identification. Probably not a simple plastic ID card, but more likely an electronic device containing information about the person's genetic markers, fingerprints, and other distinguishing data. This might not be a card; perhaps it is an item of jewelry.
- Money. Credit rating may be integrated in the ID, but it's quite conceivable that cash money still exists in some form.
- Communicator. The successor to the cell-phone, this device may well incorporate video as well as sound. Again it may be as utilitarian or decorative as the user desires.
- Keys. Most likely electronic, possibly integrated into the ID, but still could be necessary, although the management computer of a home, vehicle or spaceship can no doubt recognize its proper owners.
- Candy or chewing gum. Quite possibly sugarless, and actually good for you.
- Pocket computer. Much more sophisticated, and both smaller and neater than a modern notebook computer. It acts as diary, calculator, notebook, personal assistant, games controller, music player, library, and stress reliever all in one handy package.
- Pocket medic. A doctor in a box, able to check vital signs and administer medication as needed.
- Personal grooming kit. Comb, perfume, make-up, etc.
- Sidearm. A pocket-sized laser would be unlikely to deliver much power, and may be as much a cigarette lighter, flashlight, and hand tool as much as weapon.
- Tools. Anything from a simple knife through a sonic screwdriver to an ultra-tech utilitool that fixes most anything you could imagine.

If many of the items in those lists seem similar, remember that some things really do never change.

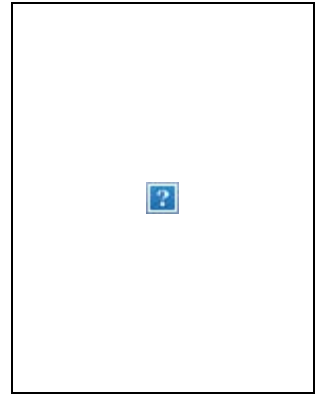
Pyramid Review

Monster Smackdown (for Buffy the Vampire Slayer RPG)

Published by Eden Studios

Written by Thom Marrion

168-page color hardcover; \$30.00



[Enter, singing (to the tune of the Armour Hot Dogs theme):]

*Smackdown! **Monster Smackdown!** All **Buffy** fans need Monster Smackdown!
Gamers, fic-ers, kids who watch the box! Teenies, oldies, even kids with golden locks . . .
Love Smackdown! **Monster Smackdown.** A sourcebook for **Buffy** I Looooooooove.*

[Exit, dancing.]

That previous paragraph was constructed using the rules included in the **Monster Smackdown** sourcebook for running a musical episode in the **Buffy the Vampire Slayer RPG**. Okay, not strictly, but it inspired me. No, seriously. They give suggestions for reconstructing "Once More, with Feeling" (the greatest *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* episode ever) as an RPG session. Admittedly, that requires a group who feels comfortable running musical improv, but is that any stranger than finding a group that wants to play an RPG based on a TV show?

Monster Smackdown follows a certain RPG paradigm by being the third core book for the Buffy RPG, and being chock full of monsters. The book is probably one of the strongest released for the game in terms of usability for non-**Buffy** RPG players who are just fans of the TV show.

The introductory chapter includes a series of optional hellmouths, each of which is fit to host their own campaign, and brief descriptions of a few demonic dimensions. Chapter two covers vampires in detail: their history, their creation, their abilities (general and special), and all the fun bits you could use to detail the undead of the Buffy-verse. If you want a vamp with Dracula's shape-shifting abilities, or who'll leave skeletal remains behind, these rules let you do it.

Demons are discussed in depth in chapter three. The chapter gives an introductory glimpse into what makes a demon, and what kind of demons there are. There is a rundown of various demons that have appeared on the show, ranging from Vengeance Demons to a chorus line of various ichor-dripping nasties. After that is a chapter of more miscellaneous villainy. There are ghosts and poltergeists, spirits of vengeance, zombies (with, oddly enough, no reference to Eden's **All Flesh Must be Eaten** game), fairy monsters (like the child-slaying Der Kindestod or the voice stealing monsters known as The Gentlemen), and creatures of *Science!*, such as the Buffybot or the mutant swim team fish men. It finishes with a description of normal people who still manage to cause trouble for Buffy and her pals on the show. Of course, this is "normal" in a relative sense, when one of them is a chaos magician and another is invisible.

The fourth descriptive chapter (Bads, Big & Small) is the most satisfying. It goes into the various long- and medium-term villains that have plagued the characters of the *Buffy* TV show. There are full-page character sheets for Adam, Glory, the Master, Angelus, and Dracula. There are also shorter descriptions for characters such as The First Evil and its Harbinger followers, plus the fear demon-lette Gachnar and Sweet, the demon responsible for making prime-time musicals respectable again. It's good to see major villains covered in such detail, and the minor ones (henchmen and single-episode villains) are covered in standard quick-sheet format. The organization is alphabetical, with minions placed in their master's location. For example, Absalom, Colin: The Anointed One, and vamped Willow & Xander are all located next to The Master's entry.

After that is a chapter of demonic abilities, and options for running various demons as PCs. These range from members of the Miquot Clan (whose Quality package cost is only slightly higher than being a cop) to vengeance demons (which have a Quality cost three times that of being a Slayer). A quartet of monstrous PC templates rounds out the chapter, providing ready-to-go troll, Miquot Clan, Werewolf, and Zombie templates.

The final chapter is the next episode in "Djinn, no Slayer," the sample campaign appearing serially in each Buffy product. This episode seems very focused on being used as an adventure for players either playing the TV cast, or a game set in Sunnydale. This is not necessarily a poor assumption, but it is one that requires Directors who've taken their games elsewhere to do a bit of rewriting.

Overall, ***Monster Smackdown*** more than satisfies. The quality and quantity of the monsters and antagonists from the show detailed within is delightful. What the book is missing are more details on the creation of new monsters. The Demon Creation chapter is more a checklist of demon abilities, and I'd been under the impression the book would have more info on creating antagonists for ***Buffy The Vampire Slayer*** RPGs. In fact, the back cover states "rules, guidelines and ideas for creating monsters true to the spirit of the Buffyverse."

There really isn't such a thing, and I'd been hoping to see an expansion on some of the ideas from the main book, such as monsters as metaphors for various personal problems that viewers of the show (and hence, players in the game) might themselves encounter. Suggestions on integrating that into the game (hints on how to broach touchy subjects with players, or checking out the comfort zones of your players) or other tools for making and using monsters properly in the game are sadly missing.

Art and layout wise the book holds together well, although one shot seems kind of obviously a test shot for the makeup (the Miquot head shot on page 154). The book is, like the previous two, a full-color hardcover, and makes good use of it, although there are at least two page references on one page that were never filled in, which is a bit disconcerting.

Monster Smackdown is very successful as a monster catalog for the show. It will appeal to both ***Buffy The Vampire Slayer*** players and fans of the show, and provides lots of new material for Directors to use as antagonists in their games. The lack of monster creation rules is a disappointment, and does detract somewhat from the overall usefulness of the book, but more than enough quality material remains in the book to make it a good buy.

--Justin Mohareb

Pyramid Review

Shane Lacy Hensley's *Savage Worlds*

Published by [Pinnacle Entertainment Group](#)

Written by Shane Lacy Hensley with John R. Hopley & Zeke Sparkes

Illustrated by Paul Daly, Marcio Fiorito, Tom Fowler, Mike Osadciw, Richard "Rico" Pollard, Jay Rozen, Chad Sergesketter, Loston Wallace, Cheyenne Wright & Kieran Yanner

\$29.95

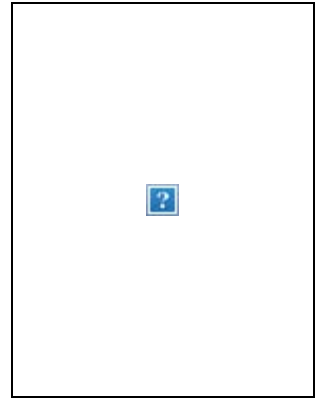
From the outset, *Shane Lacy Hensley's Savage Worlds* touts itself as many things -- "Fast! Furious! Fun!" and also revolutionary. It is designed as both a roleplaying game *and* a miniatures game, but it cannot claim to be new. The mechanics and system for *Savage Worlds* are derived from the Origins Award winning skirmish rules, [The Great Rail Wars Miniatures Battle Game](#), themselves based upon the *Deadlands: the Weird West RPG* and setting that Pinnacle is best known for. At its heart, the aim of *Savage Worlds* is to be fast -- both in setting a game up and in its play -- and also able to handle mass combats as easily as it does between single opponents.

Savage Worlds comes as a sturdy, but slim hardback that is decently illustrated and reasonably well written bar the occasional typographical error. It should be pointed out that *Savage Worlds* is not being presented in the originally proposed format, which was a three-ring binder into which can be slipped the rules, plus updates and errata as necessary. Further, it does feel rather overpriced for what you *are* given -- even though it does turn out to be rather good. Along side the main body of the rules, the author uses the voice and icon of "Smilin' Jack," a jester-hatted, harlequin-painted skull to provide commentary, advice, and alternatives to the game's contents.

Upon opening up the book, little time is wasted in getting down to the system's Test Drive, a light version of the rules that introduce its basic concepts and help equip the players ready to game. This could be any one of the scenarios available from the publisher's website, or for any of their *Savage Worlds* settings. These will include future releases for *Weird Wars* -- including a take on The 'Nam, the dark fantasy *Evernight*, the Gothic Apocalyptic *Blood Moon*, and the space opera *Slipstream*.

Essentially, the game's traits (attributes and skills) are rated in single die types -- four, six, eight, 10, and 12-sided dice -- with the average human possessing a d6 for each attribute. Basic rolls of the die succeed on a roll of a four or more, and are open-ended; higher rolls lead to additional success levels. Both player characters and some villains are what *Savage Worlds* terms "Wild Cards," and they are allowed to roll a Wild Die along with a trait's die whenever a test is made. The Wild Die is a single d6, and Wild Cards can keep the best result for their test. Player characters also possess "Bennies," usually three per session, which can be burnt to re-roll trait tests or make rolls to soak up damage. The only other real addition to Test Drive rules is the method of determining initiative prior to combat; the GM deals both players and NPC cards from a standard deck of playing cards. If they are dealt a joker card, the character can act first and do so with bonuses.

Creating characters for the game is a likewise speedy process and consists of a player upgrading from a base of a four-sided die for their five attributes: Agility, Smarts, Spirit, Strength, and Vigor. All can be raised to the human average, but players will find that they will need to keep one or two attributes at the base rating in order to for their characters



to qualify for some of the game's Edges. From the five attributes, another four secondary characteristics -- Pace (movement range), Parry (an opponent's target number in hand-to-hand combat), Charisma, and Toughness (damage threshold -- under and the damage is shrugged off, over and the character might be shaken or worse). A character also gets 15 points to spend on skill dice, taken from a relatively short, but comprehensive list.

While the default race in ***Savage Worlds*** is the humble human (which gain a free Edge), the book gives several others -- the aerial humanoid Avions, Dwarfs, Elves, Half-Elves, Half-Folk (Halflings), Half-Orcs, the mantis-like humanoid Mantids, the feline Rakashans, and reptilian Saurians -- which each have their own Edges and Hindrances. Each character is allowed one Major and two Minor Hindrances, which can be used to buy Edges, raise an attribute by a die type, and provide extra skill points or more money.

In comparison with the skills list, the list of Edges and Hindrances is quite extensive. The Edges are broken down into Background (Arcane Background, Noble, Quick, Young and Elderly), Combat, Leadership, Power (which relate to the Arcane Backgrounds), Professional (Air Ace, Gadgeteer, Wizard, Mentalist, and so on), Social, Weird (Beast Bond, Danger Sense, Healer), Wild Card (these work only when a joker is drawn during initiative), and Legendary (both these and the Wild Card Edges are available when a player gains Legendary experience rank). Many other Hindrances also have requirements that must be met before selection. At a minimum this the Rank of Novice -- all player characters begin as Novices -- but can also include minimum attribute die types and other Edges.

At first glance, characters seem to start off with relatively few Edges, but given that characters gain enough experience points to Level Up every other adventure -- at which point they can take a new Edge, increase a skill or buy a new one, or increase an attribute die type -- this is not really the case. Further, at every fourth Level Up, a character also moves up a Rank -- from Novice through Seasoned, Veteran, Heroic, and finally Legendary, thus giving them access to better, more effective Edges.

One Edge in particular covers the more outré aspects of a ***Savage Worlds*** game -- the Arcane Background. This is broken down into Magic, Miracles, Psionics, Super Powers, and Weird Science types, which should cover the demands of most genres and games. Each has an associated Arcane Skill (except for Super Powers, where each ability is treated as both power and skill), a number of associated powers, and the necessary Power Points to fuel the various powers. Once a player has taken an Arcane Background, they also select from a list of generic powers, limited only by their current rank and the type of Arcane Background. For example, spellcasters with the Arcane Background (Magic) are unlikely to have either the healing or greater healing Powers, while those with the Arcane Background (Super Powers) rarely have the detect/conceal arcana, healing or greater healing, light, wave rider, or zombie Powers. Of all the Arcane Backgrounds, Super Powers are the least powerful, geared more toward the low-end pulp style game rather than the four-color genre. Further, every Power can be modified by giving it various trappings, so that the Bolt Power can be made to look like a shard of ice or a swarm of bees, while a barrier might be made of fire, ice, thorns, bones, or even be a plain old force field.

Savage Worlds combat can handle one-on-one fights, small skirmishes, and mass battles involving thousands -- but considering that the rules are derived from ***The Great Rail Wars***, it is no surprise that it is by default a skirmish game. Players are encouraged to handle their allies in battle, treating each ally group as a single character rather than as individuals. The aim of this is to unburden the GM, leaving them free to handle the bad guys. In tandem with the rules for vehicles, the combat system in ***Savage Worlds*** can be used to play a miniatures game, but there are also rules for handling a skirmish or even a mass battle without the need to resort to miniatures. These are best described as short and to the point -- the skirmish rules run to three pages, whereas those for mass battles run to just two, plus an example. A ***Savage Worlds*** Troop Builder program is available from the publisher's website if more exacting detail is needed.

At this point, ***Savage Worlds*** is written with the pulp style game in mind, whether this is swords and sorcery, the pulps of the 1930s, World War II, and even the Vietnam War -- the latter two either straight or as part of Pinnacle's ***Weird Wars*** line. While the range of personal gear also covers the black powder and future periods, the vehicles list concentrates upon the twentieth century, including civilian types as well as modern and WWII era vehicles, albeit with an American slant. If there is any real omission from either the gear or vehicle lists, it is for the straight pulp genre -- no statistics or rules for the whip are given, nor is there any multi-passenger aeroplane listed. The latter omission could

have been rectified with the inclusion of the Douglas DC-3 or the PBX Catalina. A solid, though relatively short bestiary, suited to the atypical fantasy world, supports the fantasy genre.

Up to this point, ***Savage Worlds*** has only one problem -- a lack of full examples of either character generation or of combat. This is not so much of a problem as ***Savage Worlds*** is very easy to grasp, not just in terms of combat and character generation, but also in terms of play. Where the real problems begin is in terms of GM support and in the way it is pitched at the novice player.

Veterans will pick up ***Savage Worlds*** very quickly, but despite the ease of the rules, neophytes attempting to learn them will be hampered by the lack of examples. Much of the advice in the GM's section is likewise pitched at the novice; while it is decent enough, it seems all-too-brief. Plus it and the rules are not put into practice with either a sample world or adventure, or even guidelines for using ***Savage Worlds*** with any of Pinnacle Games; while a scenario and guidelines for a ***Deadlands*** game using the ***Savage Worlds*** rules are available for download from the publisher's website (as well as scenarios), it seems disappointing that the GM has been given nothing with the book he has just purchased . . . especially given the price.

Thus the title of this game is something of a misnomer, as its emphasis is more on the savage than the worlds, more on the rules than the setting. In this it does not live up to the claims on the back cover; while it does give a reasonable introduction to creating races or world, it is neither complete nor comprehensive in this aspect. On the plus side, it is complete in terms of the rules for character, combat, vehicles, and arcane aspect backgrounds and those rules are fast, and arguably, savagely so.

With its speedy pick up and play aspect, ***Savage Worlds*** lives up to its claim as "Fast! Furious! Fun!", but whether it is a revolution in gaming is another matter. That it nicely bridges the divide between roleplaying and miniatures play is clever enough, but revolutionary may be so much hyperbole. In the meantime, ***Savage Worlds*** delivers much of what it promises.

--Matthew Pook

'M' Is For The Many Things She Gave Me . . .

Over here in the states, this Sunday is Mother's Day, the day where more long distance phone calls are made than any other day. (Curiously enough, Father's Day is the day where more *collect* calls are made than any other day . . .)

Anyway, since I'm in the "post-X2-pre-*Matrix Reloaded*" mental haze, I thought I could capitalize on the coming holiday by using it as a column topic (and providing the moral dilemma of whether I'll try to now claim the flowers I buy her on my taxes as a business expense). Yes, mothers are pretty darn universal. And, for the most part, motherly perspectives on the world can vary wildly from many other worldviews; in particular, mothers are often much more forgiving, understanding, and supportive than the bulk of humanity.

Thus to use my own saintly mother as an example, a phone conversation might go something like this:

"Hey, Mom."

"You sound down; what's the matter?"

"Welll . . . I got yelled at in my office today because I messed up a \$100,000 account, I'm under police investigation for a string of unsolved arsons, and I accidentally hit a bus full of nuns while I was doing 110 MPH in a parking lot."

"Hmph. What's your boss' phone number? He can't yell at my son like that . . . And, see? I've always told you to watch out for those nun busses; they drive like *maniacs*! And have you been wearing clean flame-retardant underwear?"

I've spoken with many of my friends, and most of them have had conversations that are very similar to the one above (err . . . with their own mothers, that is . . . not with mine).

In spirit of the holiday, then, I would provide a few ideas for incorporating the joys of motherhood.

Now That You're Done Thwarting Evil, Can I Borrow \$10? Curiously, I just now realized that, while having parents is fairly common for starting RPG characters (although many starting characters instead seem to fit into the [Siblingless Orphan of Mystery With No Known Relatives Or Even A Social Security Number](#) category), having children is *much* rarer. In the LARP I help run in town, I realized we had a first when someone brought in a character that already was a mother. I suspect there are a number of reasons for this lack; for one thing, most RPGs seem to encourage creating characters that are at the start of their careers, and it's hard to explain why you have had this full, rich life complete with child-rearing if you're coming in as a 1st-level Moisture Farmer. But these problems aren't insurmountable, and many point-based systems already have the ability to incorporate dependants directly. So if you're looking for something a bit different, then, why not consider making your next character a mommy or daddy? That way, a whole new avenue of story possibilities arises . . . and when the phone rings and it's the police commissioner, you won't know if it's because the city needs saving or because your middle son was arrested for underage drinking at a frat party.

"Mom, I've Been Turned Into A Vampire . . ." Of course, it's also possible to emphasize familial relationships simply by having - and consulting - one's parents in a game. In the super-powered *Aberrant* campaign I ran, for example, both players had characters whose parents that appeared periodically; they provided moral support when necessary, and gave them a human perspective that further enhanced their own connection yet distance to humanity. (One memorable bit of dialogue had the character tell her mother, "But, *mom!* I have responsibilities! I'm a *superhero* now!" To which she replied, "My dear . . . you were *always* a superhero to me.") Parents are also good to add for social opportunities for GMs and players that might otherwise be uncomfortable with other highly personal relationships; although it can be difficult to run a romantic encounter for shy or self-conscious players, running a parent-sibling relationship is often much easier (since we tend to know more the dynamic of those) yet still emotionally involving for those involved in the scene.

Everyone Has A Mother . . . If you're looking for an interesting follow-up to a previous adventure, consider the point raised above: Everyone has (or had) a mother . . . even the biggest monster the heroes have ever dealt with. And, very often, that mother will believe in the child no matter what, whether it's through denial or an insight to the best qualities her offspring had to offer. As such, a mother scorned can make a *very* powerful enemy; this can either be through

direct actions ("I shall take up the mantle of Death Hat and redeem my son's legacy!!!"), or indirect means ("Public outcry continues to rise as Death Hat's mother makes the talk show circuit to speak out against the vigilantes who senselessly murdered her son . . ."). Depending on the mercy and morality of the heroes - and the ruthlessness of the mother - she can be a challenging alternative to more "straightforward" enemies, as well as providing a means of continuing a popular storyline in an unconventional manner.

Mothers Know The Truth. But moms also have an ability to glean hard truths about their children . . . especially if realizing the truth about one child lets her ensure her others are safe. As an alternative to the antagonistic mother, then, consider making her sympathetic. What if the heroes are approached by the mother of a fallen foe, and she admits that her child was no good? She may need the party to track down one of her other children, who she feels is in danger of taking the same -- or worse - path in life that her thwarted child did. Can the heroes convey a mother's plea and turn a would-be evildoer's life around? (In addition to providing players with a chance for good roleplaying, it also supplies an opportunity to be proactive in problem-solving, which is a rarity for many campaigns.)

Yes, I wouldn't be here today if it weren't for my mom . . . and I suspect many of our readers are the same way. So honor her, and make sure she feels special. And if you call on Sunday, don't call collect.

--*Steven Marsh*

The Power of the Craft

Craftmasters in *Ars Magica* and *Dark Ages: Mage*

Part One: Background

by Phil Masters

As anyone who is familiar with the background to White Wolf's *Mage* line will be aware, the organization which fought for reality as the Order of Reason in *Mage: the Sorcerers' Crusade*, and went on to become the world-dominating conspiratorial Technocracy in *Mage: the Ascension*, began its existence as a secret faction of peasant mages and "inspired" craftsmen in the European Middle Ages: the Craftmasters. Most will also know that the original inspiration for the medieval back-story to these games was *Ars Magica*, although that game has now gone its own way, and has passed into the hands of Atlas Games, with its "official history" diverging substantially. Thus, the canonical magicians of White Wolf's medieval world are now described by the new *Dark Ages: Mage*.

Nonetheless, both those medieval games largely ignore the Craftmasters. They have vanished altogether from *Ars Magica*, and they rate only a one-line mention in *Dark Ages: Mage*. Now, while the former game at least can probably do fine without them -- it makes a point of cleaving especially closely to authentic medieval beliefs, whereas the Craftmasters don't quite fit, at least without a little work -- this seems like a shame. The dominant magical factions in both these settings are hubristic and elitist wizards; in fact, the chief group in the heart of Europe in both is the Order of Hermes. While there may be "hedge wizards" around, they mostly have to avoid the mighty Hermetics, or get crushed or recruited if they get too uppity. And yet, the Middle Ages featured not only aristocrats and churchmen, but also periodical and sometimes spectacular peasant revolts, while the building of the great cathedrals shows that a great deal of creativity, knowledge, and skill did rest in the hands of lower-class craftsmen -- indeed, of masons. And the transformation of the magic-laden medieval world into the Renaissance and then the modern era, *despite* the presence of, in the games, a large organization of conservative and self-interested wizards, does rather suggest that *someone* may have been working in the shadows to change things.

Hence, this article sets out to restore the Craftmasters to a place in the mythic medieval world, and to make them playable as characters. They are stolid and cautious, but bitter and tough; they are very secret, and they know many secrets; they are the worm in the magical bud, the heretic egalitarian in supernatural form. And eventually, one day, in the future, in a way, at vast cost -- they are going to win.

History

The story of the Craftmasters has been told in various White Wolf games and supplements; the author of this article, being vain and totally biased, is going to recommend *The Artisan's Handbook* and *The Swashbuckler's Handbook*, both for *Mage: the Sorcerers' Crusade*. In brief, the organization was founded at a meeting called the "Gathering of the Square" in Frankfurt in 997 AD, by Wolfgang von Reismann, a renegade German nobleman and alchemist who claimed to be the rightful heir to the lore of the Brotherhood of the Rule, an Ancient Roman mystical craftsmen's group.

The Craftmasters can actually claim much the same intellectual antecedents as the Order of Hermes, but they choose to apply their lore very differently. Von Reismann had a bitter view of the church hierarchy, nobility, and Hermetics, and the Craftmasters had a revolutionary cast from the first. Their chief association in the mundane world was with the itinerant skilled stonemasons who could be found all around the continent, and they supported the building of the great cathedrals in the Romanesque and Gothic styles -- thereby promoting the idea that man, by skill, may seek to reach towards Heaven. These great buildings also helped to spread the power of faith, thereby subtly (and sometimes not so subtly) weakening the power of the Order of Hermes.

For von Reismann and his followers had quickly decided that the Order was their primary enemy. Prideful nobles could be defeated by political action or, if necessary, by simple violence; corrupt churchmen could be dealt with individually, leaving the pure faith cleansed and unsullied (for most Craftmasons were devout, if rather unconventional, believers); but the Hermetics, with their arrogant claim to a monopoly on mystical secrets, were a direct and perpetual obstruction to the proper use of the inner secrets of sacred craftsmanship -- to raise men together in brotherhood towards the highest. Thus, while mundane revolts brought down mundane oppressors, the Craftmasons took the struggle against the *status quo* to the magical world.

However, hard experience taught them that they would have to spend a *long* time preparing to strike at this enemy. This was acceptable to them; cathedral builders were well used to great projects taking generations, and the now virtually immortal von Reismann remained in the shadows, supervising the preparations. They spent much of two full centuries on these, surfacing only occasionally, as with the struggles of Stephen Trevanus in England. Then, around the beginning of the 13th century, they recruited a group of mystic artisans who had broken with the Order of Hermes, and learned of new fractures and crimes in the Order, especially the House Tremere disaster.

Thus, they decided to strike. They began relatively cautiously, with an assault on a well-established but fractious covenant in southern France; Mistrige. Thanks to surprise, hand-crafted cannon imported from their outposts in the east, careful study of Mistrige's architecture, and a traitor within the gates, they were victorious. The Order of Hermes put this defeat down to peasant cunning, treachery, and Tremere influence. The wizards of Europe still don't understand that they've got a whole new war on their hands.

Ideology

The Craftmasons are mystical revolutionaries. They combine (rather anachronistic) personal readings of the Bible with ideas derived from pre-Christian philosophy. The former suggest to them that the claims of warrior-nobles to political power, and the behavior of wealthy churchmen, have very little to do with the roots of Christianity. The latter, an odd and incomplete jumble of Neoplatonism and Gnosticism, along with republican ideas derived from Roman sources, lead them to argue that as humans all draw their essence from the same level of reality, personal merit must derive from wisdom and virtue -- the refinement of one's personal nature -- not birth. An individual human being can achieve higher worth and eventually greatness by skill and hard work, and it is possible that not all men are destined for glory or salvation (debate over this point is intense), but the only way this can be achieved is in the context of "work" -- whether mundane labor or the more important higher levels of mystical study.

Thus, Craftmasons are *not*, in most cases, "primitive communists." They believe in living socially, and share some things in order to strengthen their mutual bonds (notably, they try to eat communally, in large groups), but they have the medieval guildsman's strong belief in hierarchy. Unlike the Order of Hermes, however, they do not draw a sharp distinction between those with the magical "Gift" and those without. It is an article of faith with them that the least of their number *might* in theory, with enough effort, eventually advance to mastery. This in turn makes them try to preserve humility among their members of Master rank, and in any case they spend too much effort mocking the aristocracy to take any pretensions to "class" (as opposed to skill or power) quite seriously.

This leaves most of them with, at best, a rather detached view of peasant revolts. These tend to be distinctly rural affairs, triggered by the anger of oppressed peasants who feel that each man should be permitted to plough his own field in his own corner of the country, and that *no* hierarchy should exist anywhere. Even when mass rebellions do spread to large towns, they are often most popular among apprentices and others at the bottom of the guild-shaped hierarchy. A Craftmason likes to see a fat priest or cruel baron strung up as well as the next commoner, but would rather keep things under control, so that those among them who have the talent can advance to mastery of their secret arts. The assault on Mistrige came close to using angry peasants as disposable cannon fodder.

There are exceptions to this rule, including Trevanus, who found a strong following in the countryside. However, he was ultimately unsuccessful, and found himself disagreeing with von Reismann and the rest of the leadership uncomfortably often, while his interest in trade as a source of freedom will eventually inspire the formation of a whole new faction with even less regard for the peasantry. By the late Renaissance era, when other groups, descended from

the Craftmasons, have taken over the primary focus on craftsmanship and commerce, the Craftmasons themselves, growing increasingly radical, will see their main source of loyal support as lying in the villages and countryside; they will inspire radical, more or less rustic movements such as the Diggers and Levelers, and will eventually be destroyed by their exasperated former friends. But in the 13th century, they are still essentially urban.

Women and the Craftmasons

Like many people who are radical in some ways, Craftmasons can be terribly conservative in matters which they don't consider important -- and in the 13th century, an age when most European males consider women distinctly the "weaker vessels," their conservatism extends to this subject. The stereotypical Craftmason hall is a rather masculine place, full of gruff, bearded stone-workers.

However, as with most mystical groups, this attitude is tempered by a forced recognition that some women can demonstrate stronger magical talents than many men, and a practical revolutionary's understanding that female agents can be amazingly effective. Some adept women even manage to avoid the wisewoman-healer stereotype. The rather puritanical Craftmasons are often uncomfortable with the use of female spies, assuming that they may employ immoral trickery in their work (and yes, some do); but examples of other, subtler techniques, and the pragmatism forced on the organization by harsh realities, leave most accepting the idea. Anyway, more female Craftmasons are scholars than spies; while it is hard for a woman (especially a non-aristocratic woman) to gain a good education in this period, students of the supernatural have to pursue *unusual* courses of study much of the time, and once one has achieved basic literacy, this isn't necessarily much harder for a woman than for a man.

Views of Other Magical Traditions

Hard experience has made the Craftmasons cautious and secretive, and in addition, they have a fair share of conventional peasant xenophobia and surliness. This all means that they have some difficulty becoming friendly with other mystical groups from beyond their own normal cultural framework, even when they might share some interests. They absolutely abhor anyone who has communion with the powers of Hell, both for conventional religious reasons and because these are clearly just another conspiracy to oppress the mass of mankind, without even the paltry excuses offered by most over-mighty lords. Indeed, a confrontation with such enemies is probably the one thing which would make a Craftmason make common cause with a typical Hermetic magician. They tend to lump vampires and other night-creatures, and for that matter werewolves, in with Satanist wizards for this purpose. It is also worth noting that, while Craftmasons are by no means immune to diabolical temptation, demons who have succeeded in the past in tempting countless wizards with offers of personal power and glory have sometimes been thoroughly confused and stymied when they tried making the same offer to Craftmason Masters. More clever demons who study their victims before acting have accomplished rather more by playing on sins such as anger and envy.

Craftmasons fairly often come into contact with non-diabolical "witch-cults" and more or less intact pagan survivals. They tend to react rather uncertainly in these cases. On the one hand, their tendency to somewhat conventional Christian belief, and a craftsman's disdain for the wild and untidy, makes them hostile; on the other, many Craftmasons are broad minded enough to recognize fellow rebels against the *status quo*, and some are educated enough to admit to the pagan basis for their own lore. They also sometimes meet Kabbalistic adepts among the Jewish communities of Europe, in which case they usually moderate a basic suspicion of the outsider with a certain blunt willingness to let these mostly harmless folk get on with their lives. Craftmasons rarely participate in the waves of persecution of Jews which sometimes sweep European communities, unless they become caught up in the hysteria; most are cool-headed enough to recognize such things for what they are, and can and do determine that the blood libels which support them are simply untrue. Unfortunately, they rarely bother acting to damp such things down, either.

Some Craftmasons approve of the Crusades on religious grounds; others hold that good Christians should put their house in order at home before seeking conquests overseas. The former regard Islamic magical groups as just enough category of enemy (and tend to find themselves viewed in return as just another pack of Frankish hedge wizards); the latter, insofar as they acknowledge the existence of such powers at all, regard them as exotic irrelevances, to be left to future generations to confront. As for the wizards of more distant lands -- well, honest craftsmen have greater concerns

nearer to home than lying travelers' tales, don't they?

Ars Magica

The predominance of the Order of Hermes in the Europe of ***Ars Magica*** means that the Craftmasons are unlikely to encounter many factions who they might feel obliged to approach as equals. There are plenty of hedge magicians, to be sure, but they mostly lack the Craftmasons' scope and degree of organization, and so can be dealt with individually. For a broad generalization, they tend to quite like natural magicians, respect ascetics, disdain spirit masters (and the occasional Norse wizards who the Hermetics refer to as the "Order of Odin"), condescend to cunning-folk, and ignore Kabbalists and other Jewish wonder-workers.

Occasionally, Craftmasons in eastern lands (mostly the Crusader domains) collide with the Ikhwan Sulayman (see *Blood and Sand*). These meetings vary in their outcomes, but are rarely friendly, and given the power of the Muslim magi, they tend to end badly for the Craftmasons. Wise Muslim hedge wizards, on the other hand, avoid the intolerant and assertive Craftmasons if they can.

Craftmasons know a little of the faerie folk, and do not much like what they know -- but they have more important concerns than this.

Dark Ages: Mage

Craftmasons cannot ignore the other five major Fellowships of the Dark Medieval world (besides the Hermetics), but they tend to skirt around the subject of these people's status and moral position. This is easiest, for them, in relation to the Old Faith, Spirit-Talkers, and Valdaermen, who they mostly quietly dismiss as rustic idolaters. If pagans should get in the way of a Craftmason building project on virgin ground, as sometimes happens, the Craftmason will try to muster a large enough force to crush resistance, if that's possible, and grudgingly back off and go somewhere else if it isn't. They very occasionally find themselves in alliance with witches of the Old Faith against oppressive lords or churchmen, but sheer mutual incomprehension tends to make these collaborations strictly temporary. In return, the rural cults tend to see the Craftmasons as a duller version of the Hermetics.

Given that Craftmason relations with the Ahl-i-Batin are inevitably remote at best, hostile at worst (despite the very occasional moment when members of each faction recognize the other's talent for mystic geometry, and usually end up walking away shaking their heads in unrelieved puzzlement), the major question remaining concerns the Messianic Voices. The Craftmasons have inevitably learned that this faction exists, but their responses vary wildly depending on the precise nature of any contact. Sometimes, the Voices seem to Craftmasons like true saints, radiating holiness and working miracles which are no less admirable for being broadly comprehensible in the Craftmasons' own terms, and their ambiguous relationship with the conventional, mainstream church is no great problem. At other times, the Voices' attitudes to the mass of common folk, and their tendency to treat questions of the next world as more important than the injustices of this one, jars on the Craftmasons, who see intense holiness all too easily shading over into an attitude of disdainful superiority.

Craftmason Magic

Craftmasons practice a very *materialistic* style of "working." (They try not to call it "magic," but sometimes the word proves unavoidable.) They understand both base matter, especially stone, and the subtleties of structure and geometry which can imbue it with power. They also fully understand the importance of hard work, in all its aspects -- organization, planning, execution, and perfection. The results of this style of action are usually much less dramatic than Hermetic magic, slower, and perhaps less flexible. They are *not* any less refined.

In fact, despite their name and clearly stated focus on Sacred Architecture, Craftmasons can have a fairly broad range of interests. Some are practical alchemists, pursuing the complexities of refined matter; some employ a mystical, rather visionary style of rhetoric, which can itself prove more or less magical in its workings; others are not too proud to turn simple religious faith against their foes. They include healers among their number, whose techniques wander back and

forth across the line dividing simple folk medicine and hedge wizardry, and also plain craftsmen, soldiers, and spies, whose arts are minimal, little more than charms and prayers, but used deftly to augment their mundane skills.

The greatest Craftmason accomplishments take the form of great buildings and urban communities, thanks to their mastery of Sacred Architecture. This is something of a problem for a group of deeply secretive revolutionaries whose tactics must perforce rely on surprise and sudden, unexpected assaults, but the Craftmasons have solved it by learning to hide in plain sight, and to spend a long time undermining a target before permitting their plans to become visible. Nor are they entirely helpless when on the offensive, especially given their occasional ability to exploit a magical enemy's own resources.

Next Week: Rule mechanics, and the use of Craftmasons in games, as heroes or adversaries.

Designer's Notes: Gurps WWII: Grim Legions

by Michele Armellini

What's In It

This 48-page book is organized along the same standard of the other **GURPS WWII** "nation books." Chapter 1 offers a general history from 1918 to 1945, obviously focusing on the Italian point of view. The chapter describes not only Italy's war, but also how Mussolini came to power, and what he did in two long decades at the nation's helm.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the Italian armed forces of WWII, from infantry squad up, with notes on strategy, tactics, intelligence. It also covers the TO/E of the various unit types, and dwells on specialized, elite, foreign and native troops, as well as on the "poor bloody infantry." Apart from the Army, it covers the Navy, Air Force, and Fascist Militia (the Blackshirts), and the Italian order of battle in June, 1940.

Chapter 3 deals with Italian characters, building on the relevant chapter of the core book, **GURPS WWII**. Readers will find a National Package of Advantages and Disadvantages, suggested background Skills, and customization notes to create Italian soldiers on the basis of the core book templates, as well as information on Military Ranks and the status of Italian Jews.

There are also three all-new templates: the *Alpino* mountain infantryman, the cavalry trooper, and the frogman, for creating those daring raiders who piloted their ride-on torpedoes under the British battleships' bellies.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to the Italian armory, starting with personal gear, equipment, and assorted items. There is a rich selection of small arms, from pistols to the infamous Breda 30 squad machine gun, from flamethrowers to the late-war crudely-machined Schmeisser look-alike. Then there are the Italian vehicles: light artillery, the most representative tanks, the most common fighter, a fast, well-armed recon "jeep", a small torpedo boat, and the ride-on torpedo.

Chapter 5 offers information for all campaigning styles, and suggests campaign themes. It describes the living conditions of the Italian soldiers on all fronts, how they fought and what they felt. It offers a whole range of interesting campaign units, up to the unexpected Italian elite soldiers. It also covers lesser-known topics such as the home front in Italy, Mussolini's collaborationist regime after 1943, the Resistance, and the Italian Allied Army. It gives plenty of roleplaying seeds: The abysmal performance of some scratch-built infantry units during the first Commonwealth offensive in the desert. The bravery of the last cavalry charges in WWII. The epic struggle of the *Folgore* paratroops who just wouldn't give up. The nightmarish rout through the snow-covered steppes and out of the great pocket. The men who stubbornly decided to hold out against all comers in the Balkan mountains, in September, 1943. It's all there.

How I Came To Write It

In January, 2002, I off-handedly asked Gene Seabolt, the **GURPS WWII** line editor, whether he had an author for Grim Legions, the small book about the Italian WWII forces that was then on the wish list. I also immediately went on to criticize him rather curtly as to a very minor point in his recent work, **GURPS WWII** -- which, one would guess, isn't the best way to make friends with an editor! However, I didn't manage to spoil our relationship from the start. Gene saw "promise" in my outline, and by the end of February I got the job.

I had already published a few articles on *Pyramid*, so, while feeling a bit daunted by the idea of writing a book in a language that isn't my mother tongue, I thought I could do it. I was to discover that while the quality standards of *Pyramid* are high, going from electrons to paper would require a further effort at style-polishing.

Apart from the language issue, I was quite confident. I'm no history professor, but I have been an avid wargamer and history buff for years, and I am very familiar with the topic. Additionally, I had a trump card. The very fact that I'm

Italian, while being a drawback when it came to writing, was a great advantage because (I reckoned) not many prospective writers in Gene's stable would be able to access the original sources, in the original language. I was. Apart from the many books I own, I could access libraries containing, for instance, the official Italian General HQ histories about all the campaigns: bulky, difficult-to-find tomes, crammed full with original documents. These were all great primary sources, from operational orders to strength returns. So, I was sure I'd have all the info I needed. Given time, I would find all the details.

Indeed, it turned out I had *too many* details! I delved and dug and found more and more fine gems; soon, Gene had to tell me to curb my ambition. I was listing every second Italian vehicle (well, almost). I had to scale back my project because, as I wrote one chapter, then another, the balance of remaining pages was shrinking far too quickly. One might assume that the good news, coming halfway through my work, would make things easier: the booklets of the **GURPS WWII** line, initially budgeted at 36 pages, leapt to 48. Initially, I was astounded. Then, I did feel relieved; but, knowing I had 12 pages more, I let my contents grow too fat, again. In the end, I had to cut something . . . and you will find one such painful clipping below. But the harder issues came out later, as I was finishing the main history chapter (it probably wasn't too wise of me to keep most of it as the last thing to do).

Fascism

Politics is always controversial, and 1930 politics was an especially inflammatory strain. Today, especially in the Western world, we tend to take for granted that democracy is good, that political violence is abhorrent, and that nationalism may easily get out of hand. This is what we think, exactly because we hazily know of times, bad times, when these ideas were hotly contested. The times of fascism.

Fascism condemned democracy, espoused political violence, and if it had a tenet, it was a chauvinistic, aggressive nationalism. It came to power before Nazism, and not long after Communism. However, once the three totalitarian systems began working in practice, Fascism appeared more difficult to define, as external observers were often puzzled. It was also less effective and ruthless than the other two regimes, and I had to explain all of this in a few terse statements. I wanted to tell the unvarnished truth as I perceived it, but I did not want to offend anyone . . . at least, not too much. Readers will judge if I succeeded.

An even more difficult hurdle was determining how popular, really, had been Fascism with Italians. Mussolini's government actively and purposely stripped the Italians of any overt means to express any disagreement, so there are few objective ways of measuring the actual support he had -- which, additionally, fluctuated considerably. I hope the book explains why at times the nation was with Mussolini, and when and how the popular support began to wane.

The key to understanding Italian Fascism probably lies in understanding Mussolini himself, which is not an easy proposition. Although top-ranking officers, party officials, and other bigwigs would at times even quietly sabotage Mussolini's minor directions in order to defend their own turf and businesses, it's still unquestionable that the destiny of Italy was decided by one man. This is the reason why I dedicated a sizable amount of space to him. There are biographic details, information about his ideology and way of thinking, and a treatment of his special relationship with Hitler.

Stereotypes And Balance

All the WWII combatants have some stereotyped labels attached to them, but this is probably more true for the Italians. Their reputation never recovered from the first Commonwealth desert offensive, which bagged tens of thousands of prisoners. The British propaganda portrayed them as cowardly buffoons and mandolin players. The label is still there today, as otherwise reliable sources still quote from those wartime propaganda bits.

I had to explain how and why this reputation came around, when it wasn't deserved, and why: how it happened that the Italians would "run away," while, when the British and Germans happened to leave their positions in a backward direction, they would "quickly withdraw"; how the Germans would happily take all the merit when things went well, and blame the Italians when they didn't. I also had to write about the many other reasons behind the poor show in

WWII.

On the other hand, however, I needed to maintain my balance. There *were* cases when the Italians' bad reputation was deserved. There was shame, and defeat, and young men's lives stupidly wasted. Being an Italian myself, I risked becoming overly defensive and, well, biased in favor of the Italian troops. I had to avoid that.

I think I did, also because I could enlist some allies.

An Allied Effort

This being my first book, of course my editor's help was invaluable, and he taught me much more than I expected. But apart from him, other authors working for the **GURPS WWII** line helped me, going out of their way to do it. We compared notes with Brian Underhill, author of **GURPS WWII: All the King's Men**, and he gave me useful advice. As **GURPS** gearheads will have already guessed, the small-arms section is largely born of Hans-Christian Vortisch. Italian friends, including a historian, a wargamer and a former serviceman, also provided useful material, and their help is acknowledged in the title page. I want to thank all of them.

Finally, this book owes a lot to my father-in-law, Captain Francesco Scalettari, Silver Medal of Military Valor, 8th Assault Engineer Battalion, "*Folgore*" Parachute Division. He was captured while wounded, at El Alamein, after having done more than his duty.

So, here's the clipping you were waiting for:

The Front Runner

In 1938, Ansaldo and Spa (A Fiat subsidiary) were developing an armored car for the Army, and another one for the colonial police. They were instructed to unify the projects. The Italian Africa Police began field tests in Eastern Africa in 1939, while the Army ordered its batch, now designated Autoblinda AB40, in March, 1940.

To be useful for the colonial police, the armored car had to be suitable for extended patrolling, mainly on roads or dirt tracks, and for breaking up rebel bands that would lack any anti-vehicular weaponry. It also had to be fast and long-ranged, in order to be effective in policing the huge East African colony.

As a result, the AB40's armor was skimpy, its weaponry were only MGs, and its main advantage was speed, especially on the road. Like other armored cars of the time, it had a unique transmission and driving arrangement: it had two drivers, one of them facing to the back. The idea was that while cruising on a road, the armored car might be ambushed by a road block in a bottleneck, where it would lack the space to turn around. The rear-facing driver would step in, literally, and drive away much faster than in an ordinary reverse movement controlled by a forward-facing driver. In practice, it was a two-fronted vehicle: indeed, its rear facing was as sloped as the forward one, and it had a rear-facing MG. Of course, this advantage would be helpful in a very limited set of circumstances, probably not worth the complications to the transmission layout (with the added weight and maintenance problems).

This was by far the fastest vehicle the Italian armor outfits had. Once the war began, the Italian officers realized it was also much less likely to break down than most of their tracked vehicles, especially in the grueling, long-haul movements the desert war involved. Thus, the armored cars were valued both for the recon duties they had been designed for, and whenever a true runner was needed, particularly on the North African front.

Another useful asset of the AB40 was its radio: the vehicles were meant to be able to report from long-ranging patrol missions. Many Italian tanks lacked radios, and even the battalion command ones had shorter-ranged, less reliable sets. To compensate for this, a handful of armored cars were attached to tank regiments, serving both for recon and as radio/command vehicles. In another example of uninformed and hasty judgement on the Italian armed forces after WWII, foreign observers remarked that the Italians wasted good recon vehicles by using them for "escorting their officers."

In 1941, the armored car was upgraded to carry the Breda 20mm autocannon in place of the twin MGs; this upgunned version, detailed below, is the AB41, capable of dealing with its counterparts.

The vehicle was employed by the Italian Africa Police (in small numbers), as divisional assets in armored divisions, by *Bersaglieri* armored battalions, and by cavalry armored outfits, including independent companies. Such companies, platoons and detachments could be found almost anywhere in the Italian Army, although more likely in armored/mobile formations. The *Giovani Fascisti* Division had one of these in 1942, for instance.

Some 250 AB40s were delivered, including a batch of 54 never sent to the Yugoslavian army. About 580 AB41s had been delivered by August, 1943. The Germans captured 57 vehicles, including 20 still in production, and gave some to the RSI; the Germans themselves used them both in Italy and in the Balkans, and had some 200 AB41 produced for them. They also ordered a minor variant, the AB43 (see below), and 103 vehicles were delivered. The Allies also employed captured armored cars in the desert; the specimen tested in Great Britain arrived there sporting a white-red pennant and the Polish Carpathian Lancers' badge. The Polish tankers had added a fire extinguisher.

Three of the crew stations are entirely in the Body, while the commander/gunner station is half in the Turret. There are two drivers, one facing backwards. The radioman takes care of the radio and, if needed, mans the rear-facing MG. He also reloads the main gun with 8-round chargers, or hands them to the commander if the turret is rotated in an awkward position for him to reload. The engine burns 2.7 gallons per hour. The loadout costs \$187.65, with slightly more anti-personnel than anti-vehicular 20mm rounds. The commander rotates the turret by hand-cranking, at about 4° per second.

Autoblinda AB41 (Spa-Ansaldo)

Subassemblies: Standard Wheeled Chassis, heavy, medium slope +3; Medium Weapon Turret, full rotation, [Body:T] +1; Wheels, off-road (4) +2.

Powertrain: 60-kW standard gasoline engine with 60-kW all-wheel drive transmission, 51-gallon standard tank, 16,000-kWs batteries.

Occ: 3 CS Body, 1 CS half in Body, half in Tur **Cargo:** 1.4 Body 1.8 Tur

Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
Body	5/45	4/30	5/45	4/20	4/18
Wheels	3/5	3/5	3/5	3/5	3/5
Tur	4/64	4/30	4/30	4/20	-

Weaponry

20mm Long Ground Autocannon/Breda-SAFAT Mod. 35 [Tur F] (456 rounds)*

8mm Ground LMG/Breda Mod. 38 [Tur F] (1,328 rounds)*

8mm Ground LMG/Breda Mod. 38 [Body B] (664 rounds)

* Linked

Equipment

Body: Large radio receiver and transmitter, casemate mount for the Ground LMG, backup driver option.

Statistics

Size: 17'×6'×6' Payload: 0.7 tons Lwt: 7.4 tons

Volume: 59 Maint: 119 hours Cost: \$2,800

HT: 12 HPs: 660 Body, 112 each Wheel, 75 Tur.

gSpeed: 48 gAccel: 2 gDecel: 10 gMR: 0.75 gSR: 4

Ground Pressure Moderate. 1/3 Off-Road Speed.

Design Notes

The Standard Wheeled Chassis, with its *heavy* option, is defined on p. W:IC65.

As designed, the vehicle comes in a bit slower than in history, but spot on as to weight. The armor was designed for facing incoming fire from the front *and* the back, and both aspects are sloped; so half of the standard allocation of sloping for medium slope has been swapped to the back. This is the same procedure used for the Panther turret, p. W:IC81.

The wheels were large, and special tires were designed for this car; additionally, it had all-wheel steering. Therefore, following the same procedure as for the German SdKfz 231 (p. W:IC76), the High ground pressure resulting from the design was improved to Moderate (at an arbitrary price of \$150). This places the off-road speed about in the right historical range. 500 20mm rounds and 2,000 8mm rounds were purchased; historical figures are given above.

Variants

The first armored cars, known as AB40, had two linked 8mm MGs as main turret weaponry. These vehicles carried about 2,500 8mm rounds. They were used just like the more common AB41, described above, and some units had a mix of vehicles.

The Autoblinda Ferroviaria 40/41 was the same vehicle, but its wheels could be replaced with railroad wheels. Meant for line patrolling, these vehicles were not often used on the tracks. Calculated speed would be doubled with the railway wheels.

The Autoblinda AB43 was a development in the same direction taken by mid-war German armored car designs: It mounted the 47mm tank gun, and had a new, more powerful 82-kW engine (top speed: 55 mph). Although 360 vehicles were ordered in May, 1943, the vehicle remained a prototype.

Autoblinda 43 or Autoblinda AB41/43: a misleading name, since it did not mount the 47mm gun; it still had the 20mm autocannon. It was produced for the Germans in 1944 and 1945. Some sources mention that a few were modified to carry the German KwK39 (a 50mm Long Tank Gun). In addition, it had an AA pintle mount (a limited-rotation Mini Open Mount on top of the turret, with a Universal Mount) where the rear-facing MG could also be fitted.

The final runs of the AB41 had a better silencer and a fixed Mini Open Mount on the Body top, containing two Smoke Dischargers.

Pyramid Review

Buggin' RPG: The Tiny Game of Big Adventures

Published by [Deep7](#)

Written by Todd Downing with Colin Fisk

927 KB 13-page PDF; \$3.95

Whether in as humourous vein such as *Toon*, or played more straight as typified (and pioneered) by *Bunnies and Burrows*, the opportunity to play an anthropomorphic animal has always proven a popular choice of game. Yet where such RPGs have been derived from the films such as *Watership Down* and the cartoon output of both Warner Brothers and Walt Disney, it is from a more modern form of animation that *Buggin': The Tiny Game of Big Adventures* takes its inspiration. This is the latest release in the line of Deep7's 1PG mini-RPGs -- typified by [Battleforce Bravo: Wartime Adventure](#) and [Dime Heroes](#), -- that instead draw upon the computer animated movies *Antz* and *A Bug's Life* for its source. Thus, *Buggin'* is not so much an anthropomorphic RPG, as an arthropomorphic one in which the players take the roles of bugs and insects of all shapes and sizes.

Buggin' is actually Deep 7's tenth 1PG release, and is penned by the originator of the line and concept, Todd Downing. Further, it gives the publishers the opportunity to give the series something of a makeover. The choice to switch to a sans-serif font in the main body text and the comic sans-MS typeface for the titles works to give *Buggin'* a much lighter and more approachable feel. This is helped by better use of tables to organise the contents, while the bug-themed artwork is a big improvement over the clip art used in other 1PG titles.

In *Buggin'* players take the role of bugs. A list of 26 is given, including ants (of course), bees, beetles, centipedes, flies, grasshoppers, moths, mosquitoes, scorpions, slugs, snails, spiders, and worms. And yes, some of these are not insects, but their inclusion is very much in keeping with the genre.

It is the choice of bug that provides a character with their extras. For example, the ant is Quick and has +1 Running, Hive Mind that gives it +1 Bug Lore and +1 Popularity, possesses a Knack for Finding Food and knowing the Right Direction, and they can immediately be replaced by an identical twin/triplet/quad/quintuplet/etc. if he dies. The Fly has Mad Flight Skillz (+2 Flying), a Buzz that gives a +1 Gross Factor, Disease Carrier (+1 Science), can dribble a Digestive Enzyme that inflicts 2 damage, and can keep going for a short while after they have had the Goo beaten out of them. Slugs, on the other hand, are Slow (-1 Running), Juicy (+3 Goo), Silent (+2 Sneaking), Slimy (+1 Gross Factor), and have knowledge of Botany (+1 Science).

Choosing a name is just the final part of character generation, adding a momentary wrinkle to the speedy process of crafting a 1PG character. Essentially a bug has four stats -- Toughness, Craftiness, Looks and Brains (roll 1d3 for each)-- and 1d3+3 points to spend on 14 skills. Secondary statistics include Wits (sanity), Guts (will power), Goo (hit points), and Popularity; this last a measure of how many favors a bug might be able to ask the hive queen. Finally a bug might have some food, a special weapon, a vehicle of some kind, or a pet bug of his own.

The method of skill resolution in *Buggin'* is standard to the 1PG line: Roll a six-sided die and roll low. Although it also uses the 1PG combat rules, the game is nowhere near as deadly, since bugs have more Goo than characters have hit points in other 1PG titles and the amount of damage is slightly less. Thus characters are more survivable and the game has a more knockabout feel.

Before getting down to the adventures, the referee gets their own page of advice. Which, as in other 1PG games, is clear, simple and appropriate for the game. What the advice boils down to is...keep it fast, keep it light and provide

the popcorn. Not just the eating kind, but the movie references as well, as **Buggin'** is about playing the chunky, spunky little arthropods as the cast of a movie and not the icky, squishy creepy crawlies we traditionally swat with a rolled up newspaper.

Co-authored with Colin Fisk, the six scenarios have a pleasing emphasis upon solving problems and roleplay, rather than combat. In many cases, it will be easier to run away than it is to fight, and even then, it is rare that fights are to the death. The first of the scenarios is "River's Gonna Rise" in which the characters must scout out a new site for an ant hill threatened by a rising river, while in "Picnic Basket Case," they go on a raid to a family's day out for a few of the Queen's favourite delicacies. Of course, her majesty occasionally likes a day off, and when she does, somebody has to do her job, as the players find out in "Queen For A Day." Everyone can haul out their convey escort clichés for "Milk And Honey Run" as the party are hired to deliver a load of nectar to another beehive on the other side of the meadow. "Garden Variety" is akin to a more traditional RPG scenario in that the characters must conduct a raid, but since this is a **Buggin'** scenario, it is upon an all-organic vegetable garden that is protected by the 5th Armoured Ladybug Division! The last adventure, "June Bugs," gives the characters the chance to go to the Annual June Jitter Bug Dance -- not as guests, but as chaperones.

The bulk of these scenarios take place in roughly the same area so that they can be used as a mini-campaign. While each scenario easily gives an evening's entertainment, a GM can easily draw enough background from the six given to easily add more scenarios of his own creation.

One of the reasons I wanted to look at **Buggin'** was that it was written, if not for them, at least *with* children in mind. The authors suggest that it is suitable for children five years and over, and with that in mind I tested it out on a 10-year-old as her first RPG. The result worked rather well, and Alex both understood the rules and grasped how to play with ease, though this was due in part for her liking of *A Bug's Life* and similar films. She did have to take a moment to suspend her sense of disbelief though she did ask why the fly Squerg, was her ant's best friend -- "Why am I friends with a creature that carries over 150 diseases?" Even so, the author's suggestion that **Buggin'** could be use to get children roleplaying seems more of an afterthought, which is a shame, as they could have included more on this within the game.

When tried out on my regular gaming group, they rather enjoyed it once they got their reluctance to shift a gear down and roleplay, well, bugs. Of course, their experience meant that they could easily inject character into the proceedings, so I expect that Esmeralda the praying mantis (complete with *The Matrix*-style mantis-fu), Pete the spider, and Nick the socialist ant will return in between our other games.

Buggin': The Tiny Game of Big Adventures marks a reinvigoration of the 1PG line, with improved layout and a lighter writing tone, which together with the game's fun subject matter makes it an easy access point into the series. And like those other titles in the line, **Buggin'** represents excellent value for its price, further enhanced by the more widespread appeal of its game which can be enjoyed by young and old, experienced and neophyte gamer. Certainly the young will enjoy the bug theme, but it still leaves room for a 1PG game that could help introduce the younger players to the hobby and give the GM advice for doing so.

--Matthew Pook with Alexandra Pook-Leary

Pyramid Reviews

Hell Unleashed and The Darkness Before the Dawn (for When Darkness Comes . . .)

Published by [Twilight Creations, Inc.](#)

Game concept, design by Kerry Breitenstein & Todd A. Breitenstein

Art by Dave Aikins

Additional Development by Brian "Ruk" May

Hell Unleashed:

Layout and design by Todd A. Breitenstein

Written by Mark Bordenet, Robert Edwards, Darin Hinnens, Patrick Kapera, Frank Russell

64-page rule and scenario book, two miniatures (of featured characters Skin and Jonah), two tiles (upper floor of hotel, cave), 28 disks (outside obstacles, new items, nuisances), cardboard cover/screen

The Darkness Before the Dawn

Sculpting by Phil Bowen

Layout and design by Kerry Breitenstein and Todd A. Breitenstein

Written by Mark Bordenet, Todd Breitenstein, David Carl, Robert Defendi, Matt Forbeck, & Frank Russell

GM story ideas by Patrick Kapera

64-page rule and scenario book, two miniatures (occultist, beast), two tiles (magic shop,

mansion), 24 disks (magic items, allies, "no window"), cardboard cover/screen

\$14.99 each

Twilight Creations, Inc. continues to support its ***When Darkness Comes . . . Variable Tile System*** with two new supplements that offer new equipment, rules, and scenarios, and that contain the continuing and concluding chapters of their first big story arc.

Hell Unleashed supplies two new skills for characters: Gamble, which allows you to upgrade the results you get; and Two-Fisted Attack, which lets you attack a single target twice. There are also rules for windows and updates on ranged attacks, shuffling disks, opposed skill checks, line of sight, failure tokens, the sneak skill, environmental conditions, and victory points.

Hell Unleashed requires rules from ***The Horror Within***. Like the previous supplement, the bulk of the book is given over to adventure scenarios and the stories that preface them.

[HELL UNLEASHED SPOILER SPACE!]

Stories include a group of people forced to gather dark components by a cult that has kidnapped their loved ones; friends trapped by zombies in a truck stop, seeking lost pages from a book of magic that will halt the horror; a team that must scour a town to collect cursed money, lest beings that devour the innocent consume the town; a morgue whose structural shortcuts have opened a gateway to hell; and a town besieged by nothing less than the very air around them.

The story-arc scenarios requiring a GM are at the back. Heather and her strange companions are in New Orleans seeking to close the gates of hell while a demon-infested Earth tries to stop them. The Big Easy is about to be sacrificed lock, stock, and barrel for continued power. The "heroes" must first escape the demon hordes to get some breathing room. If they live, they must survive an ambush at the cemetery. Finally, they will infiltrate the gated community of Arcadia to liberate some much-needed allies.

[END SPOILER SPACE]

The Darkness Before the Dawn offers several new spells like the Locator Spell, Freeze, Pass Through, and Summon. It also adds willpower, a trait that keeps you going; distinctions between special game tiles and regular ones; and clarifications for dealing with all those unrevealed disks.

[THE DARKNESS BEFORE THE DAWN SPOILER SPACE!]

Here, there's a scramble among occultists for a magic ring; a well-intentioned attempt to stop a cult mistakenly damages the flesh golem that might confront the sect; a town is beset by magic-infused rabbits with a mean streak in them a mile wide; a judge has been possessed by a demonic spirit; and a group of people have had their bodies switched by a mysterious orb.

For the GM, the big story arc concludes. Demon hunters have zeroed in on the people most responsible for the mess the world is in -- a rich family in the small town of Ubelheim, Germany. The team closes in on their estate for a final confrontation. The entire town tries to stop the PCs from getting to the beloved manor house, but once there the team can kill the people in charge. Finally, they must seek out all the family members as they try to scatter into the town.

[END SPOILER SPACE]

The components that come with the supplements are durable, top-notch items. The disks are a mix of old and new. Some are like those from previous releases, included so there are plenty to go around when you need them to throw

players off the scent or just fill out empty spaces. Others are brand new, like the items in ***Hell Unleashed*** (duct tape, crossbow, sniper rifle) and the nine new magic items from ***Before the Dawn***. Like his work on the disks, artist Dave Aikins gives the tiles the same gothic look that never fails to please in Twilight Creations' horror games. His work also precedes each of the stories in the scenario booklets, and it looks every bit as good in black and white.

The miniatures are well done, too, from the tilt of Jonah's head to the furrow on Skin's brow (***Hell Unleashed***), from the trench-coated occultist's grimace to the look of pain on the face of the "cute" furry beast -- or rather, that of the head he's carrying (***Before the Dawn***). The beast himself is a little coarse; he's top-heavy with a look like a cross between a minotaur and a werewolf, but instantly recognizable.

The covers are stiff and can be used as screens by the GM to hide notes, although the side that folds out toward the players will have the brief skill and spell notes written on them. The GM's side is blank. The booklet for *Before the Dawn* also contains some new, updated templates for recording character stats.

Alas, the weak point as always seems to be the writing and the adventures. It's an ambitious product line, to be sure, and sometimes that's its undoing. Pairing the fiction with the scenarios means the stories have to be brief, leaving little room for error or character expansion (and not everyone can be as punchy as a Matheson). Worse, the line continues to be typified by slack editing. There are still bright spots, like Russell's deeply disturbing "Scabenger Hunt" and Hinners' creepy "The Unseen" (both from ***Hell Unleashed***). Even if the other stories aren't inspiring from a literary standpoint, they show off the system's variety and open-endedness, giving players plenty of rope with which to wrangle new ideas for themselves.

And that's really the heart of the game. Both ***Hell Unleashed*** and ***The Darkness Before the Dawn*** are nice toolkits with colorful components and good scenario layouts that can shape a GM's future ***When Darkness Comes . . .*** adventures. If that's all they're used for, the cost becomes awfully steep, but the text will help recharge the creative batteries with some solidly suggestive stories and dark, sinister advice.

--Andy Vetromile

The More Things Change

There was an Ace hardware store near my Day Job that closed down this week. I don't know how long it had been there, but it was longer than I've been in Tallahassee (going on 12 years now).

Earlier this week I also went down Pensacola Street in an effort to get to one of our malls. This was the first time I'd been down that part of the road since they tore down a bridge several years ago, during renovations to the football stadium that allowed large numbers of visitors easy access, while still allowing the giant swivel-door on the stadium field to [Voltron](#)

And just last month I went to the Cuban restaurant that replaced the comic and game store I'd worked at for years. It was still odd seeing a soda fountain where the used games were, and a giant grill used to press ham sandwiches where the L. Ron Hubbard books used to be.

Anyway, I've come to the realization that, at least in the modern world, things change all the time. Beloved locations change or die, fixtures of the cityscape get turned into frozen yogurt shops, and well-known thoroughfares get rerouted temporarily or permanently. Now, while this probably comes as a heaping dose of "Well, duh!"-brand cola to many of our readers, it still came as something of a realization to me. Since one of my goals in most of my RPGs is to present a fairly realistic environment (if for no other reason than to make the usual cinematic heroes look more heroic), I realized that most of my modern or futuristic campaign worlds remain fairly static, even in long-running campaigns.

I suspect there are a number of reasons for this oversight. When I'm busily not creating characters for an adventure, it can be difficult to also work not changing the environment into the schedule. More importantly, I suspect that many folks have an aversion to changing The Big Map, that holy cartographical artifact that came from either some canonical game book or the tortured diner scribblings of a harried GM. Perhaps even more powerful a force is the need for consistency in the game world, especially for those games that are highly improvisational. It can be awkward to say that Cooper's Restaurant is the favorite local diner for area police, only to accidentally introduce the Tomfoolery Pub & Grill in a later adventure as the preferred officer eatery.

However, for those who want to tinker with the game map, here are some techniques I've worked up in the past few weeks.

If your locations have character sheets, tinkering with places becomes easy. I described one such system in ["If It Has Stats, It Can Be Visited,"](#) but other methods are no doubt possible. In this way, any changes to a city can be represented by changes in the stats, complete with a jotted note or two. If you'd like to represent the random ebb and flow of a city, simply pick a location from the bunch at random before each game session (or more, for those with many places), modify a stat or two, jot down a note as to when it happened and why, and go on with the game.

Thus, to rip off the example from my earlier column, I might represent a few modified locations as:

Chez 'Spensivé

Carmon Fleur (Maitre d')

Cost	5
Popularity	2
Friendliness	2
Chance of Finding What You Want	4
Financial Health	3
Size	1
Hobnob	4

Notes: 5/15/03: Popularity -1, Financial Health -2 -- No longer as hip, or as crowded.

The Rusty Lantern Knifey (bartender)

Cost	2
Popularity	5
Friendliness	4
Chance of Finding What You Want	4
Financial Health	5
Size	4
Chance of Getting In a Bar Brawl	4
Tolerance	2

Notes: 5/15/03: Chance of Finding What You Want +2, Size +1 -- Added a new gambling wing; new underworld contact (named Spiral) who likes to gamble is excellent at providing (expensive) services

. . . and so on.

Of course, it's also entirely possible to simply tear up a sheet (or, more correctly, replace it with a note: "The Rusty Lantern burned down (7/29/03); new inn replaced it (8/20/03) -- see "Twisty Passage") or greatly modify a location. But if you're not feeling too creative or wanting to shake the ant farm *too* much, you can stick with minor changes.

If you keep up with this, making changes takes minutes a game, yet can add greatly to the depth of the game world:

"We try to impress our client at the Fondue Orduenot restaurant."

"Sorry; it closed down, and was replaced with a nouveau stir-fry place."

"What?!? Since when?"

"April 7th."

Of course, for games that are sufficiently high-tech in our real world, computerization would be ideal to track these changes. For example, LARPer's who play the Mind's Eye Theatre line and use Windows can use the excellent (and free!) program called [Grapevine](#). I've also tracked similar locations in games using a simple spreadsheet.

If the PCs interact with their home area regularly, it would probably be wise to let them know about changes they might notice; perhaps an Area Knowledge (City)-type skill roll can be used to determine if they learn of a particular change. This would, of course, depend on the change; the addition of a hidden call-girl operation to a hotel bar would probably go unnoticed, while the expansion of Main Street in the center of town from a four-lane to a six-lane (and the resultant traffic snarls) would probably be noticed by everyone.

Background changes are ideal for games that involve heavy investigation or conspiratorial trappings, since they serve as perfect "red herrings." If a historic hotel downtown is being torn down to make way for a casino, the city hall shifts its hours from 9am-6pm to 8am-5pm, and Appel Street is closed for repaving, it becomes much easier to sneak in that the *real* reason Appel is closed to traffic is to construct a containment shelter over the alien craft that fell to Earth. (Of course, if you introduce background changes into a game that hasn't had any before, expect to run a few sessions as the paranoid heroes try to figure out *why* the corner sushi shop has suddenly become so popular . . .)

While it's possible for more rural places to have the same general store in the same place for decades, life in more modern or futuristic settings is often hectic and fast-paced; simulating that ever-changing pulse of change can give the party something to investigate at city hall.

Assuming, of course, that it hasn't been torn down and turned into a mini-mall . . .

--*Steven Marsh*

Transmission 200 (Part I)

*"the brightness of a different sun
the likeness of no one
and I'm somewhere that I'm not
not sure if 'there' is a way
the timeline in knots and breaking
who took the clay and left the floor open
well that's o.k. I was falling anyway."
-- Solar Coaster, "Likeness of No One"*

Welcome to Transmission 200! For this auspicious occasion, I've provided hooks, results, or context for every one of the last 199 Transmissions -- it's a sprawling monster of a setting. Feel free to look around: this is primarily a [secret-historical](#) reality-war background, although it also offers lots of branching alternate histories and [conspiracy](#) theory. Get comfortable; we'll be here a while, and I'll be going back to the wells for some of my core concepts in this one: [bisociation](#), [hollow history](#), and good old [reality quakes](#). I don't need to tell anyone reading this that the best part about those things is [cheating horribly](#) by throwing in [anything that sounds cool](#), and trusting to any of the above to justify it.

This timeline is a close cousin to the [millennial timeline](#) I did in 1999, and most of the events on that one can be assumed to either occur on this one or have been edited out by one or another faction. The factions switch sides as often as they switch realities: there are no permanent alliances here (although there's room to change that if you'd like). And speaking of the factions, I'll take [my own advice](#) and begin by [defining](#) the major players, along with some of their [characteristic elements](#):

- The [Antarctic Space Nazis](#) and their Zeit-SS (ZSS), descended from Ahnenerbe research and pure evil.
- John Dee and the Rosicrucian imperialists of [MI-Infinity](#) (MI-) want to magically transform the world into their green and pleasant land. They also attempt to create a stable Red Ring of subservient, pro-British realities linked by the Royal Cliographic Society, an MI- front group.
- The [Reptoids](#) are most likely the descendants of a primordial civilization that died out 65 million years ago. Most Reptoids apparently wish to simply live out their declining millennia in cold tyranny over the humans of Earth. Some, however, may seek to reawaken and restore their lost race, or perhaps summon it through time to rule again.
- The [Sphinxes](#) are truly alien natives of a shadow or [mirror realm](#) of the Earth, a major satrapy of which is known as India Ultraterrestria by MI- . The Sphinxes seek to flip the two Earths' polarity and make their realm dominant.
- Strike Force Chronos is the strong arm of the **Argus** group, the American ultra-conspiracy that runs the Black Ops. It defends America, smashes villains, and interferes where it's not wanted, in roughly that order.
- The **Lemurians** are quasi-astral beings based in Shangri-La; their agenda is unclear but less alien than the Sphinxes.

There are also a few splinter groups, and outsiders like the Martians, who you'll notice further in. These factions continuously use all methods available to create helpful or clement alternate realities, despite (or occasionally because of) the fact that such sub-creation degrades this reality and often have to be closed off again. Most alternate realities remain accessible within a few months (or even years) of their creation, even after closing, and lucky [player characters](#) may use the cards of the [Suppressed Transmission Tarot](#) as magical "Trumps" to travel between worlds, *Amber*-style. GMs may also rule that [trepanning](#), [mandrake root](#), or some other [mystical recipe](#) grants world sight and navigation.

So strap in, charge up, and get ready to count down from 200 . . .

**450,000 B.C.-
2024 B.C.:**

The [ancient astronauts](#) war over who gets to build the Pyramids, genetically mold humanity, and rule the ontosphere. The Sphinxes, Lemurians, and Reptoids may be ancient astronaut foot soldiers, indigenous Earthly species, or both. Probably during this time, the Lemurians learn

time travel from the Reptoids (the Sphinxes exist outside time). Strike Force Scorpio and Dee's Atlantean magics finally turn the tide and solidify history in the second millennium B.C. The aftershocks shunt [Antarctica](#) into an eimically-stable crust around the Hole at the Pole, retroactively freezing it solid.

- 3246 B.C.:** Eimic shockwaves from the [Abortive Re-Creation of 1854](#) call [Reality Falkenstein](#) into existence; it remains separated from other realities by the Lemurians' astral Veil.
- 1279 B.C.-
933 B.C.:** The Bronze Age battles of the Sphinxes, Reptoid subcreations, surviving [Nephilim](#) and Titans, and so forth tear up the fabric of reality, opening up a wide gap of time papered over by extremely unstable [hollow history](#). All factions operating in this time frame, even the Sphinxes, can wind up in completely unknown arenas.
- 950 B.C.:** Lemurian renegade Khidr learns by dreams from the future that he is to found the [Uwaysi](#) order, into which he initiates the Rosicrucian King Solomon and the Sphinx [Queen of Sheba](#). Their servant the [simurgh](#) spreads the [Green Tongue](#) of Khidr throughout the realities, ensuring Khidr's immortality.
- 854 B.C.:** A final offensive by the Sphinxes (as tutelary deities of Assyria) creates [Reality Nergal](#); Lemuria and the Reptoids wipe it clean with a transitory [Ice Age](#).
- 850 B.C.:** [Dionysos](#), leader of the warrior Lemurians, rebels and leads his [griffins](#) through India Ultraterrestria and into Greece guided by the immortal poet [Aristeas of Marmora](#). Dionysos' war with the [Amazons](#) (who serve the Sphinx Cybele) spills into the still-fresh and weak post-Nergal reality and sets off a rolling reality temblor, until the Reptoid-guided poet Homer stabilizes the war by antedating it in a series of epics.
- 753 B.C.** Final subsidence of the Bronze Age [hollow history](#) in the [Glozel](#) region, which accumulates several utterly incompatible strata of pragmaclasts. MI- and the Reptoids divert the excess glory from this site to the small hill village of Rome, against Sphinx and Lemurian opposition.
- 556 B.C.:** [Nabonidus](#) becomes king of Babylon. His [archaeological work](#) threatens to reopen the still-fragile scrim of [hollow history](#), but also opens a number of gates to strategic [prealities](#) and the [Ishtar Gate](#) to an eddy in the time stream itself. In 539 B.C., Cyrus of Persia collapses the uncertainty wave, and Nabonidus' reign, at Lemurian urging.
- 408 B.C.** The Nine Unknown Seers of Shangri-La create the [Agarthan Chess Set](#). Whether they "lose" it on purpose in order to covertly direct global affairs through those who find its pieces, or its loss is what reduces them to Unknown status, remains a mystery.
- 331 B.C.** Alexander the Great's discovery of the [Emerald Tablet](#) between the paws of the Sphinx [reawakens the gods](#); only the neopagan ZSS will assist the Sphinxes in keeping the resulting reality open until Ptolemy seals the gateway to it by mummifying Alexander and establishing the Library of Alexandria.
- 323 B.C.** The [manticores](#), Sphinx-kith from the heart of India Ultraterrestria, filter undetected into the west with Alexander the Great's returning armies, while the various factions attempt to [save](#), advise, [xox](#), or murder Alexander.
- 73 B.C.:** Sphinxes launch mystical [Atlantean invasion](#) of Rome to weaken Reptoids.
- 12 B.C.:** Glancing [shards of reality](#) struck off by the passage of Halley's Comet.
- 5 B.C.:** The Reptoids, Lemurians, and MI- attempt to contain the incredible upsurge in supernatural energy accompanying the "star in the East" with a triplicity ritual using [three magi](#). They returned to their own country by another way.
- 9 A.D.:** An unexpected supercharge of energy from the Three Magi Working blows Rome up into [Roma Aeterna](#); the Reptoids are left to try a lengthy damage control process of suborning the Empire across realities.

- 61 A.D.** To bleed off more of Rome's excess reality, the Reptoids launch Sextus Afranius Burrus on an [invasion of Mars](#).
- 70 A.D.:** Destruction of the Temple by the Romans at Reptoid urging leaves the Sphinxes momentarily in control of Jerusalem; agents of MI- conceal the [Copper Scroll](#) that holds the circuit diagram of Templar reality. The backlash creates an outcropping of [superheroes](#) in Rome, who disrupt everything and fatally weaken the Empire and their own reality.
- 96 A.D.:** Steadily escalating Reptoid-Lemurian proxy fight sparks [steam revolution](#) and then accidentally introduces [OGREs](#) before Sphinxes intervene to stop it; Sphinx influence grows in Rome as a result.
- 141 A.D.** The Sphinxes subvert the [papal election](#) and sow demons throughout the Empire; the Reptoids eventually convinced to take action by MI- agents.
- 218 A.D.:** [Demon-emperor Elagabalus](#) ascends to the Purple; his knifing by Strike Force Chronos in 222 pinches off the incipient Sphinx incursion, but awakens the [Ripper-spirit](#) tied to numerical triplicities.
- 312 A.D.:** Sphinxes enfold Constantine and encyst his empire, but the Constantine shell they left behind begins the King Arthur myth-pattern (British king, sees a sign to follow, wars against the Continent, builds a perfect city) and MI- amplifies it to mask the [reality](#) of the Yellow Sign.
- 400 A.D.:** Sphinx enfoldment hollows out and destroys the reality of the Reptoid-Lemurian cross-dimensional trade outpost at [Irem](#).
- 535 A.D.:** This is the year of the great catastrophe, the [reality quake](#) known as the Dolorous Blow that upthrusts or calves off at least two Hollow Histories. All sides intervene in the wars between King Arthur and the [Demon-Lord Justinian](#) this year: MI- , the Reptoids, and Strike Force Chronos on Arthur's side; the ZSS, Lemurians, and Sphinxes on the side of "Rome" and the giants.
- 544:** [St. Brendan](#) carries the Grail to [the west](#), establishing the [American Arcadia](#).
- 590:** A brief aftershock of the Dolorous Blow (and possibly of Brendan's voyage) briefly opens [Reality Toynbee](#); Strike Force Chronos drives the Reptoids out of it.
- 614-911:** With history badly weakened on either side by the Dolorous Blow and the False Millennium, the Uwaysis, Lemurians, and Sphinxes conspire to undermine all Europe by coring out another [hollow history](#) in this time frame. The ZSS bitterly oppose any attempt to collapse the First Reich, and utilize the Spear of Destiny, Roland's Horn, and the Iron Crown of the Lombards to preserve Charlemagne intact.
- 777:** St. [Walburga](#) dies, possibly sacrificed to the [Ripper-spirit](#) to keep the Sphinxes' Wild Hunt at bay.
- 860:** During the ZSS maneuverings in the Dark Age hollow history, they attempt to create a Norse reality, but thanks to alert Argus damage control, wind up with [Reality Midgard](#) instead.
- 1000:** A Reptoid experiment with paratime goes awry, creating an ["overlay" year](#) fluctuating between four separate realities. In one, there was widespread panic over the approaching [millennium](#); in another, it was virtually unheralded The two others are shadow catastrophes, a [theological apocalypse](#) and a [supernatural degradingolade](#).
- 1066:** A failed Strike Force Chronos blow against the Occult Empire reverses Hastings under the baleful glow of [Halley's Comet](#); the rich [mercantile reality](#) that results becomes another Argus arsenal. A chaotic domino effect sparks an [electrical revolution](#) in China, put down by the conservative Lemurians.
- 1099:** Lemurian instigation awakens Muslim [superheroes](#); Strike Force Chronos closes them down during a [counter-Sphinx op](#) in the Crusades. The American ops team forms the nexus of the

violent, capitalist, heretically devout Templars -- and don't even pretend you were surprised by that.

In The Future: Part II of the setting, with pulse-pounding Templar action!

The Power of the Craft

Craftmasters in *Ars Magica* and *Dark Ages: Mage*

Part Two: Characters and Game Mechanics

by Phil Masters

[Last week's](#) article discussed the possibilities for (re)introducing the long-established "Craftmasters" to two games set in a version of the 13th century with magic; *Ars Magica* and *Dark Ages: Mage*. This second part discusses the practicalities.

Ars Magica

Creating Craftmaster characters in *Ars Magica* requires access to the supplements *Hedge Magic* and *The Mysteries*, as well as the main rulebook. Characters aligned with the Craftmasters can be at any of three general power levels:

Brethren

These individuals do not possess any significant mystical power, or are still totally untrained, but still serve the movement in many ways. They can be created exactly as grogs; in the descriptions of the possible Status Virtues and Flaws (*Ars Magica*, p.39), substitute "Craftmaster hall" or "group" for "covenant." Brethren with "supernatural" Virtues, especially *Alchemy* or *Magic Sensitivity*, are well regarded, and may be closely observed in the hope that they may become worthy of Journeyman status. (If and when such Virtues becomes obvious, the character will usually gain at least a +1 Reputation among local Craftmasters.) On the other hand, associating with certain types of supernatural power (as reflected by, say, *Faerie Upbringing*) may cause one to be regarded with deep suspicion ("Associates with ungodly powers" being a -2 Reputation among Craftmasters, by and large).

Journeyman

These "talented" Craftmasters are generally broadly equivalent to Mystic Companions (see *Hedge Magic*). The rules below produce characters at around the power level of a typical Mystic Companion; other Journeymen may, with the storyguide's consent, be designed as other types of ordinary or Mystic Companion. (Obviously, some character concepts will work better than others here . . .)

A "standard" Journeyman receives the Virtues *Alchemy* (see *Ars Magica*, p.40), *Natural Spellcrafting* *Hedge Magic*, p.55), and *Sacred Architecture* *The Mysteries*, p.168) for free, without having to take balancing flaws. He need not take a Social Class or Status Virtue or Flaw; rather, he has a respected social position within the Craftmasters, with a +1 Reputation among those in his home area, and can pass in society at large as a free journeyman craftsman or similar (often as a stonemason) -- a position roughly equivalent to the *Freeman/Freewoman* Virtue, respected slightly more for skill, but slightly less as probably a footloose wanderer. He has portable tools appropriate to his best craft skill (free choice which if two are equal), and standard armaments (or possibly minor property of similar value if he has no combat ability). The minimum age for such a Journeyman character is (24 - Intelligence).

Journeymen may *optionally* take additional Virtues or Flaws related to social class or personal wealth as part of their chosen balanced selection of up to ten, in which case they have a well-defined position in mundane society. Other Craftmasters will *usually* ignore negative Reputations arising from this, and also any positive Reputation arising from a Social Class Virtue greater than +2, assuming that the "cover" position is false -- but there may be exceptions to this, at the storyguide's option. (Actually, many Craftmasters ignore Reputations based on noble status anyway.)

A "standard" Journeyman also has the Abilities Alchemy 1, Concentration 2, Craft (architecture) 3, Craft (carpentry) 1, Craft (masonry) 3, Craftmason Lore 1, Lectio 1, Philosophiae 3, Sacred Architecture 4, Scribe Latin 2, Speak Latin 2, and Speak Own Language 5, at no cost, and Starting Experience Points equal to (age + 10).

As readers may have noticed, Journeymen somewhat resemble Natural Magicians. However, unlike those individuals, they lack the ability to construct enchanted devices, any automatic Magic Sensitivity, and the social position and some of the skills of a Magister in Artibus. (They may be given any of these abilities during character creation by taking appropriate Virtues, but they then need to take balancing flaws. However, some Craftmasters are peculiarly suspicious of enchanted devices, considering them "vain" or "hasty"; it seems that any mystical construct smaller than a house offends their sensibilities.)

Craftmasters do have one small but significant advantage, however (somewhat compensating for their overwhelming need for secrecy and the fact that they consider themselves to be at war with the entire Order of Hermes), and it lies in their reaction to Auras. Journeymen using their Natural Spellcrafting or Alchemy abilities take a bonus equal to any local Magical Aura or *half* any local Dominion Aura, and a penalty equal to *half* any local Faerie or Infernal Aura. Their positive response to the Dominion is hard even for them to explain; they claim that it proves that they are doing God's work, but their actions sometimes directly oppose those of "holy" individuals who are even more favored by the Dominion. Some Craftmason theorists suggest that they exploit the connection between the Dominion and the Sacred Architecture incorporated into many churches and cathedrals, some believe that they are working with the "grand divine plan" of the universe if perhaps a little at odds with church rules (which may, they hint, even be warping the power of the Dominion away from what is *truly* holy), and a few daringly mutter that the Dominion may be less to do with God than with the faith of the common folk -- who the Craftmasters seek to aid.

Masters

Masters are the leaders and philosophers of the Craftmasters. They are not quite as powerful individually as Hermetic mages -- certainly not in a stand-up contest of magics -- but their broad and deep skills, special insights, and large and generally devoted followings of Journeyman and Brethren make them formidable individuals. The minimum age for a Master character is (33 - Intelligence).

A Master receives the Virtues *Alchemy*, *Magic Sensitivity* (***Ars Magica***, p.42), *Natural Spellcrafting*, and *Sacred Architecture*, for free, without having to take balancing flaws. He can also take the usual list of up to 10 points' worth of Virtues with a balancing set of Flaws. He need not take a Social Class or Status Virtue or Flaw; rather, he has a highly respected social position within the Craftmasters, with a +4 Reputation among those in his home area, and can pass in society at large as a freeborn master craftsman (usually a stonemason), with a +2 Reputation in his area of operations. He has portable tools appropriate to his best craft skill (a free choice which if two craft skills are equal), an average quality horse, and standard armaments with one expensive weapon or piece of armor (or possibly minor property of similar value if he has no combat ability).

Masters may *optionally* take additional Virtues or Flaws related to social class or personal wealth as part of their chosen selection of up to ten, in which case they have a well- defined position in mundane society. Other Craftmasters (who know that they are Masters) will always ignore negative Reputations arising from this, and also any positive Reputation arising from a Social Class Virtue greater than +2, assuming that the "cover" position is false -- but there may be exceptions to this, at the storyguide's option.

A Master has the Abilities Alchemy 1, Awareness 1, Concentration 2, Craft (architecture) 3, Craft (carpentry) 1, Craft (masonry) 3, Craftmason Lore 2, Disputatio 1, Folk Ken 1, Intrigue 1, Leadership 1, Lectio 1, Legend Lore 1, Magic Sensitivity 1, Order of Hermes Lore 1, Parma Magica 1, Philosophiae 3, Sacred Architecture 5, Scribe Greek 1, Scribe Latin 2, Speak Greek 1, Speak Latin 2, and Speak Own Language 5, and additional Starting Experience Points equal to (age - 4).

Masters using Natural Spellcrafting or Alchemy take the same Aura modifiers as Journeymen.

Thus far, a Master may appear to be simply an experienced Journeyman with a broad (if shallow) range of skills.

However, what marks these individuals out from lesser Craftmasters is their deepening understanding of their own skills, and most important of all, their ability to exploit the powers that they have spent years studying, swiftly and effectively. The Masters themselves insist that they are merely using their eyes and common sense, paying attention to details, and reaping the benefits of hard work. In game terms, their special powers are as follows:

1. Every Master has a Parma Magica skill effectively identical to that possessed by Hermetic magi. Note that this is *not* identical in the way it is produced -- a magical scholar who managed to study both would almost certainly conclude that they had been developed independently, and indeed each Craftmaster Master has a slightly different "charm of defense" or "prayer against sorcery," as each builds his own defenses by dint of concentration and his understanding of the "powers of the craft." Indeed, many Masters insist that the effect is purely a matter of personal willpower and virtue, and that the small rituals involved are simply a way to focus this. (The same name is used in the game as for the Hermetic skill, however, for simplicity.)
2. By "reading his surroundings," a Master can produce effects functionally equivalent to spontaneous Intellego Mentem, Intellego Terram, or Intellego Vim spells (without Requisites other than these three forms) cast by a Hermetic magus with the Quiet Magic Virtue. The basic casting roll for this is (stress die + Intelligence + Encumbrance + Sacred Architecture + Magic Sensitivity). Masters cannot use vis or spell foci to boost these effects, and can suffer botches much like a Hermetic magus (although these are rarely overly spectacular for Intellego workings), but are immune to Twilight. These workings take Aura modifiers as above.
3. The Master can draw a protective circle to defend against spirits and supernatural beings, with game effects exactly as for one drawn by a Spirit Master *Hedge Magic*, p.46), except that the Craftmaster uses his Sacred Architecture Knowledge rather than Occult Lore or Legend Lore. However, a Craftmaster's circle uses completely different magical principles to one drawn by a Spirit Master, and Craftmaster Masters have no ability to summon (or control) spirits. Nor do their circles provide any defense against Hermetic magi or their spells, or any other mortal magic-workers. Again, this takes the standard Craftmaster Aura modifiers.
4. The Master gains a +10 bonus when using his Natural Spellcrafting ability to cast Vim spells which have no other Forms as requisites.
5. In a strong Magical Aura, a Master gains a bonus to all uses of Skills and General Talents. This bonus is equal to the amount by which the Aura level exceeds 4 (e.g. in a level 7 Aura, the bonus is +3). In addition, in a Dominion Aura of 6 or higher, the Master gains a flat +1 bonus to all such activities. This benefit is gained without any special actions, and indeed the Master may be entirely unaware of it; things simply "go his way." There is no bonus or penalty for other Auras. The Ability bonus works *in addition to* any direct bonus for the Aura, if the Ability is being used in a magical procedure, and indeed also in addition to any benefits granted by the use of Sacred Architecture in the construction of the local buildings.

Dark Ages: Mage

Craftmasters are another Fellowship of mages in the terms used by ***Dark Ages: Mage***, and so the game mechanics to consider here are those which distinguish such groups from each other.

Aura

Craftmasters have an Aura of Self-Assurance. They are self-made men who respect their makers, and little time for those who presently believe that they govern the world. Craftmasters receive their Aura modifier on any roll which might benefit from the Craftmaster receiving quiet respect, or the belief that he knows what to do in a tricky situation. The Aura may manifest as a sense that the Craftmaster is sitting slightly aside from mundane folk, even when he is in the midst of them, a faint, pleasant earthy scent, or a very slight lessening in background noise.

Suggested Traits

Attributes: Stamina, Perception, Wits.

Abilities: Alertness, Brawl, Crafts (virtually mandatory), Expression, Leadership, Stealth, Subterfuge.

Backgrounds: Allies, Chantry, Contacts, Cray, Servants.

Foundation: Craftsmanship

The Supreme Power of the True Art

Most Craftmasons will vehemently deny being wizards or sorcerers, but they speak reverently of "arts" and most especially of "craft." It is rarely clear whether they mean these words in the mundane or the magical sense, or indeed if they distinguish; what they will *not* do is use such words of other magic, which they dismiss as "sorcery." The basis of all they do is the doing of it -- with care, and respect, and good intentions. They are *builders*, they build to last, and they want their works to be admired on merit.

- With an awakening understanding of his work, the Craftmason can perceive the importance of care and exactitude in all things, and the dangers of carelessness and vanity.
- The Craftmason, who has often been told that God is the Great Craftsman, now comes to *understand* this, and to see the signs all around. Many are overwhelmed by such revelations, and wonder if further progress is blasphemous -- does it not mean that the workman is in danger of usurping the divine? But the worthy craftsman eventually moves beyond this fear, gaining a truly humble demeanor which in no way prevents him from seeking ever greater advancement.
- Now, the craftsman becomes spiritually one with his tools, his works, and his fellows. Gaining access to the higher secrets of creation, he truly understands the import and importance of his own labor, and that of others.
- The Craftmason who attains this level of insight grasps that everything he does is an act of craft, whether he wills it or not, so it is only fitting that it should be done right. He also perceives the way to rightness in any work of the hands (-1 difficulty to all uses of Artist or Crafts, and any roll required to design or create mundane mechanical devices). He *also* understands completely that "magic" is no more than tinkering with the shape of the divine scheme -- lawful if done aright, vile if done without respect. Thus, while he regards supernatural dangers with sensible caution, such things hold no irrational terror for him (-2 difficulty to Will rolls to resist any sort of magical terror).
- At this, the highest level of True Craftsmanship, the Craftmason cannot but work well. Not only the good earth and the fine-forged blade, but the air and sky and sea, are works of craft, to be assessed and used and if necessary re-made. (The -1 difficulty to Artist or Crafts described above now extends to combat and all medical and veterinary tasks. Also, the character can no longer botch Craft rolls; any roll which would normally botch simply fails instead.) Although his demeanor is usually modest, anyone who has studied any of the same Skills as the Craftmason will recognize him instinctively as an expert, and treat him with according respect.

Specialties: Beautiful Artistry, Confronting Evil, Fine Work, Manual Labor.

Pillars -- The Craftsman

Craftmasons do deny being sorcerers, and while they have faith enough, they hold that a man proves his worth and earns his place by his own labors. Hence, the Pillars of their craft symbolize the one who works it.

They have a strong bias in favor of, in game terms, "complex spells." The reason is simply that that a Craftmason does must be *built* -- assembled of simple parts. They can use simpler techniques if they must, but most of their best workings involve more than one Pillar. Die Hände combined with Die Rückseite permits great tasks to be performed with precision, while Die Öffnung combined with Das Auge can lead whole armies to great destinies. Likewise, Die Öffnung and Die Rückseite together can grant followers adamantite resistance to all forms of harm, and so on.

Die Hände (The Hands)

This Pillar represents the subtlety and precision of good workmanship. It relates to the *correct* performance of any task, and the texture and weight of the materials involved.

- The first lesson is to know the feel of good craftsmanship -- and of bad, so that the two can be told apart. The hand must also be able to discern good and bad *materials*, detecting weaknesses, strengths, and balance by touch. (More abstract qualities and assessment at a distance are the province of Das Auge.) In combat, blows will land exactly where intended, albeit with no greater actual force than usual (-1 difficulty to the character's attack rolls per success, to a minimum of four).
- The Craftmason who has advanced in this study performs all mundane works correctly (-1 difficulty to all uses of Artist or Crafts per success, or -1 to weapon use difficulties per two successes), and can assess others by watching them in action (learning the level of their Physical Attributes and any Abilities which they are using). Weapons or tools he holds can be protected from breakage, and he can work by touch as well as by sight (eliminating two levels of darkness penalty per success rolled).
- At this point, the Craftmason is an expert in works of the hands, both mundane and extraordinary. (He can gain +1 to Dexterity per success, or make it impossible for himself to botch combat or Craft rolls.) He also works with uncanny speed, reducing the time he takes for any physical tasks other than combat or travel by 10% per success (to a minimum of 40%). His weapons or bare hands can also cause bashing, lethal, or aggravated damage, as he chooses.
- Now, the Craftmason progresses beyond the mundane limits of mundane work. Any task of physical shaping can be performed perfectly, provided that the worker has the strength and the tools (or use of other pillars) to perform it at all. He can amplify forces with subtle power, so that a touch can break stone or a gesture can stir up a small whirlwind. He can also sense the nature of supernatural powers or objects by touch.
- The ultimate use of Die Hände is to shape destiny. By setting events in motion, any item may be predestined to take a desired form, or go to a particular place. Human beings have free will, but by setting the fate of a *thing* on a carefully chosen path, events can be made favorable to individuals associated with it. Items can also be made secure in their mundanity, preventing sorcerers or witches affecting them; used carefully, this can make non-Craftmason magic all but impossible in a given area.

Specialties: Choice of Materials, Sharpness, Speed, Tiny Details.

Sample Foci: Plain tools, measuring devices, labor performed with attention to detail.

Die Öffnung (The Mouth)

Any great work of craft may require more than one worker. Even the greatest masterpieces involve the humble labor of apprentices to fetch and carry and clean. This Pillar represents the skills of leadership and organization this demands. Its study often involves classical rhetoric and deep reading in the history of kingship and strategy -- or sometimes, just years of observation.

● To lead, one must first know how to follow -- and also why. At this level, the Craftmason can assess who commands in a social situation, and what general manner of leadership is required by a group of workers. Hence, the character can distinguish effective leadership from bluster or bluff. This does not imply deep understanding of the task in hand, but it does show where leadership is lacking and where the group's works are failing.

●● As he progresses, the student of Die Öffnung may first be trusted with supervision of small groups and lesser tasks. He can speak with calm authority (+1 die to Leadership pools per success), plan work for groups of no more than a score of followers (-1 to the difficulty of any planning/administration roll per success), or induce confidence in individual followers (+1 die to another character's Willpower pool per success).

●●● As genuine comprehension of leadership is attained, followers know instinctively that the leader is worthy (+1 to Charisma per success). At this level, the Craftmason can also advise other leaders (-1 to the difficulty of their leadership-related rolls per success). Also, the above benefits to planning/administration work apply with groups of any size. By assessing what a group is doing, the character can see how to do it better, whatever his prior knowledge (gain one temporary dot in any Ability relevant to the task in hand).

●●●● Now, the Craftmason progresses beyond the mundane limits of mundane work. The Craftmason can function as a leader unnoticed, while seeming to work solely as a quiet, minor member of a group. Indeed, even unthinking animals recognize his authority, obeying his words or gestures. Furthermore, just as Die Hände may grant the ability to make materials take a form in the future, Die Öffnung now enables the Craftmason to set groups on complex paths with particular goals, even without their knowledge.

●●●●● The perfect leader is a modest fellow -- but oh, what the modest craftsman can inspire in others! He can transfer his own non-magical Abilities to 10 other people per success rolled, or raise the Willpower of the same size of group by one per success. It is even possible for a character to command the very elements to obey, as described of saints and pagan heroes. Rocks, water, flames, and breezes can all be made to do what he wishes, provided that it is within their nature to do what is required. (Flames can be asked to flare up or die down, for example, but not to continue burning underwater; stone can crack, but not fly through the air.)

Specialties: Leading by Example, Quiet Judgment, Leadership of Leaders, Rhetoric.

Sample Foci: Impassioned speeches, banners bearing famous symbols, inspiring acts, buildings dedicated to a cause.

Das Auge (The Eye)

Contrary to what those few Hermetics who know of them may think, Craftmasons are often very learned. Some are actual scholars; many have some knowledge of mathematics or practical philosophy. This Pillar reflects such this analytical thought.

The first lessons taught to the scholar-craftsman concern how to learn, how to

● be taught, and how to winnow truth from confusion when studying doubtful texts. The character can discern inconsistencies with a glance, understand the inner meaning of any parable or metaphor, determine when anything has a supernatural cause, and read messages left by greater experts in texts or buildings.

●● The scholar now learns to combine lessons in ways which, if not *new* (for true novelty is rare and not always wise), are at least unfamiliar. He can employ unfamiliar weapons or tools without penalty, or enhance his own faculties (+1 to any one Mental Attribute per success). He can determine the mundane ways (if any) to negate any magical effect, or to slay any supernatural being, at a glance. (Actually applying this knowledge may be another matter.)

●●● Delving into secrets, Das Auge discerns when a speaker is lying or avoiding speaking the full truth, and how to unnerve anyone (+1 to Intimidation die pools per success). The Craftmason may create Tass from free Quintessence, detect invisible beings or things, and locate the weakest and strongest points in any structure. If anyone or anything in sight has an great and unavoidable destiny, the Craftmason may sense that, and something of its nature.

●●●● Das Auge now discerns the literal truth of an old saying; the world is God's book, and His handwriting is everywhere. Lies and illusions are obvious, while codes and ciphers reveal themselves as plain words; the Craftmason sees *truth*. He can also restore the "rightful" state of things, negating magics which manipulate Quintessence or Destiny (reduce accrued successes by two for every success rolled, but only so as to restore the previous, natural order). Structures the Craftmason designs can be made immune to natural decay, and can include secret passages and chambers which are immune to mundane detection, and symbols which convey complex messages to other minds -- knowing or otherwise.

●●●●● Now, there are no secrets, in the present or past, and even the future is visible as a set of possibilities. The Craftmason can determine a thing's history from its present state, and given one fragment of something broken, locate all the other parts. He can also set great events in motion by simple actions, often amplified by use of other Pillars.

Specialties: Mathematics, Philosophy, Strategy, Theology.

Sample Foci: Texts, words spoken by others (including sometimes fools and idiots), courteous debate, delicate measuring instruments.

Die Rückseite (The Back)

Some tasks demand strength and resilience. This Pillar embodies those seemingly simple qualities. However, a Craftmason eventually learns that strength of the body, strength of spirit, and the strength of inanimate objects, are ultimately similar -- and similarly subject to mastery.

● To use the plain strength of the body to best effect, one must first comprehend it. The Craftmason can assess the operation of raw force in a device, and the distribution of weights and pressures in a structure. He can tell whether or not a workman is exerting himself to the full, and determine any living thing's state of health (how many Health Levels it has lost, and how many remain).

●● Taking his body beyond its normal limits, the Craftmason can repair his own bruises (heal two Health Levels of bashing damage per success) or exert great

force of body or will (+1 Strength or +1 die to the Willpower pool per success). He becomes surprisingly formidable in combat, his seemingly unschooled use of weapons overwhelming foes with its energy (+1 level of damage on at attack per two successes rolled). He can determine where an axe should strike a tree or a battering ram should hit a door to break it down as fast as any normal effort could possibly accomplish. He also gains enough understanding to ensure that crops or dumb animals which he tends grow as strong and healthy as usually possible, over time.

●●● Calling on the untapped strength of his own frame, the Craftmason can staunch wounds (heal one Health Level of lethal damage per success) or even shrug off blows (soak one Health Level of any kind of damage per success). He can also heal others' bruises as he once healed himself (restoring bashing damage as above), or grant inanimate structures which he builds or repairs unique strength (increasing their ability to resist damage by two Health Levels per success). Although Das Auge is the pillar which governs the fine control of Quintessence, this level of skill with Die Rückseite enables a Craftmason to lock it into an object or structure, or free it from being locked.

●●●● The Craftmason masters strength in all its forms. He can animate trees, rocks, and stones, paralyze others with a touch, or augment other Craftmason's special efforts (adding his successes to their own in magical workings, whether or not he could actually work the magic on his own). He can heal others' cuts (lethal damage) as he can heal his own, and his strength of faith and purity of will make him a terror to supernatural entities (doing double, aggravated damage to them with "normal" attacks, even if they are incorporeal).

●●●●● There is *nothing* in the material world which cannot be supported, matched, or countered by something at the true master's command. Anything created or done by use of other Pillars can be rendered permanent and invulnerable to all but greater countering powers, and the Craftmason can even make new crays (rules as for Order of Hermes wizards using Primus). Battered comrades can be reinvigorated (healing two levels of any kind of damage per success), and shattered buildings can be restored to completeness.

Specialties: Destruction, Endurance, Healing, Raw Strength, Strength of Will.

Sample Foci: The simplest of tools (levers, crowbars, axes), Meditation before taking action.

Sample Rotes

The Glory of the Temple (Die Hände •, Die Öffnung ••, Das Auge •••)

Working within a building of the correct design (a cray under his faction's control), the Craftmason can shape the flow of Quintessence, distributing it to any other participant in this ceremonial procedure smoothly and without risk.

(Assign one point of Quintessence per success as desired, up to the limit of that available from the cray; the recipients have their normal limits as to how much they can store, but they can also spend the Quintessence immediately in workings of their own, if they choose.)

Victory in Justice (Die Hände ••, Die Öffnung •••, Das Auge ••, Die Rückseite •••)

The Craftmasons are fighting a war, and many of their troops lack the power they truly need. This rote compensates for that, granting mundane helpers what they require to fight magical foes. Furthermore, the boon is granted through,

seemingly, little more than a stirring speech.

(The recipients of this effect gain not only raw strength and resilience, but courage, understanding of the task in hand, and the judgment to carry it out. Each receives the benefits of the four pillars, at the level incorporated into the rote, as required throughout its duration -- albeit only for the purpose which the Craftmason declared when making the speech.)

Passages of Power (Die Hände ••, Das Auge •••, Die Rückseite ••)

Craftmasons know that architecture and geometry have *power*. By exploiting the subtleties of a correctly designed building, or by carefully drawing complex temporary labyrinths on the ground, one may even transcend the normal world, if one has a good reason. However, Craftmasons usually prefer to reduce, not increase, traffic with the immaterial world.

(This rote grants access to the Umbra, or makes it harder for Umbrood to enter the mundane world. Das Auge determines the subtleties involved, Die Hände shapes them, and Die Rückseite imbues them with necessary power. Each success increases or decreases the local gauntlet for the duration of the working; decreasing it to zero creates a temporary shallowing.)

Well-Meaning Nuisances

for *GURPS*

by Michele Armellini

Any GM worth his salt can easily come up with wicked, dastardly villains, or faithful, reliable allies. Treacherous traitors are a third option. These characters are perfect for a cinematic adventure; but in a more realistic setting, things would be different. They'd resemble more . . . well, real life. Not all the opponents the heroes have to face will be irredeemably evil; not all friendly guys are either steady as rocks or double-crossing scum. Some shady characters will be just muddling through with their own more or less objectionable goals, some bona-fide friendly types might be more liabilities than assets, and other people are just as well-intentioned as the heroes, or even more so . . . but they are pests.

These well-meaning nuisances make for interesting roleplaying opportunities, since the PCs can't just smash them to smithereens, nor can they recruit them as solid allies. The party will need to find other solutions: negotiating and coming to terms with them, compromising and bargaining, explaining and convincing; or, failing these attempts, making them harmless somehow, sidestepping them, or fooling them.

If everything else fails, and depending on what is at stake, the orders and priorities the PCs have, and what the "real villain" is up to, it may well be that the heroes will have to employ stronger measures against these pests. But even then, this will lead to intriguing roleplay situations, unpredictable consequences in the campaign, and possibly on-going, stormy relationships.

If the adventurers are diplomatic, patient and clever, this kind of NPCs might even offer some minor help, from time to time. They can provide comic relief, secondary sub-plots, and occasional diversions. Here are a few *GURPS* samples of well-intentioned nuisances, which can be adapted to different settings.

Jim Short, The Eager Would-Be Apprentice *TL3, 5 points*

The PCs are well-known in their home city. Jim is a great admirer, and he longs to become an apprentice, either of the whole party or specifically of one of the members.

Jim's initial application will probably come at an awkward moment. He'll be so excited to be face to face with his idols that he won't come through as a suitable hireling. In case the players should be interested in him anyway, the GM can just keep things moving, so they'll put him aside and forget about him.

But Jim is obsessed. The adventurers will find him waiting for them at their front door, following them around, and repeating his request. They'll probably turn him down again. In this case, Jim will become Dead Broke, he'll acquire a Social Stigma -1 (homeless), and he'll beg in the streets more often than he already has been doing, because, unbeknown to the PCs, he's run away from home. The heroes will see him, progressively more bedraggled, as he shamefully panhandles (note that he's Pitiable). Sooner or later, his habit of following his heroes around will cause some serious inconvenience.

Using the Character: If the PCs finally decide he'll be less of a liability if they hire him, his social standing will change. His Wealth will become Struggling or Average, and he'll replace the Social Stigma with a (non-dangerous) Duty to the party. Of course he'll cause other kinds of problems, because he's somewhat klutzy (his Quirk should be treated as a weaker form of the Disadvantage), in the kitchen he's a disaster waiting to happen, and he'll always insist on following the heroes on their missions and "learning the stuff." On the plus side, his father is a blacksmith and farrier, and he has some training in that craft; this also means he can be useful around the party's horses, if any. Jim is

just brighter than the average, but if one of the PCs decides to really train him, rather than just using him as a servant, that will be a lot of work. Additionally, maybe a closer relationship will be established, with the character becoming Jim's Patron (and possibly acquiring a Sense of Duty towards the boy).

Note that his father is a brawny, violent bully (the reason why Jim ran away), and he's angry at having lost his apprentice. He's not Jim's Enemy . . . for the time being. But if he catches him working for the adventurers, he'll try to bring him home, willy-nilly.

Another use for Jim would be as an unwary informant on the PCs! He'd be utterly loyal to them, of course, but he really can't tell a lie . . .

If the adventurers steadfastly refuse to hire him, they see Jim sink in the city's underworld. He can't find a job with a blacksmith, because they are afraid of his father. After giving up his hope, he'll shift his need of guidance onto some gang leader or Thief Guild member, who'll have no qualms about exploiting him. Jim will learn Thief Skills, and sooner or later the party may meet him as a sour, if inferior, opponent.

With a few adjustments, Jim's story can be used at other Tech Levels, too; Jim is just the TL3 equivalent of a fan boy.

Appearance: 5'2", 125 lbs, age 17, short, unkempt light brown hair, large eyes, quivering lips

Attributes: ST: 10 [0], DX 11 [10], IQ 11 [10], HT 10 [0] Speed: 5.25, Move: 5, Dodge: 5, Parry: 7 (Brawling)

Advantages: Fearlessness +1 [2]; Pitiable [5].

Disadvantages: Incompetence (Cooking) [-1]; Obsession (Becoming the adventurers' apprentice) [-5]; Poverty (Poor) [-15]; Truthfulness [-5];

Youth (17) [-2].

Quirk: Klutzy tendency [-1].

Skills: Animal Handling (Horses)-8/13 [$\frac{12}{13}$]; Area Knowledge (City)-12 [2]; Blacksmith/TL3-10 [1]; Brawling-11 [1]; Darts-11 [1]; Panhandling-13* [$\frac{12}{13}$]; Scrounging-11 [1].

Languages: English-11 [0].

* Included bonus from Pitiable.

Mrs. Jones, The Nosy Neighbor

TL6, 25 points

Mrs. Prudence Jones is a nosy neighbor. She's a smiling middle-aged lady, a widow; she can be gentle and helpful, especially with people who aren't secretive and freely talk about themselves. Because her preferred pastime is snooping on neighbors.

She spends a lot of time peering out of the second-floor windows of her corner house, unless she's in the garden, from where she will try talking with all passers-by. She's been here for ages, so she is in good terms with the milkman, the postman, the boy delivering newspapers, the technicians maintaining all the utilities, the maids, and so on. She collects information from all these sources and she's also very good at extracting tell-tale details from anybody.

Mrs. Jones, however, has no ulterior purposes; she's not a blackmailer, and accusing her of being something like that is a big mistake (she'll be mortally offended). She'll admit she is curious; actually, she is interested in other persons' lives because she has no life of her own to speak of. Her reward is to be up to date on all the going-ons in the neighborhood. If somebody is willing to share his own problems with her, she's really happy; with the uppity ones who keep to themselves, sooner or later she'll drop a hint that will let them understand they have no secrets for her.

Of course Mrs. Jones, while basically harmless, is a terrible nuisance as a neighbor to rough-hewn adventurers, caped vigilantes, shady cabalists and investigators dabbling with Things Man Was Not Meant To Know -- because Mrs. Jones wants to know it all!

Using the Character: Mrs. Jones is ideal with secretive characters like those mentioned above. When they move in the neighborhood, they initially get to know her kind side, but sooner or later somebody else warns them about her. It's too late: Mrs. Jones already knows they have some exciting secret for her to discover, and she'll be relentless! Of course the party's secret may be really dangerous. Mrs. Jones might become a valuable source for the opposition, be it the police or something more fearsome.

A different use might be to have Mrs. Jones as a neighbor to somebody the PCs themselves are snooping on. Thus, she becomes their source -- but of course, she'll be curious about them, too!

Note that at higher TLs, Mrs. Jones becomes increasingly effective -- and dangerous. At TL7 she might love photos, at TL8 she could be good at making videos, and she'd be really a threat if she had the skills for snooping not only in the real world but also in cyberspace (for a hi-tech Mrs. Jones, see also p. FW113).

Eventually, if the heroes cannot tolerate her knowing everything about them, and assuming they don't want to resort to violence against this charming little lady, they'll have the following alternatives. They might feel they just have to move out! Or they might elaborate some deception; she isn't easily fooled, but if they are successful, she might become their disinformation tool. Or, finally, they might be clever enough to come up with a solution such as providing her with a life of her own: a middle-aged gentleman courting her might do the trick.

Appearance: 5'5", 150 lbs, age 47, plump, gray hair, small black eyes

Attributes: ST: 9 [-10], DX 10 [0], IQ 11 [10], HT 10 [0] Speed: 5.00, Move: 5, Dodge: 5

Advantages: Alertness +1 [5]; Contacts (Local service workers, skill 12, 12 or less, somewhat reliable) [2]; Independent Income [5]; Single-Minded [5]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10].

Disadvantages: Compulsive Behavior (Snooping on neighbors) [-5]; Curious [-10]; Light Sleeper [-5]; Reputation -2 (Busybody, neighbors) [-3].

Skills: Acting-11 [2]; Area Knowledge (neighborhood)-14 [6]; Botany/TL6-8 [$\frac{1}{2}$]; Cooking-12 [2]; Detect Lies-10 [2]; Gardening-12 [2]; Musical Instrument (Piano)-10 [2]; Naturalist-8 [$\frac{1}{2}$]; Needlecraft-10 [2]; Savoir-Faire-12 [2].

Languages: English-11 [0].

Mary Shelby, The Berserking Pacifist

TL7, 50 points

Mary was known on the campus as a smart but short-tempered student, but what the would-be rapist saw in that dark alley was a frail-looking girl hurrying towards her dorm.

Mary can't recall the event clearly, but she still remembers the bloody pool on the pavement . . . and the fact that her assailant spent three weeks in intensive care. She had discovered she could go berserk when threatened. This changed her life. She sought psychological help to get rid of that frightening flaw, to no avail. She turned to meditation, Eastern philosophies, and, finally, non-violence. She was fascinated by Gandhi's writings -- and still, when someone bothered her or when a situation became stressful, her blood boiled, and sometimes she was barely able to control herself. She felt ashamed, but she could not change the way she was. She was, and is, a Berserk.

Today, Mary is an efficient if somewhat snappy accountant, working for a large auditing firm; she's also a divorced mother (her daughter is a Dependent), as her marriage did not survive her tempers. But above all, she's a pacifist

activist. Thanks to her intelligence and Charisma, she's the leader of the local chapter; her group is fond of her (and somewhat awed, too), to the point that they can be considered her Allies. As a local leader, she can count the nationwide movement as a rarely appearing Patron.

However, no matter how sincerely convinced she is that pacifism is the only true way, it's all in her mind, not in her guts. Indeed, she has no Pacifism Disadvantage, and she can harm people. Knowing all too well her own weakness, she stays away from the front lines during demonstrations, when a confrontation with the police is likely. This, however, has led to veiled criticism within the movement (not her own local group). Some day, she'll have to take to the field, and then anything might happen.

Using the Character: Mary works best at face value, in a campaign where there's a war looming or going on, and the PCs are cops, supers, or other law enforcers. If they underestimate her, they may be in for a surprise -- and after she has run amok, she'll unexpectedly offer her sincere, shame-faced apologies. If the party is a team of special soldiers, Mary's group can stage sit-ins in front of their barracks. If she gets acquainted with the PCs, even through an accidental scrape, she'll probably try to win them over to her cause! She's not a fanatic, but she can be persistent.

Alternatively, Mary's organization sees pacifism as the means to another end, something that will bring her at cross purposes with the PC party. Another scenario might be letting a third party make use of violence, presumably against the pacifist demonstrators, and in the presence of the PCs -- Mary will react. Finally, she can serve as a true wild card in a hostage situation, especially if taken together with her daughter -- a stress factor, for sure. The heroes can either be the rescuers or fellow hostages, and they won't be able to predict this woman's behavior!

Appearance: 5'5", 130 lbs, age 34, black hair, fiery dark blue eyes

Attributes: ST: 10 [0], DX 10 [0], IQ 12 [20], HT 11 [10] Speed: 5.25, Move: 5, Dodge: 5

Advantages: Ally Group (Local group, small, 12 or less) [20]; Charisma +1 [5]; Patron (Nationwide movement, 6 or less) [5].

Disadvantages: Berserk [-15]; Dependent (Her daughter, competent, loved one, 9 or less) [-12]; Sense of Duty (To local group and movement) [-10].

Quirks: Always wears a purple scarf; Distrusts authority; Feels guilty about her mental problem [-3].

Skills: Accounting-14 [8]; Administration-13 [4]; Bard-13* [2]; Computer Operation/TL7-13 [2]; Driving (Car)/TL7-9 [1]; Leadership-14* [4]; Politics-12 [2]; Sex Appeal-10 [1]; Research-12 [2]; Philosophy (Non-violence)-11 [2]; Tactics (Non-violent demonstrations)-10 [1].

Languages: English-12 [0]; Spanish-11 [1].

* Included Bonus from Charisma.

Arthur Benson, The Conscientious Civil Servant

**TL8, 75
points**

Arthur Benson is a top bureaucrat within the city administration. His father was a rich, greedy businessman, whose demise was caused by his shady investment practices: accused of insider trading, he died of a stroke just days before his sentence. Probably in reaction to this family background, Arthur is very different. He is straight as a die, and his ideal is doing the common good and serving the community. Although wealthy, he likes his role as a scrupulous bureaucrat. He also does community work, volunteering as a teacher to disadvantaged kids. In the years, he earned a reputation as an upright citizen and a helpful official.

What nobody knows is that Arthur is a crusader in the making.

Using the Character: The exact campaign use of this nuisance will depend on the profession and role of the adventurers. Whatever they are, be they cops, private eyes, occultists, simply rich and famous, or even supers, there will be common people who are resentful, afraid, or jealous of them. Sooner or later, some unfortunate accident will take place; it might have nothing to do with the party, it just happens to involve somebody in the same category as the PCs. For instance, some super vigilante causes huge collateral damages (or a cop shoots an unarmed boy). Suddenly, the whole city wants something done to curb the arrogant abuses by supers (or by cops). The media drum up a frenzied campaign. And Arthur comes to the fore.

This is the crusade for him. His deep-felt ideals will develop into an Obsession (to be customized by the GM). He might even develop a form of Fanaticism or Intolerance. The problem is that he's utterly earnest, honest, upright; he sincerely believes the common people need help and protection, and while he maintains that the supers (or cops, or whatever) have their rights and should be allowed to do their job, he also thinks that new, strict, severe rules are necessary.

He could strive to achieve this purpose in several different ways. He might apply to be transferred to the city department that is in charge with the specific problem; for instance, a committee reviewing everything the local supers (or cops) do. He might found and become the leader of a grass-roots movement. By exploiting his connections and wealth, he might acquire some measure of control over the local radio or TV station and keep the media campaign going from there. He might find out some other blatant case and promote a well-publicized lawsuit. If the targeted class (and, in particular, the PCs) become confrontational and try to resist the increasingly burdensome measures, procedures and public scrutiny, he might even feel he has to run for mayor on a very, very focused platform! All in all, he becomes a royal pain in the neck . . . and all the while, he's just being sincere and well-intentioned.

Dealing with Arthur will require major PR efforts, social skills, negotiating, politicking, and large doses of patience and humble pie. He's got no weak spots, so circumventing him won't be easy. The heroes should probably try to beat him at his own game, i.e. garner public support, allies, testimonials and so on. If they can manage to get good press for some extraordinary feat they accomplish, that will be of great help. Arthur can be customized for any setting where public opinion and democratic local government has a role. Even at low TLs, cities often have these features to a certain extent.

Appearance: 5'10", 160 lbs, age 42, brown hair and eyes

Attributes: ST: 9 [-10], DX 10 [0], IQ 12 [20], HT 10 [0] Speed: 5.00, Move: 5, Dodge: 5

Advantages: Administrative Rank 2 [10]; Contacts (business, skill 15, 9 or less, usually reliable) [4]; Contacts (police, skill 15, 9 or less, somewhat reliable) [2]; Reputation +2 (helpful official and upstanding citizen, sometimes, many citizens) [2]; Sanctity [5]; Status 1 [0, from Wealth]; Wealth (Wealthy) [20].

Disadvantages: Bad Sight (correctable) [-10]; Honesty [-10]; Obsession (to be customized by the GM) [-10]; Workaholic [-5]. Quirk: Whatever the weather, swims in his swimming pool very early every morning [-1].

Skills: Administration-16 [10]; Area Knowledge (City)-15 [6]; Bard-13 [4]; Computer Operation/TL8-13 [2]; Diplomacy-12 [4]; Driving(Automobile)/TL8-10 [2]; Economics-11 [2]; Law-12+4 [4, bonus applies to local regulations]; Leadership-12 [2]; Politics-13 [4]; Research-12 [2]; Savoir-Faire-14 [0, from Status]; Swimming-12 [4]; Teaching-11 [1].

Languages: English-12 [0]; Spanish-11 [1].

Getting a New Writer

by Brian Rogers

Supers games provide the GM advice on modeling the genre: Things happen because it's how they happen in the comic books. This is good advice. After all, we're playing games in these genres to reproduce the source material. Anything in the source material must be a part of the genre, right?

Not always.

Occasionally a series suddenly changes direction. Established characters vanish, new ones turn up; plots die unresolved, threats spring from nowhere. This generally means the series has a new writer. Sometimes this is a good thing: if the story has become confused, lost focus, or is no longer holding the audience's (read: players') interest, shaking things up is a good idea. Sometimes it's a bad thing, when writers change because of producer micro-management or ego disputes.

We'll assume in a game sense that this will be a good thing -- while any GM may take a game that's going well and shake it up, only a perverse one would yank it in a deliberately bad direction just to emulate an argument between the series' writer and editor. (There are exceptions to this: *Dream Park*, *Hong Kong Action Theater*, and games for fourth-wall-breaking characters like *Ambush Bug* can accommodate these changes, as they work in multiple levels of reality.) But what does it mean?

Typically, the new writer takes one of two tacks to rescue the book: look for more or burn it down.

Looking for More

Find a central story in your confused series to be your driving force. Essentially you are trying to make what you already have into something more, even if that means sacrificing some aspects. This is a three-step process:

1. Review everything that has happened to date, focusing on events after your initial loss of focus. Look for interesting bits that either you or the players enjoyed, as well as things that didn't make sense at the time. This list of interesting and nonsensical bits are your building blocks for the core idea.
2. Review the stars of your series, with an eye toward mythic or archetypal significance. Origins and abilities are key, but psychology and idiom are equally important. Your goal is finding a new way of looking at the PCs, reinventing them without changing anything that has come before. Such changes are the mortar that holds together the new story.
3. Mesh together the interesting but incongruous bits into a single, cataclysmic story, seen through the lens of your reinvented heroes. (Sounds easy, right?) Ideally such a conflict should be so massive -- time travelers preventing an abhorrent future, battle against the Illuminati, repairing a [reality quake](#) -- that it absorbs all the campaign incongruities and gives you a strong force for continuing the series.

Once you have the cataclysm prepared, it's time to spring the "nothing you believe is true" session: Shock the heroes with their revisited origins (in which the apparently random, least understood, bits of their origin are revealed as pieces of a larger plan) to start the investigation of what's really happening. This is often handled by killing one or more of the PCs and reviving them via the revelations of their history, but mysterious strangers or apparently [repentant villains](#) work too. You can emphasize the shock of this by reworking or removing supporting cast or subplots that don't fit the new plot: spouses are killed or revealed as Illuminati agents; friends cease to exist or change entirely; only echoes remain of the previous reality. Heroes often find their abilities expanding to deal with this cosmic threat. The goal is to knock the players out of their complacency and force them to reexamine everything for keys to the upcoming cataclysm. Make them sacrifice everything to be the heroes that destiny (or the secret masters, or choral agents) needs to [save the world](#).

If handled well, your recent lack of focus will be lauded as masterful foreshadowing. The players will reinvest themselves, saving the things that truly matter from this P.K. Dick-ian onslaught. The series will gain the momentum it needs to see this grand plot through. If handled poorly, you can either end the campaign (which was dying anyway, or you wouldn't have tried this) or dismiss it as a villainous plot to confuse the heroes (so you can restore the status quo next session).

Burn it Down

Find the heroes' core and reinvent the series around it. Essentially, you're sacrificing the setting in order to save the characters. There are three steps to this process as well.

1. Scrutinize the stars of the series, looking for the essential elements: which supporting cast members -- if any -- are critical? Which abilities are key, and at what levels? What were their origins, idioms, and starting ideals? List each character's important aspects as the most important things to keep.
2. Eliminate anything not on those lists. If there is nothing on the list that ties the heroes to a city or geographic location, consider changing the game locale. If an NPC isn't critical to anyone, lose them. Strip away abilities that don't fit the character's core, and downpower any that have grown too potent.
3. Develop a new setting based around these newly reinvented heroes. Keeping most of the supporting cast or the locale may limit your choices but not stifle you; you can subtly alter people and situations to restore their old spark. For groups without critical ties, chuck everything (including non-critical villains) and start fresh. This could be a new city, but it could also be a new world, or simply the elimination of NPCs and refocusing on what really matters: the heroes, their interactions and their adventures.

Once you have this new setting developed spring it on the players. This may require a couple things.

You may have to close off whatever story you were telling. Do it quickly, and don't worry if the end is a little messy. By next session it won't matter. If you're getting rid of a bunch of NPCs, handle it now: Girlfriends leave, police get reassigned, liaisons retire. Clearing ground in advance smoothes the transition.

You may have to justify your down-powering the PCs. Let your players know the series has lost focus, and you want to bring the characters back to basics. If you've eliminated abilities, explain your reasoning but let the players defend keeping them. If you've down-powered core abilities, reassure the group that the PCs still have the same rank on the campaign's hierarchy: the fastest man alive needn't be moving at warp speed if his closest competitor barely breaks Mach 2. If everyone is equally diminished players may be more willing to go along with the change.

Open the first "new" session rehashing the heroes' origins, why they're together, and what they stand for. Then put them in a scenario that emphasizes their original focus: If they're planetary defenders, have them save the world; if they're gritty detectives, a murder reveals elements of your newly restructured criminal forces; if they're explorers, a new world is revealed to them. Villains can be new, but ideally you should confront them with an equally revamped second-string bad guy from their past, with a focus on what originally made him a cool opponent. Refrain from introducing new NPCs, or using old non-critical supporting cast. Keep the focus on the things that matter!

If handled well, players will remember what made the game fun. They'll find new methods of interaction with their old supporting cast, and pick out new favorite NPCs. The series will have fresh ideas, or can re-introduce things that turned silly or dull the first time around. If handled poorly, the players will complain about losing the perks they'd accumulated, and will want all their stuff back. At this point, you can either end the campaign or rapidly reintroduce the supporting cast and restore power levels. In any case, you're no worse off than you were before.

In Conclusion

These sorts of changes are very meta-genre -- beyond the fourth wall -- and such considerations are seldom taken into account when planning an RPG. Still, while these changes sometimes happen when an argument between writers, editors and publishers wrecks a good book, some of the best comics in the last 20 years come from new writers

breathing life into confused or tired characters and plots. Supers, or indeed any, GMs can make use of these techniques to revive a dying campaign.

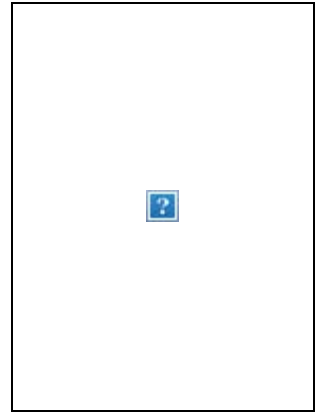
Pyramid Review

Dynasties and Demagogues (for *d20 System*)

Published by [Atlas Games](#)

Written by Chris Aylott

160-page b&w hardcover; \$28.95



Atlas Games has produced another outstanding *d20 System* supplement in its Penumbra line. ***Dynasties and Demagogues*** is a resource for DMs wanting to part from the more traditional fantasy roleplaying, where Dwarven clan histories are as elaborate as speeches come, and "kill them and take their stuff" is the order of the day. Possessing the necessary framework for a full-scale political campaign, where ***Dynasties and Demagogues*** really excels is as an alternative adventure, giving the party a break from storming lairs and fighting demons. Characters that normally exist as supporting specialists, such as rogues and bards, are suddenly pushed to the forefront of the party, and fighters soon find that negotiation and implied violence may be just as effective as actually using their blades.

For many DMs and groups, who are tired of fighting progressively tougher monsters as they advance in power, the power games and intricate webs of deception provide a welcome change. For many people, who aspire to have their characters known as kingmakers, or noble lords, rather than dragon slayers, ***Dynasties and Demagogues*** is the book the ***Epic Level Handbook*** should have been.

Dynasties and Demagogues is a 160-page, hardcover supplement of excellent quality. The binding is sturdy, having survived the frantic packing of a dorm room and a cross-country flight, haphazardly placed in a laptop bag, without a scratch. The purple and beige cover of the book is clean and attractive, while keeping with the trend of *d20 System* books these days to have some simple, circular symbol of the book centered on the cover. The interior of the book is heavy, non-glossed paper, good for those of us who are tired of the semi-gloss pages that occasionally smear. The printing is of reasonable size, and the interior artwork, while sparse, is a collection of absolutely beautiful pieces depicting epic scenes that convey the mood and tone of the book dramatically.

The book is divided up into five sections, plus several Appendices:

- **Introduction:** A discussion of "what is a political campaign" and a simple adventure to set the tone.
- **In Theory:** The ideas behind a political campaign, and the political background any adventure will need. In Character: A guide to playing characters in a political game, and new rules for typically soft, "DMs discretion" subjects, like political debates and elections.
- **In Practice:** A guide for running political campaigns and adventures, and building governments that both make sense, and are challenging to the players.
- **Appendices:** Various useful governments and titles, a bibliography and very helpful reference of all the OGL content in the book.

One of the problems many of the political games I have encountered have is setting the mood, especially in a system that emphasizes combat and other action-oriented activities. ***Dynasties and Demagogues*** throws the reader directly into an adventure in its Introduction chapter as a way of setting the mood. The adventure is by no means a truly complete one, nor is it particularly complex. It involves rescuing a troubled vineyard owned by a local Dona, but I will say no more, lest someone wish to use it for his or her group. While it is an incomplete adventure as far as pre-made adventures go, it nonetheless provides a very strong adventure seed, and shows how action and intrigue can blend together to make an outstanding political campaign. It also includes helpful sidebars for both the player and the DM, commenting on what is happening inside the adventure.

"In Theory" is the discussion of how historical forms of government, typical fantasy races, and the presence of magic fit into the gaming world. It includes the major forms of government around today as well, and some new ones. Democracy, Anarchy, Monarchy, Dictatorship, Feudalism, Mageocracy, Theocracy, and Empire are all covered. Of particular use are the adventure-seed governments, complete with a defining and fully stated NPC for each type of government. Particularly useful is the Bureaucracy rules, "Maze of Bureaucracy," which makes the process of delaying player characters or adding unexpected struggles as simple as a roll on the table. While for the most part unoriginal, the government forms section of *Dynasties and Demagogues* is well-written, helpful, and eases players and DMs into a political campaign.

The racial chapter follows the same basic pattern, presenting each of the common fantasy races in the context of a campaign seed, many with very welcome twists. For example, there is a not-so-benevolent elven kingdom, and a dwarf nation torn by infighting about the split between the surface world and the world of mines and dark things. All the major fantasy races are covered, although with varying degrees of space; dwarves and elves by far get the most attention in terms of plot-seeds and fleshed out NPCs, which are exceedingly well-done, and fit archetypal roles such as "Changing Chieftain" or "Old Political Infighter." This allows the NPCs to be yanked out of the book and patched into a campaign with very little difficulty.

The magic chapter presents a single new magical organization, yet more compelling and original adventure hooks, plus a ton of new and useful spells for sorcerers and wizards more interested in getting the truth from a witness, rather than frying them right then and there. A small-but-useful collection of magical items follows.

And thus ends the "In Theory" section of the book. While nothing presented within those pages is particularly ground breaking, there is a feeling of originality and transparency to everything written. With a little bit of adjustment, each and every bit of new material presented could slide smoothly into your campaign, with nary a continuity error. The section accomplishes its goal with solid, clean style, allowing campaigns to start up, or switch, to a political campaign with very little effort.

The "In Character" section is where *Dynasties and Demagogues* really shines. It begins with some basic "who is your character" questions, then introduces an entirely new class of feats, and rules to boot: the Rules of Personality. The system uses a long list of feats that define a character's personality, each with a brief description, restrictions (as with normal feats) and a condition. Whenever the character meets this condition in a game, they are awarded Action Points, similar to the Drama Dice AEG introduced with *7th Sea*, and has kept on with their Spycraft line of supplements, which can also be turned in for extra experience. These feats, of which a character can only have one, are a great way to introduce in-game rewards for roleplaying a personality, which is especially useful for campaigns where the DM is trying to move a party more toward character development and method acting with a group that is more used to playing a hack-and-slash character.

A brief section on the new uses of old skills follows (which seems mandatory these days), which I dispute is necessary, as most of the skill uses are painfully obvious, before the reader is hit with another set of excellent, useful but balanced feats. Meant for courtly characters, or those leading armies rather than small war bands, these feats give boosts to long neglected aspects of most characters, boosting the character's power in ways beyond the strength in which they hit things. While all useful, none of them come off as sickeningly overpowered "must have" feats that occasionally crop up in other supplement lines. Following the large group of feats is another large list, this time of prestige classes.

The author and I clearly disagree about the nature of prestige classes. I have never liked the current use of prestige classes as replacements for the old *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* kits. I have always viewed them as an extension of power groups and specialized entities in a campaign world. With the number of feats, especially with the number of new, very flexible feats that occur in this book, and the ease of multiclassing, I just don't think "kit" prestige classes are needed. However, if one agrees with the use of prestige classes as "kits," allowing characters to go down specialized paths, there is an impressive collection. Ranging from bodyguard, a useful class for fighters who suddenly find themselves protecting weaker but more skill-heavy characters; to discreet companion, for characters who know that a coy glance and night between sheets can glean as much information as months of careful sleuthing.

The flood of crunchy bits continues as the Chris introduces "Political Maneuvers." Similar to combat or the driving system of *Spycraft*, the system allows for characters to select "maneuvers," which are compared against an opponent's "Political Defense," a kind of intellectual AC. For those of you looking for an elegant way to recreate epic debates on the floor of the Roman Senate, even if your players aren't trained in classic logic and the works of Cicero, this is your stop. The mechanics for the public sphere continue with rules for elections, allowing characters who want to be kings, or king makers, to sway the public to their point of view. Essentially, *Dynasties and Demagogues* has taken some very difficult concepts, which tend to get glossed over and reduced to DM hand-waving, and gives them rules similar to combat, where how carefully and skillfully a character is played really matters, and players have some chance of predicting their success.

"In Practice" is a simple guide for running political campaigns, walking DMs through the process of creating a political campaign through several examples, plus a full-fledged campaign outline. There is nothing truly groundbreaking, and it's a bit of a shock after the hail of crunchy bits of the previous section, but "In Practice" is solidly written, and the examples all have some unexpected twists in them that may provide inspiration for political DMs.

All in all, *Dynasties and Demagogues* provides a solid, nicely written supplement that provides the backbone any political campaign will need to get off the ground, plus a huge amount of well-designed rules, feats, and prestige classes for a political character.

--Eric Lofgren

Pyramid Pick

Victorian Age Vampire (for *Vampire: The Masquerade*)

Published by [White Wolf Publishing, Inc.](#)

Written by J. Achilli, Kraig Blackwelder, Brian Campbell, Will Hindmarch, and Ari Marmell

Illustrated by Mike Danza, Guy Davis, Rebecca Guay, Vince Locke, Matt Mitchell, Christopher Shy, Richard Thomas and Andy Trabbold

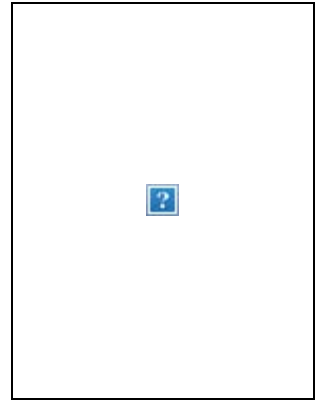
224-page b&w hardcover; \$26.95

Victorian Age Vampire ushers in the opportunity to play in a time when the Ivory Tower of the Camarilla is at its highest: a time when Queen Victoria and the bureaucrats of her government administer the furthest reaches of the British Empire by day, while the Kindred attempt to rule it by night. It is only through the efforts of the late William Gull's agents that Vampiric influence does not reach as far as the Imperial seat. It is an age of contrasts and hypocrisy: between the high idealism of the moneyed and landed classes and the squalor of those beneath them; between the façade of correct propriety and the attractive allure of all that is exotic, forbidden, and taboo; between a fascination for the exactitude of scientific endeavor and the inability to explain its answers that makes everyone look back to the supernatural. It is an age when everything is seen in black and white, and not in the shades of gray of the early 21st century.

All this applies to the undead as it does to mortal society. To the Camarilla of the Empire, the mere name of the Sabbat is too strong a taboo that none dare mention them in polite society . . . so strong a taboo that there are childer embraced who know not of their very existence. Equally, Camarilla society is as stratified as that of the Kine; the Ventruue and Toreador belong to the upper classes, the Tremere and the Gangrel to the middle classes, with the Brujah, Malkavian, and Nosferatu clans consigned to the lower classes. Where the mortal fascination with magic and the supernatural has found an outlet through a predilection for the Gothic romance and membership in secret societies such as the Freemasons and the Golden dawn, the kindred invest themselves in those self-same societies while dealing with clans -- such as the Followers of Set -- that will be reviled in later years. Of course, consorting with such individuals could be enough to lose an upstanding vampire their place in society. Even the type of coterie created to bring characters from disparate clans together will be viewed as with suspicion. After all, their cooperation might expose them to the unwholesome and the inappropriate, both in terms of individuals and of ideas.

Victorian Age Vampire is a historical sourcebook for *Vampire: The Masquerade*, which explores not the world of the gothic-punk, but that of the true Gothic, a time when an interest in the Gothic novel is at its highest and thus also the vampire. Indeed, it is a kindred that will permanently stamp the vampire onto Western consciousness simply by whispering into the ear of an Irish novelist, thus leaving a permanent mark on the Masquerade and straining at its bonds. In fact, it is with the publication of *Dracula* in 1897 that the timeframe of *Victorian Age Vampire* ends, having begun 17 years before in 1880.

In terms of production, this book is very nicely done. While the writing is itself engaging, it is the look of *Victorian Age Vampire* that really shines. An ironwork motif is used throughout for page borders, the titles, and sometimes the quotes, which is quite in keeping with the period. Better still is the artwork, with Christopher Shy's full-page chapter prefaces echoing the photography of the period to a very moody and ethereal effect -- though in black and white rather than in sepia. Andy Trabbold's illustrations also stand out in particular as similarly effective, but all of the artwork in



Victorian Age Vampire is good and works to give the reader a sense of mood and feel for the era.

The book opens with the standard slice of color fiction, which describes the first few days of a vampire's return to London and the taking of a new childe. While it sets the scene well enough, and is written in the Gothic style, it is far from engaging. Fortunately, what follows through the rest of the book is more than engaging, fascinating not only to the *World of Darkness* devotee, but also (as in my own case) to the fan of the Victorian era game, whether **Cthulhu by Gaslight**, **Space 1889**, or **Castle Falkenstein**. This begins with an overview of the era and setting, and also the society -- both of mortal and vampire. The main purpose of the latter is to highlight the differences between **Victorian Age Vampire** and **Vampire: The Masquerade**, and also (to some extent) **Victorian Age Vampire** and **Dark Age: Vampire**, the ancestor to this game. Such differences can be simplified down to being the stricter and more strongly enforced codes of conduct that will slacken by the end of the 20th century.

Each of the clans is thoroughly examined under the soft flare of gaslight. Initially, this is of the seven members of the Camarilla, who are both similar *and* different to those of today. The Brujah remain at heart philosophers, but have taken up the radical causes of the age and a more rowdy rabble, even as their revolutionary ardor wanes. The Gangrel are beset still by wanderlust and given the derisory term "adventurer," but some still serve to protect the kindred of the cities from dangers of the wilds. Though fractious, the Malkvians have found a place where science and madness bisect in the lunatic asylums, while the Nosferatu further their information networks via the ever-growing program of tunnels dug beneath London and other cities. The Toreador continue their roles as Shepard to the mortals, ever looking for a new trend to offer their patronage to, but still involving themselves in clan politics. It is their occult metier that brings the Tremere to prominence at the height of the Victorian age, as it coincides with society's fascination with the self-same subject, but it is the Ventrue that embody both Empire and Camarilla, dominating Kindred society as they always have.

Yet just as the power of the aristocratic Ventrue declines in step with that of mortal nobility, the lessening of church influence also decreases the reach of the manipulative Lasombra. Though all-powerful within their domain where they lord it over the native peasants, the Tzimisce feel the influence of civilization at their boundaries. These two clans are to be feared, but there remain four independent clans that stand between the Sabbat and the Camarilla, who define much of the Kindred's fascination with the exotic. The Assamites offer services of death and protection in return for blood and coin; they war with the Followers of Set, who sell secrets to all in return for favors to be called in at a later date. The Giovanni remain neutral and reviled, but spread their mercantile influence aided by an invisible network of spies. The Ravnos work in the same (though physical rather than invisible) capacity to those clans willing to pay for such services, although there are naturally consequences to having truck with the kindred's pariahs. Each of these clan write-ups comes *sans* rules, so players and Storyteller alike will still need to refer to a copy of **Vampire: The Masquerade** or similar for these. Of course, this leaves room for a more in-depth exploration of their natures and circumstances in the Victorian era, although it does not mean this is a stand-alone book. This is particularly so with the four independent clans, as they are intended to fulfill society's need for the exotic.

What rule changes there are, extend only so far as tweaks to fit the setting. They include new Personality Archetypes -- Artiste, Coward, Explorer, Futurist, Outsider, and Questor -- as well as an adjustment to the Skills and Backgrounds. For childe, this will start with their initial Generation, as it begins at 12th rather than the 13th of **Vampire: The Masquerade** -- though it is available as a Physical Flaw. Where in centuries past vampires have reveled in their damned nature and their monstrous hearts, they find themselves in the late 19th century dwelling upon what they were before their embrace. In choosing to live hand-in-hand with a human society that has turned to science to discover what it is that makes them human, the kindred cannot deny the pull of what they once were. Thus the Path of Humanity is paramount among the vampires of the Camarilla, and almost no other is known.

An overview of the World of Darkness is provided with "Chasing Sunset (Geography)" and like [World of Darkness: Mafia](#) before it, uses the device of a journal format as written by a ghost -- here on the Vampiric equivalent of the Grand Tour. This is a subjective view, of course, but a more objective stance is taken in the sidebar boxes that run throughout this chapter. These begin with a nicely succinct explanation of what is meant by the terms England, Britain, Great Britain, and the United Kingdom. The tour itself begins at the Empire's heart, London, and then travels by train West to Wales, North to Edinburgh, and across the Irish Sea to Belfast. From there it winds through Europe -- Lisbon, Madrid, Paris, the Low Countries, Switzerland, Scandinavia, Saint Petersburg, Germany, Italy, and the

Habsburg Empire -- before crossing the Bosphorus Strait from Greece into Turkey. The journey draws to a close in the Americas after having coming from the Britain's colonies in Egypt and India.

As much as the journal imparts a sense of geography, it also provides the Storyteller with a number of hooks to build into their chronicle. For example, the relatively recent return from torpor of London's Prince, Mithras, has left him still strong but open to threats from those who have better adapted to the modern age. Even worse, a Nosferatu known as Prince Fagin has claimed the capital's East End as his own. This whole chapter makes for both fascinating *and* exasperating reading, the former for what it does tell you, but the latter because it leaves the reader wanting more.

As good as **Victorian Age Vampire** has been up until this point, it gets even better for its penultimate chapter -- "Storytelling." This is an exemplary piece of writing that clearly states from the outset that a **Victorian Age Vampire** game is not one of "Superhero by Night," but one of mood and of evoking a darker world. It describes itself as both "advanced" and Gothic storytelling, beginning with "Gothic 101," an explanation of the elements that comprise the genre. It also discusses how such elements -- the weight of history, fascination with place, tyranny of power, ghosts, secret societies, and the supernatural -- should be used to create the required atmosphere, as well as suggesting how the Storyteller can maintain such a mood. It even suggests lightening the weight of the *Storyteller* mechanics by running a dice-lite or even a diceless game. More perverse themes are covered, and while such lurid sexual practices are part of the genre, it strongly warns that they are not for everyone.

Of course, a **Victorian Age Vampire** chronicle will want antagonists, and the last chapter is devoted to these. They are, in keeping with the themes of the book, predominately human, though there are statistics for Lupines; the Fae; and, even more suited to the period, Ghosts. Their inclusion -- the Poltergeist, Driven Shade and Murderous Shade -- ties back into the descriptions of the Giovanni, the author of the geography chapter, and the Tea-Parlor mystic also described. She is listed under the Witch-Hunters, as are the Doctor/Scientist, the Priest and the vengeful Relative. The Arcanum also exists, though in its formative years only goes so far as to maintain surveillance upon the undead. Besides the various individuals described, which also include the new additions like the Serial Killer and the Evil Twin, a number of Secret Societies are given a little coverage. Again, there is little enough about the Freemasons, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (in this game founded earlier than its historical year of 1897 to make use of the storytelling possibilities it offers), and the Enlightened Society of the Weeping Moon to give the Storyteller more than a decent taster, but their prominence ensures future coverage in other supplements.

If there is any downside to **Victorian Age Vampire**, it is that it is almost a shame to have to own a copy of **Vampire: The Masquerade** in order to play in the Victorian era. Yet without space taken up by rules, there is room enough to develop and explore both setting and genre. Indeed, this is so well done that it should be read by anyone wanting to run a horror-themed game during the reign of Queen Victoria. It does also stand apart from the other creatures of the World of Darkness, although this *is* a book about vampires after all, and the others and their situation are likely to be detailed in other supplements.

Personally, **Victorian Age Vampire** is something of a revelation after being kept away from the World of Darkness by the antiseptic feel of **Vampire: The Masquerade** and the tendency of games to drift towards the "Superhero by Night" syndrome. Instead, the emphasis is steadfastly placed upon mood and atmosphere in a semi-historical setting . . . semi-historical because some slight changes have been made to make the game more interesting (such as changing the founding date of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn above) and also because the game has been written to reflect the genre rather than to a strict adherence to what really happened and when. That said, the history *feels* right, which is a testament to the excellent efforts of the authors, as is the fact that, with the creation of **Victorian Age Vampire**, they have made me want to visit the World of Darkness once again.

--Matthew Pook

Sequel Like a Pig

In the past two weeks, I've had occasion to see *two* movies on opening night (or the day after, for those movies crazy enough to open on a Thursday). Never mind the fact that a movie night for two can cost as much as a kidney at an auction site, nor the fact that I haven't seen *two* first-run movies in the same month in the past five years.

Now, the interesting thing about these movies is that they were both sequels. *Matrix Reloaded* serves as the middle movie between 1999's *The Matrix* and this winter's *Matrix Revolutions*, while *X2* is the bridge between 2000's *X-Men* and last summer's *XXX* (starring Vin Diesel as a butt-kicking extreme-sports secret-agent Professor Xavier).

Even more interestingly, I actually *liked* both of these movies more than the originals. (As an added bonus, I've also been able to torture my friends by coming up with my own impromptu ASCIIine *Matrix*-y dialog: "Consider nothing. Can something that does not exist be *more* real than something that does? For, if you cannot touch that which is real, yet you believe in that which is not, then does not the belief become more real than that which you cannot hold? [FIVE MINUTES LATER] What is a parking space? It is, by definition, *nothing*. It cannot be felt, heard, tasted; it does not know love, or anger, or sorrow. It is defined not by what it is, but by what others *wish* it to be . . . [FRIENDS SEEK BLUNT OBJECTS]")

[Peter David](#), in his *But I Digress* column, devoted [one installment](#) to sequels. He points out that sequels are often punished by moviegoers for being too different; follow-up movies that are identical (or close) to the original are rewarded. I find this interesting, because in the gaming world, I consider the opposite to be true; maybe this is because satisfying a gaming group of four is substantially different than satisfying 50,000,000 moviegoers.

Anyway, after a successful adventure, I'm tempted to run a sequel to it. Sometimes I do, and other times I don't. Of course, the concept of a "sequel" has more meaning in some campaigns than others. In a serial campaign, adventures blend together more or less seamlessly, making a defined sequel more difficult.

There's one observation I use for movie sequels that has special application for the gaming world. Namely, did the creators of the movie intend for a sequel originally? In a lot of movies that eventually come out with sequels (not to mention comics and novels), there was obviously not intended to be a sequel in the first place. This can be evident in how much back-peddalling they need to do in the next movie:

End of Movie 1:

"Huzzah! You've defeated all the evil in the world!"

Beginning of Movie 2:

"Er, wait . . . did I say, '*all*' the evil? Actually, there's some more evil I forgot to mention . . ."

Back to the Future II, *Men in Black II*, and *Highlander II* are all examples of movies where the creators had obviously intended for the original to be a complete entity unto itself, and thus need to spend a fair bit of time shoehorning the second installment into the series.

"Why does this have an application to gaming?" I hear some of you cry. Well, by definition a sequel of this sort is an attempt to continue a story that was otherwise "closed." This can be problematic, but it also leads to some interesting possibilities that are unique. But before you consider a sequel of your own adventures, there are a few things to keep in mind . . .

Do You Really Want To Do This?

First off, many things that we may be tempted to use a sequel for can actually be done with a new idea. For example, if the heroes spent a lot of time thwarting numerous obstacles to halt the progress of the Armageddon Clock, and that adventure ended satisfactorily, what impetus is there to have *another* group of baddies come along and wind up that timepiece o' death again? Played poorly, at best you'll have an adventure that feels just like the first one, and at worst it

will feel like everything the heroes did before was moot.

Instead, why not have the same heroes called upon to thwart *another* cosmic (or not-so-cosmic) threat? If the Armageddon Clock was going to merely destroy the universe, what if the Soul Prism threatened to alter everyone to a mirrored moral outlook (a plot condition that, as an aside, would be trivial in the **d20 System**, yet more problematic elsewhere)? The basic plot is still the same ("stop Bad Thing from Doing Bad"), but it doesn't threaten to make the first plot moot. Heck, the heroes might have been called upon to stop this device because of the smashing success they had the first time around, allowing for some reaffirming continuity while not making it seem moot.

Yes, I Really Want To Do This, Dagnammit!

Okay, okay . . . So you *really* want to run a direct sequel to a previous adventure. Fine. Be that way. My advice then is to try telling a story that can *only* be done as a sequel. In other words, take advantage of the opportunity, not to go back to the same well as before, but to dig a new well that is only possible because of the previous tale.

In my mind, the most effective movie sequels have been those that took the opportunity to expand the story of the first tale, yet went off in a vastly different direction. Thus *Empire Strikes Back*, *Godfather II*, and *The Two Jakes* are each dissimilar to their previous movies, yet they take the opportunity to further explore the world they created. The ties to the previous stories are augmenting, not degrading.

As an example of a gaming story I consider a "sequel," in the previously mentioned long-running **Vampire: Dark Ages** campaign I ran, there was a big bad guy who, after considerable effort, was dispatched . . . presented with the choice of death, or leaving the kingdom and never coming back. He chose the latter. In the sequel to this story, I had the kingdom appear to be under siege from someone using atypical tactics: a campaign of subterfuge and terror. Eventually, clues start appearing that point to this being the aforementioned Bad Guy. The players start frothing at the mouth about how they're going to get this guy and rend him into tiny pieces. Eventually, as the adventure series progressed, the climactic -- nay, [pivotal](#) -- moment is when it was revealed the mastermind behind the whole event was, in fact . . . the (hitherto unknown) daughter of the original Bad Guy. This is mildly shocking, yes . . . until the players learn that she had accumulated the means of throwing off suspicion by killing her father, and stealing his stuff. (Oh, and then the heroes learn that she may not even be his *real* daughter.)

Now, this tale had several points that I enjoyed. First, in one fell swoop, the players went from gnashing at the teeth for a villain to actually feeling genuinely *sorry* for him. ("Poor guy; sure, he tried conquering the kingdom and destroying everyone we love . . . but he wasn't so bad, really.") Second, the story was only possible as a direct sequel of the other story; it relied on the involvement and characters of the previous tale, while being significantly different. (Mind you, in the interest of full disclosure, I should mention that this adventure also resulted in the ["We need to talk. . ."](#) incident. But once we got beyond those problems, the players seemed to appreciate the climax.)

So to get back to our Armageddon Clock story, if we were interested in doing a sequel, some ideas that spring to mind are:

- The heroes encounter the architect of the original clock, perhaps facing a dilemma: Can someone with the power to create such an artifact be allowed to live?
- The players learn (or are informed) that, in fact, they were *unsuccessful*; a side effect of the clock is to make the last moments of its victims as comfortable as possible by directly controlling their brains. If this information is true, what do the heroes do now that they're living entirely in a dream-world? Can they somehow reverse the Clock's effects? And if this revelation is *not* true, then who is attempting to fool them, and how? And, regardless, how do they get back to a world they understand?
- There is another attack on the Armageddon Clock, and the heroes fail to stop them . . . only to learn that its activation does *not* end the world! It is ultimately revealed that the hero who deactivated it before has somehow absorbed its entropic energies; it is also revealed that, if he dies, so does the universe! So the heroes get to ask . . . now what?

Each of these adventure possibilities adds to the story before while not taking anything away from the previous story.

And that, ultimately, is perhaps the best use for a sequel.

But, what is a sequel? It is, in fact, nothing more than a number; we assume that time is a line, and that which comes now could not have happened before events that transpired after it . . .

[STEVEN IS BLUDGEONED TO DEATH BY FRIENDS]

--*Steven Marsh*

Transmission 200 (Part II)

"What canst thou swear by now?

The time to come.

That thou hast wronged in the time o'erpast;

For I myself have many tears to wash

Hereafter time, for time past wrong'd by thee."

-- William Shakespeare, *Richard III*, IV:iv:403-407

Herewith, we continue the overarching reality-war begun [last week](#). Set all your games in it at once, or change it as you will. Ignore everything except the Reptoids, and use it to [effortlessly create](#) your own backdrop instead! Although storylines do interact somewhat, the events (of necessity) are fairly modular, since they assemble all 200 previous transmissions into one. And with that, let's rejoin parahistory, already in progress.

- 1125:** The ZSS attempt to marry Queen Matilda of England off to Frederick II Hohenstaufen of Swabia, producing an unbroken Germanic [Mathildine Dynasty](#) in England backed by werewolf infiltrators.
- 1165:** Templar agent [Prester John](#) establishes a kingdom inside India Ultraterrestria, and immediately begins establishing mythic communication lines to reify his domain.
- 1190:** Date eventually fixed (by MI- mythography) for the [Robin Hood](#) entity ([manticore](#), [faerie](#), or [werewolf](#)), contained in Sherwood Forest by Rosicrucian ritual dramaturgy after deprecations reaching all the way to 1441.
- 1214:** A clever RCS maneuver pinches off Reality Orkney in 1263 and then jumps back into that reality's past to pinch off Reality Gisbourne at Bouvines. Rather than untangle this knotty patch of the [Red Ring](#), the [manticores](#) slide King John into the Robin Hood containment field and close the leaks that way.
- 1222:** Glancing [shards of reality](#) struck off by the passage of Halley's Comet.
- 1268:** Roger Bacon discovers the [arts of magic](#), but MI- dithers until the Lemurians confound his writings (except for the technical drawings taken by the [dwarves](#)) using the Voynich Casting. The resulting [Manuscript](#) becomes a pragmaclastic hot potato for centuries down the line.
- 1305:** Glancing [shards of reality](#) struck off by the passage of Halley's Comet.
- 1307:** [Templar fleet](#) escapes their Reptoid-inspired arrest and returns to the American Templar fastness of [Norumbega](#) with the [prophetic head](#) of [Bran the Blessed](#), the Ark of the Covenant, and other artifacts and pragmaclasts. They bury many of them in the Oak Island [Money Pit](#), in the tesseract space established there by the Reptoids around 8,000 B.C. One squadron of Templars goes to ground in Scotland, allied with the [Spider Goddess](#) (a Sphinx) to support Robert the Bruce against the Reptoids.
- 1315:** In revenge for Jacques de Molay's death, the Templars trigger an [Ice Age](#) (which also wipes much of their anomalous past away); the Reptoid repair job is haphazard at best.
- 1322-1356:** MI- agent Sir John [Mandeville](#) infiltrates and explores India Ultraterrestria; he may or may not have become a double agent for either Lemuria or the Sphinxes, and his network remains untrustworthy.
- 1360:** RCS expedition calves off and buttresses Reality [Plantagenet](#).
- 1380:** Glancing [shards of reality](#) struck off by the passage of Halley's Comet.
- 1395:** Tamburlaine, an MI- avatar-operative gone rogue after a [Marlowe](#) overthrust, [sacks Europe](#) and nearly breaks the walls into Shangri-La and India Ultraterrestria both. Marlowe eventually puts him down dramaturgically, but this incident shows that Marlowe himself may be unreliable.
- 1406:** Chinese hopping vampires steal Lemurian time technology from a Tamburlaine-weakened Shangri-La and create Reality [Ming-3](#). MI- and the Lemurians jockey for power and leverage rather than change

things back just yet.

- 1431:** Cybele uses the burning of [Joan of Arc](#) as an opening into the mind of [Gilles de Rais](#) and as an attempt to [enfold Europe](#) in [mandrake](#); MI- fills the gaping holes here with substandard dramaturgy and a changeling.
- 1452:** The fall of [Megalion](#) from a higher order of history cascades across Europe, especially Italy, where it exalts both [superhumanitas](#) and the arts. The earthly shell of Megalion, Constantinople, falls to the Turks the next year.
- 1456:** Glancing [shards of reality](#) struck off by the passage of Halley's Comet.
- 1476:** Perhaps as blowback from an MI- operation in Ming-3, Vlad "Dracula" Tepes rises as a vampire to [conquer Europe](#). His vampiric contagion spreads across timelines and bloodlines with Reptoid aid, pre-positioning his descendants to resist a Turkish Europe as the Khan-Pendragon in [yet another alternate](#).
- 1485:** Reptoid sabotage opens a new reality when King [Arthur returns](#) to the Battle of Bosworth. An MI-dramaturgy closes it down again.
- 1488:** Bernard of Treves unlocks the Azoth and brings forth a [world of flying galleons](#) and alchemical industry. MI- guards this reality jealously, although they must devote a substantial force to defending several Englands from it in the Armada year a century from now.
- 1493:** Christopher Columbus (or one of his many [doubles and imposters](#)) explores the sailing routes [to Atlantis](#) and [Calyferne](#) for the Rosicrucians, but Lemurian resistance replaces him until he loses them again.
- 1507:** The Venetian glass-makers learn the secret of mirror-making, allowing the Reptoids to carry the battle into the Sphinxes' [mirror universe](#); the Reptoids activate their [benandanti](#) sleeper agents in Friuli (near Venice) for the contest.
- 1513:** Reptoid-Lemurian double agent of influence [Piri Re'is](#) draws a map of tropical Antarctica to seed the rediscovery of [Atlantis](#) into the New Cartography. For a similar agenda, the Templar agent Balboa has his men chew sacred [cacao](#) beans for three days straight on a shamanic voyage to tie the Pacific Ocean to the New World.
- 1531:** Glancing [shards of reality](#) struck off by the passage of Halley's Comet.
- 1538:** ZSS agent Bartholomaeus Welser, on a mission to [Akakor](#), stumbles into the ancient astronaut base at Muribeca and calls in a [Martian invasion](#) to extract himself. The resulting reality damage splinters El Dorado all across the continent.
- 1541:** First of several attempts by Greys to "spore" into our reality through the hole over [Roswell](#), New Mexico halted by MI- .
- 1542:** The English Reformation provides the anti-magical juice for Operation Dymchurch Flit, the final operation of the lengthy Strike Force Chronos [campaign](#) against the [faeries](#) in England, carried out against stiff MI- opposition despite the strong ties between the Sidhe and the Sphinxes. British [goblin marketplaces](#) move onto pirate quays.
- 1555:** Possibly after invoking the [triplicity-year Ripper](#), Michel de [Nostradamus](#) receives a vision of all times and realities. He immediately becomes the target of a series of psywar attacks which completely unhinge him, concealing his true prophecies in a jumbled morass.
- 1587:** [Roanoke](#) Summit between Dee's agent Raleigh and the Grand Master of the American Templars; [Arcadia](#) established and the gates to [Calyferne](#) opened and monitored.
- 1588:** Another [major nexus](#) battle, as MI- throws all its resources including a secretly resurrected [Arthur](#) and a [dramaturgical inversion ritual](#) into defeating the [Spanish Armada](#) in all timelines. Various Armadas receive Reptoid, Sphinx, or ZSS aid. A covert Strike Force Chronos [team](#) covers Dee's back, keeping the Lemurians, the [nanotech swarms](#), and less categorizable things at bay. During the commotion, [Spring-Heeled Jack](#) slips into reality.

- 1589-1613:** John Dee's agent William Shakespeare crafts a series of dramaturgies designed to alchemically harness love and gold [\(1594\)](#), sacrifice the false king [\(1595\)](#), exalt Dionysos [\(1601\)](#), restrain Leviathan [\(1605\)](#), destroy the world [\(1606\)](#), shield witches [\(1606\)](#), cement the occult imperium in Bohemia [\(1611\)](#), and so forth. Shakespeare, and others, often use these dramaturgies for other, private ends both now and later.
- 1593:** [Marlowe](#) knows too much; MI- gives him up to the Lemurians and the ZSS in a classic [Macbeth](#) Working, but persistent rumor says that Marlowe himself was his own "third murderer" and escaped to asylum in Tamburlaine's India Ultraterrestria.
- 1595:** [Guiana](#) Summit between Raleigh and the South American Reptoids; marital alliances worked out (both forward and backward in time) between the Rosicrucian-Merovingian and Reptoid bloodlines.
- 1597:** Perhaps in revenge for Marlowe's killing, Tamburlaine launches a strike out of the Tuat, raising a plague of [mummies](#) against MI- .
- 1607:** Glancing [shards of reality](#) struck off by the passage of Halley's Comet. The [Uwaysi](#) order fills the gap with the *History of the Uwaysis*, spreading Uwaysi dreams along the shockwaves and fault lines.
- 1611:** Foundations of the Occult Empire are laid when Shakespeare's dramaturgical inversion of [Bohemia](#) overlaps the sorceries of the Sphinx werewolf Erzsébet [Bathory](#), opening a werewolf channel back into England the next year in Webster's [Duchess of Malfi](#). Bathory is imprisoned by the Rosicrucians, but the damage is done.
- 1622:** With Raleigh gone, the Rosicrucian-Reptoid alliance begins to fray again, and the Rosicrucian agents Solomon Caus and Antonio Bosio begin to map the Reptoid [tunnels under](#) Europe's capitals.
- 1626:** [Sir Francis Bacon](#) fakes his death, slipping into one of the many Rosicrucian safe houses that MI- has established across Europe and its associated realities.
- 1641:** [Reality Cromwell](#) created as one of Dee's thought-experiments to remove the "Puritan strain" from Britain. MI- keeps the reality isolated for further study.
- 1660:** By restoring Charles II, the Rosicrucians suppress all memory of the [Cassiopeia nova](#) and [prevent](#) a return to order. The Sphinxes take advantage of this opening to spread [wendigo](#) in Canada.
- 1666:** Great Fire (a magico-temporal backlash from the [Ripper killings](#)) opens the way for the Rosicrucians to [rebuild London](#) on [illuminated sacred-geometrical](#) principles, and for the Lemurian [Mister Punch](#) to appear to selected children.
- 1682:** Glancing [shards of reality](#) struck off by the passage of Halley's Comet. A [succubus](#) crawls through the cracks and attempts to seduce Louis XIV; the Reptoids already seducing him prevent the attempt but leave the reality shard intact to distract the Templar and Rosicrucian agents of the [Man in the Iron Mask](#).
- 1685:** The RCS establishes [Britannica-4](#) during WWII as a "shared reality" for joint Argus-MI- planning and pre-positioning.
- 1692:** Lemurian refugees from [Irem](#), [benandanti](#) witches, American Templar pirates, and the Mandeville faction of MI- establish the [Libertatian Brotherhood](#) in Madagascar and open a new crossworld entrepot and goblin market. It lasts until [Captain Kidd](#) dies for its sins in 1701, but hatches new [rocs](#) to protect many realities, and empowers [George Burroughs'](#) trip to the Martian [spirit realm](#).
- 1743:** The Comte de [Saint-Germain](#) manifests himself (or themselves) in London to begin his 41 years of sustained apparition, but is [vouchsafed](#) to all sides at all times in all realities.
- 1758:** Glancing [shards of reality](#) struck off by the passage of Halley's Comet.
- 1764-1767:** Depredations of the [Beast of Gévaudan](#); the [Robin Hood entity](#) having escaped into France through the [Little Red Hood](#) tales, it attempts to work its way into the indestructible prophecies of [Nostradamus](#), but is [bisociated](#) into [New Jersey](#) by MI- and left for Strike Force Chronos to deal with.

- 1773:** The faeries launch a [counter-attack](#) against Argus, at a weak ebb as relations with MI- worsen. They ally with the Sphinxes the next year, who begin by sending the [Mothman](#) to fulfill Chief Cornstalk's curse.
- 1776:** [Masonic Civil War](#) erupts between the Washington and Weishaupt factions. The Reptoid-backed Weishaupt faction mounts an internal coup against Dee that replaces MI- with the Occult Empire. During the struggle, the [RCS](#) sets up Reality [Cornwallis](#) as a fallback, but the American Templars soak 1776 in mythic energies from their limitless [Arcadian cornucopia](#).
- 1780:** It is a dark time for the rebel alliance; the Occult Empire shrouds the skies of America. An elite Strike Force Chronos team flies through a trench in reality to remove the Occult Empire before it existed, leaving only an acausal eclipse over New England on [May 19](#).
- 1782:** The Occult Empire strikes back, empowering Victor [Frankenstein](#) (a pragmaclast thrown back from the 1816 temblor) to [galvanically revive](#) King George III. Argus alchemist Benjamin [Franklin](#) diverts the crucial lightning strike 30 years previously, and again removes the Occult Empire retroactively. Into the royal gap steps [Mister Punch](#), a powerful and cruel Lemurian entity.
- 1805:** Thanks to a clumsy MI- cover-up of the [Influencing Engine](#) fiasco and a Lemurian raising of [Atlantis](#), mentalic technology spreads through the European mechanical underground and into Napoleon's ambit. MI- and even a "[loaner team](#)" from Strike Force Chronos must redouble its efforts to contain the [Corsican ogre](#).
- 1809:** A busy year all around as MI- works to save both Napoleon and Wellington and thus prevent an [Imperial French tyranny](#) open to Reptoid or ZSS meddling. While they're distracted, the Sphinxes open a Void into the Hollow Earth tied to the newborn soul of [Edgar Allan Poe](#), and the Lemurians silence Meriwether Lewis.
- 1811:** Reptoids insinuate an agent into the MI- [Macbeth Working](#) in the [Ratcliffe highway](#); George III goes completely insane, weakening the Sherwood boundaries and forcing MI- has to infiltrate a [hunter](#) to kill the wolfshadow within. While the boundaries are down, the Martians launch another [probing raid](#) and distract the Reptoids.
- 1816:** The Tambora eruption shakes loose [Frankenstein's monster](#), a sentient pragmaclast, and sets off two major reality temblors. In one, Lord Ruthven becomes Prime Minister of a [vampirized Britain](#); in the second, an [Ice Age](#) descends. The Lemurians eventually shut both chasms.
- 1821:** Whether the bitter goal of the Rosicrucian breeding alliance with the Reptoids or the result of Sphinx taint, the True King of Britain (dethroning Mister Punch) is born a monster in [Glamis](#) Castle. Another monster (or another aspect of the same monster) attempts to [suborn Russia](#), but falls to Lemurian cleansing.
- 1824:** Lord Kelvin's birth year, impenetrably defended by the Royal Cliographic Society, who owe their [reality](#) to his circular causality.
- 1827:** Second Grey spore attempt through [Roswell](#) stopped by Argus.
- 1831:** Michael Faraday's "[Rainbow Effect](#)" experiments tap or break into the [Red Ring](#) set up by the [Delaware-Kelvin causal loop](#). The ZSS and Argus pinch them off, and bury Faraday's experiments in the data fog.
- 1835:** Glancing [shards of reality](#) struck off by the passage of Halley's Comet. Silas Duncan slips back into existence during the aftershock, establishes his [Duncanite](#) society.
- 1837:** [Spring-Heeled Jack](#)'s rampages in London poke through the ontological hole punched by one of the [Roswell echoes](#), but the Red Ring reality that results hints that MI- might have been summoning Jack for their own dramaturgical ends.
- 1841:** Lemurian agents unleash tailored conceptual retroviruses, creating [Reality Rust](#). However, the entropic field spreads throughout all space-time until even the Sphinxes are forced to intervene, establishing the [scarecrow](#) protocol around plague and panic to prevent utter chaos from enveloping everything. Those

**In the
Future:**

Sphinxes infected by the Rust become qliploth, and even more [horrific](#) than normal Sphinx agents.

Part III, and the end of the world -- what I tell you three times is true!

The Marking Controversy

A Desperate Paper Trail for Modern-Day *Call of Cthulhu*

by J. Edward Tremlett

The following is a controversial, public correspondence with certain Mythos-related overtones. It takes place in three consecutive issues of the small but well-renowned *World History and Archaeology Monthly*, a scholarly Journal, available through subscription only, for "the well-informed Archaeologist."

Investigators who have cause to read this Journal might well wonder just how well-informed everyone involved really is. Notes on the principal players in this drama, and ideas on how to exploit the paper trail, are given to Keepers at the correspondence's end.

World History and Archaeology Monthly, January, Current Year

Resolved: the Reality of Queen Nitocris of the 6th Dynasty by

Dr. Fredrich G. Marking, Egyptologist

Queen Nitiquet, better known under her Greek name of Nitocris, is something of a mystery to Egyptologists. Though it is possible to list her as a Queen of the 6th Dynasty, perhaps the last true ruler of both Upper and Lower Egypt before the anarchy of the First Intermediate Period, there really is not much to prove that she was ever there at all. Apart from what may be a typo on a kings list, a generous description courtesy of the Egyptian historian Mathetho, and a sad fate revealed in Herodotus' history of Egypt, we have little else to corroborate this story.

However, I believe that a recent find in the newly-rediscovered city of Menouthis has finally given us the proof we need. Based on this discovery, we not only know that the Queen and her reign were historical reality, but have learned a bit more about her short reign. And so, in this monograph I will posit that Queen Nitocris was real, did indeed rule over a united Egypt, and in fact ushered in a brief reign of religious revival before she gained her revenge and died by her own hand.

What We Knew Before:

Save for two historians' tales and her name on the Turin King-list (but not the Abydos list), we formerly had little evidence to list Nitocris as a true historical figure. Her short reign -- which is often conjectured as being anywhere from three to seven years in length -- either immediately followed that of Piopi (Pepi) II, or was second or perhaps even third in succession. I have tended to prefer the following timeline --

Piopi II	(ca. 2246-2152 B.C.E.)
Merenre II	(ca. 2152 B.C.E.)
Netjerkare Siptah (Nitocris)	(ca. 2152-2125 B.C.E.)

-- because it has her on the throne for as long as it could have taken to work the

revenge Herodotus attributed to her.

No contemporary sources mention her at all, and there were no records of decrees she made. Perhaps even more unsettling, there were no records of building projects made under her authority or in her name. One would think a ruler of Egypt would have at least started to build some sort of monument in three years.

Much like Britain's King Arthur, we have a number of stories -- some complimentary, and some contradictory -- that define her. The most spurious is one that has her becoming her time's Cinderella: coming to queenhood after an eagle stole one of her gilded sandals and dropped it into the lap of the king. Another, darker story has her as some sort of cannibal hag.

The "true" story, so far as it is known, is credited to Herodotus. Nitocris was married to her brother, Menrenre II. He reigned for one year and was then assassinated by a group of well-placed nobles. These men then placed his widow on the throne as their puppet Queen.

Unwilling to play this role for them, she quietly nursed her desire for revenge. She had a great underground chamber constructed by the Nile, and when it was finished, she invited many guests to a grand party. Among the guests were those nobles who had killed her brother and made her their pet.

At some point during the festivities, she left and sealed the chamber. The waters of the Nile began to flood into the room at that point, and drowned the guests to a man. Immediately thereafter, she threw herself into a room full of embers to commit suicide -- cheating those who would have sought her death.

I would posit that a reason why we have not found too much about or by her was because of her final actions. If they were unable to kill her to gain revenge, how unlikely would it be that the mob went after her works instead? There are precedents for the removal and defacement of monuments erected to unpopular rulers, or those who displeased the monarchs who succeeded them: Queen Hapshepsut's works were very quickly covered up or defaced by Tuthmosis III when he came to power, and the "heretic pharaoh" Akhenaten's holy city of 'Amarna was razed but a few decades after his death.

The only "monument" we could attribute to her before was one of the pyramids at Giza. According to Manetho, Nitocris was responsible for the "third pyramid," and it has been said by some that he meant the pyramid of Mykernos. That is plainly impossible: it was built by the 4th Dynasty Pharaoh Mykerinos, who reigned from 2532-2503 BCE, and nothing inside or outside the structure would indicate any connection with Queen Nitocris at all.

The most likely cause of Manetho's confusion in this matter is his confusing the name of Mykerinos (Men-kaw-re) with her prenom, Men-ka-re. One would think an Egyptian historian wouldn't have made such a mistake, but given the lack of information concerning her, this is understandable.

The Clue from the Sea:

The mystery of Queen Nitocris could have endured for another 4,000 years, had archaeologists of France and Egypt not teamed together to search the ocean off the shores of northern Egypt. There, under the silt of the sea bottom, lay cities strongly

suspected to be Menouthis, Canopus, and Herekleion. All of them were long since lost following what may have been an earthquake, a devastating flood, or perhaps both in swift succession.

Among the relics found at the site of Menouthis was a stela carved from black granite. It stood some two meters tall, and was carved in a style consistent with the Old Kingdom. It was badly defaced, but still legible in enough spots to allow for a partial translation. And once it was translated, it was found to bear the name of Queen Nitocris.

Of course, the great mystery here is why a stela erected to a 6th Dynasty Queen would be found in Menouthis. That city was built much later in time, after all. Odder still, the stela was strewn along with the ruins of the famed temple to Isis; what could it have been doing there?

My contact on the expedition, Tariq Al-Attar, was responsible for the stela's raising, based on what little he was able to translate in situ. Once it was brought up to the surface and cleaned, he and one of the expedition's translators went to work deciphering the badly-damaged artifact. Though large portions of the text are missing or scrambled, what they did translate says much.

" . . . ascended to the throne, the loveliest queen of all, as ruler of upper and lower . . . "

" . . . and Queen Nitiqret said that there is one god who speaks to all gods, and that men should all kneel before him. For he is the hole through which the others see the land and sky and people. He is the one who brings messages and wisdom to the land and sky and people. And she said that the god was (Nyhar-Rut-Hotep) . . . "

" . . . Beautiful Queen Nitiqret who is the lady of the night . . . "

" . . . Great (Nyhar-Rut-Hotep), we beg your favors. Blessed (Nyhar-Rut-Hotep), we confess our failings. Great (Nyhar-Rut-Hotep), we beg your forgiveness. Blessed (Nyhar-Rut-Hotep), we bring you our sacrifices. Great (Nyhar-Rut-Hotep), we beg you to accept . . . "

Finding a monument raised to Nitocris was more than gratifying after all this time, of course. But the most interesting thing here was the suggestion that the Queen decreed the worship of a new god. Did she come up with this idea on her own, or was it the plan of the nobles who placed her on the throne? As we saw with Akhenaten, creating a new god can be a rather enriching business.

Who is this Nyhar-Rut-Hotep? We have not found mention of him anywhere else. It is possible that he was given another name after Nitocris left the throne, or was absorbed into the worship of another deity following a brief time of heightened importance. He might also have suffered the same fate as Akhenaten's god Aten following that Pharaoh's death: cast aside in anger and forgotten after the wrecking of his temples and records.

The name Nyhar-Rut-Hotep means "there is no rest at the gate." "Rest" could also be "peace" or "safety" depending on the context, but given this is a god to be worshipped I would suspect it to be "rest." This could be implying that if the god is acting as a "gate" for the other gods to speak through, then one cannot slacken one's faith or rituals in his sight.

In Summary, a Solution and another Puzzle:

To sum up: without a more complete translation, we have more questions than answers, but now that we have found one piece of the puzzle we know what to look for in the others.

We now know that Queen Nitocris was real, and may have discovered the reason that we haven't found much else about her. This stela represents an exciting discovery in Egyptology -- one that yields even more fascinating discoveries about a time period we know very little about. Hopefully, we will find more pieces associated with Nitocris at or around Menouthis, and shed even more light on this early period in Egyptian history.

World History and Archaeology Monthly, February, Current Year: Letters **Page**

Dear Editor:

I read with interest the monograph by Dr. Fredrich G. Marking, "Egyptologist," about his so-called discovery. But having had the displeasure of knowing Mr. Marking for some time, and having looked further into the matter, I feel it is my duty to inform you that your otherwise impeccable publication has been duped.

Allow me to explain. When Mr. Marking was first attending college, he did so at Heidelberg University, and took several of my undergraduate courses in Archaeology. He did rather well for himself, and I thought he was quite brilliant, but then I caught him manufacturing sources for a midterm essay.

When I confronted him with his cheating, he denied it, but I took the case before the Dean of the College and he agreed with me. The result was that Mr. Marking was expelled from Heidelberg for academic dishonesty, as we call such a thing these days. (I believe he went on to start over on his degree somewhere else.)

As such, you can understand that, when I saw that he'd decided to declare an ancient mystery solved based on one new discovery, I was rather skeptical. So I contacted Frances Lemarchand, as he and I are old acquaintances. You can imagine his surprise when he discovered a mystery had been solved on his own watch without his knowing!

After some investigations of our own, we confirmed Mr. Marking's "discovery" to be a sham. There are no records of such a stela being found by Mr. Lemarchand's team at Menouthis. None of the translation experts the Egyptian government has brought remember making any such translation, either. From start to finish, this monograph has been a bloody lie.

In closing, I would hope this experience would be an instructive one to your magazine. In future, it might pay off to make a few inquiries as to the veracity of your contributors' sources to save embarrassment.

Sincerely yours,

--Doctor Franz Kruspe, Dean of Archaeological Studies, Heidelberg University

* * *

Editor's Note: We at the **World History and Archaeology Monthly** tend to take our contributors at their word. Given how easy it is to discover fraud, we generally assume that no one would be stupid enough to even try -- especially when luminary names are invoked. This time, however, we seem to have been wrong to trust.

While we apologize to our readers, and Mr. Lemarchand, for this embarrassing incident, we will continue to trust in our contributors and correspondents.

World History and Archaeology Monthly, March, Current Year: Letters Page

Editor:

Having been accused of lying by an old adversary, and referred to as "stupid" by yourself, I feel I have to respond.

What happened at Heidelberg is very much a matter of perspective, and I do not wish to go into all that now.

And as for the matter of the stela, it is little wonder that Dr. Kruspe and Mr. Lemarchand could not find it. After reading Dr. Kruspe's vicious attack on my ethics I checked back with my source -- Tariq Al-Attar -- to get some cooperation. It was then that he told me the horrible news: The stela has disappeared from the secure location it was being kept in.

The stela isn't the only thing that's missing, either. Any and all files concerning its being brought up from the sea bed, its translation and accompanying notes, the photos and the negatives they were developed from . . . indeed, any evidence whatsoever that my source made or saw no longer exists. One day it was there, and the next day it was not.

And just this last week, in Cairo, my source was attacked by a group of thugs intent on killing him. He feels this cannot be a coincidence, and I agree with him. The last phone call we had was a frantic affair, and I can only hope that soon -- around the time this is due to be published in *WHAM*, in fact -- he and I will have met up in Egypt as we discussed and have come to some more conclusions in the matter.

When we have them, we will come forward to say more. For now, however, we can only say that we hope this magazine, and its readers, are willing to extend a little more faith than we've received thus far.

I swear before everything I hold dear that what I am saying is true. I only hope I am able to prove it.

--Dr. Fredrich G. Marking, Egyptologist

* * *

Editor's Note: Having spoken with Mr. Lemarchand, upon receiving this letter, we have confirmed that there was no such stela to Nitocris found. The only thing close to

that description was a stela raised in the honor of Nectanebo I. It was taken from the seabed, translated and photographed, and then moved to a more secure location for safekeeping, due to its delicate condition.

There is some truth to the story in that a Tariq Al-Attar did, indeed, work with their expedition. However, we are told that he was due to be fired from his job for reasons Mr. Lemarchand did not wish to discuss. Before Mr. Al-Attar could be properly terminated from his position, he stormed off after having a roaring argument with the assistant foreman, packed his things and went away. He has never been seen by them since.

After consulting with our legal department, we have decided not to open our magazine to the possible risk of defamation of character that could follow from further correspondences on this subject. Therefore, this topic is now closed.

*In addition, we would like to remind our readers that we prefer the **World History and Archaeology Monthly** to be referred to as such, or at least "your magazine" -- or, more properly, "your Journal" -- and not by the acronym.*

Keepers' Notes

Dr. Marking's monograph imparts skill checks in Archaeology and History, and gives +1 Cthulhu Mythos for its information on Nitocris and her relationship with Nyarlathotep.

The paper trail can all be read in real time. It costs 0/1 Sanity to read if the Investigators know of Nyarlathotep and His role in the Mythos. If they don't know, don't make them roll until an appropriate moment comes along.

If the Investigators haven't encountered her before, a successful Cthulhu Mythos roll uncovers that Queen Nitocris was all too real. She was a cruel queen of the 6th Dynasty who reinvigorated Nyarlathotep's worship among the people. While the popular story has her committing suicide, the legends speak of her being buried alive in an unknown tomb. (Keepers may choose to give more information than that, as befits their campaign desires, but that is the basic answer. See "Ideas for Use," below, for more references to the cannibal queen.)

Checks into the background of Dr. Fredrich G. Marking (using Archaeology, Credit Rating, or Library Use) reveal him to be a German Egyptologist with a somewhat questionable track record. He often "discovers" things that others had already found, or makes "amazing finds" that others had passed over and found to be of minor importance. He also tends to over-publicize his few, small achievements to the point of sheer incredulity.

Any calls made to his office in Germany after March go unanswered. None of his colleagues have seen or heard from him since he departed for Cairo. Inquiries made in Cairo -- backed up with some heavy-duty "baksheesh" money -- reveal that he departed for Aswan by bus, back in February. However, he left no travel plans and never returned . . .

Dr. Kruspe is a pompous, taciturn fellow whose doctorate was entirely earned in Hiedelberg's University Library. Attempts to contact him gather little of use: he knows nothing about Queen Nitocris other than the usual, mundane stories -- which he doesn't really believe -- and he won't give any more substantial information about Dr. Marking, either. If Investigators push him he might tell a scandalous story or two about Dr. Marking, but these will be of varying degrees of truth.

Tariq Al-Attar's involvement in the expedition is a complete mystery. He has no paper trail connecting him to any previous work, or any degrees or qualifications that would give him a clear reason to be there. Any inquiries made about his person reveal him to be a hard worker and devout Muslim, but possessed of a bad temper.

On the other hand, no one has anything bad to say about famed, French underwater explorer Frances Lemarchand. His

previous excavations of sunken ships in the Mediterranean have made him world-famous. The project in the shores of Egypt is going splendidly, if slowly, but now that he has gained some better, private sponsors he hopes for a more productive season at sea.

Attempts to contact Lemarchand lead to a battery of under-secretaries, who only let well-known archaeologists, rich people, or well-regarded journalists on through. All others must leave messages, which are answered through the mail via "signed" form letters. Lemarchand is friendly and talkative, but clams up and gets very defensive if "that article" is mentioned. Investigators who push the subject any further get hung up on.

Ideas for Use

This incident leaves itself open for a lot of possibilities, some ideas of which are given below. Left out is the obvious notion that this could all be a fraud, or some strange publicity stunt on behalf of Mssrs. Marking and Al-Attar. But, if you really need an excuse to get your Investigators to Egypt for something else, this might be as good of a red herring as any!

The Stela is . . .

- . . . the last, surviving remnant of a blasphemous temple to Nitocris -- one razed by the new ruler once the ghoul-queen was no more. It could not be completely destroyed, and was left in the sands to be forgotten. It was eventually rediscovered, long after Nitocris' reign had been largely relegated to legend, and hidden in the temple to Isis so none might look upon it.
- . . . a repository for a great deal of the ghoul-queen's magic, placed there in trust for the day that she would return. It was looked after by one of the remnants of her cult, but that sect was corrupted by its influence and fell into ghouldom. The cult secretly moved the stela beneath the temple to Isis in the hopes of having its malign influence corrupt others. The disaster befell the city before it could.
- . . . little more than a stela, however blasphemous and damning its engravings. It was moved to Menouthis with a treasure trove of other monuments and items related to "officially-forgotten" rulers, priests and events. The authorities were going to toss it all into the sea and be done with it, but then the city was swamped. The stela's presence in the temple was accidental, caused by sea floor shifting over the ages.

The Stela was . . .

- . . . rediscovered as publicized in *WHAM*. It was then repossessed by a sect of the modern-day cult, courtesy of the assistant foreman, who was an insider. It is now being held in a secret place, somewhere in Egypt, waiting for it to be used.
- . . . taken by a secret army of religious extremists -- Muslim, Christian, and Jewish -- who believe that "Nyhar-Rut-Hotep" is a guise of the Devil. They intimidated the dig's assistant foreman to remain silent on the matter and fire Tariq Al-Attar, and then threatened Al-Attar with his life if he didn't remain silent, too. They are planning to destroy it, and have it hidden somewhere in the Sinai Peninsula.
- . . . removed by a small band of Ghouls, who weren't very circumspect about sneaking in or leaving. The dig's assistant foreman saw them go and went mad, pushing all memories of the event from his mind. In an insane attempt to forget what he saw, he "sleepwalked" to the records building and destroyed all evidence of the stela ever having been there, and its having been stolen. He also silenced or fired every person who might have been able to verify its having been there, including Tariq Al-Attar.

Dr. Marking, Egyptologist, is . . .

- . . . dead, having been ambushed by the cult in Aswan and sacrificed to the favor of the Ghoul Queen and Nyarlathotep. Investigators who go to Aswan might find his savaged remains in their secret temple. (1d3/1d6 SAN to see what little yet remains)
- . . . on the run for his life in Egypt, having watched Tariq Al-Attar be killed by something that did not belong in

this world. The extraplanar assassination took place just after that man told Dr. Marking all he'd discovered, which was not pretty to say the least. All the good doctor wants to do now is get out of this country, slip away to someplace quiet -- like Sri Lanka -- and try to forget what he's learned.

- . . . at the Lemarchand Expedition, masquerading as a Dutch investor while trying to discover what's really going on. Tariq Al-Attar told him what happened to him once they met up in Aswan, and they hatched this plan to get back in. Unfortunately, Dr. Marking's investigatorial skills are as poor as his tact, and it's only a matter of time before he slips up.

Frances Lemarchand is . . .

- . . . completely unaware of the truth of the matter, having been hoodwinked by that assistant foreman. He's too busy to look into the matter, and too proud to think anything might go wrong with *his* expedition. So it's all slipped his mind in favor of more pressing discoveries.
- . . . a bit of a shady character, at least when he has to pay his bills. He's supposed to give all findings over to Egypt, but he's been "losing" some pieces to sell on the archaeological black market. Once he realized what a find he had in the stela, he "lost" all information and prepared for an auction. Marking's article was a bit of an inconvenience, to say the least, and he's put the auction off until the fuss -- such as it is -- dies down.
- . . . in fear of his life, having been told point-blank by one of his new, private investors to hand over the stela -- and do what they say from now on -- or suffer the consequences. The demonstration involved the investor turning one of Lemarchand's assistants into a man-shaped pillar of dust. Since then, Lemarchand's become little more than a tool for this investor, and his sanity is slipping . . .

As for Queen Nitocris . . . she could be any number of things. Keepers interested in doing something directly involving her will want to check out Chaosium's classic ***Masks of Nyarlathotep***, where she appears, and the excellent ***Unseen Masters***, where she is extensively updated for the modern day. H.P. Lovecraft's "Imprisoned with the Pharaohs" and Brian Lumley's "The Mirror of Nitocris" are also recommended.

Captain Sir Edward Grey

A Villain For *GURPS Swashbucklers*

by Mark Gellis

Introduction

The 1660s and 1670s were a dynamic period in England. Only two years after the death of Oliver Cromwell in 1658, King Charles II had returned from exile. The monarchy had been restored. The oppression of the Protectorate had been swept away. The playhouses were open again and Londoners enjoyed comedies like Wycherley's *The Country Wife* and tragedies like Dryden's *All for Love*. (Charles II was especially fond of the theater because it was one of the places he went shopping for mistresses.) But the reign of Charles II was also a time of danger and intrigue. Parliament was often uncooperative. Religious and political tensions at home and abroad led to espionage, rivalries in court, and secret alliances. Plague struck the nation in 1665 and fire destroyed part of London in 1666. All the while, the great lords of the nation plotted to advance their own interests.

One of the most cunning of these lords was Anthony Ashley Cooper, Baron Ashley during the 1660s and eventually Earl of Shaftesbury. Considered one of the consummate politicians of his time, Shaftesbury was often part of the inner circle advising Charles II. Later in life, he became one of the King's most powerful political adversaries, a man whose "loyal opposition" was more often opposition than loyal. A man like Shaftesbury could not do everything on his own, of course, and one of his most dangerous agents was Captain Sir Edward Grey.

Biography

Grey was born in 1630 in London, the son of a wealthy London merchant. His family managed to ride out the troubles of the Civil War with their fortunes mostly intact. In 1647, Parliament was in control of the country and Grey decided to cast his lot with the winning side. He joined the cavalry and two years later found himself in Ireland helping Cromwell crush resistance to Parliament, keeping the island from serving as a staging point from which the young Charles II could launch an invasion. During the campaign, Grey distinguished himself with his abilities as a soldier, and at Drogheda and Wexford with his willingness to put Catholics to the sword. By 1652, he had been placed in command of an entire company.

The end of the Irish campaign left Grey with little to do. He had been given an Irish estate as a reward for his service to Cromwell, but was uninterested in running it and left its management in the hands of one of his cousins. The rents from the estate provided him with an independent income and he returned to England. He then became acquainted with John Thurloe, who ran Cromwell's espionage network (Cromwell was plagued throughout the 1650s by monarchists trying to restore Charles II to the throne) and who was perhaps the second most powerful man in England at the time. Grey completed various missions for Thurloe during the 1650s. He did not need the money, but he found the work interesting. He became especially adept at convincing people that they could trust him, getting them to admit involvement in either secret or criminal activities, and at interrogating prisoners.

In 1658, Oliver Cromwell died and Edward Grey saw that it was only a matter of time before Charles II was restored to the throne. He began secretly making contact with royalists and was able to assist Anthony Cooper (not yet Baron Ashley or the Earl of Shaftesbury) in some of his efforts during the Restoration. Cooper recognized Grey's talents and made a point of cultivating him as an agent. In 1661, Anthony Cooper was a privy councilor and the King had made him Baron Ashley; on the baron's advice, Charles knighted Edward Grey the following year.

Grey spent the next 20 years working for Ashley. These were the best years of his life. He was respected and wealthy, had powerful friends, and was popular at court. He enjoyed the attention of beautiful women, and over the years took a

number of them as his lovers. Most enjoyable of all, Ashley's constant intrigues gave him the opportunity to seduce people, to learn their secrets and manipulate them, and to force information or admissions of guilt out of spies and other enemies. He was also often asked to find, arrest, and interrogate individuals involved in criminal or seditious activities. This is especially true when Ashley became part of the Cabal government in the late 1660s and early 1670s; Ashley continued to reward Grey for his services. In 1672, when Ashley becomes the Earl of Shaftesbury and lord chancellor, he used his influence with the King to have Grey made a baronet. Shaftesbury fell from favor in 1673, but Grey continued to work for him because even in Opposition the Earl is a powerful man.

What happened to Grey? Grey is a completely fictional character, so the GM can have him meet whatever end suits a campaign. Assuming he is not killed or utterly disgraced by one of the PCs in a campaign, however, he is likely to live to a ripe old age, and his obvious talent will attract the attention of some new patron after the final disgrace and death of Shaftesbury in the 1680s. Eventually, Grey would retire from "active" duties, but he might remain a force to be reckoned with, possibly appearing during the reign of William of Orange as a sheriff or mayor of some town, or a spymaster for the King. In this capacity, it is possible he could remain active as late as the reign of Queen Anne.

What makes Grey a villain instead of a hero are his motives and his methods. He is selfish, ultimately loyal only to himself. Furthermore, while he works for Shaftesbury (or anyone else, for that matter) he is ruthless and capable of deceit, treachery, and brutality. On the surface, he is simply another charming courtier, but this is a facade. He enjoys deceiving people, learning their secrets, and then using that knowledge against them. He particularly enjoys seducing women and getting them to betray their lovers, friends, or families. He is, of course, careful to make sure that his victims do not realize they have been betrayed until it is too late to do anything about it (which means he may keep up a false front with someone for months or years). He is also a sadist who enjoys interrogating prisoners or disposing of those who are deemed either too dangerous to live or simply no longer valuable; he is perfectly willing to use torture or other violent means to break someone's will. He enjoys hurting people. He enjoys seeing the helpless fear in their eyes. Despite all this, if Grey has no reason to harm someone, he usually does not go out of his way to do so. However, once he sees someone as an object to conquer or an obstacle to his plans, he is capable of anything.

Using Edward Grey In A Campaign

Grey serves Ashley (later Shaftesbury), first and foremost, as an agent promoting his patron's interests and a spy who can identify and, if need be, eliminate his enemies. At times, Ashley will be working to complete some mission for Charles II and Grey is effectively an agent of the King; at other times, Ashley is simply working on some scheme of his own and Grey will be careful to make sure that his patron's activities do not come to light.

Intrigue flourished during the reign of Charles II. Charles II began his reign by attempting to institute religious toleration in England, an effort foiled by a Parliament that passed several laws in the early 1660s placing severe restrictions on Dissenters. Ashley himself initially supported religious toleration, but he gradually became suspicious of the King's pro-Catholic sympathies and eventually supported the Test Act (which made it illegal for Catholics to hold military or civil office) in 1673. Charles II dismissed him from his position as lord chancellor the same year, initiating his long period of political opposition to the King.

International relations would have been complicated under the best of circumstances; war, colonial ambitions, and religious hatred during the period made things even worse. England went to war with Holland three times between 1660 and 1680, with somewhat mixed results. During the first war, England gained control of New Amsterdam in 1664, which was promptly renamed New York in honor of the King's brother. In the second war, however, the Dutch dealt the English a humiliating defeat, sailing up the river Medway, destroying a number of ships and capturing the *Royal Charles*, the pride of the fleet.

In 1668, during a brief period of peace with Holland, Charles II entered into an alliance with Holland and Sweden against France. In 1670, however, he signed a secret treaty with France in which he agreed to assist Louis XIV against the Dutch and Louis XIV promised that if Charles openly joined the Catholic Church he would send him a large sum of money and that if the English rebelled he would send Charles aid in the form of several thousand soldiers.

There was also enormous concern about James, the Duke of York (who was Catholic) because Queen Catherine turned

out to be unable to have children, and as time went on it seemed more and more likely that James would inherit the throne when Charles died. (In fact, this is what happened, in 1685, but James II only reigned for three years before being forced to abdicate in favor of his Protestant son-in-law, William of Orange.) In 1678, Anglican minister Titus Oates "uncovered" a so-called Popish Plot to assassinate Charles II and place James on the throne; it was later revealed to be a fabrication on the part of Oates, but it brought anti-Catholic feelings among the English to a fever pitch. Shaftesbury, whose Whig party gained control of Parliament in 1679, ruthlessly exploited the situation so he could introduce the Exclusion Act (which would have barred James from becoming King). Shaftesbury favored the King's illegitimate son, the Duke of Monmouth, to become heir to the throne. King Charles II dissolved Parliament in 1681 to prevent the Exclusion Act from passing.

During all of this, Grey would have been very active. At court, he would have picked up news and gossip while playing cards and drinking with other gentlemen, and charmed his way into the hearts and beds of fashionable ladies who could provide him with additional information. It is also likely that he would have been actively working to learn the secrets of anyone who could be forced to aid Shaftesbury, such as European spies or Catholics hiding their faith so they could hold public office. He would also have been pleased by any opportunity to interrogate prisoners, especially female ones. Grey would be perfectly willing to interfere with an investigation by anyone else (including agents of the King) if he felt it threatened his efforts or to eliminate the investigators if they threatened either Shaftesbury or himself.

It is also possible that Grey might command a company of cavalry during one of the wars in which England involved itself or during some political crisis (including the alternate universe "what if" scenario where Charles does openly avow Catholicism after signing the secret Treaty of Dover, perhaps after dissolving Parliament in 1681, and England does rise in rebellion against him). In a situation like this, Grey should be treated as having the additional advantages of a large Ally Group, available on 15-, to represent his company of soldiers and Military Rank 4 (Captain). These advantages would only be temporary, of course, but if one wishes to include them to determine the value of the character, they are worth a total of 110 points.

In any campaign involving witchcraft or devil worship (*Blood on Satan's Claw* is an excellent horror film about devil worship during this period), Grey is exactly the sort of man who might be asked to investigate occult activities, whether or not the people involved can actually use magic or summon demons. Here, the heroes might need to rescue innocent people accused of being witches. One could also run a "Restoration Horror" campaign where the witches could really use magic but still needed the assistance of the player characters. In fact, one could even have a horror campaign where it was actually Shaftesbury who has made a pact with demonic forces and Grey is protecting him from the only people who can expose him . . . the witches!

PCs encountering Grey would probably know very little about him except that he works for Baron Ashley (or the Earl of Shaftesbury, depending on the year of the campaign), that he is popular at court and with the ladies, and that in battle he is a man of both skill and courage. There might be a few dark rumors about him, but nothing that would ruin his reputation. It is, after all, easy to dismiss such rumors as either the result of jealousy on the part of others or, if they can be shown to be true, an unfortunate lapse of judgement on the part of the otherwise charming Sir Edward. Grey himself is always careful to channel his vicious energies in ways that will not wreck his situation, although having him finally slip up in a way that would ruin him might be an important part of a campaign.

If the adventurers have any status themselves, Grey will try to gain their trust and find out what they are up to. If they are without status, he will rely on his servants and contacts to gain information. Then, if it is necessary for him to do so, he will move against them, quite possibly spreading rumors about them or warning the people they are investigating. Grey is never afraid to confront his enemies himself, of course, but he prefers to be subtle, and if he can get someone else to destroy his foes for him he will do so.

Adapting Grey for other campaigns is simple. Shaftesbury makes a good "master villain" for campaigns set during the Restoration because he is a major figure of this period and noted for his political intrigues. This makes him a good patron for Grey. But Grey could just as easily work for some other nobleman (or noblewoman) or for the governor of a European colony like New York or Jamaica. Grey could also easily be adapted to serve as a villain in other periods from the Middle Ages through the Victorian era. He could even be used in a fantasy campaign without needing too many changes. In most cases, a GM would only need to modify his patron, Area Knowledge skills, weapon skills, and

personal history to suit the period and locale of the campaign.

The main thing to remember about Grey is that he is a cruel man. The fact that he is a charming, handsome, and seductive villain who is also a formidable fighter will make him a challenging opponent, but it is his cruelty that will make him a memorable one.

Captain Sir Edward Grey In *GURPS*

Grey is 6'0", 180 lbs., stunningly handsome, with blonde hair, blue eyes, and a mustache. He is always well-groomed and well-dressed, usually in dark colors such as black or dark red, and makes a point of using his attire to make himself look fashionable, elegant, and powerful. His weapon, when he goes armed, is either a cavalry saber or a transitional rapier with a cutting edge; he will also have a dagger and a pair of belt pistols (pp. SW35-37). Grey is a pleasant conversationalist, an intelligent gambler, an excellent dancer, and an outstanding swordsman. As if that was not enough, he also has a terrific singing voice.

ST 12 [20]; **DX** 15 [60]; **IQ** 12 [20]; **HT** 13 [30]

Advantages: Ally Group (servants, staff, and thugs, small group, 15-) [30]*, Charisma +2 [10], Combat Reflexes [15], Contact (current mistress or friend at court, Knowledge (Court Gossip)-15) [2], Contact (street thug, Streetwise-15) [2], Contact (tavern owner, Area Knowledge (London)-15) [2], Courtesy Rank (Captain) [4], Fashion Sense [5], Independent Income [5], Legal Enforcement Powers [10]**, Literate (in semi-literate society) [5], Patron (Shaftesbury, very powerful individual, 15-) [45], Status +3 [10]***, Strong Will +2 [8], Very Handsome [25], Voice [10], Wealthy [20]

* Grey has three servants who will arrest, assault, kidnap, or kill people on his orders. All three should be treated as 75-point characters who are capable fighters (Brawling-14, Broadsword-14, and Knife-14); at least one of them will have Shadowing-14 and one of them will have Forgery-14. Beyond this, the GM may design them as necessary.

** only when Ashley (or Shaftesbury) is a minister for the King

*** includes one free level from Wealthy

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Gentleman) [-10], Duty (to Patron, 12-) [-10], Sadism [-15]

Quirks: Enjoys using people to gain information and advance his own interests [-1], Likes dogs [-1], Likes singing [-1], Patient [-1], Strokes his mustache while thinking [-1]

Skills: Acting-14 [6], Administration-13 [4], Area Knowledge (England)-12 [1], Area Knowledge (London)-13 [2], Black Powder Weapons (Matchlock Musket)-17 [1], Black Powder Weapons (Wheellock Pistol)-17 [1], Brawling-15 [1], Broadsword-16 [4], Carousing-13 [2], Cloak-15 [2], Cryptanalysis-12 [4], Cryptography-11 [2], Dancing-15 [2], Detect Lies-14 [8], Fast-Draw (Sword)-17 [2], First Aid-12 [1], Fencing-16 [4], Gambling-13 [4], Interrogation-15 [8], Intimidation-13 [4], Knife-16 [2], Leadership-14 [2], Merchant-11 [1], Riding (Horse)-16 [4], Savoir-Faire-16 [1], Sex Appeal-20 [1], Singing-16 [2], Streetwise-12 [2], Strategy (Land)-11 [2], Survival (Woodlands)-12 [2], Tactics (Cavalry)-14 [8]*

* skill levels include bonuses from IQ, Appearance, Voice, Charisma, etc.

Languages: English-12 [0]

Total Points: 385

Resources

Anyone interested in the Restoration and its politics will find Antonia Fraser's biography of King Charles II, *Royal Charles*, both useful and interesting.

Before the Conspiracy

Starting Points for Cinematic Weirdness (in *Feng Shui* and Elsewhere)

by Brian Rogers

The world of *Feng Shui* is full of enough dynamic adventure to accommodate any action-hero fan. It's also -- with fluid history, chronological junctures and a pile of factions fighting a Secret War -- pretty darn confusing. The rulebook suggests that GMs might want to run a Secret War-free game for a while, slowly easing the players into the [stranger elements](#) of the world. This is a good idea for any conspiracy game, as it makes the slow unfolding of the Ascended, Mythos, or Secret Masters that much more mysterious or threatening.

But what should you use for that real world base? Below are suggestions for such starting points, which should ideally be set before the opening of the "contemporary" juncture in 1988 to ensuring a low starting weirdness quotient. All of them should give your players immediate familiarity through lifelong exposure to the source material. Finally, each has the advantage of being cinematic in its own right, so the players will have no cause to suspect that the world is anything other than what it appears to be. Until their first encounter with a Lotus Eating Eunuch Sorcerer, that is . . .

Cest La Guerre

The Vietnam War served a crucible for a generation of American action heroes, and has had some success as a setting for Hong Kong action as well (John Woo's glorious *Bullet in the Head* is the best known example, but don't overlook Samo Hung's [Eastern Condors](#)). Since Vietnam is written into so many action hero origins, why not start the action there? As a flashback or prelude from which you will draw the surviving soldiers for a second, more contemporary game, Vietnam has a lot to offer to the GM looking to introduce the Secret War.

Freedom of Action: Movie Vietnam is full of small special forces units roaming the battle ravaged countryside with minimal supervision and a loose chain of command. Player Character groups slot nicely into this setting: their superior simply hands over mission objectives and sends them off. The lack of oversight also translates into a lack of support, freeing GM from the worries of PCs calling for more equipment, back up or medical attention -- once in country, the PCs are on their own, for better or worse, and have no one to rely on except each other.

The Draft: Vietnam marked the last conflict with a United States draft, with its attendant opportunity for the cliché squad of disparate everymen drawn together in the madness of war -- improved by the worldwide nature of the forces present, giving not just American but international variety. This leaves the field wide open for Character Types: while Ex-Special Forces is king, Big Bruisers, Everyman Heroes, Karate & Maverick Cops, Killers, Medics, Journalists, and Techies easily round out the platoon. Spies and Transformed Animals make great outside specialists to lead the PCs deeper into the heart of weirdness.

Clichés A'Plenty: *Feng Shui* is built around clichés, and after decades of media treatments, the Vietnam War has lots of them. There's the incompetent new lieutenant and the murderous cynic looking to shoot him in the back, the sadistic prison camp guard with his bamboo torture cages and the soulless black-clad enemy soldiers, the beautiful young South Vietnamese women staffing the nightclubs and their perhaps too friendly cousins or brothers who might be agents for the enemy. As with other *Feng Shui* settings, players will instinctively understand the Hollywood version of this reality.

A Sense of Futility: The actual futility of the conflict can only be heightened by the players awareness of its final outcome. This is critical in the early stages of a conspiracy game, as the squad has to begin to wonder "what's the point." Sure, they may complete mission after mission, but they don't know why they're doing these things, and the war never seems to change. When they do start to stumble onto the edges of the Secret War they'll be receptive to even the strangest explanations . . . even if no one outside the squad will ever believe them.

Conspiratorial Reasons: Why are the Ascended having this war, especially since they control both forces in the conflict? While the PCs might start blaming the traditional culprits (Military Industrial Complex, widening drug trade), like everything else, it revolves around feng shui. The war altered much of the Southeast Asian landscape, including the destruction of uncountable temples and the at least temporary alteration of other potential Chi-altering structures (including whole jungles stripped away by defoliant). In the aftermath, the Ascended took absolute control of the area and its remaining sites.

So who had been controlling them? While the Guiding Hand (active in the 1950's-contemporary interim) is a possibility, a magical faction (a Lotus remnant from 56 AD? a strange new group?) has more high weirdness potential-- with the PCs encountering demons, Jiangshi, or wizened sorcerers guarding apparently worthless jungle huts -- and better justification for the force of the response -- if there was any chance of a magical group gaining a toehold in the world's Chi, the Ascended would not hesitate to order the worst excesses of the Vietnam war in pre-emptive self-defense.

Other Wars: Due to time's relentless nature, the Vietnam War is the oldest chronological starting point for an eventually contemporary *Feng Shui* game -- the action heroes it forged are in their late 40s, at least, today. If this is too old, much of the Hollywood Vietnam War tropes translate smoothly to Central American "Drug War" conflicts. Again, we have small semi-autonomous groups in an apparently futile conflict acting as cover for the Ascended's push to control feng shui sites and eliminate a possible magical rival, with action focused in the 1980s and 1990s.

Court on the Street

Another answer: make the PCs Cops. The game is tilted that way anyway with the presence of the Maverick Cop and Karate Cop Types, but rather than having their Cop history be something quickly set aside by the vagaries of the Secret War, put it front and center. Fill out the supporting cast and precinct, set up a couple of crime lords (who just happen to be expert martial artists -- Transformed Animals are great for this!) and let the cops have at them. You could go years without touching the Secret War, have weirdness slip in for spice, or suck the cops in during one mind-bending game.

Movie Law: As this is *Feng Shui*, PCs aren't [rookies on the beat](#). They're Movie Cops: detectives with minimal supervision (aside from one angry lieutenant), who return fire on punks without paperwork, get paired in get-on-each-other's-nerve teams, solve mysteries in 44 minutes, and eventually get promoted for killing someone who caused more mayhem than they did. Hero Cop games give GMs a variety of plots and sizable PC supervision without strait-jacketing them by something as fussy as the law. They are the law!

Civil Service Exams: The fact that these days anyone with the skills can become a cop leaves the field wide open for a diverse cast of heroes. While the actual Cop Types (Karate Cop, Maverick Cop, and Elder Cop, below) dominate this setting, almost any other Character Type fits if you give them a single point in the Police skill. Sure, not all characters will be good, well trained cops, but they do carry badges, and that's what counts! Big Bruisers (bulls), Everyman Heroes (new, perhaps minority, detectives trying to make good), Ex-Special Forces (lethal weapons), & Techies (cyber-cops) all look good in blue.

Hangers On: Unlike the other settings presented here, Cops interact with the real world on a day to day basis. This opens up Character Type selection even more. In fact, to stick with the genre you should have two mismatched Cop types, then fill out the cast with civilians. The presence of a Journalist (crime beat reporter), Masked Avenger ("Is it Henry, the mild-mannered file clerk?"), Medic (EMT? Forensic specialist?), PI, Thief (helping as part of parole? Under cover?), or Scrappy Kid (dependant? only witness to the big crime?) will make a producer take notice of your series pitch.

Conspiracy and Frustration: Even for movie Cops, there's plenty of frustration. Their hidebound superiors won't let them go after the big villains (a.k.a. the Ascended and their cronies), who manage to escape through legal loopholes. A persistent wondering why things never change makes Hero Cops receptive to evidence of conspiracies. This supposes they don't simply run into strangeness above what they normally encounter -- magical cabals, martial cults, and icky hyper-tech are distinct possibilities, and all vanish into the Ascended's "this never happened" bureaucracy if the Cops

don't start digging on their own.

Elder Cop: here's a new Character Type for your Hero Cop game, filling a much needed cliché;

"Just stay down. And don't do anything stupid -- I'm retiring next year and I'd like to live to see it."

You've been on the force for years, and you know how to get the job done. You might not be as flashy or as violent as some guys on the squad, but you always see things through. You've solved every kind of crime and interviewed every kind of witness, handled every type of tense situation and talked with all the varieties of media. Sure, you're getting up there, but you're not going to coast to your retirement, because you still have a job to do and you do it well.

Your reward for this dedication? The brass makes a habit of assigning the hot young idealists or the on-the-edge psychos as your partners, hoping that you can sharpen them up or tone them down. You're the classic straight man in the buddy cop pairing, but just because you're not the one the headlines scream about doesn't mean you're not the one getting the job done.

Juncture: any

Attributes: Body 5, Chi 0 (Fortune 1), Mind 5, Reflexes 5

Add 3 points to one primary attribute, 2 points to another and 1 to a third.

Add 2 points to one secondary attribute.

Skills:

Driving +4 (9) Max 13

Guns (=13)

Leadership +3 (8)

Martial Arts +3 (8) Max 10

Police (=15)

Add 4 skill bonuses

Shticks:

Unique Shtick -- Cuff 'Em: Spend one Fortune Point to use your Police AV rather than your Martial Arts AV when trying to handcuff opponents in combat. The difficulty of Cuff 'Em depends on what you're cuffing them to (No penalty if you're cuffing them to yourself or to themselves, up to a -2 for something like a moving fire truck).

Weapons: 2 weapons of the appropriate juncture.

Wealth: Working Stiff

You Want the Truth?

Now, eventually you're going to want your heroes to figure out the truth, so you may as well start them off as people who make a living out of finding it. This includes private investigators, spies, and journalists -- all of whom get paid to learn what's really going on. Unfortunately many of these work alone, but with a little work it can become the rationale for a group: The heroes are a team of spies who specialize in impossible missions, are a private investigation agency that work together on cases or test corporate defenses, or are the special investigations branch of a major metropolitan newspaper who have to pool their skills to crack the big stories. There are lots of movies and shows that focus on just such people.

Disavow All Knowledge of Your Actions: Again, the classic versions of these groups have a wide degree of autonomy. The IMF is given a target and told to go to it; the PIs accept the job from their client, but brook no interference in how it is handled; all is forgiven if the reporters actually get the scoop. However, when the job is on, the agents are likely breaking national and international laws, and that means no support until things are done -- even the regular authorities can't be trusted.

Sneaking and Running: Such teams will need to have as broad a base of skills as possible to succeed. As with the Cop game, each member of the team should have at least a point in the relevant skill, but it is likely that there will be one real expert in the field (Spy, PI, Journalist) surrounded by Everymen, Big Bruisers, Ex-Special Forces, and retired Cops, with a Techie to provide computer and engineering experience. A Scrappy Kid might be present, either as a Junior CIA or the child of one of the detectives or reporters who's been dragged along by circumstances or acts as a mascot.

No Plan Survives Contact: You'll have to develop some legitimate "normal," if action packed, scenarios for the agents to encounter before you sneak in the weirdness. This sort of advance planning structure could bring your tactician players into *Feng Shui's* more fluid and cinematic environment. Of course, once the impossible becomes real their plans will collapse. The tacticians must think on their feet to get out, then pursue the reasons behind what just happened with terrier-like tenacity to prevent it from ever happening again.

No Comments: Of course, futility runs rampant in these fields too. In a war in the shadows, there are no acknowledged victories, and many good stories are buried by the owners of the newspaper. Even if the PCs don't have a shocking front page photo of a flying Abomination, they may start to wonder what's happening to all the things they learn that never get revealed to the greater world. Digging into the secrets of those who employ them will be unhealthy, but it will ultimately show if they *can* handle the truth.

Other Systems, Other Conspiracies

While our focus has been on *Feng Shui's* Secret War, hidden conflicts exist in plenty of games and you can easily shift these suggestions into them. *Unknown Armies*, *Delta Green* or any other flavor of Cthulhu both work well for this (though standard CoC investigators need a two-gun cocktail with a [kung fu twist](#) to get the action level right). These games' sanity systems handle the mundane horrors of war or police work, reinforcing their internal reality long before the Mythos or Naked Goddess rear their heads. *Spycraft's Shadowforce Archer* setting or *Conspiracy X* both include histories unknown to the average man on the street, making the slow unfolding of the truth to soldiers, agents, or cops a nice transition into the weirder parts of the game world, or the stages before recruitment into the real truth.

The trick to this is keeping the players interested once they realize the conspiracy advertised on the book isn't showing up. Making them action heroes rather than [everyday folk](#) is a good place to start. Once you've got them interested in the normal world, get them to dig for what they assumed they'd find out immediately. This is especially effective if you've modified the [nature of the conspiracy](#) as well . . .

Pyramid Review

The Marvel Universe Roleplaying Game

[Published by Marvel Comics](#)

Game design by Dan Gelber, Jeffrey Simons, & Evan Jones

Additional design by Bill Jemas, & Mark D. Beazley

Written by Jeffrey Simons, Dan Gelber, Evan Jones, & Jim Graham

\$24.99; 128-page full-color hardcover plus heavy-stock perforated character sheet/insert

If you want something done right, the old saw goes, you have to do it yourself. There have been a couple of stabs at a Marvel Comics superhero game from TSR and its successors, but the latest version, *The Marvel Universe Roleplaying Game*, comes from the House of Ideas itself.

Based on the adventures of their many super-powered heroes and villains, Marvel Comics' game tries a diceless system to adjudicate big superhero battles. A character is created by spending Character Generation "stones" on statistics, though the stones used to create a character should not be confused with the stones you'll use in play.

You start with five basic Abilities: Intelligence (your smarts), Strength (physical power), Agility (your coordination), Speed (how fast you move), and Durability (for resisting damage). Your Durability is the same number you use for Health (how much punishment you can take).

You also buy Actions with stones. Actions is a catchall term meaning "stuff your character can do." Thus superpowers find themselves in the same boat as skills and areas of knowledge. All these stats are bought to the desired level, and that level is how many stones (the in-game kind) you can commit to using that Action or Ability. Some Actions let you use a related Ability at the same time, increasing the number of stones you may put into play; for example, Acrobatics lets you use Strength or Agility in conjunction with the Action. If the description doesn't list it as part of the Action, you have to pay extra to use an Ability with the Action. Create Illusions doesn't get a bonus, so if you want to add your Intelligence when using it, you'll have to buy that as an Advantage.

Advantages and Disadvantages can be added to an Action (usually a superpower) to change how it's used. Advantages like $\times 2$ damage increase the cost of an Action, while Disadvantages like power out of control without device (ala Cyclops' visor) lower the cost.

Normal Actions are those Actions anyone can try, like running or climbing. If you didn't buy the Action, you can use just an Ability to attempt it, but you may have a Situational Modifier added to the Difficulty that a more talented individual might not suffer. If you're not sure what kind of character you want to play, you can save as many as half of your Character Generation stones to tweak the character as you go.

Now for the other kind of stone. Actions and Abilities have a rating on your Character Action Display (CAD -- your character sheet), usually from 1 to 10. That's how many stones you can put into the feats you perform. You commit stones to a task and the GM puts stones into Difficulty and Resistance, or the NPC's Defense Area. Stones come in two colors: red and white. White stones are used to represent your Health; lose all of these and you'll go unconscious or die. Red stones are used for Actions.

Your Health determines your Energy Reserve; you can have a maximum of ($3 \times$ your Health) stones in your reserve to power Actions. If you want to play a character who relies more on smarts than fortitude for their Actions and powers (like Professor X), you have the option of substituting your Intelligence for your Health for all your Energy Reserve calculations -- but this only gives you two red stones for each white stone in Intelligence. After each round, you regenerate your Health in red stones back into the reserve (so you're probably using more stones than you're regenerating during a fight). If damage lowers your Health, you'll have a harder time regenerating your Energy Reserve.

A round of activity is called a panel, and when everyone gets a panel in which to act, it's called a page. At the beginning of every panel, you decide how many stones you'll take from your Energy Reserve and into which Ability or Action Boxes you'll put them -- limited to what level you paid for the Ability or Action. If you were able to combine an Ability with your Action, you can add them together and use that many stones (if your Energy Reserve is big enough). If you put stones into an Action, you can use it this turn. It's a good idea to put some stones into your Defense Area (if it's a combat situation); otherwise you'll have nothing to stop incoming attacks.

For example: Cyclops has Force Blast (his Optic Beams) at 9, so he may put up to nine stones in Force Blast this round. If the target he chooses only has 5 stones in defense, the opponent will take 4 stones in damage. With a Health of 3, though, Cyclops' maximum Energy Reserve is only 9 stones ($3 \times$ Health) -- and his Energy Reserve only regenerates a straight 3 from Health at the beginning of each panel. He can't cut loose a full blast every round. He has a Kevlar jacket to protect from some attacks -- equipment has stones of its own -- and most street scum aren't much of a match for Cyke anyway. But if the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants shows up, that jacket's one stone of defense won't keep him awake for long. Success in combat comes from wise expenditure of your stones, balancing attack with defense.

In less stressful cases, the GM decides on a Difficulty and Resistance for what you're trying to do. Difficulty is how hard something is; Resistance is how much effort it takes overall. For example, if Reed Richards wants to cure a disease, it may be that the Difficulty is 8 but the Resistance is 40. If Richards can put 8 or more stones of Intelligence or Invention or any other applicable Action behind it, he's smart enough to figure it out eventually -- if he does this for five panels, he'll have beaten the Resistance of 40. The Thing could never muster 8 stones, so he's not smart enough to even begin working out a solution to the problem without help or some serious bonuses.

How long a page or panel lasts is dependent on the kind of activities you're into. In the above example, Richards will take five panels to finish, all the while with little captions over his head saying, "Mr. Fantastic labors into the night . . ." If it's combat, panels take considerably less time. There are several other wrinkles to the system, like extra stones from weapons, splitting up stones among several targets, or spending stones each panel to maintain ongoing powers, but that's the short version.

In addition to these tweaks, the book presents the reader with an admirable cross-section of Marvel superstars. While there will be plenty more said in supplements for all the major players, you get write-ups of Spider-Man, some key X-Men, the Hulk, Captain America, and the Fantastic Four (among others) in the basic book, as well as famous villains like Magneto, the Abomination, and the Green Goblin. There are also a number of smaller players like Quicksilver and Baron Mordo. There are 42 characters in all -- the authors weren't chintzy with the goods, and these are all good reference points for anyone who needs samples.

Anyone needing help with what all the stats mean can check the Difficulty & Resistance Chart. The D&R lists several benchmark activities, feats, speeds, weights, etc., so the Gamesmaster has a basis for comparison when Iron Man wants to lift that Chevy or Quicksilver wants to dash cross-country.

There are nine Action Boxes on your CAD, but that's not just a space requirement -- you're actually limited to only nine Actions. You can (or may be required to) pick Specialties for some of your Actions. Daredevil, for example, has Social Skills at 3 and has chosen Academia, the Pro-Boxing Culture, and Law Enforcement. These Specialties can offset Situational Modifiers for him when these subjects come up.

Actions can always be increased with Lines of Experience, the game's equivalent of experience points. You can place these according to your deeds during the "issue." If you got into a fight with Bullseye, you might write down "Dodged

a bullet" or "Used trash can lid as a shield." It's up to the GM how useful these are at offsetting the Situational Modifiers that may come up in later sessions, but if you get 10 Lines under an Action, the Action may be raised one level and a new Specialty added.

There's a list of Actions for purchase in the book. It's a strange mishmash that can't decide if it's going to help you "build any hero you want" or "mirror the action of Marvel Comics." Force Blast can be used to model anything from Iron Man's repulsor rays to the Wasp's sting, but Web-Slinging seems somewhat esoteric. The selection, combining skills and superpowers as it does, reads kind of wonky, but every single entry gives an example so you have some sort of map. Subjects like creating a magical character and building powered armor get fuller sections.

A number of passages discuss playing the game and Gamesmastering. There's nothing revolutionary in them -- group dynamics, party conflicts, judging actions, prepackaged adventures -- but they are necessary for the new players the company is hoping to rope in (and, given the awkward shop-talk, every little bit helps). Advice is scattered throughout the book, but this isn't good as it makes it hard to find some of the critical "here's how it works in play" bits -- valuable, but not always placed with rhyme or reason.

Anyone who hasn't been exposed to Marvel's universe can find a small primer here, which gives a (very small) thumbnail of New York City, some of the major alien races, and a few of the weird gods, if you're into games of that power level. A brief adventure is included to wet your feet:

[SPOILER ALERT!]

Someone is filling the streets with R, a new drug that causes strange aberrations like tusks among the city's youth, and sometimes even jumpstarts a full-fledged mutant. Every criminal in the city wants the 411 on this popular vice, and the players have to find the one crook that's actually making the stuff.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

An exhaustive manifest of equipment is listed, and to tie the whole thing together, the back of the book has a full-color, two-sided, perforated CAD on stiff paper stock for photocopying.

The artwork, as you might expect, comes from various Marvel Comics and licensed products, and it's some of their best . . . one of the benefits of having the company do its own work. The graphic presentation is really clean, though sometimes the text loses itself in the crack of the book. The maps are really snazzy, and about the only real failing is the twisted and overly stylistic Spider-Man cover.

The ***Marvel Universe Roleplaying Game*** would be a far better work if the creators didn't keep shooting themselves in the foot throughout. Once a gaming group has the system hammered out and smoothes the edges, it's a fast play. The diceless system works pretty well: Juggling stats and stones gives the participants something to do, and the effects still feel somewhat random. But come on -- nine Actions for Spider-Man after 40 years? Arbitrary limits like this bring that forced feeling back.

Asking you to put stones from the Energy Reserve into your Action Boxes (which are physically too small to hold many stones to begin with) makes sense, but then if you want a defense you have to get those stones from the Action Boxes you just filled. It adds another layer to the strategy, demanding that you balance your defense from your offense, but it also means you cannot just pump stones straight into defense, or even just build a wholly defensive character. (Then again, you could tell the GM you're putting all your stones into Psychology this panel, then yank all those stones into your Defensive Area and start dodging energy blasts.)

Writing and erasing the shifting numbers would be a strain on a character sheet, true, but fiddling with little stones every single panel isn't exactly the soul of convenience. Characters of different power levels are mentioned, but while there's advice for having such characters work together, there's no mention of the potential mechanical hazards involved, and the D&R Chart lists few similar progressions (up to three miles for jumping, up to light speed for flying - and how does one compare Quicksilver's Speed of 10 and Thor's Strength of 10?).

The game is written in a casual and conversational style that makes it an easy read, though a lot of it comes off like a sales pitch. What holds you up is trying to absorb the information. It's a real headache because nothing is written as simply as it could be. It doesn't assume players will quickly get a grip on all the new concepts thrown their way, but it keeps telling you it's easier the way they present it and that simply is not true. Even using other terms like points instead of stones and skills instead of the generic Actions would have helped. As it is, it's a torturous mess, and an index would have been an enormous benefit.

The authors have certainly taken much of what slows down an RPG and replaced it with rules that will be a refreshing take on roleplaying in general and superhero roleplaying in particular. The trouble is, ***The Marvel Universe Roleplaying Game*** makes a simple and imaginative system anything but simple to get hold of.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

The Black Seal #2 (for Delta Green/Call of Cthulhu)

Published by [Brichester University Press](#)

Edited by Adam Crossingham and Nick Brownlow

Written by Andy Bennison, Nick Brownlow, David Conyers, Tobias Cooper, Adam Crossingham, Daniel Harms, Rik Kershaw Moore, Davide Mana, Graeme Price and Brian Sammons

Illustrated by Adam Crossingham, Neil Beattie, Robert Corcoran, Sarah Evans, Paul J. Holden, David Lee Ingersoll, Baz Nugent, Charlotte Ronald and Luis Corte Real

Cartography by David Conyers and Koen Goorickx

84-page softcover; \$13

The long wait between official supplements and scenarios for *Call of Cthulhu* is something that the devoted fan has long learned to bear. This is particularly so for Chaosium's *Cthulhu Now* setting, and Pagan Publishing's still-stunning and Origins award winning *Delta Green* campaign setting. While they wait, it leaves room for the amateur step in and fulfil the need for new material, which is where last year's initial issue of [The Black Seal](#), published by Brichester University Press, proved to be so useful. This was never more so than for the Keeper running a campaign set in the British Isles, as it updated the United Kingdom for *Call of Cthulhu* far better than any previously published on the subject. In addition, it further developed the material describing Great Britain as presented in [Delta Green: Countdown](#).

Of course, to describe many of the authors of *The Black Seal* as amateur is wholly unfair, as many of them contributed to the contents of *Delta Green: Countdown*, so they are best placed to develop the United Kingdom with the Delta Green milieu. Which is exactly what *The Black Seal #1* did, and *The Black Seal #2* continues to do. This second issue is a nice step forward in terms of the magazine's production values, with a better layout and better artwork that overall serves to make it a much more professional looking product. It does suffer from one quite glaring printing error, but really this is a fault of the printers more than the design team.

The Black Seal #2 is subtitled "P.I.S.C.E.S.: *The Silent Service*," bringing its focus to bear upon the "Paranormal Intelligence Section for Counter-intelligence, Espionage & Sabotage," the oldest paranormal intelligence service in the world. A relic of World War II, it is tasked with the defense of the United Kingdom from the entities and worshippers of the Cthulhu Mythos. Beginning with Adam Crossingham's cover -- entitled "On Her Majesty's Occult Service" -- this examination for the most part ignores the current state of PISCES, a partially Shan-infested and increasing Shan-dominated agency, as described in *Delta Green: Countdown*. Together with Graeme Price, Crossingham gives an overview and history of the agency in "PISCES: Her Majesty's Watchmen," which ties very nicely with some of the events and scandals of the last 50 years. Not only is a timeline provided, but so also is a list of its various directors, known as "R." Though directly responsible to the Prime Minister's Office, PISCES (much like its American counterpart, Majestic-12) reserves judgement on whether or not it should tell the current head of Her Majesty's

government. Since the current Prime Minister is the head of a left wing government, PISCES has so far exercised that judgment and remained hidden, funding itself from the profits made by Severn Aerospace. The agency has always had an interest in Talents or those that have "Acquired the Gift" and maintains an active program of recruiting and training psychic individuals for use in espionage. Both Talent and Talent Handler are one of the several Occupational Templates described elsewhere in this issue.

Should PISCES successfully handle a Mythos manifestation, it has the facility to intern it safely -- and if not safely, hopefully flooding or at the last resort, a nuclear device will be able to contain it . . . This facility is "Magonia," a holding and research establishment built beneath the island of St. Kilda, West of the Outer Hebrides, off the Scottish Coast. David Conyers' "Missing Persons . . ." is a fascinating yet ghastly and well-realized creation that, as written, is actually quite difficult to use. This is intentional, as it is almost impossible to get onto the island, let alone get into the facilities below it.

As a dark answer -- a very dark answer -- to the Village of *The Prisoner* television series, Magonia is not going to be easy to use in a normal **Cthulhu Now** campaign either, and only slightly more easy in one that focuses that has the investigators as PISCES agents. That said, a campaign set entirely within Magonia could be a very creepy and intense experience . . . Just as with the Village, Magonia is used to incarcerate those who know too much, which might just include members of PISCES itself, right to its bosses, among whom breakdowns seem to be a little too frequent. Among its more dangerous inmates is Wilbur Bromley, an Avatar of Y'golonac, developed from the Ramsay Campbell story, "Cold Print" and mentioned in **Delta Green Countdown**.

Although PISCES is primarily tasked with the defense of the United Kingdom, its masters take an interest in events outside of its borders and that includes on the other side of the pond. Its difficulty is that, unlike its more mundane British counterparts, PISCES does not have a "special relationship" with any of its American cousins. Indeed it has had no link with Delta Green since 1945 and is still unaware of its demise -- or its resurrection. Thus PISCES is one of the few British intelligence agencies that pursue a number of active operations on U.S. soil. These are mostly passive in nature, such as surveillance, but the occasional operation is not unknown if a threat needs neutralizing. Graeme Price's "Perfidious Albion: PISCES Operations in the United States" describes these very low-key and long-term affairs, some of which are in danger of getting deeper into things than PISCES is really aware of . . . It also provides a new organization in the form of The Paragon Foundation, a Toronto-based body that is a PISCES front actively recruiting Talents or even giving aid should such a Talent need denying to a foreign power.

While much of **The Black Seal #2** is devoted to PISCES, it still remains useful to the Keeper who runs a **Cthulhu Now** rather than a **Delta Green** campaign by presenting a number of articles that could be used for either setting. The first of these is "Strange Histories: alternatives to pises for Cthulhu now," which gives four alternate government organizations or conspiracies that could replace PISCES. With two of them, a side bar discusses their different playing themes, as they diverge in both style and theme to the down-and-dirty style of **Cthulhu Now**. One, "The Black Lodge," tends toward the high weirdness of *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, while "The Directorate of Social Intelligence" is more akin in style to *Dr. Who's UNIT* and *The New Avengers*. Of course, The Black Lodge could just as easily form the basis of a **Cthulhu by Gaslight** campaign. A fourth agency is "Government Intelligence Section G19," a straight adaptation of the organization and its leading agents seen in the excellent television series *Edge of Darkness*. A major influence for British-based **Cthulhu Now** campaigns, the aim with G19 is allow the running of classic 1920s-style adventures in the modern era.

The Avengers receive a second tip of the bowler hat in Davide Mana's nicely done "The Avengers: Off-best espionage in the Swinging Sixties." This suggests how a more light-hearted game might be run with something of a sense of style and this article brings to the fore an air of British knowingness that pervades much of **The Black Seal #2**. Of interest to those who have played the classic campaign **Masks of Nyarlathotep**, Daniel Harms' "The Penhew-Carlyle Foundation" updates this archeological body that was a front for the Brotherhood of the Black Pharaoh during the 1920s. It is designed as a possible challenge for use by a Keeper running a PISCES game, but still could be used for a **Cthulhu Now** campaign. More useful still is "A Brief Summary of known Great Old One-worshipping Cults and Independent Agents in the British Isles," which is unfortunately only the first part of a two-part article and would really benefit from greater coverage of each of these cults.

Although there are as such no scenarios given in this issue, it does include several "Tales of Terror" and "Dangerous Places." Each is a detailed summary of a situation that requires relatively little further work upon the part of the Keeper. Nick Brownlow's "13 Places of interest in Brichester" could be adapted as path of investigation in a scenario, but works mostly as a piece of decent fiction. Rounding out ***The Black Seal #2*** is a set of reasonably interesting reviews, an interview with Gary Sumpter (one of the lead authors and editors on [Ramsey Campbell's Goatswood and less pleasant places](#)) and several new Investigator Templates -- for the Environmental Agency, the Serious Fraud Office, the Royal Military Police, and PISCES, as well as one each for the IRA and the UDA, for those campaigns that stray across the Irish Sea.

Despite the fact that none of the contents of ***The Black Seal #2*** is either official or canonical, the authors have tried to adhere to both the world-view and feel of the ***Delta Green*** universe as closely as possible. What this means is that ***The Black Seal*** is as good as it gets without being fully endorsed by Pagan Publishing, and it would be an utter waste for the Keeper not to use its take upon PISCES. It is an excellent continuation of the information given in both ***Delta Green: Countdown*** and ***The Black Seal #1***, while also providing plenty of material for ***Cthulhu Now***.

--Matthew Pook

Transmission 200 (Part III)

"Whatever the case, we are all players in the game that is known as 'time.' The obvious way to protect one's interest is, of course, to gain knowledge about time itself. Whether one wants to do this by pursuing meditation or astrophysics is an entirely personal matter."

-- Preston B. Nichols and Peter Moon, *The Montauk Project*

We're blowing through all 200 transmissions in a giant, secret-historical time and reality war setting. The past is [thataway](#). (The further past is further [thataway](#).) The future is just ahead. Ladies and gentlemen, start your saucers . . .

- 1853:** The [Nineveh Lens](#), a powerfully bisociative artifact with the ability to refocus reality, appears in an archaeological dig. This is the same Lens lost (so far) in 535, 1492, 1588, and 2012, continuously "re-found" in 1853 again by a different faction each time.
- 1854:** Eliphas Levi learns the Words of Power from Apollonius of Tyana, and only quick thinking by an astral Lemurian agent present channeled the resulting Re-Creation into a [pocket universe](#) of steampunk Victorian magick, which may have sent eimic shock waves back to [3246 B.C.](#) A splashback effect almost reifies the filibuster William Walker as archon of [Reality Dixie](#); another sets the [NYMZA](#) group to secretly building airships.
- 1859:** To contain Dixie, Argus is forced to confirm MI- agent of influence Joshua [Norton](#) as Emperor of America. The planet [Vulcan](#) enters our reality, setting off a cosmic struggle between the Sphinxes and MI- over its existence; the battle spreads back in time to spark a [covert space race](#), remove the Earth from [Saturn's orbit](#), and launch Monstrator.
- 1861-1865:** Argus' hard-headed Dixie-containment efforts, unfortunately, create a mythic backlash just as the Civil War begins to weaken the American reality fabric. [Superheroes](#), [crashed saucers](#), a [Rainbow Effect flare-up](#), astral openings (focused by MI- dramaturgies using [Pepper's Ghost](#)) through [Lincoln's visions](#) and [Mumler's ghost photographs](#), a [Martian invasion](#), [splinter realities](#), and even [Rebel O.G.R.E.s](#) make the American Civil War a long, dirty slog as Argus must defend both the American Dream and the American reality from all comers.
- 1870:** Lemurians attempting to infiltrate the [American Arcadia](#) (using the [Wandering Jew](#) as their agent) anomalize a headquarters in [Mount Shasta](#) and set off the [superheroic](#) Ghost Dance resistance. Argus sees this as just another incident in their lengthy [campaign](#) to tamp down the unreality that threatens to explode in the chaotic, mythic American West; their newly-invoked patron deity [Paul Bunyan](#) contains things on the iconic scale.
- 1874:** Just the place for a [Snark](#)!
- 1877:** Beginning of the [Bone Wars](#) to define American prehistory, pitting the hyperscience of Strike Force Chronos against the theosophical mysticism of the ZSS and the Lemurians, and the Biblical gigantology of MI- . The Reptoids only want to hide evidence of their own primordial civilizations; the Wars end in 1889 with victories for Darwin, and thus for Chronos and the Reptoids.
- 1880:** [Norton's death](#) (and perhaps the strobeline [alternation of history](#) during the Civil War) sets off the Covert [Airship](#) Time War between Gernsback, Reich-5, and Shikaku-mon's Catholic Japan (and hence between Tesla's rogue Lemurians, the ZSS, and the main Lemurian elements). Strike Force Chronos runs a secret op to monitor and control it, considering the U.S.' past their turf, against some [interference](#) by MI- . The CATW peaks in 1896-1897, and ends with a Gernsback-Argus victory in 1927.
- 1881:** Argus and MI- [duel](#) over America's sacred kingship while simultaneously erecting the [Cleopatra's Needle](#) tuning forks to mark their alliance. (This kind of thing happens more often than you'd like in time wars.) Both halt yet another Grey intrusion through [Roswell](#), and the [Mad Fishmonger](#) strikes during this distraction. Concerned about Argus-Rosicrucian cooperation, the Lemurians set up the [Black Ocean](#) Society.

- 1886:** Arcadian [alchemy](#) assures American (and Argus') ascendance.
- 1888:** Joint Reptoid-MI- operation attempts to Ascend London using the [Ripper](#)-spirit, but the Sphinxes divert a portion of the energy to Yorkshire through [Le Prince](#)'s occult lenses. Le Prince, driven mad by the visions, embraces the Sphinxes two years later.
- 1893:** The Argus-front [Auriga Society](#) begins the Ascension of [Chicago](#) through faultless [urban planning](#) by the Lemurian double agent Daniel Burnham -- and possibly through [H.H. Holmes'](#) Murder Castle. Meanwhile, the astral faction of the Sphinxes establishes a foothold in L.A.'s [Bradbury Building](#) from its base in a [San Luis Valley](#) meteorite. A rogue Lemurian agent, Nikola Tesla, manages to create a thought-sphere that enmeshes many future visionaries in a "[Gernsback Reality](#)."
- 1896:** [Martians](#) launch another invasion during the peak year of the covert [airship](#) war, along a route possibly opened by the Lemurian agent Tesla, or by Ronald Montagu [Burrows](#). The turmoil opens the gates to the dark, Sphinxian dreams of H.P. [Lovecraft](#).
- 1902** Lord Kelvin's self-causal [transmission](#) bootstraps time travel into MI- hands, and weakens the twentieth century's reality from the beginning.
- 1908:** The [Tunguska impact](#) calves off [Reality Tunguska](#) (and throws up the [Phaistos Disk](#) as a pragmaclast), an MI- stronghold contested by Argus only. Some suspect a payoff to Tesla's renegade Lemurians given this reality's "Gernsbackian" qualities, and hint that the Tesla faction controls (or subcontracts) Argus' [HAARP](#) array secretly built around now (which may have fired the Tunguska "test shot" itself) but only revealed 90 years later. Under the alias "Charles Dexter Ward," a youthful [H.P. Lovecraft](#) makes contact with the Sphinxes in Europe.
- 1909:** Weak between two huge impacts, reality folds back to the 1854 splashback under a [Futurist assault](#) eventually contained by Rosicrucian art historians.
- 1910:** Halley's Comet slams into the Earth, splintering reality for good. A desperate alliance of all surviving agents manages to divert the [Highway](#) and thus switch the impact to a near miss, but [five new realities](#) remain accessible, along with the "[spare parts bin](#)" from the reality patch job.
- 1912:** MI- agent Wilfrid Voynich acquires the Bacon [manuscript](#) and evades the Lemurian attempt to kill him on his way back to America by not sailing on the [Titanic](#).
- 1918:** Strike Force Chronos retroactively snuffs out an outbreak of [zombie flu](#) from an unknown reality; Argus suspects Lemurian meddling as in 1841.
- 1920:** Charles Fort burns 40,000 of his notes after publishing the [Book of the Damned](#). Every faction seeks to salvage those notes that reinforce their realities and burn those that degrade their rivals'. Fort dies in 1932 of "unspecified weakness," possibly as a result of exposure to the reality-thinning smoke of his burning notebooks. Taking advantage of the thinning, Reptoid agent [Al Capone](#) assumes the Four Deuces and begins his Black Grail working.
- 1922:** The Sphinxes' agent, the [Duchess of Malfi](#), re-enters reality through Eliot's [Waste Land](#) to erode reality with magic when Howard Carter exposes the Staff of Ra to sunlight. The [resulting magical universe](#) remains accessible to them, the Ahnenerbe magi in the ZSS, and to the Reptoids. Argus is attempting to recruit Houdini and the Magician's League, to at least keep this reality's energies focused inward.
- 1924:** Alexandra David-Neel (part of the dubious Mandeville faction of MI-) invokes a dangerous [green-gloved](#) tulpa in Tibet, opening a reality fissure that upthrusts the [Crystal Skull](#) and the [Glozel](#) fragments, among other, still more dubious, pragmaclasts, while propelling [Rogers Hornsby](#) to the highest one-season batting average in the century.
- 1927:** Charles [Lindbergh](#) makes a secret treaty with the Sphinxes, ostensibly on behalf of Argus. Lindbergh later shows signs of having been suborned by any or all of the [Duncanites](#), the Reptoids, or the ZSS; he may have splintered like Columbus in 1492.
- 1933:** A series of ZSS hammer blows against the weakened century splits off [Reich-5](#), but accidentally triggers

an [automata coup](#), a [risen Atlantis](#), an [Ahnenerbe Fimbulwinter](#), and something worse than all of them [in the Kremlin](#) as well. The ZSS pulls back, and allows Strike Force Chronos and MI- to undo the damage by shunting the realities off to upper floors of the newly-built [American Yggdrasil](#).

- 1938:** An [astral Martian invasion](#) nearly [breaks into our reality](#) through newly-opened [Kirlian](#) space, but is contained at the last minute inside Orson Welles' radio broadcast. The Occult Empire makes a comeback bid by creating the [Waste Land](#) in [Cleveland](#), but Eliot Ness' myth is too strong for it. In the chaos, the Kriegsmarine and Ahnenerbe "stake out" an eimically-secure fastness in Neuschwabenland for the [Antarctic Space Nazi](#) Refuge.
- 1940:** Accidental ZSS op [awakens Arthur](#); ZSS contains the reality before too much Grail energy is emitted.
- 1941:** Lemurian pawn [Rudolf Hess](#) attempts to avert WWII, but is hollowed out by the Sphinxes in midair and immediately contained by MI- . Massive temporal distortion around [Pearl Harbor](#) charted by Rainbow Project personnel to gather data for [Philadelphia Experiment](#).
- 1943:** The [Philadelphia Experiment](#) secures time travel technology for Argus and Strike Force Chronos, but unfortunately it also rips open a [green-glowing](#) time portal that (among other unfortunate effects) gives Heisenberg the theoretical data needed to perfect the Nazi time program. (Others claim that the Montauk Project, a shadowy Argus op, gave the Nazis the data in 1983/1943 to defeat an Orion invasion.) A [test](#) on the Russian Front goes awry.
- 1944:** Nazis use time technology to build [the Bomb](#) and [nuke London](#); Strike Force Chronos and MI- repair the timestream, but the remainder of the twentieth century shows increasingly unstable shock effects from their patchy rush job.
- 1945:** The Trinity test produces a whole storm of realities from [Technomancer](#) (and its 1991 [splinter](#)) to a [dinoskeleton rampage](#) to [Zuse's Ogoromniy](#). Distracted by this and the [Werwolves](#), Argus is unable to prevent the escape of Bormann and other key Nazis via saucers and the [Amber Room](#) to [Neuschwabenland](#).
- 1947:** Latest Grey infiltration through the [Roswell](#) hole launched in force against Argus while they are distracted by Operation High Jump against [Neuschwabenland](#). Retaliatory strikes open overt war in [some realities](#), spill [Rods](#) into existence. Argus finally able to "Welles" the entire Grey invasion into a forgery with Lemurian assistance at [Maury Island](#).
- 1949:** As payoff, Lemurian agents eliminate the anti-Lemurian Defense Secretary James [Forrestal](#). Argus-Neuschwabenland armistice declared after both sides reach [the Moon](#).
- 1954:** William S. Burroughs opens the way to the [Martian Interzone](#); it remains uncontained by any faction.
- 1957:** Father Pellegrino Ernetti invents [time travel](#). He attempts to preserve his invention, but is forced to turn it over to Reptoid influences within the Church. Argus' [Project Moon Dust](#) established, begins collecting fallen pragmaclasts in a tesseractive warehouse.
- 1963:** Lone gunman [Carl Edward Schermer](#) shoots and kills President John F. Kennedy.
- 1968:** [Project BANQUO](#) established as an Argus spectral forces unit in the wake of the [Mothman](#) detonation, which weakens American reality enough that Lemurian pressure upthrusts [Atlantis](#). Fortunately, it's 1968, so nobody really notices.
- 1969:** Argus, the Ahnenerbe, and the Rosicrucians alchemically fix [the Moon](#) in a [Three Magi Working](#), badly weakening Lemuria, the Sphinxes, and the Reptoids on many crucial spheres.
- 1986:** Halley's Comet strikes off [shards of reality](#) and opens a brief dimensional gash. [The Chairman](#) falls through the opening, and erects a culinary arena to realize his dream.
- 1998:** A swarm of gnats pours out of a [tabloid shell reality](#) created by a qlipthotic Sphinx entity and knocks down an Indonesian DC-8 in Sumatra. Strike Force Chronos handles it, but must put down an increasing number of tabloid irruptions as pre-millennial tensions build.
- 1999:** The [King of Terror](#) (either a qlipthotic entity or a pre-Sphinxian primal god) returns from the sky in the

midst of yet another [Martian invasion](#). Children take shelter in [libraries](#), but find the clashing realities within equally dangerous. All sides manage to throw him back before he revives an even greater entity, Angolmois, slumbering within the hollow Earth.

- 2000:** Probably unrelated to the [bike controversy](#), a [planetary alignment](#) causes a catastrophic [Pole Shift](#); history restored from backup on January 1, 2001. American Presidential election files corrupted in restore, which takes [four tries](#) to get right.
- 2012:** A qliphothic Sphinx pours onto America and sets off the Great Blight, creating [Reality Autoduel](#). An MI-op secretly [reincarnates Arthur](#) to pinch off the future as a mythic variant.
- 2061:** [Halley's Comet](#) comes around again for another impact. All seems lost, when [two A with B burst C](#).

The Voices From The Magic Box

(And Other Places To Get Ideas)

I continue my trademark "Oh, crud, it's 9 P.M. on Thursday and I haven't started my column yet" tradition of drawing inspiration from whatever is handy . . . in this case, the target is [National Public Radio](#), which happens to be a much more promising subject source than the unopened can of Heinz Vegetarian Beans sitting on top of my scanner/printer. (And if anyone knows where my can opener is currently, I'd be *very* appreciative . . .)

Anyway, over here in the states there have been some Senate hearings lately on more deregulation regarding media ownership. The FCC has considered further relaxing restrictions that were eased in the early 1990s; these regulations were originally placed to keep one station from building a radio tower the size of the Death Star and broadcasting its hip-hop line dancing acid jazz across all available radio stations, then publishing its broadcast schedule in its local newspaper. (Okay; I don't know if that was the *real* reason . . . it probably has to do with [player piano rolls](#) or something.)

Now, without getting into the political implications of this decision -- because, really, gaming and politics combine like Pringles and Kahlúa (and I speak from painful, painful experience) -- I note that there's potential in this idea for a good gaming possibility.

Perhaps I was just influenced by this week's article "Other Realistic Fantasy Worlds" into thinking about various magic possibilities. But I wondered: What if magic was licensed in a game universe? What if this wasn't because of some governmental desire to control mages and magic *per se*, but because of a limited resource . . . say, a finite "magic band" wherein magical effects take place? There could be various effects that take place on, say, the AM (Astral Magical) or FM (Fulgent Magical) spectrums of reality. The AM band allows for more subtle and long-ranging effects, while the FM spectrum allows for flashier and more explosive effects but are limited to a shorter range.

Anyway, what if these spectrums needed to be regulated because there simply wasn't enough magical potentiality to go around? If one person tried scrying while another tried telepathy on the same AM frequency, their efforts would interfere with each other and cause heartaches (literally). And if one person was attempting a fireball while another was trying to cast an illusion on the same FM band, perhaps neither spell would work . . . or perhaps both would work at a much amplified (and dangerous) scale.

This would allow for a modern (or near-modern) magical setting that gives magic a logical limited framework, and permits some interesting roleplaying conundrums. ("Well, you *could* use your lightning bolt spell, but you're not licensed for that magical frequency in that city. Now, if you want to pirate-cast it, you can . . . do you feel lucky?") Of course, if I were to use this idea in any games I ran, I'd probably change the FM/AM designations (unless it was a *very* silly game); otherwise, it'd probably be about a week before wizard players started wearing pointy hats that strongly resembled radio towers . . .

Anyway, the basic idea seems sound, and is something that I suspect my players would like. And it broadly illustrates that many good ideas can be found by taking real world events, philosophies, or conundrums, and filing off the serial numbers into a new genre or setting.

For example, consider a frontier science fiction colony setting. The heroes could be charged with helping lay ultra-dense datatrans cables across the land, connecting one city to another. These wires would allow instantaneous transport of organic and inorganic matter across them . . . assuming they can get the cities connected. And once cities are connected, it would be necessary to go and repair the cables, or thwart unscrupulous DOSperados who might splice off cables to intercept matter-transmissions. Well, suddenly the game can use any of the myriad of plots and ideas from a Wild West campaign; from a storytelling standpoint, these cables are obviously little more than railroad lines, but wrapped up in the right context it doesn't even need to seem incongruous. After all, history has been repeating itself for quite some time . . . (And this same idea can be used whole-cloth in a fantasy game; replace "datatrans cables" with

"woven silver cords," make the cable-laying take place in the ethereal plane, and you're set!)

Of course, taking real-world ideas and translating them to other genres has been done for years, especially in science fiction. The *Twilight Zone* brought it to the masses, and *Star Trek* made a near-cliché out of it. ("Oh, c'mon; do they need to draw a roadmap? One guy has the left side of his face painted black and the right side white, and the other guy has the right side of his face painted black! Are you and your crew flickin' ***BLIND?!?***") But there's nothing that says it can't be used for really any genre; ***Aberrant*** used many of the modern ideas of celebrity and fame and applied it to the supers genre, while ***Fading Suns*** took many themes of a historical religious Dark Ages world and transplanted them to a science fantasy universe.

So for those of you who may be desperate for a plot, or otherwise looking to shake up a campaign, consider going to the real world. There are all kinds of interesting conundrums and problems that can be tweaked and used in other games. From a sci-fi world wherein all entertainment media is being upgraded to higher quality but uncopyable crystals, to conspiracy theories in medieval fantasy campaigns ("Did man *really* enter the astral plane?"), to justice issues in transhuman worlds (what does a life sentence mean to someone who can live 800 years?), it's easy to plug new game ideas into a campaign.

And, perhaps best of all, the next campaign or adventure idea need not be any further away than your television, newspaper, radio, or can of baked beans.

--Steven Marsh

Other Realistic Fantasy Worlds

by Giles Schildt

The article ["Realistic Fantasy Worlds"](#) discussed how magic can alter social, political, and economic structures when its existence is widely known; but magic doesn't have to make the front page of the *New York Times* to change the world, or even *because* it changed the world. Worlds where magic is a powerful, but secret, force are some of the most interesting to adventure in.

To determine how clandestine use of magic affects a society it is necessary to ask a few questions, such as: Who is keeping magic secret? Why are they keeping it secret? What are they doing with their secret magic? And what relationship does magic have with the world's technology? Each answer shapes a small part of a campaign world, and collectively they determine if anything can be taken at face value.

Who Knows About Magic?

A world can have more than one answer to this question, but as more people learn about magic the odds of everyone finding out increase dramatically. (Remember the Mafia joke about how two people can keep a secret -- if one of them is dead.) A good rule of thumb is that the likelihood of a secret becoming public is proportional to the square of the number of people that know it.

Magic could be a state secret, one more guarded military or espionage technique. If its existence is known only to a few key (and honest) spymasters, the only significant effect magic will have is making that country's intelligence service more powerful (and most likely allowing that country to dominate international politics). Given the nature of bureaucracies, it is more likely that such abilities would be abused. Ambitious individuals could use magic to gain effective control of the government, or a government could slowly become more oppressive; increasing the use of its "secret weapon" during each crisis until the sorcerers are completely above the law. Of course, if a government that is already oppressive discovers magic it will use it to consolidate its control.

A whole corporation could never keep something like magic a secret. If magic was discovered in a corporate research lab the discoverers would either be (for all practical intents and purposes) a clandestine organization within the company, or the secret would eventually leak. A group of mages could form a company, but that is more accurately handled as a clandestine organization that controls a corporation. In either case effective control of the company may rest with the clandestine mages instead of the board of directors.

"A clandestine organization" is in many ways the default answer, because any group with secret knowledge of magic is effectively a secret society (whether they admit it or not). The GM has a lot of leeway creating secret societies, one secret society might use the power of magic only to satisfy their curiosity (having little or no effect on anyone else) while another might use magic to take over the world (or at least try). The nature of the clandestine organization can easily be built around the things they do with magic or the way they keep the secret, something handled in more detail below.

Like corporations, religious orders are too diverse to keep a powerful secret like magic; however, religious organizations make an excellent front for a magic-using secret society. The followers of religious orders are conditioned to accept the organizations teachings on faith, and if an uninitiated individual in the church happens to witnesses Something They Should Not Have Seen they are more likely to attribute it to divine intervention than to a sinister plot. Magic would also help church leaders control their followers.

An interesting situation for a roleplaying game is a few Random Individuals discovering an old grimoire. What will the PCs do with their newfound abilities? Will anyone else notice them, befriend them, or perhaps want them dead?

When more than one person is "in" on the secret, the relationship between the co-conspirators has a powerful influence

on how long the secret will stay a secret and what they can do with it. An efficient organization with magical powers could take over the world in short order, but most groups have minor disagreements, political dissidents, or even outright rebellious factions.

Openly adversarial groups bound by a common need for secrecy make a very interesting campaign world. *Highlander* and ***Vampire: The Masquerade*** are set in interesting worlds where antagonists are forced to cooperate to protect a secret more important than their individual differences.

Of course, more than one Random Individual might find an old trunk full of grimoires. Depending on their ambitions, it might take a long time for them to discover each other.

What Are "They" Doing With Magic?

What mages are trying to accomplish will have the most significant effects on society, even if they aren't very successful. A variety of goals are possible, but trying to make the football team win doesn't provide many adventure hooks.

Show Me the Money

Earning income is one of the most obvious uses for magic. If mages flaunt their wealth -- or even live without any visible means of support -- they may soon find themselves in trouble with the local equivalent of the IRS or SEC. Authorities may suspect illegal activities and start drug or organized crime investigations. A cover story and possibly some creative accounting will be called for, but it is hard to imagine an organization (or even many individuals) that wouldn't realize *some* economic benefit from clandestine sorcery.

A mage could also realize substantial personal benefits without converting his spell casting activities to cash. Creative spell casting can provide many subtle benefits that could help land the prettiest girl (or handsomest guy), exact revenge, improve schoolwork, or simply keep the wizard entertained. Relatively safe (from a legal and discovery standpoint) economic benefit could be obtained by using magic to moderately improve job performance.

The Same Thing We Do Every Night, Pinky

Trying to take over the world is another likely use. While it's possible for legitimate governments to use magic as an espionage, diplomatic, or military tool, it's more likely that mages will control the government. They might openly control the government and keep their magic a secret or be the secret masters holding the strings of the "legitimate" officials.

Using mind control magic against a government that isn't aware of magic's existence (and therefore has *no* defenses) is the ultimate "Get Out Of Jail Free" card. Any government official, and therefore any power the government can exercise, is available at spell casting range. Pardons, wars, tax refunds: All are just an incantation away.

Creative use of many other forms of magic can have similar results. A few things that could drastically alter public opinion and policy are fabricated evidence, illusionary events, leaked (scryed) secrets, and deniable assassinations. (No autopsy will reveal the use of Deathtouch, and what modern jury would convict someone because he said "Abracadabra!" just before the victim died?) The espionage applications of magic are just as effective *against* a government as they would be for it. In a sufficiently low-tech society even the ability to predict events like solar eclipses (and a little showmanship) can topple kingdoms.

If mages rule openly, their secret spell-casting abilities provide them with a number of unique advantages. Depending on the grimoire in use these could include near immunity to assassination, precise knowledge of their staff's loyalties, easy identification (and neutralization) of dissidents, and perhaps even the ability to make convenient "natural" disasters. (Reconstruction after a natural disaster allows governments to exert more control, perhaps even martial law. Controllable natural disasters could of course be used to eliminate dissidents in a way that even conspiracy theorists

wouldn't connect with the government.)

Welcome to a Messed-Up World

Secret conspiracies don't *have* to be malevolent. Some very interesting game worlds include a benevolent conspiracy. Altruistic mages might defend the planet from an invasion by demons or aliens, or Elvis impersonators. This is especially plausible in worlds where the public doesn't believe in magic. They probably don't believe in demons or aliens either, so no normal authority can act. The guardian wizards can't give interviews or they will be locked up in the insane asylum. They could be winning or losing the war, or might have held their own since ancient Greece. They may take advantage of new technologies, or bullets might pass through demons without hurting them (or the aliens have kinetic shields, etc.).

The world might need saving even if it's not being invaded. The benevolent conspiracy could just protect humanity from its worst excesses. Sorcerers might "make the world safe for democracy" without admitting their existence. They could fight terrorists, oppressive governments or ideologies, or economic exploitation. These guardians might create a virtual utopia or merely defend comparatively bright spots in an otherwise dark and oppressive (e.g. Cyberpunk) world.

There Can Be Only One

If keeping magic a secret is *important* (in 1600s Salem for example) then magic using factions might even fight wars without revealing their secrets. Mages might be the greediest robber barons since the recent CEO scandals, each trying to take over the world for himself . . . if only these other mages would get out of his way. Even one wizard might be powerful enough to topple mundane governments, but he's too busy keeping his rivals at bay to get control of even a local police department. (Or maybe he has control of the local police department and a rival controls the Mafia.)

PCs could be unwitting pawns in this game or get recruited by a scheming wizard . . . perhaps both in one campaign. The world they live in will be more violent than a world without these behind the scenes power struggles. Eventually the heroes will start to figure out what is going on, and may even learn magic and become power brokers themselves. Will they try to save the world, or just exploit it?

Look! I've Invented Flubber!

The world's most powerful mages might not have anything more pressing than figuring out how magic works on their mind. This doesn't get interesting until someone else notices that they are doing some unusual things (when they foolishly try to impress a girl, perhaps). Will the lucky observers allow them to conjure in peace or become opportunistic? Whose side will the players be on? Will anyone believe it is magic, or just a new (and poorly understood) technology?

Why Is Magic a Secret?

This may seem obvious, but whoever isn't telling the world about magic probably has some reason more compelling than laziness. These reasons can range from devious to altruistic; or maybe they just need more data before a scientific journal will publish their findings.

Anyone using magic for political or economic reasons will keep it a secret because it is more effective if the victims do not know what to defend against.

Mages can also remain concealed because they fear persecution. This would be particularly likely if open use of magic would seem threatening to any entrenched powers -- particularly those that claim supernatural association. Mages could be killed or imprisoned as witches, demons, or worse. In a more enlightened society, mages would be more likely to fear regulation than persecution. Although it is less deadly, regulation can be very inconvenient.

Mages might believe that society is not ready for magical knowledge. Benevolent wizards may even be working diligently to prepare society for the eventual acceptance of magic. If a society really isn't ready for magical knowledge spell casting may remain a secret because the public refuses to believe in it despite the evidence. All three of these options provide interesting roleplaying hooks, especially in a campaign that contains magic but doesn't focus on it. PCs might be enlisted to (unwittingly) aid the mages, or might stumble across the secret and spend months trying to convince someone to believe them. If the mages really are protecting society from something, their discovery provides PCs with a difficult choice.

It is also (barely) possible that a small group of mages would keep magic secret just for the personal gratification of knowing something nobody else knows. That does not make things very interesting, though.

How Powerful Is Magic?

This question goes much deeper than the amount of damage a spell can do in combat. Discreet spells, like missile deflection or telekinetic shields, can be more powerful than an extensive barrage of fireballs, and are far less likely to draw attention to themselves. The real question is what can a mage do that a mundane individual can't, and what kind of advantages does that give him?

Nearly all grimoires include spells that a dishonest person could use to operate above the law. Invisibility and Illusion spells allow a clever wizard to commit almost any crime -- and fix the blame on almost anyone else. Mind control spells can even make the fall guy commit the crime himself. Sleep spells or spells that subvert mechanical or technological security devices can be even more useful because even the victims won't suspect anything more sophisticated than mundane robbers and bad luck (or dereliction of duty by the guards). Controlling or predicting "gambling" outcomes is another low-risk, high-yield activity. As long as the use doesn't give away the existence of magic, those spells are keys to almost unlimited wealth and power.

Many unethical economic uses for magic would even be legal, simply because nobody worries about writing laws against things they think are impossible. Most forms of magically assisted corporate espionage fall into this category.

Even ethical mages can realize incredible gains from magic. Some artistic illusionists could make a movie like *Titanic* for only a few hundred dollars' worth of film. A team of magical doctors might anesthetize their patients just so they wouldn't realize they're *not* being operated on. Maybe they'd even scar some skin tissue after casting their healing spells. The ability to magically create valuable items is like owning a gold mine.

How Are "They" Keeping it Secret?

This is a more complex question than it first appears. There must be mundane explanations for any unusual effects magic produces. (Where are they getting all this money? Why does the CIA *always* know which Russian diplomat has the secret documents?) Any powerful effect will immediately reveal the existence of magic unless a plausible cover story is provided. Remember that a person does not have to see the spell being cast to notice its effects. Magical longevity requires forged public records. A magical traveler may need alternate identities. Using one credit card in New York, London, and Los Angeles in the same day will certainly raise fraud alerts at the issuing bank. Using several cards under the same name leaves a suspicious trail in the automated clearinghouse records. In a modern campaign a person using magic to make an "honest" living (for example, creating trinkets to sell) might get into serious trouble with the IRS (or SEC for corporations) if they don't have an accountant come up with a plausible set of books. (Books that may involve non-existent suppliers and look suspiciously like an embezzlement ring if the accountant wasn't very careful.)

Magicians (and clandestine magic using organizations) must decide whether to attempt to blend in with the mundane society around them or completely isolate themselves from society. An isolated group can cast magic freely, but the discovery of its very existence is a serious threat to the secret it hides. A group that attempts to blend into society will have to deal with more situations that might reveal its secret, but each one is likely to be less severe.

Casting spells without being noticed gets harder as communication technology improves. Improved technology allows more plausible cover stories (the "magic" of computers), but the same technology makes a cover story more necessary, and mistakes harder to cover up. Public education (whether it is accompanied by technological development or not) also makes magic harder to conceal. An uneducated person might believe he was mistaken unless he has a picture or a videotape -- even then it might be possible to convince him he simply doesn't understand what is going on.

In the 21st century, blending in usually means minimizing the use of magic, or at least minimizing any use that will interact with a significant number of other people. Active magic users could keep the secret only if they were *very* careful not to draw attention to themselves. A person who is in the public spotlight would have a hard time keeping even infrequent magic use a secret.

How any clandestine wizards deal with "innocent bystanders" (and nosy investigative journalists) who happen to stumble across their secret says a lot about the character of the wizards, and will occasionally change the world they live in too. Any society of mages that lasts longer than one generation has to get new members somehow; if magic stays a secret, they are controlling the secret's leakage, rather than preventing it.

Unconditional recruitment of anyone who discovers the secret will educate the entire world in fairly short order -- even if relatively few people discover the secret, the odds are good that any random person would go public if he found out. Threats are cheap and easy, but least likely to work against the antagonists it is most critical to silence (journalists, knights, spies, political leaders, etc.). Erasing memories and destroying evidence are the most humane methods of protecting the secret, but they can have interesting side effects. Erasures may delete other important information from a person's mind; the possibilities here are endless -- especially for a Very Important Person. Missing memories (if discovered) or evidence could strengthen a victim's resolve to get to the bottom of the mystery. Of course law enforcement agents would consider any removal of evidence vandalism, theft, or robbery; and obstruction of justice if there was already a criminal investigation in progress.

Discrediting a witness is also effective, but some people are hard to discredit; would-be mudslingers may succeed only in drawing attention to themselves. Permanent mind control magic and elimination (or exile to alternate dimensions accessible only with magic) are completely effective for that witness, but tend to draw attention from a number of sources.

Magic and Technology

Arthur C. Clarke's statement that "sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic" is almost a science fiction writers' axiom. Sufficiently clever magic can be indistinguishable from technology, too. Clever use of magic *and* technology can create many effects neither could produce alone: 100-mpg carburetors, cold-fusion engines, a perfect contraceptive pill, and so on.

In addition to providing a "cover story" for magic use, some technologies make it easier to detect clandestine magic users. Video cameras, wireless microphones, and spy satellites present obvious challenges. Less obvious, but no less important, are financial record keeping systems, pervasive identification technologies, cell phones with Global Positioning Systems (GPS), and distributed communication systems (like the Internet).

Magic could also secretly enhance a wide range of technologies. Very few people really understand how a computer works. An average person could never tell if electronics engineers or enchanters created his computer. Maybe all technology really *is* magic; the public just doesn't know.

The existence of clandestine organizations that use magic doesn't necessarily inhibit the existence of clandestine organizations that don't use magic. A technologically adept secret society might be protecting the world from the depredations of the Secret Sorcerers. Those sorcerers might believe they are protecting the world from an out-of-control branch of the CIA or rogue KG-used-to-B agents. Perhaps both of them are right, and neither can be trusted.

Putting it All Together

Calculating the total effect a clandestine-magic-using organization has on a society can be as simple as adding all the individual effects discussed above together. Sometimes the effects can reinforce each other. When the Secret Sorcerers try to take over a world that refuses to believe in magic, their efforts will be that much more effective. Sometimes these effects will work against each other. Magic users trying to take over the world might not even have a significant effect on mundane institutions if fierce internal conflicts, weak magic, small numbers, and a paranoid fear of detection hamper them.

Once the direct effects of magic (redistribution of wealth, increases in crime, government oppression, etc.) have been determined, any economics or psychology text can help fill in additional details (such as spending patterns, life expectancies, or rebellious populations). In most cases, if magic is rare enough to stay a secret, there won't be enough of it to alter low-level economic patterns.

Of course, the truly conspiratorial will recognize that nothing in this discussion *requires* magic. These effects could all be caused by the discrete use of psionics, super-powers, or (in tribute to Mr. Clarke) sufficiently advanced secret technology. For campaign ideas consider any works that deal with high-tech conspiracies or supernatural secrets. Some good places to start include:

- *The Manchurian Candidate* -- It's explained technologically (or psychologically, depending on your point of view) but one good mind control spell would make things so much easier (for the conspirators, that is).
- **GURPS Illuminati** -- An ideal starting place for all things conspiratorial.
- **GURPS Black Ops** -- Saving the world without taking the credit. The benevolent conspiracy, if you believe in such things. Replace the aliens with demons and the ray guns with magic missiles (or psychokinesis, or kryptonite, or . . .) and it's a background that could have existed since the Middle Ages, or earlier.
- *The X-files* -- The TV show relies on alien super-technology, but many of the ideas could be used in mystical settings.
- *Total Recall* -- Excellent ideas for mind controlling conspirators . . . whatever their means might be.
- *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* -- This technological conspiracy in a magical world contains many ideas that are also useful for a magical conspiracy in a technological world.

Martial Arts Styles for Mages

by Peter V. Dell'Orto

GURPS Martial Arts opened up a new world to character immersed in the fighting arts -- styles, maneuvers, new cinematic skills to give access to all of those kung-fu movie stunts and legends. But why should non-mages get all of the fun? **GURPS Martial Arts** gives a nod towards mages using martial arts styles with Dragon Man Kung Fu, but it was based on knacks instead of spells. Mixing Psi and Chi was given a sidebar, but magic gets short shrift.

Several races in Fantasy Folk -- elves, bales, etc. -- have inherent Magery. Would they not include specific spells into their martial arts styles? Even Neal Byles's excellent article ["Beyond Sylvan War Lore"](#) did not include specific spells for the styles. **GURPS Wizards** included the Martial Artist as a type of mage, but those were mages with a non-magical fighting style and spells to augment it. Why not mages who learned a style that presumes magical ability in its practitioners? This article contains some worked examples of magical martial arts, and some design guidelines to help you make your own hybrid martial/magical styles. This article focused on **GURPS Magic**-based campaigns. Ritual Magic, Rune Magic, and other systems of magic can also have styles developed for them. This article is also fairly generic. Hopefully, this article will inspire people using those systems to develop their own high- kicking, spell-tossing wizards that fit snugly into their own campaigns.

Primary Skills, Secondary Skills, Optional Skills, etc. are as defined in Chapter 4 of **GURPS Martial Arts**. Three new categories have been added. These are Primary Spells, Optional Spells, and Prerequisites.

Primary Spells are spells that are considered "core" spells for the style. These spells -- like Primary Skills -- must be within 2 points of each other. They do *not* need to be within 2 points of Primary Skills; since mages will very often have higher spell skills it would be very restrictive if they needed to raise physical Primary Skills before they could raise a much-utilized spell! Spells also need to be at higher levels -- while Karate-21 denotes a very skilled fighter, Deathtouch-21 is required for a melee-oriented mage to cast the spell without concentration. However, a magical martial stylist must have skill 18 (not 16) in any Primary Spells before learning any Cinematic Skill or Cinematic Maneuvers.

Optional Spells are spells typically learned by students of the style but which are not core spells for the style itself. Optional spells may require additional prerequisites to learn which are not factored into the cost of the style nor into the list of prerequisites. These spells can be learned at any time; they are simply included to highlight the spells stylists may find especially helpful.

Prerequisites are mostly self-explanatory. These are advantages, stats, and especially spells that are required for the Primary spells in the style. Cost of prerequisite spells are factored into the cost of the style; prerequisite advantages and stats are not. This is because the Magery prerequisite can be met as part of a racial package, through limited Magery, etc. Stat costs can also vary thanks to racial packages.

Cinematic Magical Arts

There is no *technical*, game-mechanical reason why Trained By a Master and its accompanying Cinematic Skills and Cinematic Maneuvers cannot co-exist with Magery. There may be valid game *world* reasons why a GM wants to keep Chi powers separate. These styles assume that you are willing to mix Chi and Mana; if not, simply ignore the Cinematic Skills and Cinematic Maneuvers for the style. Some of the more fantastic elements of Wuxia films and console video games are more easily modeled by magic, in any case.

Multiple Attacks can also exist side-by-side with mage-centered martial arts; however, normal rules for spell casting apply. In other words, even if you can strike four times a turn, you can still only cast one spell per turn. One highly cinematic and potentially campaign-changing is to allow attacks to be traded for seconds to cast spells faster, identical in all other respects to the Reduced Concentration for Cinematic Skills sidebar on MA61. You can still only cast one

spell (plus one Blocking spell) per turn.

For another way to mix Chi and Magic, see ["Chi Based Magic."](#) Chi-based mages would develop very different styles from those in this article. A mixed campaign with both mage-focused martial arts and Chi Mages using "standard" styles could feature the flexible Chi-style fighter-mages contrasted with the more narrowly focused but powerful Mana based fighter-mages. Characters would have to choose between enhancing their mundane skills using Chi, or adding magic to their mundane skills. Perhaps there is a secret war between the Chi Masters and the Mana Masters, each trying to prove the ultimate superiority of *their* magical style.

Stone Missile Fighting

13 points/15 points

This style is based on Stone Missile from the Earth College; similar styles based on missile spells from the Water (Ice Dagger, Ice Sphere), Fire (Fireball, Explosive Fireball), Air (Lightning), and Movement (Poltergeist, Winged Knife) colleges are also common. Stone Missile Fighting places great emphasis on keeping the enemy at range and dealing with missile counter fire using a shield. Because the Stone Missile wizard must keep a free hand to hurl his missiles, unarmed strikes and parries are taught to help fend off a foe.

Advanced students often learn Iron Arm to give them a surer defense with their open hand; Shield and Missile Shield provide further protection from enemy mages and archers seeking to neutralize the stylist.

Legends of the greatest Stone Throwers (as they are sometimes called) claim they can hurl their missiles through the walls of castles and that they can hit a moving target while blindfolded.

Stone Missile Fighting is an excellent style for characters with Single-College Magery.

Primary Skills: Brawling; Shield; Spell Throwing (Stone Missile) [2].

Secondary Skills: Short Staff.

Optional Skills: Broadsword, Throwing, Staff.

Maneuvers: Feint (Spell Throwing); Hit Location (Spell Throwing), Off-Hand Weapon Training (Spell Throwing).

Cinematic Skills: Blind Fighting, Breaking Blow.

Cinematic Maneuvers: None.

Primary Spells: Stone Missile [2].

Optional Spells: Iron Arm, Shield, Missile Shield.

Prerequisites: Magery *plus* Create Earth, Earth to Stone, Seek Earth, Shape Earth.

Death Fist

21 points/27 points

Deathtouch, especially at high skill levels, is a natural spell for a melee-focused wizard to learn. Death Fist was developed by a small sect of master Body Control wizards in their hidden mountain fortress. It has since spread, but retains a fearsome reputation for its destructive power.

Death Fist assumes the wizard will be fighting multiple opponents or fighting armed and armored opponents. Because of the danger in striking an armed opponent either from a successful parry or possible injury for striking hard armor, this style teaches grapple techniques and counterattacking techniques. Death Fist practitioners will usually take a "wait and see" posture against armed opponents, seeking to lure them into striking first and either countering with an Arm Lock and repeated Deathtouch spells or a Riposte. Death Fist fighters facing armored opponents will typically either grapple or use the Mage's Touch. A mage with this style *can* Riposte while pulling his blow to a mere Mage's Touch, inflicting damage or paralysis on an enemy. Stylists can also substitute Karate or Judo for DX to make a touch attack.

Hit Location is taught to enhance the body-part specific touches needed for Total Paralysis and Paralyze (or Wither) Limb. Jump Kick is used to strike foes at longer reach, and the Shuto is taught to help bypass the dangerous defenses of an armed opponent.

A very popular spell combination for Death Fist practitioners able to cast Total Paralysis or Deathtouch without concentration, is to parry with Iron Arm, and immediately Arm Lock the opponent. On the mage's turn, the attack spell is cast on the hapless opponent while inflicting a damaging arm lock. Death Fist mages facing multiple foes often use their grappled foe as a shield against any foes, or throw paralyzed foe to the ground. Against a single foe, stylists are taught to hold on and not let go.

Advanced students are taught the staff to provide another option against armored foes; jumping and acrobatic techniques are sometimes folded into this style as well. Deathtouch-21 and/or Total Paralysis-21 are very common skill levels amongst Death Fist practitioners.

Primary Skills: Karate, Judo.

Secondary Skills: Staff.

Optional Skills: Acrobatics, Jumping.

Maneuvers: Arm Lock, Hit Location (Karate), Jump Kick, Riposte (Karate), Shuto.

Cinematic Skills: Blinding Touch, Hand of Death, Pressure Points, Pressure Secrets.

Cinematic Maneuvers: Roll With Blow, Sticking.

Primary Spells: Deathtouch [2], Iron Arm, Total Paralysis.

Optional Spells: Dexterity, Great Haste, Shield, Wallwalker.

Prerequisites: DX 12+, Magery 2plus Itch, Pain, Paralyze Limb, Resist Pain, Spasm, Wither Limb, and 4 other Body Control spells (which can include the Optional Spell Dexterity).

Fire Swordsmanship

13 points/15 points

Fire Swordsmanship is practiced by mages specializing in Flame Jet. Derogatorily called "Johnny One-Spells" by more broadly skilled wizards, these stylists can be deadly foes. With a flaming, variable-length weapon (albeit a potentially tiring one, depending on the skill level of the stylist) Fire Swordsmen can be dangerous fighters. Because the flame jet is useless as a defensive weapon, shields (especially Large shields) are used extensively in this style. Some stylists eschew the shield, and use defense magic and a second Flame Jet to fight.

Full-extension lunges are taught with the Flame Jet, allowing for (counting a Step) a whopping five-yard attack range with a full-power Flame Jet. The Stop Hit maneuver is taught as well, with Fire Swordsmen sticking their Flame Jet into an opponent instead of attempting any defense with the (useless for parrying) Flame Jet. The tactic is especially effective against Pyrophobes and animals.

Fire Swordsmanship has relatively few legends about its practitioners. Those few legends fixate on the hypnotic nature of fire; Trained By A Master Fire Swordsmen can use Hypnotic Hands, but instead of intricate hand motions, complicated and rhythmic swirls and turns of their Flame Jet are used to fascinate an opponent. A Flame Jet must be maintained at all times in order to use this skill. One famous Fire Swordsman is said to have been able to strike everyone within 10 feet of him in a single second. Whirlwind Attack based on Magic Jet is also possible for a cinematic Fire Swordsman.

Primary Skills: Magic Jet [2], Shield.

Secondary Skills: Broadsword.

Optional Skills: Brawling, Hypnotism, Wrestling.

Maneuvers: Close Combat (Magic Jet), Feint (Magic Jet), Lunge (Magic Jet), Off-Hand Weapon Training (Magic Jet), Stop Hit (Magic Jet).

Cinematic Skills: Hypnotic Hands (with Flame Jet).

Cinematic Maneuvers: Whirlwind Attack.

Primary Spells: Flame Jet [2]. This spell is typically learned to skill-21+.

Optional Spells: Missile Shield.

Prerequisites: Magery plus Create Fire, Ignite Fire, Shape Fire.

Elves, bows, and magic have all gone together since before the rise of man. The ageless elves seek perfection in the bow, and have woven together a style that meshes their innate skill with the bow with their innate Magery. Because elves are in no hurry, Elven Archery takes a *long* time to learn -- typically decades of study. Elven archers are taught that nothing should ever suffer, and to kill with one shot is the goal of training in the longbow.

Despite the elven penchant for taking things slowly, they are not fools -- advanced students learn Fast-Draw (Arrow) to help get them out of tight jams in times of warfare. To counter the crude, poisoned arrows of their orcish foes, Elven Archers favor Reverse Missiles, thus removing those orcs skilled enough to cause any real harm neatly and effectively.

Elven master archers are famous for their extremely long-distance shots, even considering spells such as Hawk Vision. Those same masters are reputed to be able to paralyze a foe without harming him in any way using a blunted arrow.

The Autotrance advantage is very appropriate to the elven practitioners of this style, if the GM permits. Non-elven stylists are extremely rare; non-mages can learn to shoot a bow from the elves, but lacking Magery they will be unable to execute many of the long-range shots elves regard as part and parcel of the style. GMs are justified in charging a very stiff Unusual Background for a non-elf learning this style.

The skills outlined below are only the basic core of Elven Archery. Because of the long lifespan of elves, masters of this style will develop a bewildering array of tactics and spells to help achieve them. Because of this, *any* spells can be considered Optional Spells for this style. Examples include learning Illusion & Creation magic to deceive enemies or create warriors to help rain arrows down on them, Sound and Plant spells to hide from the enemy or distract him, spells such as Flaming Missile, Icy Missile, and Electric Missile to further harm foes, etc. All elven archers learn the fundamentals, but no two masters are truly alike in their spell selection.

Primary Skills: Bow [4].

Secondary Skills: Philosophy: Elven, Meditation, Stealth.

Optional Skills: Fast-Draw (Arrow), Knife, Physiology.

Maneuvers: Hit Location (Bow) [2].

Cinematic Skills: Breaking Blow, Pressure Points (Bow), Zen Archery.

Cinematic Maneuvers: none.

Primary Spells: Keen Eyes, Hawk Vision, Night Vision, Dark Vision.

Optional Spells: Invisibility, Reverse Missiles; also see above.

Prerequisites: Magery.

Designing Your Own

Why is the Style?

The most important consideration is coming up with a rationale for the style. Will it be built around a given tactic or set of tactics (such as Death Fist is), a given weapon (Elven Archery), or a given spell (Stone Missile Fighting, Flame Swordmanship)? You can also base them around an entire College (again, Death Fist) with a concentration on a few spells within that college that could potentially be the most useful.

An important consideration is cost. Sure, a style based on Blinking fighters using Disintegrate and Sleep cast instantaneously might be exceptionally effective, but would have a long chain of prerequisites, high Magery and stat requirements, and require a moderate number of skills and spells at high levels. Remember that the style should be learnable, and useful to, students of the style as well as masters.

All in all, the key to designing a magic-based style is a good theme. There are no historical examples of magic-based martial arts, which leaves a GM free reign to make up almost anything. Great fun can be had combing through **GURPS**

Magic and ***GURPS Grimoire***, looking for "the" spell that would form the basis of a great style.

Campaign Impact

This article assumes that the existence of fighter-mages is common knowledge and in fact that mages capable of holding their own in combat are an accepted part of the game world. If this is the case, adding style retroactively is much the same as adding ***GURPS Martial Arts*** styles retroactively. The GM must decide if this would cause too much of an impact on the game. Important considerations are the effect on pre-existing characters (perhaps a PC would have taken Hit Location for his Spell Throwing skill, but lacking a style previously he was unable to) and the effects of additional applications for maneuvers not previously allowed. Magic-inclusive styles are balanced with normal martial styles; they simply codify the types of tactics a fighting wizard would use even without the title "style" being applied.

Another way to add these retroactively is to make them a *secret*. This is especially effective if combat mages are somewhat uncommon and in a game world chock full of secret societies. It is also an ideal way to introduce these hybrid styles into an ongoing game featuring Cinematic martial arts. The next Secret Master the PCs meet could mix Fireballs and Deathtouches in with his Invisibility Art and Power Blows.

If martial arts styles for mages are being added to a campaign at the start, it would be a good idea for a GM to sketch out at least a few common styles. In game worlds like Yrth, where you have a military empire with strong magical leanings (Megalos), it would be likely that there is a "basic training" style that all of their combat mages are taught. By extension, you might get dueling styles used by mages in Araterre or Sahud to settle their grievances, police-mage styles used in Tredroy to safely subdue suspects, secret and bizarre styles practiced by crazed islanders on the Ring Islands waiting for foolish adventurers to practice their spells on . . .

A League of Your Own

Designing Supers Teams

by Brian Rogers

It's time to start your new supers campaign, and it's time for you to build a team of costumed heroes. Here are some ideas on how to do that drawn directly from the source material, for you genre fiends who want your games to look exactly like the comics.

While it's a cliché to divide things into two types, in this case it's true: there are two types of supers teams. There are teams for which the heroes appeared first (and often only) in the team book, such as the *X-Men*. Then there are teams where the heroes also appear (or used to appear) in their own books, like the *Justice League*. While this distinction may seem like a small thing, it makes a big difference, and if you're aiming for the feel of one or the other you'd do well to keep it in mind at the outset.

Wanna Party?

Heroes that originated in teams have specific powers. Despite the prevailing advice that supers characters should have balanced methods of offense, defense, miscellany, and movement, most team characters start with only one or two of these aspects. They're focused rather than being broadly powerful. Some are strong, close combat fighters, others use distance attacks or manipulate the environment, or are sneaky, or versatile support characters. Since no one is skilled at everything, they must rely on each other's strengths to accomplish their goals.

All of this sound familiar? It should -- they're an adventuring party! Just as a good fantasy party relies on a good mix of fighting men, sneaky types, and magic wielders, a supers party relies on a good balance of offensive, defensive, movement, and miscellaneous powers spread through the team.

If you want to design such a party of heroes, you'll have to abandon the idea that each starting character is "balanced" between offense/defense/movement/miscellaneous aspects. In fact, many party heroes start with just one of these aspects. Yes, this does make the character more focused at the outset, but a starting focus doesn't prevent him from growing later. Heroes who start with a single movement power -- say, personal teleportation -- can develop capable offenses and defenses from that power over time, or those starting with a single offensive power -- perhaps a force beam -- can stay vital without ever branching into the other aspects. The key is remembering that an experienced character still provides the party with his initial aspect over any other, just as a 12th-level fighter in a *Dungeons & Dragons* game still brings the same percentage of close combat muscle that he did at 1st level. Remember, the key to a party of super-heroes is that no one can do everything.

Instead of designing a character who can do a little of everything, pick one or two powers and decide which aspects those powers bring to the team. Put aside any preconceptions about what the power is supposed to do (such as "flame powers = energy projector = flight, force field, energy blast") and select which aspects you want it to provide. Most power concepts are flexible enough to work for any aspect if you tweak it a little. If you want to play someone with fire powers, but want to provide defense for the group, perhaps your only power is a flaming aura hot enough to vaporize lead? The character is well-protected against physical and temperature attacks with the potential for a potent offense if he can get close enough. A hero with Invisibility might start with just the ability to warp light around a target's head to induce blindness, making what is traditionally a defensive power an offensive one.

Ideally, power/aspect selection will occur during a group character creation session, preventing overlaps that might sideline one character in favor of another. In a party of supers, each character should bring something special to the team. While "shrinking inventor" is a great concept, having a teammate who can shape-shift to any animal (including an ant or amoeba) and another who is a genius technician makes your powers nearly irrelevant -- there are only so

many times the bomb is so small only a microscopic man could disarm it. Working around balance issues in play is a roleplaying challenge, but starting together reduces the chance of problems.

One last note about party-teams: expect everything to be cheaper and faster once you abandon balanced offense and defense. The same character concept can be built more cheaply when you don't need another 20 points in an attack to penetrate modest defenses. Combat, a big part of the supers genre, speeds by with lower defenses. Fights in party-team comics are generally two-to-three hit affairs rather than the nickel and dime conflicts of aspect-balanced heroes. Mirroring this keeps you closer to your source material and gives you more time for roleplaying or investigation (or more fights, if you prefer). Be warned that attacks and defenses should be scaled so that heroes won't be killed in one shot, but one-shot-KOs are pretty common in the comics.

Just a Little League

The other type of team is one where the heroes worked solo first. In comics, solo heroes stick to the "balanced aspect" concept. They have to -- they're on their own and must be able to handle various challenges. With a combination of potent aspects, solo heroes are stronger than party-based heroes. Many supers players like knowing their hero is able to do something in every situation, making solo heroes the RPG standard (after all, superheroes are partially about adolescent wish fulfillment). If each such hero is powerful, then a league of them . . . well, such a group can probably claim to be Earth's Mightiest Heroes. Even a small league can handle big problems.

Of course, leagues also *cause* big problems. League style teams tend toward a lot of ability overlap. Dee's hero, the Blur, has super-speed? Great! Of course, her teammates Omniman and Amazonia also have super-speed, and come to think of it, Jovian and Red Flame can fly pretty darn fast . . . But the Blur is also a forensic chemist and police officer? Cool! But Vigilance is the world's greatest detective, and isn't Red Flame a member of an inter-stellar police corps? But, well, Blur's faster than everyone else. Dee can take comfort in that. If everyone is balanced in every aspect, players can count on sharing powers with at least one teammate, even if it's just flight or super-strength. If one PC can do everything, expect his teammates to be the same way. This makes it harder to distinguish one character from another by their powers. And while this hyper-competence can be a boon for GMs -- who can run a plot knowing that even if half the players don't show up the remainder have the necessary abilities to meet the challenge -- it also makes truly challenging situations harder to come by.

Group character creation is as important for leagues as parties. The main rule hasn't changed: each character must provide something special. In a party, this is done by giving each character something unique. In a league, it's done giving each PC an unmatched strength. Even if half the league has super-speed, the Blur should blow them away. While Amazonia isn't as strong as her other super-strong allies, she can speak with animals and enter the spirit realm -- powers none of her teammates possess. Overlap won't matter if each PC has a power no one shares or no one can match.

Notes on leagues: things will be pricier and take longer. Balanced characters cost more to build since they're meant to be more capable. With strong offenses and defenses, they'll last longer in fights. This could turn fights into hours-long slugfests with slow cumulative effects, or hinge on somehow trumping the villain with a masterstroke. Leagues in comics tend towards the latter, with one or two heroes engaging in the slugfest while the others set up the coup de grace. Second, since such characters in comics originated in their own books, game approximations of league heroes should be carrying more baggage. Expect each one to have a unique origin story, a rogues gallery and personal contacts. This can be a hassle, but it also gives more room to play: expect a league to have a lot of personal enemies who will team up or go to war with each other, leaving the heroes caught in the middle.

Column A+ Column B

Some comics have teams composed of both solo heroes and team-only heroes -- the Avengers are a good example of this, with powerful headline members (Iron Man, Thor) appearing in their own books and other, focused heroes (Scarlet Witch, Hawkeye) who work just with the team. This is a good solution if you want to have heroes of differing power levels on the same team. Such power imbalances are common in comics, but anathema to some game systems.

There's little advice for this, other than keeping your eye on the main rule: everyone must have one standout ability to bring to the team. If you have that, and the heroes form an interesting [gestalt personality](#), relative power level doesn't matter.

Of course, you have to have players who won't play characters to their ultimate potential to the detriment of the game. Yes, the Blur's super-speed will get her into the enemy base unnoticed, but if her teammate Dancer focuses in invisibility and stealth she should let him take point. Of course, given the stakes that a league of heroes faces, such gracious behavior is just common sense; if the heroes mess up, things get really bad. Heroes who could *possibly* do something will learn quickly to cede the initiative to teammates who can *probably* do it if failure means a massive loss of life.

League as Troupes

If you do decide to construct a league of heroes, one common, unrecognized loss in RPGs comes from ignoring such heroes' defining characteristics: each has his own comic. There is a whole set of adventures outside the team that we, the players, never see, since the story's focus is unlikely to move to River City just to watch the Blur at work. To recapture this multiple comic feel, try borrowing a page from *Ars Magica* and construct your league for troupe style play.

To design a troupe, each player makes up a league hero. In addition to archetype and power concept, define the feel of his home city and solo adventures. Then everyone makes up a less powerful character to connect with every other league hero. These are sidekicks, contacts or friendly adversaries that form the supporting cast for a hero's solo title, even if they seldom appear in the league's comic. Such supporting cast members should be significantly weaker than the solo hero, and should fit the solo hero's idiom.

For example, let's take a group of 5 gamers: Asha, Bob, Chip, Dee and Eugene.

Asha is playing Amazonia, the spiritual warrior. She normally operates from Palette, a desert city known for its arts scene but steeped in ancient mysteries. Asha's looking for her character to be a butt-kicker in a magical environment. With this in mind, Bob makes Deacon Frost, Christian bookstore owner, low-end magician and possible romantic interest; Chip builds Tunnel Rat, a mostly reformed were-rat who shares Amazonia's enemies and hunting ground if not her raw power; Dee decides to play Plucky Orphan Sara, the quintessential curious teen detective weirdness magnet; Eugene settles on Coyote, a shamanistic trickster and Palette's other public hero.

Bob is Omniman, the innocent über-hero. Operating from Spire City, home of vast skyscrapers, with a love of the grand and new. Bob wants Omniman to be the childlike heart of this metropolis, with whimsy and big threats going hand in hand. Asha decides to make Capt. Lisa Quincy, head of Spire City's SWAT team and fully grounded in reality. Chip questions Bob on Omniman's origin, learning that he was irradiated by a meteorite before his family moved from the farm to Spire City. That gets a riff going, where Chip makes Omnipup, Omniman's irradiated dog with a fraction of his powers, and Dee makes Omnilass, Omniman's precocious eight-year-old sister, also with the same power set. Eugene toys with the idea of playing Omnihorse, but settles on Dr. Bertram Bueaford Blast, absent minded scientist with a flare for irreproducible accidents.

Chip is Vigilance, the aggressive detective. His home, Bridgeport, is steeped in crime and corruption, and Vigilance is the last bastion of law within a community whose police are rotten to the core. Knowing that Chip is pushing the dark detective motif to its limits, Asha goes for Holly Heart, madam with tantric super-strength and no love for the current regime; Bob builds ORWELL, the AI that helps Vigilance track events in Bridgeport; Dee makes Shadow, Vigilance's kid sidekick, a weaker version of his mentor with a tragic past but hope for the future; finally, Eugene makes Detective Mark Janus, who plays the 'one good cop' in Bridgeport, but may have just hitched his wagon to Vigilance's star to get a shot at taking over.

And so on.

Notice that each supporting cast acts as a complement to the hero. Each city and cast emphasize core concepts:

Amazonia's share her mystical bent. Players can build what would normally be NPCs -- like straight men (Captain Quincy) or romantic contacts (Deacon Frost) -- to play with genre tropes. They can focus on favorite clichés by bringing a version of it into each city (just as Dee made everybody a kid sidekick). The unique power rule gets waived for supporting cast (Omnilass doesn't have any powers her brother isn't better at), but such supporting cast members stand out on personality in their limited appearances (Omniman seldom goes "Wheeeeeeee!" or plays dolls with the giant robots). Character concepts too silly (Omnipup) or too limiting (ORWELL) for long-term PCs make strong supporting cast members. Finally, the supporting cast makes the hero look heroic and important, demonstrating why he rates membership in the league.

Troupes have other advantages. Group creation of supporting casts spreads the creative burden. Different cities make the world feel lived in, and give places to tell smaller stories than those normally facing the league. The cities, with their personal connection to the league heroes, make excellent places for alien armadas or cosmic entities to threaten.

In Conclusion

The divisions between solo heroes banding together, teams that begin together, and the mix of the two are fairly consistent in the comics. The team's origins showcase how heroes develop and work together, and provide a better framework for those people who want their game to feel like the adventures of their favorite heroes. Supers games are incredibly flexible, so they should be able to accommodate the unwritten rules of their source material -- even ones driven solely by the marketplace.

Frederick Townsend Ward

A Historical Character for *GURPS*

by James L. Cambias

Lived 1831-1862. A wiry, dark-haired American man 5'7" tall, with black shoulder-length hair and a black mustache and imperial. Descriptions give his eye color as either black, deep hazel, or dark blue.

History

F.T. Ward was born November 29, 1831 in Salem, Massachusetts. His father was a sea captain and a stern disciplinarian both on ship and at home. Young Fred went to sea as second mate on a merchant ship in 1847, but already he was becoming interested in soldiering. He spent a term in 1848 at a military school before going back to sea. After voyages to China and Latin America (where he met the exiled Italian revolutionary Giuseppe Garibaldi), Ward became a mercenary soldier. He served under William Walker on an abortive invasion of Mexico in 1852, and fought in the Crimean War in the French army.

In late 1859 Ward arrived in Shanghai just as the city was threatened by the advancing armies of the Taiping rebels. The Taiping movement needed a new base of supply and new sources of loot, and Shanghai offered both in abundance. The Manchu government could not spare troops to protect the city, and the European powers were reluctant to be drawn into a Chinese internal conflict.

The Chinese and foreign merchants of Shanghai weren't about to let themselves be plundered by a rebel army of religious fanatics. The energetic young American Fred Ward offered a solution: he would organize a mercenary force under his own command (but at least theoretically loyal to the Manchu rulers of China) and stop the Taiping forces. The mercenary army wasn't big enough to mount a major offensive against the Taiping forces, but it didn't need to be. By defending Shanghai, it served as the anvil, while a much larger Chinese army moving downriver from Hunan acted as the hammer to crush the Taipings.

During 1860-1862, Ward's mercenary force, known variously as the "Foreign Arms Corps," the "Chinese Foreign Legion," or simply the "Ward Corps," scored a remarkable series of victories against the Taipings. After a bad experience with using European mercenaries, Ward kept his unit all-Chinese, trained and equipped Western style, with American and French officers and British NCOs. The fact that many of his British noncoms were deserters did not endear Ward to the British authorities in Shanghai. By 1862, the force was given the title of "Ever-Victorious Army," and it very nearly lived up to the name.

Ward's battlefield success won him wealth and acclaim. He collected a bounty from his backers for each town captured from the Taipings. The Manchu government honored him by making him a Mandarin and giving him a

A Time Traveler?

Of course, maybe Ward wasn't ahead of his time so much as out of his time. Certainly he had many features which suggest a visitor from the future -- his unusual lack of racial prejudice, his keen grasp of cutting-edge military tactics, and his attention to "winning hearts and minds" as well as battles. The Taiping Rebellion and the failure of the Manchu rulers to adapt to Western encroachments set the stage for the Boxer Rebellion, the Japanese invasion, and the rise of the Communists. Perhaps Ward was a time traveler hoping to change history by making China more stable and progressive. Or maybe Ward was from an alternate future, working to prevent China from becoming a world power too soon by keeping the corrupt and ineffective Manchus in power for another generation -- in which case his death may have been faked once he accomplished his mission.

Illuminated Ward

China in the 1860s was a hotbed of foreign and domestic conspiracies anyway, so it's not too hard to make Ward an agent of one or more Secret Masters. His constant world travel could easily be the movements of a crack field

commission in the Imperial army. Remarkably, in 1861 Ward proposed marriage to Chang-mei, the daughter of his patron Yang Fang. They were married in proper Chinese fashion.

Sadly, the marriage was doomed to be short. Ward was killed on September 21, 1862, during an assault on the town of Tz'u-ch-i. He was almost 31 years old at the time of his death.

Ward's effect on history is potentially large. Without the Ever-Victorious Army, Shanghai's only defense would have been the French and English regular troops, and the campaign would have quickly turned into a scramble for more colonial influence. This could have hastened the collapse of the Manchu dynasty -- ending the Chinese Empire 50 years early and plunging the whole country into chaos.

Alternately, the Taiping conquest of Shanghai might have given the rebellion a much-needed second wind. A more successful Taiping movement might either unify China and kick out the foreign influences a century before Communism, or else provoke a united response from the colonial powers, bringing about a complete partition of the country under foreign rule. The success of Ward's army helped preserve China's rickety Manchu regime for another half century.

Encountering Ward

Player characters in 1860s China can encounter Ward in a number of ways. The most obvious is professional; characters with military experience can join the Ever-Victorious Army as officers or NCOs, especially if they have valuable skills (engineering, artillery, medical, intelligence, etc.)

The swirl of intrigue in Shanghai could also put the PCs and Ward on opposite sides. There are many powerful factions who would like to be rid of him -- the Imperial Court, the British, and of course the Taipings. Shady characters could get hired to kidnap or assassinate Ward. Not that getting past China's best-trained military force will be easy.

Ward makes a great patron or ally for adventurers. Maybe he needs to organize a special-forces unit for the Ever-Victorious Army, and hires the PCs to form the core of his elite force. Characters who stumble into occult mysteries in China can certainly use the help of a tactical genius and a heavily-armed military force.

Finally, Ward makes a pretty good villain for a party of Chinese martial artists. Making him evil requires little more than a shift in emphasis. After all, he really was making a fortune out of China's most bloody civil war. Downplay his concern for the Chinese people and make his marriage to Chang-mei either a simple matter of political scheming, or else a temporary liason which Ward intends to abandon as soon as he can build up a fortune and return to America. For a completely over-the-top bad guy, make Ward a megalomaniac planning to take over China as the first step to conquering the world! Can a band of martial-arts masters beat the "Imitation Foreign Devils" of Ward's army and preserve China for the Mandate of Heaven?

Other GURPS Settings

operative.

Ward's background in Salem points to a possible connection with the Anglo-American "Insiders," Masons and their Bavarian Illuminati masters, or Gnomes of Zurich-style business interests -- any one of which would profit by keeping China unstable and ripe for plundering. On the other side, given Ward's opposition to both European colonialists and the corrupt Manchu rulers, he might be trying to liberate China on behalf of the benevolent masters of Shangri-La or the anarchist precursors of the Discordian Society.

Going into battle against the mystical Taiping rebels might serve the interests of a magical conspiracy group like the Cabal or the Adepts of Hermes. It might also serve the interests of the cult of Cthulhu: Salem is not far from Lovecraft's Innsmouth.

Finally, there's the matter of Ward's appearance. Small, unusually strong, almost emotionless, and with eyes of a color no one can describe -- is Ward an alien in disguise? Only the Secret UFO Masters know for sure.

The Ever-Victorious Army

Ward's force at its peak numbers 4,000 men, making it more of a brigade than a corps. The troops are all Chinese or Filipino, armed with Colt revolvers and Sharps rifles and trained in European-style drill and tactics. They wear green tunics and turbans. In game terms, they are Average TL5

GURPS Black Ops

The Taiping Rebellion has Grey plot written all over it. By the time the Company's Black Riders (see Ken Hite's "Shades of Black: Alternate Black Ops") learns the truth, it's too big to stop covertly. So instead they send in a top agent to fight fire with fire. Sure, Fred Ward's just one Black Op, but there's only one Taiping Rebellion, isn't there?

troops, which makes them a highly formidable unit when faced with the Green and Raw TL4 Taiping armies. The Ever-Victorious Army is supported by a large artillery battery equipped with a varied mix of field guns, howitzers, and cannon.

GURPS Castle Falkenstein

With hardly any changes other than letting him live into the 1870s, Frederick Townsend Ward would make an excellent member of the Second Compact. His tolerant nature and knowledge of the Far East nicely complement Sir Richard Burton's expertise on India and the Muslim world. For an interesting melodramatic twist, "Frederick Townsend Ward" might have been the nom de guerre of a well-known 1870s character -- Phileas Fogg, Auberon, Captain Nemo, or King Ludwig himself!

GURPS Traveller

Switch Ward's military skills for TL12 abilities like grav tank piloting, fusion gunner, or Battle Dress, and he could be a mercenary commander defending the Imperial starport on a planet torn by civil war. Or leave his skills as they are and make him a specialist in early-TL5 warfare operating on a low-tech world.

ST 13 [30], **DX** 12 [20], **IQ** 12 [20], **HT** 12 [20]. Move 6.

Advantages: Imperturbable [10], Military Rank 7 [30], Patron (Yang Fang, a Chinese banker) [10], Status 3 (free from Wealth and Military Rank) [0], Voice [5], Wealth (Wealthy) [20].

Disadvantages: Dependent (his wife Chang-mei) [-24], Reputation (headstrong foreign adventurer, among Chinese officials and Shanghai colonial leaders, -2 reaction, all the time) [-3], Sense of Duty (to his troops) [-5], Social Stigma (white devil barbarian) [-15].

Quirks: Broad-minded, Has no respect for authority, Leads from the front, Suspicious of British [-4].

Skills: Area Knowledge-13 (Yangtze delta region) [2], Area Knowledge-13 (World) [1], Black Powder Weapons-15 (Colt Dragoon revolver) [2], Boating-12 [2], Brawling-12 [1], Diplomacy-12 [4], First Aid-11 [1/2], Gunner-12 (Muzzle-loading cannon) [2], Leadership-14 [6], Merchant-12 [2], Navigation-12 [3 1/2], Riding-10 [1/2], Savoir-Faire-12 [1], Seamanship-14 [4], Strategy-14 (land) [8], Swimming-12 [1], Tactics-14 [8].

Languages: English (native), French-11 [1], Spanish-11 [1], Canton Chinese-9 [1/2]

Equipment: In battle, Ward typically carries nothing more formidable than a rattan cane as a mark of authority. If he did need a weapon, it would probably be a Colt revolver or Sharps rifle. He wears a plain blue military-style coat with no insignia. For his wedding, and at formal occasions among Chinese officials, Ward wears a mandarin's clothing including a peacock feather as badge of rank.

This is Ward shortly before his death. Before late 1861 he has no Dependent. His Wealth is Struggling in 1859, Average in 1860, and Comfortable in 1861. Ward's Military Rank starts out as 4 in 1860 when his mercenary force is established, increasing as the force grows in size. His social advantages and disadvantages reflect his position in Chinese society -- a barbarian outsider who has nevertheless achieved high position. Note that Ward does not have a Duty to China -- though technically under the orders of the provincial governor, in practice he makes his own strategy and ignores instructions.

Ward never did learn much Chinese. His skill level is the minimum possible, and he probably can't read the language at all. All his skills are TL5.

To make Ward even more cinematic than he was in real life, give him the Hard to Kill advantage (he was wounded in battle more than 15 times), Daredevil, or Toughness.

Point total: 165

A Plague of Diseases

for the *d20 System*

by Daniel Gent

With the advent of SARS, and all the precautions governments and medical personnel are putting into place to help prevent the spread of this flu-like virus, one can not help but wonder how would such a disease or virus plague your campaign world.

Both the *d20 System* and *d20 Modern* touch on the concept of diseases, how they spread, and the damage they can do. In this article we hope to introduce you to several new diseases you may or may not have heard of. The following describes the profile of a deadly disease.

Locales: Climate the location is commonly found in.

Incubation Period: Period of time in which the disease is in the body, the carrier is not infectious nor do they take damage from the disease. Incubation periods may actually vary depending on your constitution score.

Infectious Period: Period of time when the person can spread the disease by close contact or bodily secretions. This is always after the incubation period.

Transference: How the disease may end up infecting a group of people or your character.

Initial DC: Difficulty Class for the saving throw, the character must succeed the saving throw in order to avoid any effects of the disease.

Initial Damage: Damage taken after the Initial DC is failed.

Secondary DC: Difficulty Class for a repeated saving throw, the character must succeed in hopes of ever recovering from the deadly contagion. If the DC increases or decreases over time, it is indicated. This may be a daily check or a weekly check.

Secondary Damage: Damage taken after each failure of the Daily DC.

Symptoms: A list of those tell-tale signs that you have been infected.

Recuperation: The recuperation is how the body may heal all or some of the damage done by disease.

Chagas Disease

Locales: Warm climates

Incubation Period: Constitution less than 11, 7 to 14 days; Constitution equal to or greater than 11, 10 to 20 years

Infectious Period: After 7-14 days, regardless of Constitution score.

Transference: Initially passed from insect feces entering the body. Contact with infected blood.

Initial DC: 12

Initial Damage: The victim suffers 2 hit points of subdual damage from the swollen wound area.

Secondary DC: 10, increases by 2 points for every year of infliction; weekly until cured or the creature dies.

Secondary Damage: loss of 1 Con point, until cured or the victim dies.

Symptoms: Enlarged heart, cardiac problems, enlarged digestive tract, problems swallowing.

Recuperation: Once the disease is removed, the creature regains half of the constitution points lost, at the normal rate of recovery. The rest are permanently lost.

Dengue Fever

Locales: Tropical Climates

Incubation Period: 7 days

Infectious Period: Any point after 7 days

Transference: Bitten by an infected mosquito. Contact with infected blood.

Initial DC: 15

Initial Damage: After incubation the creature loses 2 points of Strength.

Secondary DC: 10; daily until cured or the creature dies.

Secondary Damage: After each failed save the creature loses 1 point of Constitution and Strength. One point of Intelligence is lost after 2 failed saves.

Symptoms: high fever, headache, nausea, vomiting, rash, weakness. External bleeding and internal bleeding is seen in some.

Recuperation: The creature regains 1 point of Strength and Constitution every week thereafter. The creature regains all Intelligence points lost at a normal rate of recovery, except has permanently lost 1 point of Intelligence.

Ebola

Locales: Tropical Climates

Incubation Period: 2 to 21 days

Infectious Period: Any point after 2 days.

Transference: Contact with infected blood.

Initial DC: 30

Initial Damage: loss of 1 Con, Str, and Cha

Secondary DC: 30; decreases daily by 1 point; a daily DC check is required to avoid the secondary damage

Secondary Damage: loss of 1 Con, Str, Wis, and Cha, plus 2d6 points of damage from bleeding wounds, until the Secondary DC is down to 10, or until the victim is dead; once the DC reaches 10 the disease is no longer active

Symptoms: Fever, headache, joint and muscle aches, weakness, diarrhea, vomiting, stomach pain. Internal and external bleeding is seen in some.

Recuperation: The body begins to recuperate normally after the disease has left the body. The initial damage is not recouped.

Leprosy

Locales: Warm and Tropical climates

Incubation Period: 7 to 14 days

Infectious Period: anytime after incubation

Transference: Close contact with infected person.

Initial DC: 20

Initial Damage: loss of 1 Str and 2 Cha points

Secondary DC: 14; daily until the creature is cured or dies.

Secondary Damage: loss of 1 Str and 1 Cha points; after 5 failed DC checks blindness or loss of member occurs

Symptoms: skin lesions, plaques, thickened skin, and nasal congestion; severe symptoms include blindness, loss of flesh and limbs (i.e., nose, ear, fingers, etc.)

Recuperation: Regain all lost abilities at a normal rate of recovery except initial damage. Loss limbs are not restored unless magical regeneration is performed.

Madcow Disease

Locales: Anywhere

Incubation Period: Constitution less than 11, 6 months to 5 years; Constitution equal to or greater than 11, 5 to 20 years

Infectious Period: None

Transference: Eating infected meat, often from a hooved animal (i.e. cow, deer, etc.)

Initial DC: 15

Initial Damage: 1 point loss of Wis

Secondary DC: 15; weekly check until the creature is cured or dies

Secondary Damage: loss of 1 point Wis, Int, Cha

Symptoms: Dementia

Recuperation: Regain all lost points, except for initial damage

Malaria

Locales: Tropical

Incubation Period: 7 to 9 days

Infectious Period: after incubation period

Transference: Bitten by infected mosquito; blood transference

Initial DC: 15

Initial Damage: 1 point loss of Con.

Secondary DC: 15; daily check until the creature is cured or dies

Secondary Damage: 1 point of Con, and Str; 4 points of subdual damage

Symptoms: vomiting, chills, headache, tiredness, nausea, seizures, confusion

Recuperation: Regain all lost ability points at a normal rate of recovery, except initial damage.

Spotted Fever

Locales: Temperate; Urban centres

Incubation Period: 5 to 7 days

Infectious Period: Non-infectious

Transference: Bitten by ticks

Initial DC: 15

Initial Damage: 1 point loss of Str

Secondary DC: 18/weekly; weekly decrease of 1 point until the creature dies or the DC reaches 10

Secondary Damage: 1 point of Str, Con and Cha

Symptoms: severe black rash, fever, headache

Recuperation: Regain all lost ability points at a normal rate of recovery, except 1 Charisma point.

Typhoid Fever

Locales: Developing urban centres

Incubation Period: 2 to 3 days

Infectious Period: after 3 days

Transference: contaminated drinking water and consuming food handled by an infected person

Initial DC: 20

Initial Damage: loss of 1 Con.

Secondary DC: 20/daily; decreases daily by 1 until the creature is dead or it reaches 10

Secondary Damage: loss of 1 Con and Str, 2 points subdual damage

Symptoms: Fever, chills, lose of appetite, spotted red skin rash, stomach pains

Recuperation: Regain all lost ability points at a normal rate of recovery

Disease Carriers

One way of introducing a new plague into any campaign world is through a disease carrier. Disease carriers are at times shunned by others they are lonely and seek to belong. They may be vengeful souls lashing out at the world the only way they know how, by infecting others with their burdens.

Some of your villains may be disease carriers and purposely attempt to infect others. These villains need not be powerful archetypes, but may be confused and angry people, commoners, people your characters come in contact with regularly, barmaids, teachers, equipment suppliers, retailers, fishmongers, etc.

One such famous disease carrier is Mary Mallon, better known as Typhoid Mary. Mary was born in 1870 in Ireland and later lived in New York City. She was notorious as she was a typhoid carrier and yet continued to work as a cook, by the time of her death she had infected 51 people, three of which died. Mary was shunned by many and it is believed that she was mentally unstable.

Typhoid Mary

Human Female 3rd level commoner; CR 1; Medium human; HD 3d4; 9 hp; Init +0; Speed 30ft.; AC 10; Attacks: by weapon -1 melee; Damage: by weapon -1; Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./ 5 ft.; Special Qualities: Typhoid fever disease carrier; Saves: Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +0; Abilities: Str 8, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 10

Skills: Craft (cooking) +6, Knowledge (cooking) +2, Listen +2, Profession (cook) +4, Search +2, Spot +2,

Typhoid Fever Carrier (Ex): Mary is a carrier of typhoid fever. She is immune to the disease and anyone who comes in contact with her prepared meals must make a Fort save (DC 20) or suffer 1 loss of Constitution ability point, a daily save (DC 20) is required, which decreases by one point daily until the save reaches 10 or the creature is dead. Each day the save fails the creature loses an point in Strength and Constitution and takes 2 points of subdual damage.

References

- The Center for Disease Control and Prevention -- <http://www.cdc.gov/>

Pyramid Review

Crimson Skies: Collectible Miniatures Game

Published by [WizKids](#)

Rules Pack: \$7.95

Aces Pack: \$15.95

Squadron Pack: \$15.95

As well as producing a trio of comics-based games using their Clix-based mechanics -- [Marvel HeroClix: Infinity Challenge](#), [DC HeroClix](#), and the forthcoming [Indy HeroClix](#) -- WizKids continues to delve into the magic box of old FASA developed intellectual properties. Having already advanced the **BattleTech** universe 50 years in [MechWarrior: Dark Age](#) and will be adding a customizable aspect to their forthcoming **Shadowrun: Duels** game, WizKids turn the clock back for their latest release, the **Crimson Skies: Collectible Miniatures Game**.

Based upon the [Crimson Skies](#) board game designed by Jordan Weisman and published in 1998, this is the game of dogfights and aerial dueling in the skies over the Shattered States, an alternate America of 1937. Weighed down by the effects of the Great Depression, the United States of America has splintered into some 20 rival and allied nations, such as the Confederation of Dixie, the pirate haven of Free Colorado, the political and economic powerhouse that is Empire State and her cultural rival, the Nation of Hollywood, the militant, stridently anti-bootlegging Lakota Territory, the fundamentalist Christian People's Collective, and (of course) the Republic of Texas. Torn by regionalist drives, both the intercontinental railways and the new highways were ripped up and disrupted, forcing both trade and travel into the air, ferried across the Shattered States by zeppelin. Of course, crime soon followed and aerial piracy became all too common, thus requiring the formation of state-sponsored aerial militias, privately funded security forces, and privateers operating under letters of marque! Always fascinated by the relatively new invention of the aeroplane, the media has made darlings of both pilots and their steeds, while the inventors and designers of 1937 continue building ever more exotic-looking machines in search of the perfect airborne thoroughbred. Of course, the media attention does nothing to cool the rivalries that form between pilots and militias, which in the hotheaded decade of the 1930s leads to some memorable dogfights.

Shot through with a pulp sensibility and peppered with a dash or two of Captain W. E. Johns' Squadron Leader James Bigglesworth, the **Crimson Skies: Collectible Miniatures Game** has the players take command of some of best air militias and most notorious aces to have them fly the unfriendly skies, go toe-to-toe and duke it to see who is top dog in the "Air Action Game." In addition, the **Crimson Skies: Collectible Miniatures Game** lets these aces face each other on the ground in a game of brawn, bullets, and brains in the "Aces Game."

The initial release for the **Crimson Skies** almost follows that of other click-base games in which a Starter Set is bought, followed by Booster Packs that add further figures. With **Crimson Skies**, the first purchase is the rules box, titled the "Blake Aviation Security Mission Briefing -- Rules for Air and Ground Engagement." This contains everything a player will need to play, except for both plane and figure models. The former come packaged in blister packs known as "Squadron Packs" containing four from a particular unit, which in the initial release are the rival militias the Broadway Bombers from Empire State and the Hollywood Knights of the Nation of Hollywood. Future Squadron Pack releases will include the piratical Fortune Hunters and the infamous Red Skull Legion. The figure models are similarly packaged, but are known as Aces Packs, with the first being "Aces Pack #1: East Meets West." This contains a figure each for Loyle "Show-Stopper" Crawford of the Broadway Bombers and Charlotte "Charlie" Steele of the Hollywood Knights, as well as their individual planes.

The rule box, which is designed to look like a leather satchel, contains the following:

- A 64-page double cover rulebook
- Two 30"-by-19.5" map sheets, together forming a large color map of an aerodrome on one side and blank on the other, all marked out in 1.5" squares
- A four-page full color Air Combat Quick Start Rules pamphlet
- An Aces Talents And Abilities Card for the Aces Game
- A Skills & Equipment Card for the Air Action Game
- A set of six six-sided dice
- Two envelopes, each containing a set of 12 Navigation Cards
- A large envelope containing 24 black-and-white Movement Markers for the Air Action Game and 48 Characters Tokens for Aces Game

The production values for all of this and the models are quite high. The modeling of the characters and the airplanes is nicely detailed, though the painting is perhaps a little splodgy in places, especially on the characters, which can make them look rather goggle-eyed. Another problem occurs with the gun barrels on the planes, some of which are bent. This is not helped by the difficulty of actually getting any of the planes out the packaging, which is a lot sturdier than in other Clix-based games and consequently holds the models in a lot more securely. A nice touch is that of the envelopes containing the Navigation Cards, the various tokens, and also the rule box itself, which are all fastened by string ties and help enhance the period feel of the game.

Both sides of the rulebook open with a full-color comic, one for the Aces Games and the other for the Air Action Game, the latter written by Michael Stackpole and both drawn by Ryan Benjamin. Combined with background culled from previous **Crimson Skies** games, they help the reader get a feel for the setting, both on the ground and in the air. Once past the comic though, the rest of the rulebook is done in black and white, which is a shame as much of the background material works much, much better in full color. This is particularly so with the photo-realistic depictions of the airplanes and much of their presence is lost by being in black and white. Fortunately the rules are very clearly written, with just seven pages detailing the Air Action Game and just less than that for the Aces Game.

Both decks of the Navigation Cards details eight different maneuvers -- Cruise (straight ahead), Glide (a gentle slip to the right or left), Turn, Tight Turn, Snap Roll, Side-Slip, Wingover and Half Loop (which brings the plane around to face in the opposite direction). Each maneuver has a Speed Rating, which is the minimum speed at which a plane must be traveling before it can be attempted. Some maneuvers can be performed at any speed -- a Tight Turn or Glide for example, while a Wingover requires a Speed of four or over, and a Snap Roll needs a minimum of three. Whenever an Ace's plane is in play, they can add an extra Navigation Card to the basic deck. For example, **Aces Pack #1** comes with Charlotte Steel's signature "Follow Me" move which enables her wingman to duplicate her maneuver exactly, while Loyle Crawford can perform a "Hammerhead Turn," which is a short, sharp turn to the left or right.

As with other Clix games, the statistics for each model are recorded on its base. For the aircraft they include the plane's name, its Collector's Number in the set, Squadron Symbol, Point Value (used to determine cost when creating a squadron up to an agreed Build Total), pilot's name, and seven combat values. Three of these do not change -- Silhouette (how difficult a target is to hit, the higher the better), plus the Front and Rear Gunnery Ranges -- while the other four do change. These are Maximum Speed plus the Front Gunnery, Rear Gunnery and Piloting Skills, all of which are read through the L-shaped window on the plane's base. Beside this window is a spindle much like the Heat Dial in **MechWarrior: Dark Age** on the various 'mech figures; here in **Crimson Skies** it is used to regulate a plane's speed and its effect upon gunnery skill. It is known as the Speed Dial.

The Air Action game begins with everyone creating a squadron and facing off against each other. In the initial release this consists of four planes per side, or five if the Aces are involved. The Broadway Bombers get two Grumman E-1C Avenger interceptors, and two Fairchild F6II attack aircraft, while the Hollywood Knights start with a pair of the under-armed but fast and nimble Hughes Aviation Bloodhawks and another of the multi-role, more heavily armed Ravenscroft Coyotes. The presence of Loyle Crawford adds another Avenger, while Charlotte Steele adds another Bloodhawk.

Each turn consists of players rolling for initiative to determine who will be the aggressor and get to act first. Speed is set for each plane, with pilots able to throttle up or down just a single click or turn of the Speed Dial. Speed

determines the maneuvers available for that aircraft, and while it is possible to fly faster than the current maximum speed allowed by redlining the engine, a piloting check is needed to prevent the plane from taking a click of damage. Likewise, a successful piloting check -- rolling equal to or greater than the pilot's skill on two dice -- can let them throttle up or down two clicks of the Speed Dial.

A Navigation Card is chosen and laid down beside each plane, to be revealed as the combatants move in order of their Speed, from fastest to slowest. The actual maneuver is plotted out using the Movement Markers as depicted on the Navigation Cards. Each Movement Marker is a piece of octagonal white card marked with a single black arrow. The plane then moves along the laid out cards, but only as far as their Speed Rating allows -- the black arrows of the Movement Markers shown on the Navigation Cards are marked with numbers. This indicates how far a plane can get into that maneuver at its current speed.

Once movement has been conducted (including resolving potential collisions), combat can occur. If a target is in range, measured out again by using the Movement Marks, then they can blast away! Some aircraft come with tail-mounted gun turrets, so they can shoot out of both their front and rear arcs. For each point of gunnery skill, a player rolls a single die, hoping to gain results equal to or greater than a target's silhouette, in which case a click of damage is inflicted. Once an aeroplane has been clicked down so that three bullet holes are visible in the L-shaped window, it is knocked out of the sky. The pilot still has the opportunity to bail out of their aircraft as it goes down.

The **Aces Game** centers on the character figures and the character Tokens, with the figures being like WizKids' other Clix-based figures in that they withstand no little punishment, while the Tokens can only take a single click of damage before being knocked out of the game. On the base of the characters -- such as Loyale Crawford and Charlotte Steele -- are marked their Point Value, Squadron Symbol, and Collector's Number, none of which change during the game, while those for their Speed, Attack, Defense, and Fate ratings do change as the characters take damage. Marked with the symbol of a four-leafed clover, Fate can be used to save a character's skin or improve their accuracy and damage, but either use comes at a cost -- a click's worth of damage. Like the other values Fate fluctuates as a character takes blows and bullets. Character Tokens do not possess Fate, but do have "Talents and Abilities" just as the characters do and are likewise keyed to their Speed, Attack, and Defense values. Once the players have recruited their team -- the character figures are more costly than the Tokens -- they are ready to go. The Aces Game plays fast and teams will find themselves going through the Tokens fairly quickly in comparison to the more durable figures.

The presence of the Aces also has an impact upon the Air Action Game. Once in their planes, they have as much Fate in the air as they do on the ground, and it works in exactly the same way as in the Aces Game -- in combat and also in avoiding collisions. If an Ace gets his aircraft close enough to an opponent, they can attempt a "Daring Feat," which can range from inflicting a click of damage through small arms fire through distracting an enemy pilot such that his next Navigation Card must be drawn at random, to the prestigious deed of stepping lively from wing to wing to force the bail out of the opposing pilot and thus commandeer their plane.

The **Air Action Game** can be played as a campaign, with pilots gaining experience for shooting down other planes, successfully bailing out, winning a game, and performing Daring Feats. The points go toward attaining ace status, though what effect this has on the game is never made absolutely clear (except that is, for increasing the cost of a plane or character during the purchase phase of both games). Someone will also need to note such changes down . . .

So what of the **Air Action Game** in play? It is easy to set up and play, and despite the lack of rules to regulate aircraft height (which would really only complicate the game), does capture the feel of the aerial dogfight. Maintaining and controlling a plane's Speed Rating through the Speed Dial is the key to the game as they make diving and sweeping passes, cannons and guns blazing, and rockets blasting. The effect of the Movement Markers is to make manoeuvring easy to plan and control, though it becomes more difficult as a plane takes damage.

One problem with the basic game is that with just eight planes in play, four from each squadron, the number of Movement Markers is perhaps a little tight. This gets more difficult when the other two planes from the **Aces Pack** are included in a game. This is only a relatively minor problem that can be rectified by the purchase of another Rules Pack.

The major problem with the **Crimson Skies: Collectible Miniatures Game** is the lack of support beyond the basic

game. Although scenarios and the like are promised from the publisher's website, there are currently none yet available and their omission from the **Rules Pack** is a disservice to the purchaser, who still has to pay for the comparatively more expensive miniatures. So at this stage, players can only set up the two squadrons or teams for the **Aces Games** and shoot each other down.

Another potential difficulty is the release of Squadron Packs that are very much tied into the **Crimson Skies** setting; with every pilot named, there is little room for the players to imprint their personalities and adventures upon the setting. In other words, the **Crimson Skies: Collectible Miniatures Game** leaves out one of the key attractions to FASA's versions of both **Crimson Skies** and **BattleTech** -- roleplaying. They did, however, retain it with **Mechwarrior: Dark Ages**. Perhaps WizKids will rectify this with some more generic miniatures and figures so that this can be addressed and also provide a wider range of opponents.

Just as it would have been nice to have had a book of scenarios in the Rules Pack for both the Aces and Air Action Games, it would have been pleasing if the rulebook had been done in full color throughout and on the same paper stock. It is also a shame that no map of a zeppelin is included for the **Aces Game**, or even a template for the **Air Action Game**.

These complaints aside, the **Crimson Skies: Collectible Miniatures Game** is a very nicely appointed, well-done and playable re-interpretation of FASA's original **Crimson Skies**. At this stage it does veer toward the beer 'n' pretzels type of game. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but hopefully WizKids will add some more generic miniatures that will help give their **Crimson Skies: Collectible Miniatures Game** the depth worthy of the setting.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Dante's Inferno

Published by [Twilight Creations, Inc.](#)

Game concept & Design by Kerry Breitenstein and Todd A. Breitenstein

Art by Dave Aikins

Layout, design by Todd A. Breitenstein and Kerry Breitenstein

\$29.99; boxed set; 81 colored board tiles; 21 demon figures, including Lucifer; 36 player figures in 6 colors; two six-sided dice; 28 counter markers; 6 full-color resource tracks; 8-page full-color rulebook; for 2-6 players

Twilight Creations, Inc. is going back to the well for their latest board game, *Dante's Inferno*. Not only does it use that epic work of literature as the loose basis for the action in the game, there are parts that feel a bit like Twilight's other games and mechanics that were heavily inspired by the popular *Settlers of Catan* lines.

The object of the game is to be the first player to reach the ninth circle of Hell and defeat Lucifer. The board is made out of 81 tiles, each forming the circles of the underworld (technically, they're squares here). The board is nine tiles on a side on the outside, with two levels of hell per tile. The next tier is seven squares on a side, and they taper down to the single tile in the center where Lucifer rules.

Everyone starts with three of his playing pieces on the first circle. The tiles come in four colors (not counting the black corner squares), and they all have two numbers printed on them. Once a player dispatches any demons hanging about, he rolls for resources with the two six-sided dice. Resources are the sinners you liberate from hell. If either number on your tile(s) comes up on the dice, you get one point of the color-coded resource. Red squares, for example, give you one point of the red resource Violence. Rolling doubles gives you an added resource of your choice, and if you roll a 2 or 12 you can place the "good" or "bad" counter. "Bad" stops a tile from producing resources, while the "good" counter makes that tile pay off double for anyone standing on it.

While everyone receives resources on the die rolls, only the active player may trade Violence, Gluttony, Lust, and Hypocrisy points with the other travelers or spend them on actions. Different resource combinations allow you to bring more of your travelers onto the board; give extra movement to your playing pieces or move them to a deeper level of Hell; force an opponent's piece to move away; alter the roll of a die; flip a tile (preventing anyone from moving through it or getting resources from it); or buy a new tile. When the game begins, circles one and two are already built (corner spaces, where units move to the next level, cost nothing). But as you proceed, you must "build" your way toward Lucifer. Others can use the tiles you lay, so make sure you've got resources for movement or you may build it only to have opponents waltz in past you.

Going deeper has definite benefits aside from getting you closer to the winning conditions. You can only have one playing piece per tile per circle, so if all the choice spots are taken on circle one, you can go to the second circle and stand on those prime resource spots. If you go to the next layer of tiles (i.e., the tier with circles 3 and 4), the resource numbers tend to be a little more toward the extremes on the 2d6 curve, but when the number is rolled it's worth two of that resource. You get three of each on level 5/6, and four on level 7/8. Of course, the demons are tougher to fight as well.

A demon comes out every time someone gets a 7 on the resource roll. If you start a turn with a demon on your space, you have to fight it by rolling two dice and getting a 6 or better. Success sends it back to the aby . . . er, the box. Failure means the demon sets you back one circle, costing that counter some advancement. The demons get tougher the farther you get; on 3/4 it takes a 7+, and by the ninth circle you need a 10 or more to beat Lucifer.

The game components meet the usual high standards of Twilight Creations. The board tiles are keen little glimpses of Hell, like thumbnail sketches slightly reminiscent of a Hieronymus Bosch painting. The resource tracks and their counters are lightweights -- not that they're flimsy items, just that a good sneeze or a brush of the arm can easily sweep the information aside (which is bad since you're keeping track of four constantly changing resource totals . . .). Other than that, no problem. There are five different demon sculptures, each lovingly crafted to look sick and ugly, and an imposing Lucifer for your centerpiece. The playing pieces are also bold and look ready to dish out some demon beatings.

Only the first two steps of the turn sequence -- combat and resource rolls -- are set. Everything else can be performed in whatever order helps your strategy (for example, you can trade before you enter combat, or wait until afterwards to get back any critical vices you're low on). This makes it harder to remember the possibilities, and it's hard to be sure you've done all you want on your turn . . . and it's not all that clear to your opponent that you're finished, either.

Game play is a little more involved than Twilight Creations' ***Zombies!!!*** games; this one isn't as exciting, but then it's supposed to be more of a strategy game than a demon slaughter. The mechanics are simple enough, but there are twists aplenty that put a crimp in your plans . . . if you can remember to use them. The added resources as you progress through the circles is a good way to accelerate the game, and being able to change dice rolls with the right resource mix ensures the endgame won't get dragged out by a series of lousy dice results when you're up against the Author of All Lies. Even the demons are balanced well enough that they're a hindrance to your schemes and not a ruinous death knell.

A game takes about an hour, even with a full complement of players, and it's a nice combination of strategy, trading, and resource management. There are enough tactical considerations to keep play fresh and challenging, and to motivate repeat play. Although it freely borrows elements from both ***Settlers of Catan*** and some of Twilight Creations' own previous products, ***Dante's Inferno*** still has an enjoyable feel and style all its own.

--Andy Vetromile

A Game of Give and Take

I was talking with a friend last week about the best piece of writing advice I ever received while in college. This was a piece of advice I've found so useful, it's almost worth the \$20K albatross of student loans with which I shall no doubt go to that Great Con In The Sky. And, really, it applies to gaming as well, for both GMs and players. And it's advice I like so much, I spent a bunch of time in the archives trying to discern that, indeed, I haven't discussed it before. (And who knows . . . I may have. After 170+ columns anything is possible.) And the advice is:

No matter how close the tank is to the door, never shoplift lobsters in your pants.

Er, no . . . that's another column.

Anyway, the "five-years-of-college-in-a-nutshell" advice this:

Whenever two characters are interacting, each one wants something from the other. It is from this conflict and the interplay of these desires that the scene gets its tension.

Now, the interesting thing to note here is noting that "each wants something." We understand this on some level:

The hero is facing off against an orc in battle:

The hero thinks, "I want to kill this guy, and keep this guy from killing me."

The orc thinks, "I want to kill this guy, and keep this guy from killing me."

The hero is up against a merchant:

The hero thinks, "I've got to buy provisions from this guy, sell some old loot, and keep from getting ripped off."

The merchant thinks, "I'd like to make as much money off this guy as I can, keep from buying junk I won't be able to sell, and hopefully shoe him away so I can get to lunch."

Okay; so far, so good.

But "wants something" is a wide concept, and it flavors the entire context and atmosphere of the meeting. Let's take the scenario where the intrepid hero meets a beautiful princess . . . standard stuff. Consider the following scenarios:

The hero wants enough money from the princess to release his sister from indentured servitude.

The princess wants to improve her position in court, and having heroes run pointless errands for her will help her do so.

The hero wants to woo the beautiful princess.

The princess is looking for someone to cure her father's rare illness.

The hero is looking to uncover evidence of a shapeshifting imposter, and wants proof of the princess' guilt or innocence.

The princess wants to be left alone after a long day of dealing with minor courtly problems.

Despite the clichéd premise of the scene, each iteration will play out *very* differently from the others. And it's not just because of the individual desires, but the interplay between the two. Take the above three premises and mix-n-match each character's desires with a different opposing one; even assuming the same characters and personality types, the "hero seeks shapeshifter/princess wants solitude" scene would play out differently from "hero seeks shapeshifter/princess seeks cure."

Remember that "wants something" doesn't necessarily mean a selfish or materialistic desire. When a mother and son interact, the mother may want the child to be safe while the child may want the mother's love. Of course, the child may want candy instead, or to be left alone, while the mother may want the child to behave strictly, or to learn enough to

graduate the second grade. And it is possible - although rare - for desires to line up; usually there will be *some* incongruity between those desires, and it's possible for tension to arise from that difference. (Thus two lovers may wish to be with the other, but if they both want backrubs then it might be problematic . . . until they figure out to swap.)

So what does this mean? Well, for GMs, it's pretty straightforward. In the gaming world it's entirely common for characters to exist simply to serve the needs of the GM's plot and the desires of the PCs . . . but that shortchanges a living world. Instead, consider what the motivations of any NPCs the heroes encounter are. What do they want from the PCs? (In fact, it's entirely realistic for an NPC to want different things from different characters; he may want to be left alone by one, catch the eye of another, and learn more about the arcane pinky ring of the third.) Then, once you have a firm idea of what the NPC wants, figure out how he will try to get it out of the adventurers. (Again, not all NPCs need to be conniving backstabbing treacherous fiends; if a shopkeeper has the desire to "be left alone," one might accomplish this by giving the heroes exactly what they want, while another is as steadfastly uncooperative as possible, and a third is shopkeeper is entirely jovial but honest in telling the heroes to come back tomorrow.)

This advice is also good for players, especially in games of heavy PC-to-PC interaction or angsty campaigns. For example, I shared this theory with our two-player *Fading Suns* gaming group, and we realized something. One PC was committed to keeping my character safe (she had a duty as a bodyguard), while my PC saw her in a similar light as he saw everyone (including himself) -- as pawns that can be expended as need be for the greater good. Once we were aware of this, we were able to more fully play up the dramatic tension of those scenes; where her first inclination was to lock my character up at the first sign of dangerous evil, my character was equally tempted to push *her* into that first sign of dangerous evil (or myself . . . or both of us . . .). This realization allowed for greater tension, and more fun roleplaying within the group itself.

So in any game - even those with long-running PC interactions (or perhaps *especially* those long-running games) - take a step back and ponder those relationships with other player characters and important NPCs. What does your character want from his meeting with the emperor? What does he hope to get from his continuing relationship with his aged mentor?

Not every character needs to have novel-length documentation of their motivating forces behind them, but recognizing that the interplay of characters can boil down to competing desires goes a long way toward making even the most common interesting, dramatic, and unique.

For instance, I suspect that you want to stop reading this column soon, whereas I want you to give me a "5" in the ratings. Now, I'm sure we can work something out . . .

--Steven Marsh

Designer's Notes: *GURPS WWII Dogfaces*

by Shawn A. Fisher

"They wish to hell they were someplace else, and they wish to hell they would get relief. They wish to hell the mud was dry and they wish to hell their coffee was hot. They want to go home. But they stay in their wet holes and fight, and then they climb out and crawl through minefields and fight some more."

--Sergeant Bill Mauldin, *Up Front*

Introduction

Bill Mauldin's words could apply to virtually any American soldier, be they Continental, Billy Yank or Johnnie Reb, Doughboy, Dogface, or Grunt. Mauldin understood the American soldier. As a cartoonist, writer, and actor (starring alongside Audie Murphy in *The Red Badge of Courage*), his observations of the lowly footsoldier of WWII have often been hailed as an exceptionally revealing look at war. Mauldin, along with fellow Pulitzer Prize-winner and GI journalist Ernie Pyle, depicted the GIs as they really were: tired men far from home doing a brutal job.

Those weary GIs that returned after the war didn't seek thanks. They viewed their job in the war, almost to a man, as a necessary evil. There were parades and grandstands, and more valuable rewards like the GI College Bill. But there were few monuments. They didn't *need* a national monument to recognize what they had done; a nation still standing was thanks enough.

In our time, director Steven Spielberg paid homage to Mauldin's gritty version of the war with *Saving Private Ryan*, awaking America's curiosity in WWII yet again. And true to its forebears, that movie presented a fictitious situation that said more than any simple truth could convey.

Dogfaces was intended to portray the war in much the same way, to capture the gritty, sweaty, and terrified lives of citizen-soldiers some 60 years ago. There was much debate over the title of the book between myself and Gene Seabolt. As the ***GURPS WWII*** line editor, Gene insisted on "Dogfaces" all along. I had other ideas, but Gene did not relent, and I'm thankful for it. No title could have better captured the tone of the book.

Dogfaces was many years in the making, both in research and life experience. As an Army dogface myself, I marched through jungles in faraway places, worried about having enough toilet paper in the latrine, and treasured perfumed letters from home at mail call. As a historian and certified gun nut I fired many small arms from the war, climbed on various WWII tanks, rode in a DUKW, explored a WWII-era battleship and sub, and even parachuted from an airplane. I traveled the Ardennes in winter while studying in Europe, and trod hallowed ground among eternally sleeping GIs in Italy and France. Steve and Gene may claim this was all "reality testing," (and I confess that my wife may have been given that excuse a time or two . . .) but I can't blame it on them. I've been in love with WWII most of my life.

During my research I discovered that for many contemporary Americans, WWII is not just a fleeting time gone by. It's tangible. My grandfather stormed the beaches at Normandy, and later manned a half-track. Another relative was a Merchant Marine in the Pacific, and yet another an Army cook in occupied Japan. Thousands of Americans can recite the deeds of their forefathers (and mothers too!) during the war. The Internet is crawling with sons and grandsons begging for information about this unit or that battle. This thirst for knowledge is flattering to the quiet men whom seldom discuss their role in the world's greatest conflict.

Despite my research and background, I needed help. And lots of it. I received invaluable assistance while writing ***Dogfaces***, from friends that scoured old book stores for me while they were on vacation, to WWII veterans tolerating my pesky questions. Brandon Cope was the head engineer, contributing vehicle color text and designs. Hans-Christian Vortisch offered his usual fare of crunchy and tasty weapons data. *Pyramid* playtesters, among others, provided help on both content and style that added immeasurably to the strength of the project. Unfortunately, I neglected to credit

two of those foxhole buddies, Garrett "Whitestreak" Roberts for his aircraft carrier research, and accomplished **GURPS** writer Brian Underhill for support and advice.

Of course, the ramrod of the operation was Gene Seabolt, whose direction, encouragement, and hard-edged advice often found him in role of the crusty old sergeant while I played opposite as the naïve recruit. I don't feel like I've earned my stripes quite yet, but if I ever do, it'll be in part because of his guidance. Thanks, Gene.

Now, in fine Design Notes tradition, I offer you some juicy outtakes from **GURPS WWII: Dogfaces**.

A Setting By Any Other Name . . .

Roleplaying in a modern war may seem impossibly deadly. The lethality of the environment intimidates even the most talented GMs. In this, simulationists and storytellers alike seem united: how can a player enjoy a game where their character can be obliterated seemingly at random? Admittedly, this is a question that must be addressed, but thankfully the answer is simple: Treat war like any other setting.

First, GMs must forget about haphazard PC death. Most Game Masters would never kill off a party of subterranean adventurers in a tunnel collapse or gas explosion, yet both of these are dangers faced by real miners every day. Likewise, a modern campaign would rarely feature a character slain by a drunken driver, even though such occurrences claim thousands of lives every year.

Minefields, snipers, and artillery attacks should be viewed in the same way. They are plot devices, set dressing, tools for the GM. Though a common source of casualties for real-life soldiers, they have no more prominent a place in WWII setting than a capricious lightning strike killing a knight at a joust. This approach dovetails nicely with another misunderstanding, casualty rates.

Casualty rates in all wars are, to be indelicate, greatly overblown. Of the nearly 16 million men that served in the U.S. military in WWII, less than 10% were casualties. With rare exceptions, throughout history the death rate in battle has held steady at roughly 10% of the fighting forces engaged. Those wounded are normally two to three times the figure of those killed. A GM wishing to run a campaign based on front line troops would do well to remember that many troops survived multiple campaigns untouched, and many of those wounded suffered multiple light wounds in the course of a campaign. In terms of deadliness, the front lines should be no different than Huruk the Barbarian's next dungeon crawl.

So, how do you exploit the setting? Frontline campaigns have the capacity for intense combat, sure, but also for character interaction and conflict. The stereotypical WWII squad, with a soldier representative of every corner of the USA, may be straight out of Hollywood . . . but it was a real possibility in an army made up of exuberant volunteers, leery draftees, and hardened professionals. Perhaps nothing could be more frightening than to be saddled with an ambitious officer bent on promotion, willing to unnecessarily risk the troops lives, or sweat, for his gain (see James Cagney in *Mister Roberts*, or Eddie Albert in *Attack*.)

And of course, a modern war epic is not restricted to front-line fighting (though the TV series *Combat!* was). The troops may choose to rob a bank, as in *Kelly's Heroes*, or rescue horses -- on Patton's orders -- as depicted in Disney's *The Miracle of the White Stallions*. GMs may steal a riff from John Ford's *3 Godfathers* and saddle the unsuspecting GIs with a baby. There are hundreds of movies, books, and comics to mine for ideas. With ruthless adherence to plot and story over random violence, virtually any story can be set on the front lines.

Character Design

Names

According to the Social Security Administration and the Census Bureau, only half of the names listed as the top 100 most popular names of the 1940s are on that same list today. Although names such as James, John, and William were

popular then, as now, players and GMs should consider using some of the more popular names from the period. Names listed below include those of heroes and heroines, and entertainers.

Male: Archie, Audie, Belton, Benny, Bennett, Bing, Bud, Buster, Carwood, Cary, Chester, Clifford, Dee, Doyle, Elbert, Ellery, Elmer, Eugene, Herbert, Ira, Lyle, Orville, Otis, Marion, Milton, Norval, Sid, Slade, Uriah, Virgil.

Female: Betty, Clara, Dora, Dorothy, Dulcie, Edith, Edna, Eleanor, Esther, Gladys, Laverne, Lorna, Lucille, Mavis, Mildred, Myrtle, Ruth, Sadie, Violet.

Among pals, few men would call each other by their proper name; nicknames were the rule among GIs. These could be descriptive -- Red, Beanpole, Stumpy, etc. -- or just shortened forms of their given names (Bert for Herbert, Art for Arthur, and so on).

Movie Star

55 points

Hollywood answered America's call to war because it was both popular and profitable . . . and because it had to. The Army took over hundreds of motion picture backlots and soundstages to make training films, and then drafted actors and directors ruthlessly. By the end of 1942 about one-third of the movie industry was at war. For those that weren't, the Office of War Information closely scrutinized their products.

Some stars joined on their own, such as Jimmy Stewart, who became a squadron commander with the 8th Air Force, flying 20 missions into Germany (his pre-war pilot's license was put to good use). He was promoted to general after the war.

John Wayne tried half-heartedly, but never served. Clark Gable enlisted at the age of 41, became an officer, and flew combat missions in Europe. Douglas Fairbanks was a Captain in the Navy, leading commando missions to confuse the enemy about the location of Allied landings. Henry Fonda won a Bronze Star while serving in the Pacific.

Those that didn't serve visited the front in USO shows. Humphrey Bogart, himself a sailor during WWI, visited Italy and North Africa. A seemingly endless string of actresses wound their way through all the theaters; Marlene Dietrich, Ingrid Bergman, and Rita Hayworth all visited troops overseas.

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 10 [0]; HT 10 [0].

zzAdvantages:xx Very Wealthy [30], Reputation +4 (Everyone, all the time) [20] and a total of 20 points chosen from Alcohol Tolerance [5]; Appearance [Varies]; Charisma [5/level]; Voice [10]; or National Advantages (see p. W68).

zzDisadvantages:xx A total of -30 points chosen from National Disadvantages (see p. W69) or Alcoholism [-10]; Compulsive Carousing [Varies]; Extravagance [-10]; Laziness [-10].

zzBasic Skills:xx Acting (M/A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Bard (M/A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Carousing (P/A - HT) HT+1 [4]-11; Performance (M/A) IQ+1 [4]-12.

zzSecondary Skills:xx Area Knowledge (any) (M/E) IQ-1 [1]-12; Sport (Golf, Polo, or Tennis) DX-1 [1]-9; Fast-Talk (M/A) IQ [2]-12.

zzOptional Skill:xx Spend 5 points on any of Motorcycle (P/E); Boating, Driving (Automobile), Powerboat, Riding (Horse), or Sport (any) (all P/A); Cooking or Savoir-Faire (all M/E); Gambling or Photography (all M/A); History or Literature (M/H).

zzCustomization Notes:xx This template represents the non-combatant but wildly popular movie star. If visiting the front, celebrities will likely wear a military uniform; during their acts the stars usually wore their trademark attire.

If the character is in the military, add Extremely Hazardous Duty [-20] and use the resulting points to buy the primary

skills appropriate for the template. While the character probably went through basic training, it's doubtful that the quality and frequency of training would be equal to that of other recruits. Generals, senators, and the press frequently intruded on the stars during their training. To represent a skilled star, buy the military template first, and then use the remaining points to purchase this template.

Businessman

80 points

Financiers and profiteers made a killing during the war, with most of the contracts going to less than 20 corporations. General Motors alone produced one-tenth of all American production, followed by Ford, DuPont, U.S. Steel, and General Electric. But the few contracts that did go to the little guys made those company owner's rich. One machine tool company with only 50 employees in 1939 had 1,500 in 1945, and increased its value from \$100,000 to \$5 million.

The businessmen worked hard to deliver the goods during the war, building more and larger facilities and opening second and third shifts. Sometimes it took more than elbow grease. Henry J. Kaiser (who had never built a ship before the war) applied mass production techniques to ship building. Henry Ford did the same with aircraft, which had been hand-built in years before. These advances required a leadership in constant motion to insure that raw materials, production, and transportation all ran smoothly. This took a monumental effort of cooperation. Competing companies, despite a few incidents of conflict, worked together to share time-saving ideas and improve efficiency.

This production increase was financed by the government's "cost plus" method of procurement. For both the companies and the government the "plus" was easy to deduce; it was plainly written on the contract. The problem was getting the "cost" right. Businessmen consistently underbid, then bumped the cost up until someone screamed. The Willow Run Facility, built by Ford outside of Detroit, was such an operation. Initial projections for the B-24 plant were just over \$10 million, but final cost was almost \$50 million. Ultimately it was successful, cranking out a B-24 every hour, but until 1944 it was "Will it Run?" to the critics.

In some cases the business community stalled, citing excessive taxes, unfair buying practices, or any number of other problems with government contract requirements (specifically the Fair Employment Act, one of the first labor laws to deal with discrimination). The response was seldom pleasant. In the worst cases the government simply bought the company, in others it took over the operation of the company during the war. The War Production Board was not above sending khaki-clad officers to replace balky managers.

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 14 [45]; HT 10 [0].

zzAdvantages:xx Filthy Rich [50]; Status 1 [0]; and a total of 15 points chosen from National Advantages (see p. W68), or Lightning Calculator [5]; Single-Minded [5]; Voice [10].

zzDisadvantages:xx A total of -30 points chosen from National Disadvantages (see p. W69) or Age [-3 per year over 50]; Code of Honor (Merchant's) [-5]; Bad Sight [-10]; Overweight [-5].

zzBasic Skills:xx Administration (M/A) IQ+3 [8]-17; Area Knowledge (any) (M/E) IQ-1 [1/2]-13; Detect Lies (M/H) IQ-3 [1/2]-11; Fast-Talk (M/A) IQ [2]-14; Merchant (M/A) IQ+3 [8]-17; Psychology (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-13; Savoir-Faire (M/A) IQ [2]-14.

zzSecondary Skills:xx Accounting (M/H) IQ-2 [1]-12; Economics (M/H) IQ-2 [1]-12; Leadership (M/A) IQ [2]-14; Research (M/A) IQ [2]-14.

zzOptional Skill:xx Spend 2 points on any of Swimming (P/E); Boating, Driving (Automobile), Powerboat, Riding (Horse), or Sport (Golf, Polo, or Tennis) (all P/A); Cooking or Savoir-Faire (all M/E); Bard, Gambling, or Writing (all M/A).

zzCustomization Notes:xx This template illustrates the men that orchestrated what David M. Kennedy called the "War of Machines": the Fords, Kaisers, and other industry greats. It would be appropriate for union leaders, like John L.

Lewis of the United Mine Workers, or even Roosevelt's dollar-a-day men. In the latter case, add Administrative Rank 6, but since these men were appointed and removed at the president's whim, one could argue that the appointees had the rank only in name. Lower ranking governmental employees were much more stable, of course.

Businessmen served in unofficial but important governmental positions overseas. Business leaders negotiated for raw materials in Central and South America, Africa, and even India on behalf of the United States. These business meetings were often conducted aboard Navy ships, with grim-looking Marines prowling the docks as a show of force to sometimes fickle foreign companies and governments.

Odds and Ends

Artillery

More so than in the Pacific, the U.S. military relied on heavy artillery to kill the enemy in Europe. One of the techniques used was the time-on-target, or TOT (p. W43). For veteran and newbie alike, the TOT was a grisly experience. If executed correctly, the whole sheaf, or barrage, of shells would impact at precisely the same time. This impact would sound like a single large explosion to those far away. For those at the point of impact, it was hell on Earth.

A TOT barrage requires all guns involved to be in contact with an FDC and to have synchronized timepieces. Every gun must fire at the exact same instance. This combined all the advantages of the U.S. artillery system at once. For those in the strike zone, Fright Checks on the order of -4 or more are certainly in line with descriptions penned by German survivors even decades later. Even the most battle-hardened kraut shivered at the thought of a TOT courtesy of Uncle Sam.

As great as the American artillery system was, artillery shell production was reduced in 1942-43 to cut costs. Well-meaning but squirrely congressmen howled about wartime waste. As a result, US forces suffered a shortage of artillery shells in October 1944. Daily shell use was curtailed to only seven shots per gun in some divisions. By November new production had made up the shortfall and artillery units returned to firing shells in prodigious amounts.

D-Day: Mulberry and Pluto

The Allies' plans at D-Day relied on getting men and materiel on shore and in battle as soon as possible. Over-the-beach operations using DUKWs and landing craft would only suffice for a short time. Logistics needs for each of the divisions could exceed 700 tons per day, while the six U.S. amphibious truck companies (with 50 DUKWs each) could only unload 500 tons a day each. The armies would run out of supplies.

The Anglo-Americans planned to create artificial harbors, code-named Mulberries, by sinking more than 50 ships along with large concrete caissons to create a breakwater called a Gooseberry. With this in place, a floating pier was built that would allow trucks to drive from shore to ship. The plan worked, providing 15,000 tons of supplies daily at each of the two harbors. A violent storm June 19-20 destroyed one and damaged the other, but even with one operating, supply needs were met.

The Gooseberries proved a useful base for landing craft, since the superstructures of the ships were still above the waterline. These naval halfway houses were used as temporary barracks and kitchens in the first weeks after the invasion.

Also useful was PLUTO, the pipe line under the ocean. Several 3" lines were unreeled from giant drums across the channel. The pipeline transported 300 tons of gasoline daily. This was insufficient, however, since a single armored division could consume 200 tons of gas daily. Tanker ships were required to handle most of the fuel, pumping 600 tons of gas per hour through an off-shore mooring system once they reached the landing areas.

D-Day: Peppermint

Manhattan Project scientists had suggested back in 1942 that radioactive salts be used over Germany, killing the population by radioactive means. When concern began to rise about the Nazi atomic-bomb project, those involved knew that it was far more likely that their 1,200 tons of uranium ore might be used as poison, rather than in a bomb.

A team, Codenamed Peppermint, was assigned to search for signs of radiation poisoning among Allied troops at D-Day. The scientists and chemical-warfare officers used Geiger counters and unexposed photographic film to check the area. If the film became foggy or began to blacken, the team would be alerted.

Fortunately, no radiation was detected. The team spent much of their time after D-Day inspecting V-2 bomb craters near London for radiation, at the request of Roosevelt and Churchill.

Useful Links

- If you are looking for hard-to-find military manuals, visit the folks at <http://www.military-info.com/Index.htm>
- You'll find tons of free guides and training manuals here: <http://carlisle-www.army.mil/usamhi/DL/chron.htm#AWorldWarII19391945>
- The full list of U.S. Army forces at D-Day can be found here: <http://www.army.mil/cmhp/reference/normandy/UnitList.htm>
- Period IDs and paperwork. Though designed for re-enactors, the site provides free materials for GMs interested in making props: <http://www.hardscrabblefarm.com/ww2/index.htm>
- A detailed source on small-unit organizations: <http://www.stormpages.com/garyjkennedy/index.htm>
- For those planning a Navy-based campaign, this site should be extremely useful: <http://www.cv6.org/company/muster/organization.htm>
- This site is a great resource for campaigns centered around combat in the skies: <http://www.zenoswarbirdvideos.com/main.html>

When the Wizard's Away

Ways of Keeping Higher-Powered NPCs in the Background Where They Belong

by Stephen McKenzie

GM: *"You see a shadowy humanoid figure emerging from the opening in the burial dome. Its body is insubstantial, but its eyes are glowing, and it is moving towards you at great speed."*

Mortimer (Human Cleric): *"A shadow! Hey, I'm only 2nd level. Let's get out of here."*

Moseley (Dwarven Fighter): *"Yeah, agreed. We run for it. Hey, Morty, lets go and ask your overseer to come down here and turn it for us! He's supposed to do that for a living, right?"*

* * *

This situation is likely to crop up sooner or later if you are playing a low-level game and there are friendly NPCs of higher power level than the PCs in your scenario. Apprentice wizards and priests have their masters, as do many fighters, and even a thief may have contacts at the local guild. Part of the fantasy milieu is that the heroes are set apart from the mundane world by their skill and bravery and may attempt things normal folk could not. Despite this, it is common to find the character lists of pre-made adventures filled with powerful NPCs. There are times when logic dictates that these NPCs would want to become involved in what your party is doing . . . especially when it has something to do with money, powerful magic, or a great threat to the kingdom. As GM, you must be careful to ensure that these figures do not end up taking over the adventure.

In the example above, suppose Mortimer the Cleric is a member of a Church of Light whose main aim is to rid the world of undead. Suppose also that the GM has designed a few higher-powered church figures, the ones who taught the PC cleric his spells. And further, the GM has designed the scenario so that the cleric will get to encounter some undead creatures; after all, they are his forte. So, why wouldn't the more powerful cleric come down and turn the undead the party has found? If he does help out, the players become redundant, and the adventure becomes boring. If he does not help, the players may begin to ask questions. "Real nice church of light you're in there, Morty. They send underlings like you down to get killed, while they sit round eating roast snaarg-beast and watching the sunset."

Of course, the basic way to avoid this situation is by designing challenges for the PCs that are never so difficult that they might require help. This can be done in low-danger dungeon settings (part of the reason why dungeons are so popular), but becomes more difficult as they become more powerful. The ideas presented here are based on fantasy settings but could be applied to other rule systems and genres. They will help you to deal with this situation of "NPC interference" and design your scenarios so that your higher-powered NPCs stay in the background where they belong.

A Matter of Honor

Many players will instinctively want to avoid involving higher-powered characters, because the whole point is that they want to do things for themselves. You may wish to reinforce this, by making it part of the chivalric background of your clerical orders that it is considered dishonorable for them to seek help from others before they have attempted to do something themselves. Character classes such as barbarians will have a natural distrust of seeking the help of others, especially if magic might be involved. Try this technique with one of the characters in your party.

Honor can be a useful plot device, but in some situations it will not suffice on its own. What happens if the party uncovers evidence of a lost city, thought to be filled with artifacts that the local magic order is keen to get their hands on? Who gets sent on the mission to recover them? Not your humble party, if the members of the order have any sense

at all. You'll need to think of another strategy.

Quests, Tests and Training

A classic reason for NPCs to stay in the background is that one or more of the characters have been sent on a quest, or asked to perform a certain task in order to advance in the rankings of their order. You could use this idea a number of times; for example, you could invent magic initiation rites for various levels of magical knowledge, by which time your mage PC may be in the "inner circle" of the order.

Training quests are a neat device, and one that stands to reason. Many NPCs would not be willing to help their underlings simply because they want to make sure that they get adequate experience on their own. However, this device will wear thin after a while, especially if you employ it on more than one character. Your players may start to feel that they have no control over the story, and that their superiors allocate tasks to them on a random basis, with no continuity in the plot.

Scale and Balance

You are using a pre-made adventure setting in which the characters travel to a remote village, and are asked to by the villagers to defeat an evil monster that is terrorizing them. Look quickly to the list of NPCs provided, and think carefully about the implications. If you find, for example, that the local blacksmith is actually a high-powered dwarven fighter, is your fledgling party really the village's only hope? Think about knocking the smith back down a few levels, or alternately, giving him a gammy leg. After all, does he really need to be that powerful for the purposes of the scenario?

NPC power levels are a question of scale and balance. Simply put, the higher-powered of your really powerful NPCs, the more mid-powered PCs they will need to have underneath them for the hierarchy of the organization to make sense. Think about designing a local order of knighthood. To use *Dungeons & Dragons* terms, if you make the leader 18th level, you'll probably want to have one or two 12th-15th levels, more 7-10th levels, and then a whole host of 4th-6th levels, any one of which could treat your junior 1st-level PCs like hayseeds. So why not simply make the leader 9th level, and let the rest of the order sort itself out accordingly?

You can take this approach to your entire campaign. Rather than having hordes of hugely powerful NPCs, why not run a campaign in which NPCs over a middling power level are very uncommon, ones over 10th level are extraordinary, and any NPC over 15th level will be famous throughout the continent? Once your players have adjusted to this, it will seem very natural to them (and they will not ask you questions such as "how come there are no arch-mages in this city?") It will also mean that the PCs' own achievements will seem all the more noteworthy. One they reach 5th level, they will also be known throughout the region -- and most players just love it when their characters get a bit of fame.

Know Your NPCs (and give them something to do)

One of the most dangerous (and most common) things you can do in designing a kingdom, city, or other adventuring base is to simply jot down the names and levels of powerful local figures without giving any thought as to who they are and what they do. For example, in your capital city, you might place:

Order of St Christopher -- Sir Trimble, 15th level

Mage College -- Nimblor, 18th level

Church of Light -- Cassandra, 15th level

As we have seen, the existence of each of these figures suggests a host of other subordinate NPCs as well. The question is, are they necessary? If you don't know what an NPC does, that means they are not serving any function in the plot of your scenario. So why are they there? As a rule of thumb, do not use high-powered NPCs as window-dressing for your campaign. If you do position powerful figures in your local area, do so with some forethought as to

what role they might take in the long-term campaign. If you want NPCs as window dressing in a low-powered campaign, the dwarven fighter with the gammy leg will do just as well as the immensely powerful mage.

If you decide you absolutely have to have that arcane order with the all-knowing wizard (and his underlings) in your local area, it is important to flesh out the day-to-day workings of the order. It is much better to do this to begin with than to make it up on the spot as an excuse for why those NPCs cannot help your party. Doing this creates work for you as a GM, but it can certainly provide you with a ready-made excuse as to why Nimblor the Necromancer cannot help your party today, or any time soon -- "She's busy fighting the Illithid, I'm afraid."

Destabilize the Situation

"NPC interference" is most likely to happen when the party is located in a well-organized kingdom with no major internal or external threats. The "Grand Duchy of Yond Bezzle," peaceful and prosperous, may seem like an ideal starting place for fledgling PCs to begin exploring the wider world, but in practice it may cause you some real headaches, because there will be little activity for your NPCs to undertake. When the party comes back into town with tales of terrible monsters and untold wealth, folks will listen, because there is not a lot else going on.

A good local base for new PCs will be an area in which there are one or more serious threats to security, but which is still stable enough for the PCs to survive in the early phases. Perhaps Yond Bezzle is at war with a renegade kingdom on its northern border, or plagued by civil strife or orcs (or just plague, for that matter). Your NPCs will not help the party because they really do have better things to do than listen to treasure tales.

Hit them in the Hip Pocket

Players will be far more reluctant to reveal the secrets of their adventures if they have to buy assistance in return. Make sure the party is charged handsomely for any help provided to them and they will think twice about asking for it again.

This trick can even be used with organizations that the PCs belong to, such as benevolent clerical and magical orders, provided you do not make them *too* wealthy. If your cleric PC is a sworn servant of the Church of Light and seeks their aid to flush out those undead, surely it is not too much to ask that all the party's treasure be donated to help fix the temple roof? After all, the order has fallen on hard times lately. The cleric will probably want to do just that, but will have a hard time convincing the rest of the party that it's a good idea.

Hold Off on the Grand Epic

Grand epics are the essence of a many good roleplaying campaigns; when they are properly handled, they can make a series of one-off adventures pale in comparison. As a scenario designer you may want to involve your characters in your epic right from the word go, and if you do, you will probably also want to have some idea of where things are going to end up after the next 15 play-sessions have passed. Your the party have one piece of the hexagonal puzzle (that will prevent the Worm-God returning to plague the earth) and their overall mission is to find the other five, by which time they will be of a sufficient power level to take him on. Sounds neat . . . but why is it your party is looking for the pieces, and not someone with a little bit more clout? If they tell higher-powered NPCs their tale, it will be difficult to justify why no one listens -- after all, the fate of the world is at stake.

The trick here is to introduce elements of the quest slowly, so the PCs do not find out exactly what they are up against until they are ready to face it themselves. Perhaps they have a piece of the puzzle, but do not know what it is. The secret can only be uncovered by tracking down a sage who lives on the other side of the continent -- a voyage which can encapsulate a series of minor adventures along the way, gaining experience for the PCs as they draw closer to their ultimate goal. Reveal the facts one by one, to build up the player's knowledge over time, rather than handing the whole story to them all at once.

"Take This Job and Shove It"

Another way of avoiding NPC interference is to cut back on PC involvement with training orders or other institutions. For example, your cleric might be an itinerant monk, and your mage a hedge wizard. Your party is essentially an enclave, trying to establish itself as a force in the local area in competition with other organizations.

The difficulty here for many RPGs is with training. You may want to run a campaign in which the restrictions on training and power advancement are modified so that characters can train themselves, or each other, in some situations. You may also wish to arrange it so that your players' characters have a number of different options for training, and do not build up any allegiance to one particular organization.

An "enclave" party does not work for anyone else, and "tests" or "missions" laid down by higher-powered NPCs will be right out of the question. The party will be unlikely to ask for or receive assistance, either. The downside is that parties with no allegiances at all will end up becoming separated from your society. In some cases, you may end up with a situation where much of your campaign design work becomes wasted, because the party has no interest in anything that is going on outside their own small base of activity.

Getting Some Distance

One of the most obvious devices to avoid NPC interference is simply to remove the party from areas in which they could get support or suffer from NPC interference. Perhaps they are on a quest, and need to travel to an outlying wilderness area five days journey from the nearest town. Alternately, perhaps a local wizard is away on a quest, and the party has been asked to look after his holdings in his absence. Sounds like a piece of cake -- but what was that howling noise from the cellar?

One of the simplest and most effective ways of creating "distance" early in the campaign is to trap your PCs down in the dungeon (enemy adventurers lock them in, a cave wall collapses, or Something Lurking In The Dark decides to teleport them down to the 8th level). Snowstorms, shipwrecks, and other catastrophes can also leave them stranded and reliant on nothing but their own wits, hopefully for quite a few play-sessions.

Not So Friendly After All . . .

Suppose the heroes seek help from another local NPC who may have ideas about adventuring of his own. The party has run into trouble fighting some skeletons down in a crypt and their cleric is knocked out and reduced to near-death. They seek the help of a local high-level cleric of another faith, who is rather curious to know where they have been. "So, you *have* found the entrance to those fabled crypts, have you? I might pop down there and take a look myself!" Reason dictates that higher-level adventurers in the area would periodically bust in on the players territory, provided they knew about it. This can muck up your campaign but it can also work in your favor; sting your party with this trick once and they will be pretty careful about asking for help for a while to come.

Your players' secrecy about their adventures can be a great way of making sure that the higher-powered NPCs do not get involved too soon. Of course, this can preclude their involvement with any good organizations. If your ***Dungeons & Dragons*** paladin holds off on telling his superiors about what he's found because he wants to get the credit himself, an alignment check is probably in order.

The Unequal Fellowship

One of the greatest fantasy epics, *The Lord of the Rings*, features a party with wildly different power levels of ability; there is no reason why you cannot do so as well, provided you talk it over with your players first. Say you have a reasonably powerful priest sent out to do battle against a local nest of undead. Another priest assists him, and two local guards are hired as muscle, as well as a man of questionable morals to deal with the locks and traps. You now have a party that makes sense in the context of your setting; the local church is taking the undead seriously, rather than

leaving the problem to their underlings to deal with.

You can use this technique either at the start of the campaign, or introduce the more powerful PC character into the game in response to the players' request for NPC assistance (which will mean that someone will have to play two characters for a while). If you want to go the whole way, compose a party in which each player has one low-powered character and one mid-powered character, and the two different level groups take on related aspects of the same quest.

Some players will object to seeing their friend playing Mungo the Magnificent while they play Wetwipe the Wimpy. In this situation, you can make the higher-powered character a "Party Character." The other players each get a say in what this character does, coming down to a vote in case of conflict, with the GM having the final say. If you do decide to have a higher-powered character as a Party Character, it pays make them a bit slow-witted. Mungo might be Magnificent, but he's not the brightest fellow, and is easily told what to do by your more assertive and canny PCs.

The "Q" Character

In many situations it will make sense to have an NPC that the characters are directly responsible to -- a leader of the organization who is involved in deciding what missions they are given, or needs to know what they are up to for some other reason. However, there is no reason why this NPC should be more powerful than the PCs in terms of their ability level. Think of the character "Q" in the James Bond films, who was Bond's superior in the organization, but who would have been quite useless if called upon to come to Bond's assistance in the field.

You can use this trick in your campaign to provide a sense of realism in your NPC organizations without filling them with high-powered figures that could end up spoiling the fun. Think about your local clerical order. Is it possible to have a church leader who cannot cast any but the most basic spells, but is very charismatic, and excellent leader, and a wily politician? This tactic is another way of reducing the power of your NPCs, while still maintaining believable hierarchies in your organizations.

Lying Low

In this situation, the party cannot reveal too many of their secrets or ask for too much help because their behavior has been less than strictly legal. In the most obvious case, the heroes become outlaws, engaged in freedom fighting against an oppressive regime (or just plain old bandits if they choose). In other cases, the party live within your campaign society but there are a few aspects of their lives they are keen to keep secret.

You can also turn an incident in the ongoing campaign into a reason the party is keen to lie low. Try to engage one member of the party (thieves are a good target) in something unsavory, or in something that would offend a powerful local figure. You can also plan out this kind of campaign from the beginning, making the party's guilty secret the main focus of the game. Suppose that a certain kind of magic is illegal in your campaign world, and its practitioners are persecuted by the dominant religion. It will be easy enough to get your players interested in finding out how to use this kind of magic (everyone loves doing what they shouldn't), and soon they will be up to their necks in ancient magical lore, risking execution if they are discovered.

Put the Boot on the Other Foot

If your players have been put to one side by a powerful NPC, turning the tables can be an excellent way of restoring their morale. Suppose that Mungo the Magnificent thought that those skeletons would be easy work, and strode in ahead of your party. But unbeknownst to him, there is also Something Lurking In The Dark down there, who teleports the dimwitted fighter far down below, to fend for himself. Next time your party comes across him, he's suspended over a bottomless pit begging to be rescued. Of course, that encounter was not present in your original scenario . . . at least, not on the first level; you added it in to make sure Mungo did not end up running the show. Your players will enjoy rescuing him, and will love gloating afterwards as well.

The Hidden Enemy

You can set up one of your local organizations so that one member is actually an agent for a dark power. Imagine that one of the members of the magic order is secretly in league with the vampire that is the ultimate source of undead power in the area and wants his lair in the crypt to remain a secret. This NPC is eager -- a bit too eager -- to become involved in party affairs down in the crypt, and offers help (perhaps even killing a few zombies to prove his or her integrity), but then misleads the party so that they do not find the secret passageway down to the next level of the dungeon. After a while, the party may become suspicious of this NPC and seek to uncover the truth about him.

Alternately, it is known that somebody within an organization is a spy for an evil power, because it is clear that the enemy has been gaining information in advance; finding out who it is can be a challenge for your PCs at some later stage, but in the meantime, they have to be careful about revealing too much, because they might be unwittingly telling their enemy their plans.

Putting it all Together

Let's look at how you might design your next low-powered scenario around some of the principles above, looking at a standard beginning fantasy group -- a fighter, a cleric, a mage, and a thief -- in a standard crypt setting.

The party live in a in a kingdom that is beset by civil war; the northern part of the kingdom is attempting to secede from the main areas where the players live. There is also the persistent threat of subterranean elves who live in underground cave areas that abut onto several city dungeon areas, and the underground of several cities is currently a war zone. All this keeps high-powered NPCs rushed off their feet.

The party wishes to explore an ancient crypt, two days from the nearest town, and a full five days from the main city. The cleric PC has been sent to explore the crypt as part of a training exercise in order to be fully initiated in his order, and knows he will receive no further help than what has already been given him. The fighter, who is a bit more powerful, has been hired by the church to protect the priest (and might be a "Party Character"). The mage is hoping to recover lost magic artifacts that may help defeat the elves, but is reticent about saying too much too soon, as she knows that one of the members of the order is a spy. As to the thief, he doesn't want to go anywhere near the main city in case he ends up sleeping with the fishes.

With a bit of forethought in the initial design of your campaign, and the scenarios within it, you can rest assured that the adventurers will be the masters of their own actions and will thus have a great amount of input into the shape of the game. You will also end up with NPCs who have their own stories to tell, and who are fully involved in the plot. And finally, there will come the day when it is your PCs that are telling the NPCs what to do, and you will have a great campaign on your hands.

The Extraordinarily Classified Adventures of Troubleshooter Munch-O-SEN

by Matt Riggsby

The Extraordinary Adventures of Baron Munchausen is Hogshead Games's parlor/roleplaying game of conversation and storytelling among genteel 18th century aristocrats. *Paranoia* was West End Games's famous game of inept PCs, malfunctioning equipment, and confused bureaucracy in a darkly humorous future. One might think that the play styles of *Baron Munchausen* and *Paranoia* would be diametrically opposed, and yet here we are. Now you can bring the mechanics of Munchausen to a post-mission briefing of unruly Troubleshooters.

Munch-O-SEN can be regarded as a cutthroat version of the original Munchausen game. Rather than moving around the table in an orderly fashion, taking turns telling individual stories, a Munch-O-SEN game involves a single story: Troubleshooters recounting the events of their most recent mission. Players flatly contradict each other and interrupt their comrades, seizing control of the narrative. The object of the game is to survive both the judgment of the Computer and summary execution at the hands of the other characters. Play requires a copy of *The Extraordinary Adventures of Baron Munchausen*, or at least extensive familiarity with the rules, and a working knowledge of the world of *Paranoia*, if not the actual rules themselves. *Paranoia* is long out of print, but those unfamiliar with it can learn enough to play by asking about it on any discussion board where older gamers congregate or visiting some of the web sites listed at the end of the article.

(Stylistic note: In accordance with the Computer's views on equality of the sexes, pronouns of alternating genders will be used. Citizens who do not match the gender of any given pronoun will be surgically reassigned.)

Setting Up

Players may select names and service groups as they desire, although for convenience all players should be the same security clearance. They may also select roles in the Troubleshooter team, such as:

- Team Leader
- Mission Leader
- Assistant Leader
- Hygiene Officer
- Political Officer
- Weapons Officer
- Morale Officer
- Robotics Officer
- Vehicle Officer
- Experimental Equipment Officer
- Key Grip

These roles are entirely optional and are only for extra color.

Instead of gold coins, players should be issued tokens to use as treason vouchers. Pour a round of Bouncy Bubble Beverage, select a mission from the list below (or make one up), use any suitable method to pick someone to start, and begin the game.

Duration

The shared story told by the players here takes a bit more time than a story told by a single player in a conventional

game. Set a timer for about 15 minutes (the Computer has determined that the optimum time for debriefing is 14 minutes and 27 seconds). The game ends once time is up, even if the story isn't finished.

Contradiction and Stealing the Spotlight

Play begins as usual, with a player starting to tell a story. Other players may challenge his veracity by voicing an objection and putting forward one of their tokens, although the genteel challenges and wagers of 18th century noblemen may be replaced by flat contradiction.

Other players may also take control of the story by giving the player currently telling the story three treason tokens. Unlike regular contradictions, the interruption can't be avoided by anteing up one's own tokens; the attempt automatically succeeds as long as the interrupting player can cough up the three tokens. Taking control of the story also allows the player to flatly contradict a fact stated by the previous player, although it isn't mandatory.

Finally, unlike an orthodox *Munchausen* game, players *can* contradict the current storyteller by suggesting that he died. However, this can only happen up to five times during a given game (if the sixth clone died, he obviously wouldn't be around for debriefing), and the contradicting player must pay the three tokens to take control of the story at that point.

Example

The game begins with eight players: Alex, Beth, Chris, Denise, Eric, Georgia, Frank, and Holly. Denise made baklava for the evening's game, so she gets to go first.

Denise: After receiving our orders from our friend the Computer, we went down to the motor pool to get the vehicle we had been issued for the mission. It was a six-seat ground crawler, so . . .

Frank (pushing forward coin): No, it wasn't. It was seven.

Denise (pushes it back with one of her own): . . . you're kidding. You're challenging me about the number of seats?

Frank (adds another coin to the pile): Yup. I bet you're trying to make the Computer think there's something wrong with its resource allocation subroutines, you dirty Commie.

Denise (takes coins): Fine, fine, it was seven. The seats in the back were small so it *looked* like six. We didn't have enough room, so we had to put Alex in the trunk.

Alex: Hey!

Denise (ignoring Alex): I was the vehicular officer, so I got in the driver's seat, started it up, and . . .

Beth (shoving three coins towards Denise): . . . that's when the anti-theft system went off because she didn't put in a clearance code. There was a laser in the dashboard that shot her in the head. After we disposed of the body, I got in the driver's seat and leaned out the side so the laser wouldn't get me . . .

Experimental Equipment

The only companions Troubleshooters have are other Troubleshooters, who are not known for their remarkably useful abilities. Instead of companions, Troubleshooters have experimental equipment from R&D. Once per game, a player may cite a piece of experimental equipment which she can use to get herself out of a sticky situation.

Mutant Powers

Troubleshooters have deep, dark secrets, in the form of mutant powers. It is assumed that Troubleshooters will try to keep their mutations a secret, but will use them covertly if they have to. However, an observant citizen might ferret out their use.

Before the game begins, the names of mutant powers should be written down on slips of paper and put into a hat or other container (if your *Paranoia* books aren't at hand, write down as many as you can remember, or make some up if you want). Players should pass the hat, taking one slip each. If, while another player is narrating the story, a player can rationalize the character's actions as the use of the mutant power he holds the name of, he may reveal the name of the power, imply that the narrating character has a mutation, and take two of her tokens. Particularly bad rationalizations may be shouted down by a majority of players. The original game's convention of throwing bread rolls is in order here, although for a more *Paranoia* feel, [flavored kelp snacks](#) may be substituted. If this happens, the tokens are returned and the revealed power goes out of play. A character may only be stuck with one mutant power per game.

Example

Here, Eric holds a slip of paper with the Psychokinesis power and uses it well.

Alex: . . . the traitor dropped the memory chip into the sewer grating, so I had to reach down to get it.

Eric (waving the slip of paper and taking two of Alex's tokens): Gee, you'd have to have pretty long arms to reach that far. *Unless you were a mutant!*

And here, Eric uses the same power badly.

Alex: . . . we ran into some traitors coming around the corner, but I quick-drew my laser and blasted them.

Eric (waving the slip of paper and taking two of Alex's tokens): Gee, you'd have to be pretty fast to draw your laser that quickly. *Unless you were a mutant!*

Other players (hurling nori snacks): That's stupid!

Summary Execution

In "Munch-O-SEN," honorable duels are replaced by heavily-armed free-for-alls. At any time, one player may announce that another is a Commie mutant traitor and attempt to execute him forthwith. The target will, of course, fight back, using the same rock-paper-scissors procedure as dueling. Because life is cheap and weapons are exceptionally lethal in Alpha Complex, combat is resolved after a single round rather than best two out of three.

Also, once the attack is announced, other players can join in. They may choose to fire on either the original attacker or defender. The secondary combatants participate in the rock-paper-scissors contest, but aren't killed if they lose; the person they're shooting at is, after all, already firing on somebody else. However, if a secondary combatant *matches* the person he attacks, flip a coin. If it comes up tails, he suffers a severe weapons malfunction and is killed.

Unlike the original game, the player of a character killed in debriefing isn't out of it yet. She must give *half* of her tokens (as of the time fighting breaks out; round up) to the player she was shooting at. Being dead, she may no longer issue challenges or otherwise participate in the debriefing. However, she may participate in the voting at the end of the game; the players of dead characters represent the wise, even-handed justice of the Computer.

Example: Denise, taking exception to Frank's implication that she's a mutant, announces a summary execution attempt. Alex and Beth gleefully join in on Denise's side, while Holly decides to fire on Denise. Alex goes with rock, Holly and Denise with paper, and Frank and Beth with scissors. Frank kills Denise. Alex kills Frank. Beth matched Frank's scissors and flips a coin; it comes up heads and she lives. Holly matches Denise's paper; her coin comes up tails, so Holly is dead as well. Frank and Denise exchange half of their tokens, while Holly gives half of hers to Denise.

Ending the Game

The game ends when the time limit is up, all the characters die in a debriefing crossfire, or (as happens occasionally) the story comes to a logical end. Players should count up the number of treason voucher tokens they have. Instead of awarding them to other players en masse, players take turns, allocating tokens one at a time to the other players. Theoretically, this is to vote for which characters were the most traitorous during the mission, but in practice it allows the players one last opportunity for bickering and petty revenge. The player with the most tokens starts, handing them out one at a time until he's tied with the player with the second most tokens. They take turns until both are tied with the number three player, and so on.

Example

At the end of the story, Alex has 16 tokens, Beth has 7, Chris has 9, Denise has 12, Eric has 4, Georgia has 6, Frank has 1, and Holly has 8. Alex hands out four tokens, tying him with Denise. He and Denise alternate handing out tokens until they get down to 9, at which point Chris joins in, then Holly, and so on. Frank only participates in the last round.

The player who ends up with the most tokens is deemed to be a traitor and is taken away to be executed. The player with the least is given an official commendation. A well-played game may end up with all characters simultaneously being commended and executed. The Computer thanks any survivors for their cooperation.

Sample Missions

The Computer orders the Troubleshooters to do the following:

- Deliver a heavy box making ticking noises to an Indigo-level member of the CPU service group.
- Search for and apprehend a Sierra Club terrorist believed to have ties to renegade Outside organizations.
- Monitor levels of pharmaceuticals in a gruel vat facility and look for signs of sabotage.
- Quarantine all samples of Cold Fun concentrate with lot number Q843-AD8938E.
- Take over operation of a snack bar used as a meeting place for secret societies and take appropriate action against any traitors frequenting it.
- Review several new vid programs from HPD & Mind Control for treasonous content and fun value.
- Escort a traitor from a nearby detention facility to the interrogation center in far-off FAR sector.
- Disable several loudspeakers reprogrammed to broadcast Communist propaganda and apprehend or execute anyone who has listened to them.
- Engage in live-fire anti-traitor activities in order to test experimental new performance-enhancing pharmaceuticals.
- Perform cleanup of accidental spill of green paint in an Orange-clearance area.
- Direct traffic at several intersections where sabotage has disabled traffic signals and remote vehicular control.
- Investigate pilfering of gloves and helmets in a Red-clearance dormitory.
- Clear obstacles and saboteurs from a set of train tracks for inter-sector mass transit system.
- Provide security for a team of hydrological engineers repairing sewage tunnels.
- Pose as Armed Forces personnel to investigate possible treasonous behavior in a Vulture squadron.
- Collect the right boot of every citizen in a nearby Technical Services office block as part of an investigation of possible Corpore Metal activity.
- Hunt down and neutralize a rogue scrubbot accidentally fitted with a warbot brain.
- Infiltrate an Infrared barracks to investigate rumors of treasonous pagan rituals.
- Assist an IntSec officer in investigating a suspicious series of malfunctions at an important fusion power facility.
- Scout out OLD sector, a sector long sealed off from Alpha Complex, and report on any surviving residents' political orthodoxy.
- Stop a renegade band of PURGE fanatics who are attacking apparently random public hygiene centers in the sector.

Guard a warehouse containing classified Old Reckoning artifacts.

- Inspect a series of slidewalks for unauthorized monitoring equipment and booby traps.
- Assist R&D with a demonstration of genetic engineering experiments.
- Bring me the head of Alfred-O-GCA.

Sources

These web sites contain useful descriptions of ***Paranoia*** and its setting, Alpha Complex:

- <http://www.paranoia-rpg.com/>
- <http://www.blumeat.com/paranoia/>
- <http://www.crd-sector.com/explain.htm>

Analects Arcane

Mnemotheurgy for the d20 System

by Owen K.C. Stephens

Journal Entry: Forty-First Day of Summer

I am always a bit awed when I change journals. My old journal served me well, and is even now being copied by my senior apprentices to ensure my rambling thoughts and messages to the future are not lost in a tower fire or other local disaster. The first copies are already in the hands of many of my peers, and their compliments and reassurances warm my heart. But now I face a blank slate, a thick tome of creamy pages waiting but ink and effort to become another book for others to read. I am forced to wonder what I will find to fill so many pages, and worry if those eventual readers will receive this volume as well as the last.

In truth, I don't clearly remember the last time I began a new journal, though certainly I could look it up in the first pages of my old set. But these days, even rereading my own words doesn't always bring clear recollection of events back to me. Aerifel once jested the reason a mage's bond beast is commonly called a familiar is that it's the only thing an old mage is sure not to forget. Perhaps when she's older, I'll let her know how close to the truth she is.

Struggle as we might against the ravages of time, mages grow old. Our eyesight and hearing weaken, our muscles thin and our bones creak. Most arcanists my age are either thin as a rail or fat as a boar, and it's only because one of my apprentices is a skilled and observant cook that I manage to stay between those two extremes. But most worrisome of all our frailties is the loss of a mage's memory. Much of what sets us apart is what we know, and losing memory is very much losing power. In this case, even descending into hated undeath is no cure, as many of the ghoul lord wizards I know are just as forgetful as their living counterparts. So, how do aged sages deal with this slow degradation of our minds?

We cheat.

*The magic of memory is not as famous or alluring as flashier spells of fire and thunder, but all experienced archmages at least dabble in it. Generally younger mages don't bother, both because they have no need yet, and because they lack the experience to design a proper memory spell. Such arcana must be effective in a long-term way, able to assist the mage even when not active. It must be useful in specific situations when a mage is willing to prepare it. Though I have several works covering this subject, the best is without a doubt **Sera ves Unbres con Rarris**, which translates to *The Light Against the Mists of Thought*.*

*There aren't many original copies of **Sera ves Unbres con Rarris** left in good condition, and I require all my apprentices to make three copies in the first three years of their service with me. One I give them when they become masters, one I sell, and one I use to trade with other sages. There are many magics I feel should be kept secret, but I've seen far more good than evil come from doddering wizards being able to remember*

which staff heals and which summons demons.

*The reason I prefer the **Sera ves Unbres con Rarris** over other memory magics is that all its arcana is based on mundane memory techniques. The order that researched these spells long ago delved deeply into the philosophy of thought and memory, developing numerous mundane mnemonic techniques before they put any work in on the arcane versions. I am particularly impressed with their ability to use memory palaces, which most mages lack the time to construct and maintain through pure study and dedication. These spells allow even the most elderly of mages to use a few simple spells to remember things that would otherwise be forgotten.*

Of course, it's sometimes difficult to remember to remember.

*Arngrim Aignirson
Mage of the North*

Sera ves Unbres con Rarris

Original copies of *Sera ves Unbres con Rarris* are easily identified by their fine and heavy construction. The covers are slabs of thin, polished marble bound together by bronze rings. The body of the book is papyrus, though most also have linen front and back pages. The work is written in the draconic language in dark red ink, though, contrary to popular opinion, the ink has no blood content. These books are pretty, but weigh a hefty eight pounds and are vulnerable to breaking, mold, and fire. Many are missing one to three spells because of such wear.

In addition to several spells (all presented below), the book outlines the use of mnemonic tricks for remembering phrases and facts, and a method of memorizing long strings of numbers by associating each group of two or three to a well known date, collection, or possession involving that number. Neither method is given in enough detail to justify improved memory for a character, but they can serve as starting points for a character who wishes to research such methods more thoroughly.

Copies of the work done by apprentices of Arngrim Aignirson are actually more common than originals, and are often available in upscale magic shops (prices ranging from 2,500 to 10,000 gp). These are more typical-looking spellbooks, with tough leather covers and paper treated to resist moisture and heat (when closed, the books are not considered easily flammable). Of course copying errors do occasionally occur, and there is a 5% chance per spell that the information given is not complete, requiring a wizard wishing to learn the spell to pay an additional 25 gp per spell level in research and make a second Spellcraft check to fill in the gaps.

Though designed as wizard spells, most of the things in *Sera ves Unbres con Rarris* are usable by bards as well, who can select the spells normally after they have been exposed to them.

1st Level Sorcerer And Wizard Spells

Inertial Navigation. Get a mental map of how far you've gone and in what direction.

Refresher. Gain a bonus to skills you have ranks of.

2nd Level Sorcerer And Wizard Spells

Perfect Recall. Remember events with absolute clarity.

3rd Level Sorcerer And Wizard Spells

Akashic Access. Tap into a vast mystic storehouse of knowledge.

4th Level Sorcerer And Wizard Spells

False Recollection. Change your memories for a few days.

5th Level Sorcerer And Wizard Spells

Memory Palace. Gain a mental construct to store knowledge and memories.

7th Level Sorcerer And Wizard Spells

Memory Palace, Greater. Gain a mental construct to store knowledge and memories.

Akashic Access

Divination

Level: Brd 4, Sor/Wiz 3

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 10 minutes

Range: Personal

Effect: Information gained

Duration: 1 minute/level

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

There exists a mystic imprint of all knowledge ever discovered by any living thing, known as the akashic record. This spell allows the caster to tap into this source of knowledge in search for a specific piece of information. Because the akashic record is so vast, only an experienced caster has a good chance to find what he's looking for, and more common information is far easier to find than rare knowledge. The caster rolls a d20 and adds his caster level and Wis modifier. The DC is set by the GM, based on the chart below.

DC	Type of Knowledge

15	Uncommon, known by a reasonably large group of educated people
25	Rare, known only by the most educated, or those who are specialists in the field.
30	Obscure, known by only the most well educated specialists.
35	Extremely obscure, known by very few, possibly forgotten by most who once knew it, possibly known only by those who don't understand the significance of the knowledge.

The effort to access the akashic record is a strain on the caster's mental faculties. Each time the caster uses this spell, he suffers a cumulative -5 penalty to further attempts for a week.

False Remembrance

Transmutation

Level: Brd 4, Sor/Wiz 4

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Personal

Effect: False memory

Duration: 1 day/level

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

This spell allows the caster to rewrite his own memories in any way he wishes. He may forget events, edit when things occurred or what his own actions or motives were, or make any other change he desires. For the duration of the spell, the caster believes his false memories are real and accurate, not even remembering the casting of the false remembrance. Spells that reveal lies do not expose his altered recollections, so a caster who stole a staff could say in a *zone of truth* that he did not, if he had altered his memory to remove the knowledge he had. Other divinations are not affected, however, so the truth may still be discovered through other means.

The caster may, if he wishes, set a command word when the spell is cast that causes him to remember events accurately when he hears it. Many casters use this to entrust a close ally with the ability to restore the caster's original memories before the end of the spell.

Inertial Navigation

Divination

Level: Brd 0, Sor/Wiz 1

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Personal

Effect: Mental map

Duration: 1 hour/level

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

All movement the caster takes during this spell's duration is recorded in a mental map. The caster knows exactly how far he's moved and in what directions. Thus the caster is always aware of his relative position compared to any other place he's been during the spell. This allows him to calculate how far apart and on what bearing any two points are. He can also perfectly retrace his route to go back to any place he's been.

Even after the spell's duration ends the caster has access to the mental map it created, though obviously it no longer keeps track of his position.

Memory Palace

Transmutation

Level: Brd 3, Sor/Wiz 4

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 minute

Range: Personal

Effect: Mental construct of a palace within caster's mind

Duration: 10 minutes/level

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

The *memory palace* spell allows the caster to create an arcane mental construct within his own mind. The casting time of the spell represents the caster visualizing himself wandering through a palace, where everything he sees, smells, or hears within the palace acts as a reminder of some bit of information or text the caster has stored within the memory construct. The *memory palace* survives after the spell's duration ends, but the caster cannot add to it or retrieve information from it without casting the spell again. A caster can only have one *memory palace* at a time.

In game terms, the caster may store up to 10 pages' worth of information per level within his *memory palace*. The spell must be cast both to add and retrieve information to the mental construct. For the duration of the spell, anything the caster sees, reads, hears, smells, tastes, or touches can be stored in the *memory palace*, and anything already within the palace can be perfectly recalled. As a rule of thumb, one minute of input from one sense takes one page of space within the *memory palace*. Thus a caster who wanted to store the sounds and sights of a conversation he took part in during the spell uses two pages of the *memory palace's* storage for each minute of the conversation.

Recalling information takes the same amount of time the memory originally took, or that would be required to read

stored text from a book. It is possible for a caster to place his spellbook within his *memory palace*, but he must first have the spell in a real spellbook which he then reads to add to the *memory palace*. As a result, many casters take Spell Mastery with this spell and then place their entire spellbook within it, guaranteeing they can prepare spells in an emergency, or even recreate a lost spellbook.

The caster may eliminate anything stored in his *memory palace*, but once discarded it is permanently lost and cannot be regained.

The information in a *memory palace* is particularly resistant to the effects of a *modify memory* spell. Even if a character with a *memory palace* fails his save against a *modify memory* spell, he is allowed a second save at +4 to prevent any information within his *memory palace* from being altered. In no case does the caster of the *modify memory* spell become aware of the existence of the *memory palace*.

Memory Palace, Greater

Transmutation

Level: Sor/Wiz 7

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 minute

Range: Personal

Effect: Mental construct of a palace within caster's mind

Duration: 1 hour/level

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

This spell functions as *memory palace*, except as noted above and in allowing the storage of 20 pages per caster level. A caster may have both a *memory palace* and *greater memory palace* at the same time.

Perfect Recall

Divination

Level: Sor/Wiz 2

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Personal

Effect: Recalls one memory

Duration: 1 minute/level

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

Perfect recall allows the caster to perfectly remember any one event he experienced directly. This could be used to quote a riddle or book exactly, remember the name of someone met only once, or determine the seating arrangement of all 300 guests at a royal dinner. The memory must have occurred within one month per level for casters of 7th level or less, within one year per level for casters of 8th through 14th level, and within 10 years per level for casters 15th level or higher. The memory recalled can be no longer than one minute per level in length, and the perfect recollection of it lasts only one minute per level.

If engaged in a legal argument (a debate based on a specific set of rules, which may include some theological debate), or lengthy negotiations or similar verbal contention, using *perfect recall* to remember exactly the content of the previous debate or rules upon which the issue is to be settled (such as recalling reading a church's holy book), grants a +3 circumstance bonus to all Diplomacy checks made in regards to the argument.

Refresher

Divination

Level: Sor/Wiz 1

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Personal
Effect: Enhanced skills
Duration: 10 minutes /level
Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: No

The *refresher* spell causes the caster to recall all his training, education, and educational experiences with great clarity, as if they had just occurred. For the duration of the spell the caster gains a +1 circumstance bonus to all Str, Con, and Dex skills he has ranks of, a +2 bonus to all Wis and Chr skills he has ranks of, and a +4 bonus to all Int skills he has ranks of.

Pyramid Review

Friends & Familiars (for d20 System)

Designed by [Talisman Studios](#)

Published by [Bastion Press, Inc.](#)

Written by J. Darby Douglas and Kristen Schlight

Illustrated by Jason A. Engle and James Byrd

32-page color softcover; \$14.95

Friends & Familiars joins Bastion Press' "Legends Collection" as the sequel to *Allies & Adversaries*. Like *Allies & Adversaries*, *Friends & Familiars* is a very full-color collection of NPCs -- for use as sidekicks, companions, unique animal companions and even as rare familiars -- all suited for inclusion in any **d20 System** fantasy campaign. That color element comes from the brush of artist Jason Engle, with every page of the book done in tones of burnished gold and brown and each NPC given a full-length portrait. The style of each illustration possesses the slightest of ethereal qualities and any one of these pieces stands as among the best seen in any **d20 System** supplement released to date.

The format for *Friends & Familiars* is simplicity itself. Each NPC is given a two-page spread, with its illustration on the left-hand page, and the statistics and background given on the right. Also below the illustration is a simple two- or three-sentence thumbnail description of the character, followed by two or three hooks to help get each of them into a campaign. Only a contents page helps the reader find everything, but really *Friends & Familiars* is exceedingly simple to use. Unfortunately, the very high production values of this collection have been let down by a lack of proofreading. True, only the very occasional word is missing, but just one more read through would have negated this tarnishing of an otherwise beautiful book.

Friends & Familiars opens with an oddity -- a Chaotic Good but Undead Ranger. Abernath once served as an elite scout, part of an army led by a gallant and knightly paladin. His last assignment was to infiltrate the keep of a Necromancer Lord and retrieve a holy relic. Though the mission was successful, the victory came at great cost, as Abernath and his comrades were either killed or captured. The ranger's body was subject to necromantic experiments that corrupted his body, but his will was strong enough to survive and he was able to escape. Now he wanders the land fighting for the good of a society that he is unable to re-join.

Coglinus is a magical and mechanical construct created by the wizard and sea captain, Whestra. Both a scholar and an explorer, Whestra uses this self-aware, four-legged device as an aid to researching and analysing both legends and lore in preparation for expeditions to lands unknown. This is done by the use of spells such as *Analyze Dweomer* and *Legend Lore*, but Coglinus needs careful handling as he often interprets his instructions a little too literally.

More cunning and malevolent is Dusk the shadow mastiff, which also serves a master, though this one is an increasingly powerful shadow-mage. On the other hand, Infernus used to serve a master as his steed, but since the death of Lord Urroth in battle, this flame-maned and flame-hoofed horse has been wandering the land, terrorizing villages and setting light to both crops and houses. Also free to spread dissent and disruption is Necruss, a nasty little Imp with a fear of servitude and an extreme dislike of Elvenkind.

Fiondell is a Pixie Adept whose curiosity led to an interest in the arcane and in those from outside of the Great Forest. Unfortunately, this has grown too much for her father, who has banished her from his realm (which, of course, leaves

her free to attach to any player character willing to teach her more magic). Several of the other NPCs are likewise driven to particular purposes: Eriv the fighter wants to bring vengeance upon those who mistreat women after the murder of his mother, though woe betide anyone who gets him drunk, as he will rant at her needless death; Harenhorn wants to keep his upper class origins a secret while searching for his missing younger brother; Shae the cleric will quietly but firmly insist in her offer of help and aid to the player characters; and the young wizard, Terean is out in search of adventure.

Another interesting entry is that of Riak'khon, an albino tiger cast out of his clan and worshipped as the totem-god of a Goblin tribe. The tribal shaman's magic fused "soulstuff" into the tiger and granted him intelligence equal to that of any human, which enabled the formation of a long-lasting partnership with a lore master. Unfortunately, on their most recent delvings into ruins above and below ground they were cast apart and Riak'khon may be found looking for the Goblin, his old partner or even a new one.

Of the 15 NPCs in ***Friends & Familiars***, only two possess a Challenge Rating above 10, while the majority of the NPC humans have a level of six or below. Some of the entries are also connected by generic themes and names, so that they could be worked into the same plot if the DM so desired. There is also the inference from the writing that most are intended to be long-term additions to a campaign, though a few of the evilly-aligned entries -- such as Infernus -- could be used for single one-off encounters.

There are those who are going to look at ***Friends & Familiars*** and dismiss it as too expensive for what it provides; some 15 NPCs at a cost of a dollar each. This is not an entirely unfair assessment, as there is plenty of ***d20 System*** supplements available that offer more than the 15 on show here. Yet these 15 are shown very well indeed, with the portraits as often as not, saying as much about the characters as their write-ups do. Overall, what ***Friends & Familiars*** gives you is a selection of likeable, ready-to-use NPCs, some more interesting than others, but all of them beautifully presented.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Diceland: Space

Published by [Cheapass Games](#)

Designed by James Ernest & Falko Goettsch

Ships based on designs from Richard Carlson & Iikka Keranen

Art by phosphorous, Iikka Keranen, & James Ernest

25 full-color snap-together dice (glueless assembly required), full-color rules booklet, two cutout sets of 1-10 counters

***Garthans vs. Muktians Set:* 11 Garthans, 8 Muktians, 5 Tan Ru, 1 Kawangi Destroyer**

***Terrans vs. Urluquai set:* 11 Terrans, 8 Urluquai, 5 Zorg, 1 Klackar Outrider**

\$14.95 per set

It looks like Cheapass Games is finally following up on their promise to produce new genres and settings for their **Diceland** paper dice game. The first set, **Deep White Sea**, told the story of five different factions fighting for a lost ship on an icebound planet. Another version crossing into Steve Jackson Games' **Ogre** territory is also slated for release. With the current set, **Space**, the action goes -- surprise -- into outer space. More specifically, it puts the [Strange Adventures in Infinite Space](#) computer game onto its dice and sets them on the tabletop.

For those not familiar with the first release, **Diceland** sets come with 25 paper dice, colorful die-cut foldouts that easily snap into oversized eight-sided dice. (The packaging also has two sets of 1-10 counters that can be cut out for keeping track of commands.) The dice are your units in combat, with a single combatant in varying stages of health on each die face. Players press dots on the facets when the dice are damaged or moving; this rolls the unit onto another side, changing which enemies the die points at and what their current stats are. Based on the **Strange Adventures** computer game produced through the cooperation of Cheapass and their computer partners at Digital Eel, each die in Space represents a starship. The ships belong to one of the many bizarre alien races from that game.

The Garthans vs. Muktians set has 11 of the former's forces and eight dice for the latter. It also gives you five Tan Ru dice and a bonus die, the Kawangi Destroyer. The Terrans vs. Urluquai set has 11 Terrans, eight Urluquai, five Zorg, and a bonus Klackar Outrider die.

For those who haven't played the computer game (and some of this is meant to be discovered through play, so if you want to find it out on your own):

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The Garthans are warmongering lizards who attempt to enslave and destroy others. The Muktians are slug creatures who have come out of hibernation to explore the galaxy. The robotic Tan Ru are built to resemble chitinous animals, and they have little regard for biological life forms. The Urluquai are a combative jellyfish race whose watery home has prepared them for drifting through space. Not all races are as aggressive as these, though -- humans, relative

newcomers to space, can trade with the birdlike Klackar or ask the large-headed Zorg to use their mental abilities to fold space. Above all of this are (is?) the Kawangi -- no one knows what they want, but they blow up planets to get it.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Most of the flavor from the computer version doesn't translate to **Diceland**, though each race has a different feel in play. A great many more units in this set can -- and will -- pull additional units onto the board with the Call ability. The Terrans excel at filling the table with their many fighters, but the Urluquai with whom they are paired have a more even spread of firepower, added abilities, and die faces with multiple special effects. The Zorg from this package have fewer ships in their standard mix, but they can field their whole force almost at once, and what their shields don't stop they can jump out of the way of. And the Klackar, well -- they don't need a lot of allies.

The Garthans are perhaps the most middle-of-the-road group of either set -- they haven't a great many special abilities, but they have several ships. Most of the ships are small, but they have two carriers to bring them in. Their packaged counterparts, the Mukhtians, have fewer ships, but they've concentrated more firepower among those smaller ranks. Some of their ships give up their firepower, but only because they get better Command of their fleet in return. The Tan Ru, as a machine intelligence, work together better than any other race (like the Zorg, they can practically Call every ship in all at once), and while they have few dice, they control them the best. As for the deadly Kawangi, they are terrible to behold -- easily the most devastating foe in the game.

Most of the special effects will be familiar to players of **Deep White Sea**, though a couple of effects have been removed (Poison doesn't affect ships much). A few new ones have been added -- Cloak and Dodge allow a ship to avoid being seen or hit by enemy fire, and Shield simply deflects any attack lower than its level. Additionally, Remove lets you force the removal of an opposing unit (though without scoring points for it), and Move and Shoot (and its opposite number Shoot and Move) give a ship two actions to the normal one action.

The rules haven't been altered significantly -- the only major change is that dice may act as they are brought into play instead of waiting for their next turn, and a few minor bits have been cleaned up. The order in which the rules have been presented has been shifted, and this seems to make a world of difference (for the better) in understanding the system.

Thematically there's little overlap between the two releases -- the first set had individual people on its dice duking it out in personal combat, while this is spaceborne dogfighting. Nevertheless there's nothing stopping players from using the sets together, and they should be able to do so without anything more hazardous than suspending some disbelief.

The graphics are nice, but it's hard to jazz up the artwork and make the units look different from any other ship counter from any other game. A few of the designs are a little dark and this sometimes makes the accompanying game stats dim, but most are pretty clear considering their small size. They duplicate the look of the ships from the PC version, so computer fans who want to see what their favorites can do on the board will get the visuals to match.

It's good to see the **Diceland** game finally getting a new release to spice things up, and **Space** is good fun and a worthwhile purchase whether you've played **Deep White Sea** or not. Still, the set is something of a holding pattern, adding functional new quirks but offering little in the way of real changes or innovations that demonstrate the full potential the game can -- and hopefully will - attain.

--Andy Vetromile

Passing Players and Painted Bellies

This past week has seen a number of events align within my life, some of them interrelated:

I have started rehearsals for my role in a local play here; my role as Joel Cairo in *The Maltese Falcon* marks my first return to the stage since high school (not counting the occasional improv work). Cairo is a role where I play an effeminate vaguely European criminal, and I find myself reaffirming my masculinity in the rest of my life - smashing beer cans into my forehead, leaving the toilet seat up, not asking for directions - and convincing myself that being told, "You're *great* in this role!" is a good thing. I've also learned that trying to keep an accent is difficult; what started out as a Russian accent turned into an Irish one by the end, to the point where I found myself saying afterwards, "The kids are after me Lucky Charms *and* me Maltese Falcon!" There is a wide variety of local theatre folks in the production; although we all seem to be having fun so far, I've already come to the conclusion that some of the performers take this *much* more seriously than others.

Last weekend I also had the opportunity to go to a beach house with some friends and join their smallish LARP for the evening. I got the opportunity to see the interactions of a bunch of different players and observe how their game went, as well as adopt a cheesy Italian accent.

Meanwhile my traditional weekly LARP - which I was absent from for a week because of the aforementioned beach house - had an incident last time, where, amid other conflict, one player got worked up and actually pushed another one . . . thus violating one of the sacrosanct rules of the *Mind's Eye Theatre* books. Afterward one player met a group of other players at a 1980's dance night at a local club, and found herself snubbed by them . . . seemingly for game-related reasons. As she put it, "I'm, like, 21, and they're all like 26 and older . . . and *I* need to be the mature one?!?"

Unrelated to the above incident, I've found myself putting in a sabbatical as a GM at my weekly LARP until my play runs in September. Yes, I found that even my seemingly infinite time commitments do have *some* limit, and I've decided that the "something that has to give" would be the LARP.

Oh, and I also have learned that, when the tanning parlor makes you sign a four-page waiver basically stating that pasty-skinned Irish red-heads with green eyes and an inability to tan - like, say, me - shouldn't use a tanning bed, they really, really mean it.

So what common thread (besides my Darwin-Award-nominated dalliance with pigmentation technology) ties all of these incidents together?

Well, I realize that gaming is a hobby that, like many, people have different levels of attachment to. Now, not too long ago I probably would have made the point that folks should remember that, no matter what happens or how exciting or angering it is, it's only a game; don't take it too seriously and you'll be okay.

But I'm not so sure I believe that anymore. Oh, sure, it *is* still just a game, and it's probably wise not to become obsessed with it; if you're going to fling yourself off a bridge because your wizard Zappo Zam failed his Getting Turned Into Hush Puppies saving throw, it's probably time to get some professional help. But I also recognize that much of life's experiences and pursuits strike us in different ways; just because you feel less strongly about something than many other people doesn't mean you're necessarily wrong, nor are other people wrong for having stronger ties to things. (Or vice versa . . . wow, that's a complicated sentence.)

I got choked up when my hamster died a few years ago. I have a hobby (habit?) of collecting copies of the comic *Marvel Team-Up* #137 from bargain bins. I don't care *anything* about sports, and keep up with them the bit I do solely for their ability to let me tap into the Guy Collective. Events hold different weights for different folks; I realize now that if, say, someone wants to devote themselves to the Detroit Lions, collect all Detroit-related merchandise, and dress up like a cheerleader for LionCon, more power to him . . . and hopefully he won't judge *me* too harshly for getting weepy during *Mulan*.

No, the point I would make nowadays is to take a step back to recognize and fully gauge *how much* this stuff means to you. That step alone can make all the difference, especially in games, which are a social pursuit and generally require having other folks hanging around. Having an obsession with your group's **Vampire** game means that you'll probably contribute seriously and in a positive manner to that campaign, but it also means that setbacks or disruptions - either in-game or out-of-game - may bother you. On the other hand, having a mere passing interest in that same game means you will probably be okay with troubles about the game, but may be a disruptive element yourself.

What can you do once you recognize your level of involvement with the game? Well, not counting the bridge-flinging mentioned earlier, that really only depends on the disposition of the *rest* of the gaming group. After all, if everyone you are hanging around with enjoys the same level of commitment - whether it's a bloodthirsty weekly poker game you all take deathly seriously, a group urge to paint the Detroit Lions logo on your bellies and go to the stadium in 10-degree weather, or playing in a **Shadowrun** game you play in 12-hour marathon sessions - it really isn't a problem. Likewise if everyone treats the monthly **d20 Modern** game as an entertaining diversion but nothing to get terribly excited about, everyone should have a pretty good time.

The problem only potentially comes when people with different outlooks intermingle in a gaming group; steely-eyed poker players will probably tear apart a chatty "in for fun" member of the group, a casual football fan will probably view belly-painters with horror, and a **Shadowrun** player who goofs around during those marathon sessions may well ruin the game for everyone else. (And, of course, the flip side is also true; a **d20 Modern** guru may be wildly dissatisfied by that casual beer-and-pretzels gaming group.)

So if there is the potential for conflict, then what? Well, determine if there actually *is* conflict, or try to assess how likely conflict is. It's entirely possible that the differing viewpoints and interest levels are *healthy* for the game; the less-interested players can help keep the more intense players grounded, while the enthusiastic players can provide an environment for those less extreme to more fully appreciate the game.

But that may be the Best Case Scenario. If so, try to consider, if there is disruption, how much there is likely to be. Life isn't perfect, and a bit of friction may be a small price to pay for a gaming group that everyone is happy with.

But if everyone isn't happy, then what? Well, a good possibility is to try to find a compromise of some sort. For example, I was once part of a **Shadowrun** game where two of the players were *really* into the game, and two others were only mildly interested; there was friction within the game almost immediately. After a few games where folks weren't having too much fun, we canceled that game and switched over to an **Advanced Dungeons & Dragons** game. This game was less of an obsession to the two diehard **Shadowrunners**, and was mildly *more* interesting to one of the other two gamers; as a result, the level of interest within the game was more balanced, and the game was more successful.

Or consider the possibility of separate games or sub-games. For example, many larger LARPs will often break into smaller groups based on the interest levels of the players; the "hardcore" players cluster together, the more casual attendees get in a group, and so on. If the **Shadowrun** game above was large enough, with roughly equal groups of diehard and casual gamers, it may have been possible to break the game into two separate games - one for each interest level.

And, that isn't possible, and any of the other Random Thought Table koans - be honest, talk to each other, etc. - don't work, then it may be better to leave a gaming group that isn't meeting your needs. Life is short, and there's a lot of world out there to limit yourself to a game that bothers you.

But, no matter what else you do, if the waiver says you shouldn't use a tanning booth, then for pity's sake don't.

--Steven Marsh

The Akashik Four!

for *GURPS*

by James L. Cambias

The Akashik Four are a group of superheroes based on the ideas of Theosophy as put forth by occultists like Madame Blavatsky, Rudolph Steiner, and Annie Besant (see the sidebar for a very incomplete summary). They are designed as low-end 300-point supers, suitable for a Theosophical *GURPS Cliffhangers* campaign or a four-color Golden Age *GURPS Supers* game.

History

The Akashik Four began their career battling crime and the forces of occult evil in 1926. The founder was the being known as "The Lord of the World," leader of the Great White Brotherhood of mystic Mahatmas, headquartered in the hidden city of Shambalah in the Gobi desert. Aware of the growing tide of both mundane and supernatural evil in the outside world, the Lord of the World selected four champions to fight for good. He appeared to each of them in a vision and gave them their instructions: they must gather in New York and join forces to battle the sinister minions of the Dark Face.

The Akashik Four responded to the challenge, and made their headquarters in Doc Toltec's laboratory high atop the Woolworth Building. Their first exploits were campaigns against the gangsters and bootleggers whose turf battles were making the city unsafe for decent folk. But in 1927 the evil Lords of the Dark Face made their first bid for world power with an army of ectoplasmic horrors. Only the devices of Doc Toltec, the mental and mystic powers of Nova and the Golden Lama, and the brute power of Thal the Lemurian kept civilization safe.

In subsequent years the Akashik Four battled occult perils in Egypt and Central America, while facing mundane evils in Chicago, China, Spain, and Ethiopia. As the 1930s went on, their efforts became focused on the rising menace of German fascism and Japanese militarism. By 1937 they and other occult heroes were already locked in a struggle with Nazi sorcerers. During the war they were affiliated with the OSS, conducting occult covert operations in Peru, Egypt, India, and Tibet.

Their final battle was in Antarctica in 1948, against the last remnants of the Third Reich. Thwarting a final plot to unleash worldwide destruction, Doc Toltec and Thal the Lemurian were killed. Heartbroken, Nova and the Golden Lama abandoned the active campaign against evil and devoted the rest of their lives to finding and training future champions.

Thar the Lemurian (300 points)

The last survivor of a forgotten Lemurian colony on a remote South Sea isle, Thar was discovered by a film crew in 1922 and brought to America as a circus attraction. In the summer of 1924 the big top caught fire, and Thar's heroism in saving audience members from the blaze won him widespread fame. Pressure

Headquarters

The Akashik Four make their headquarters in New York's Woolworth Building, a gleaming white spire in lower Manhattan overlooking Chinatown. Doc Toltec rents the entire 49th floor of the building, which is furnished with a complete laboratory and workshop, guest quarters for the other members, and an arsenal of fantastic devices and weaponry. There is a private elevator direct from the lobby. A basement garage holds Doc Toltec's powerful Studebaker cars, while a private hangar at Floyd Bennett Field contains his Ford trimotor plane and personal blimp.

Nova is the only member of the team who doesn't normally live in the building (although both Thar and the Golden Lama often spend nights elsewhere in their wanderings about the city). She has a comfortable apartment in Greenwich Village, linked to the laboratory via a radiotelephone device disguised as a piece of Mayan sculpture. Since many villains know about Doc Toltec's laboratory headquarters, Nova's apartment must sometimes

from newspapers and civic leaders freed him from his life in the circus, and he spent the next couple of years as a wanderer, doing odd jobs and picking up women across North America. When the Lord of the World appeared to him, he made his way to New York and joined Doc Toltec.

Thar has learned enough about the modern world not to suffer from the Primitive disadvantage, but still prefers not to use any technology more advanced than stone or wood. He is an incorrigible (and surprisingly successful) skirt-chaser, as his kind personality and good reputation nearly offset his alarming appearance. Despite his outlandish appearance, he probably has a better understanding of ordinary people than any other member of the Four. When not battling the minions of the Dark Face, Thar spends his time at simple pursuits -- fishing, watching baseball games, and introducing himself to every pretty girl he meets.

A hulking Lemurian, 12' 2" tall, 1,600 lbs., with four arms, brown fur, and three blue eyes spaced at intervals around his head. Age 34.

ST 28 [165]; **DX** 12 [20]; **IQ** 10; **HT** 16 [80]
Move 7.

Advantages: Charisma (+2) [10], Collected [5], Combat Reflexes [15], Damage Resistance (DR 4) [12], Extra Arms (two) [20], Night Vision [10], Reputation (as a protector of the innocent, +2 all the time, everywhere) [10], 360-degree Vision [25].

Disadvantages: Appearance: Monstrous [-25], Chummy [-5], Gullibility [-10], Inconvenient Size (12 feet tall) [-10], Lecherousness [-15], Pacifism: Cannot Kill [-10], Truthfulness [-5], Xenophilia [-5], Wealth: Poor [-15].

Quirks: Attracted to tall red-haired women, Distrusts all technology beyond TL1, Loves dinosaurs, Refuses to get a job, Speaks in a booming voice [-5]

Skills: Axe/Mace-13 [4], Brawling-15 [8], First Aid/TL1-11 [2], Occultism-10 [2], Riding (Triceratops)-11 [1], Stealth-12 [2], Streetwise-9 [1], Survival-11 (Jungle) [4], Swimming-12 [1], Throwing-12 [4], Tracking-10 [2].

Languages: English-9 [1], Lemurian-10 (native).

Equipment: Thar seldom carries any weapon other than a club or rocks for throwing. He normally wears a leopard-print circus strongman's leotard, modified to fit his immense body. For more formal occasions he has a single custom-tailored suit.

Doc Toltec (300 points)

Doc Toltec (his real name is Rlaveg Askac) was born three-quarters of a million years ago in one of the Atlantean colonies in what is now Central America. Like all the ancient Toltecs of Atlantis (not to be confused with their remote Mexican descendants), he had rock-hard coppery skin and a tremendous intellect. He was an up-and-coming scientist in a highly advanced civilization until an earthquake trapped him in an underground laboratory complex. With no way to escape, he placed himself in suspended animation until help could arrive. Sadly, the quake was the start of the catastrophes which destroyed

serve as a safe house for the team, and has a cache of medical supplies, some spare weapons and devices, and a convenient skylight for secret comings and goings.

What the Heck?

Theosophy is a school of occult thought (or mystical balderdash) invented by Madame Helena Blavatsky in the 1880s. It combined elements of Spiritualism with poorly-understood Buddhist and Hindu theology, a dash of garbled Darwinian evolution, and borrowings from just about every mystical or occult tradition. Madame Blavatsky presented all this in a series of books which she claimed were channeled from the "Akashik Records," a kind of supernatural archive maintained by the Great White Brotherhood of mystic Mahatmas.

A key element of Madame Blavatsky's history of life on Earth is the sequence of seven "Root Races," each of which goes through various sub-races in the progress of the species. In particular, the Third Root Race were the Lemurians, who discovered sexual reproduction and kept dinosaurs. The Fourth Root Race were the Atlanteans, which Madame Blavatsky identified with the Toltecs. They were wiped out when their continent sank 800,000 years ago (this Atlantis isn't to be confused with the later Atlantis which Plato wrote about, nor are the Toltecs to be confused with the Toltecs of

Atlantis, and rescue never came.

In 1915 a band of Mexican revolutionaries stumbled across the complex and tried to break in, triggering devices which awakened the sleeper. His mighty intellect quickly mastered English and Spanish, and equipped with super-scientific devices and a hoard of golden treasure, he moved to Manhattan to assist the people of his adopted eon. The newspapers quickly dubbed him "Doc Toltec," and when the Lord of the World contacted him in 1926, he was already battling New York's gangsters and various monsters in exotic parts of the world.

Doc Toltec's skills are all at TL6, since he has completely familiarized himself with modern science. He can also use ancient Atlantean equipment, which was approximately TL (5+4), but naturally there isn't much of that around after hundreds of thousands of years. Gadgets developed by Doc Toltec are either improved versions of existing TL6 equipment, some TL (5+1) "weirdtech," or TL7 gear decades early. "Weirdtech" devices appropriate for Doc Toltec are such things as the Magnetic Needler, Chloroform Grenade, Etheric Spiriphone, Eigenwellendetektor, or Etheric Mesh (all from **GURPS Steam-Tech**). Real-world TL7 equipment includes electric stunners or tasers, high-powered pistols, or compact submachineguns like the Uzi or MP-5. (A later-period Doc Toltec operating during WWII or the Cold War could even have 1990s firearms or prototype TL8 equipment, although computers and most of their applications are beyond his resources to create.)

Doc Toltec's personality is perhaps the most abrasive of any in the Four. He was a member of an elite group in a civilization more advanced than anything humanity has achieved. Consequently he considers himself naturally superior to humans, and takes a patronizing attitude toward them. Toltec seldom takes a break from work, and when he does he prefers to spend it contemplating the stars or meditating rather than socializing with humans.

Apparent age 30, 6'2" tall, 240 lbs. Copper-colored skin, black hair, dark eyes. A powerfully-built man in a gold-embroidered loincloth.

ST 14 [45]; **DX** 14 [45]; **IQ** 15 [60]; **HT** 13 [30]
Move 6.75.

Advantages: Appearance: Attractive [5], Charisma +1 [5], Combat Reflexes [15], Damage Resistance 7 [21], Gadgeteer [25], Gizmos (two) [10], Status 1 (free from Wealth), Versatile [5], Wealth (Filthy Rich) [50].

Disadvantages: Cannot Harm Innocents [-10], Code of Honor (Gentleman's) [-10], Curious [-5], Enemy: gangsters (large group, 9-) [-20], No Sense of Humor [-10], Overconfidence [-10], Secret (true origin) [-5], Sense of Duty (innocents) [-15], Stubbornness [-5], Unnatural Feature: shiny copper-colored skin [-5], Workaholic [-5].

Quirks: Alcohol Intolerance, Considers his own ethics more important than laws, Doesn't understand many modern ideas, Drinks warm animal blood, Wears very little.

Skills: Armoury-18 (guns) [8], Astronomy-15 [4], Beam Weapons-17 [2], Chemistry-16 [6], Electronics Operation-16 (sensors) [4], Electronics-16

precolonial Mexico, unless maybe they are -- consistency was not Madame Blavatsky's strong point). Modern humans (or at least the "Aryans" of Europe and India) are the Fifth Root Race, and soon the first members of the Sixth Root Race will appear.

Crossovers and Variations

Though the Akashik Four fit best in a pulp-era campaign, when Theosophy itself was at its height, GMs can use them for **GURPS Atomic Horror** adventures or four-color Golden Age supers games. They can be beefed up for higher-powered superheroics by increasing their attributes, especially DX and HT. Past about 1960, their brand of mysticism is a bit too old-fashioned, though they might serve as "elder statesmen" in the superhero community.

They can also be moved back to an earlier era, although Theosophy itself didn't exist before the 1870s. A Steampunk-era version of the Akashik Four would spend less time battling mundane evil and more time coping with weird menaces unleashed by the Lords of the Dark Face. In the **GURPS Castle Falkenstein** universe, they are certainly allies of the Second Compact, and the Golden Lama is a powerful sorcerer of the hidden Shambalah lodge.

In the **GURPS Cabal** setting, the Cabal are the Lords of the Dark Face the Akashik Four

(sensors) [6], Engineer-18 (electrical) [12], Guns-18 [4], History-14 [2], Karate-15 [8], Mathematics-15 [4], Mechanic-14 (electric motors) [1], Occultism-15 [2], Physician-14 [2], Physics-16 [6], Piloting-14 (dirigible) [2], Research-15 [2], Science!-15 [8], Stealth-14 [2], Swimming-14 [1], Weird Science-14 [4].

Languages: Ancient Toltec/Atlantean (native)-15, English-13 [1], German-13 [1], Mayan-13 [1], Spanish-13 [1].

Equipment: Doc Toltec usually wears nothing but a gold-embroidered loincloth, although in public he puts on trousers and occasionally a shirt. He never bothers with shoes. Toltec always has a couple of advanced gadgets with him, and in dangerous situations arms himself with a pair of powerful firearms equivalent to .44 Magnum automatics.

Nova (300 points)

The first of the Sixth Root Race, Nora Vance exhibited unusual mental and physical powers as a child in Ohio. In her teens, however, her uncontrollable "poltergeist" telekinesis made her an outcast, and she eventually fled her family home -- just in time, as the agents of the Lords of the Dark Face were on her trail. For a time she worked as a vaudeville showgirl, before her paintings attracted the attention of gallery owners in Los Angeles. She remained there until the Lord of the World contacted her in 1926, at which point she relocated to New York. Today Nova maintains a cover identity as Eve Newman, an artist and fixture in the Greenwich Village bohemian set.

Her psionic powers are an interesting mix. She has low-level powers which she can use all the time, but her higher power levels of ESP and Telepathy require her to enter a trance state. Meanwhile, her Telekinesis power can make small objects fly around like bullets when she's in danger. In fact, none of her powers are perfectly under her control -- strange things just happen whenever Nova's around.

Note that unlike the other members of the group, Nova has the Lords as a personal enemy. The Dark Face fight Doc Toltec when he interferes with their schemes, but are otherwise content to leave him alone. But Nova is a prize -- by capturing and corrupting her they can influence the evolution of the next human race.

Nova's personality is the most flashy of the group. In her secret identity she is a colorful bohemian artist, and her attitudes carry over to her heroic persona. Her artistic life has given her good exposure to some of New York's seamier side. She can often be frivolous and impulsive, which drives Doc Toltec frantic. One thing which can make her serious is the welfare of other members of the Sixth Root Race. As other children of the new race are born, she strives to protect them from the Lords of the Dark Face and help them control and understand their powers.

Age 26. 5'2" tall, 100 lbs. A slender fair-skinned woman with no hair and unusual silver eyes (in her secret identity she wears a frizzy blonde wig).

ST 10; **DX** 15 [60]; **IQ** 15 [30]; **HT** 13 [30]
Move 7.00.

spend so much time battling. The Golden Lama can switch his ritual magic abilities for a batch of standard **GURPS Magic** spells and a complete working knowledge of Hermetic modifiers to go one-on-one with Cabal sorcerers. Players can run the Four in their epic battles against the Cabal, or use them as potent if slightly clueless adversaries for a group of Cabal PCs. Note that it's quite likely that one of the Grand Masters is actually the "Lord of the World" who organized the Four, as a convenient "deniable asset" for internal battles. Cabal PCs may fight against them one week, then join forces the next.

Finally, Theosophical ideas found fertile soil in 1920s Germany, and some of Madame Blavatsky's concepts have uncomfortable echoes in Nazi ideology -- some writers specifically identified the Fifth Root Race as the Aryans, with all other humans merely the degenerate descendants of previous races. Maybe the Lord of the World isn't such a nice guy, and the Akashik Four are swastika-wearing bad guys for a **GURPS Weird War II** or **Hellboy RPG** campaign. In that case, Thar the Lemurian is a brutal, sex-crazed goon, Doc Toltec keeps alive ancient sacrificial rituals, Nova is impatiently waiting for humans to go extinct and make way for her super-race, and the Golden Lama is possessed by a hostile alien intelligence.

Advantages: Absolute Timing [5], Appearance (beautiful) [15], Autotrance [5], Eidetic Memory [30], Longevity [5], Metabolism Control-2 [10], Rapid Healing [5], Reduced Sleep [10].

Disadvantages: Enemy: The Lords of the Dark Face (medium superhuman group, 6-) [-15], Extravagance [-10], Impulsiveness [-10], Overconfidence [-10], Pacifism (self-defense only) [-15], Secret Identity [-10], Sense of Duty (the Sixth Root Race) [-10], Unnatural Feature (hairless) [-5], Weirdness Magnet [-15].

Quirks: Always wears trousers, Avoids alcohol and stimulants, Bisexual, Encodes occult wisdom in her paintings, Only eats fruit and nuts.

Skills: Area Knowledge-14 (New York) [1/2], Area Knowledge-14 (World)-1 [1/2], Artist-15 [4], Chess-14 [1], Dancing-15 [2], Disguise-13 [1], First Aid-14 [1], Guns-17 [1], Judo-17 [16], Literature-13 [1], Lucid Dreaming-13 [1], Occultism-14 [2], Performance-13 [1], Piloting-14 (dirigible) [1], Savoir-Faire-14 [1], Sex Appeal-13 [1], Stealth-16 [4], Streetwise-13 [1].

Languages: English-13 (native), Mayan-12 [1], Spanish-13 [1], Tibetan-12 [1].

Psi Powers: ESP-5 [15], ESP-20 (only in trance state, 1/3 cost) [20], Telekinesis-4 [16], Telekinesis-16 (uncontrolled, 1/2 cost) [32], Telepathy-3 [15], Telepathy-9 (only in trance state, 1/3 cost) [15].

Psi Skills: Clairvoyance-13 [4], Clairaudience-13 [4], Emotion Sense-13 [4], Mental Blow-12 [2], Mind Shield-13 [4], Precognition-12 [2], Psi Sense-13 [4], Psychometry-14 [6], Telekinesis-14 [6], Telesend-13 [4], Telereceive-13 [4].

Equipment: In her secret identity, she wears fashionably "arty" clothes and a blonde wig. As Nova she wears boots, white jodhpurs, a black tunic, and a domino mask, leaving her hairless head exposed. In combat situations she carries a 9mm Luger, but prefers not to use it.

The Golden Lama (300 points)

The Golden Lama is a 16-year-old Tibetan boy, the current bodily vessel for an ancient immaterial Venusian Lord of Fire. Consequently he has vast mystical abilities and can tap memories from dozens of previous lives. He was only 14 when the Lord of the World sent him from Shamballah to New York to join the Akashik Four.

The Lama's powers are considerable, but require some preparation. If he has time to perform a magic ritual, he can summon and command spirit beings and manifest them with his Ectoplasmic Projection ability. Caught in a sudden combat situation, he must rely on the martial arts he learned as a monk.

Because he has the mentality of an ancient otherworldly being, the Golden Lama seldom bothers with practical worldly details. Money and possessions are unimportant to him. He does regard all human life as precious, and whenever possible tries to convert foes rather than harm them. He often forgets that his current vessel is only a youth, and often surprises or amuses people with pronouncements of ancient wisdom and casual references to events of past centuries.

Age 16. 5'4" tall, 140 lbs. A wiry Tibetan boy with a shaved head and dark eyes, dressed as a Buddhist monk.

ST 10; **DX** 13 [30]; **IQ** 13 [30]; **HT** 12 [20]
Move 6.25.

Advantages: High Pain Threshold [10], Racial Memory [40], Sanctity [5], Strong Will +1 [4], Unfazeable [15].

Disadvantages: Absent-Mindedness [-15], Clueless [-10], Compulsive Generosity [-5], Devout Buddhist [-5], Pacifism (self-defense only) [-15], Poverty (poor) [-15], Selfless [-10], Sense of Duty (all humanity) [-15], Truthfulness [-5], Youth (age 16) [-4].

Quirks: Begs for food, Fanatically clean, Forgets he is only a boy, Prefers to sleep outdoors.

Skills: Autohypnosis-14 [6], Breath Control-12 [4], Fire Walking-13 [1], First Aid-13 [1], History: Esoteric-12 [2], Karate-16 [24], Meditation-12 [4], Occultism-17 [12], Panhandling-13 [1], Stealth-13 [2], Theology-14 (Buddhist) [6], Weird Magic-13 [6].

Languages: English-11 [1], Hindi-12 [1], Mandarin Chinese-12 [1], Sanskrit-13 [2], Tibetan-13 (native).

Magical Skills and Rituals: Ectoplasmic Projection-12 [2], Path of Health-17 [20], Path of Knowledge-16 [16], Path of Protection-17 [20], Path of Spirit-18 [24], Ritual Magic-18 [28].

Magical Advantages: Channelling [10], Ectoplasmic Projection-2 (Always Visible, -20%) [10], Medium [10], Ritual Adept-3 [30], Ritual Aptitude-5 [5].

Equipment: The Golden Lama wears saffron-colored wool robes and carries a string of beads and a begging bowl. He never uses a weapon.

* * *

Thanks to Jesse Lowe for inspiring this article, and Bill Stoddard for making me write it.

Franz Anton Mesmer

for *GURPS*

by James L. Cambias

History

Friederich (Franz) Anton Mesmer was born May 23, 1734, the son of a forester for the Prince-Bishop of Constance, in southwestern Germany. The young Mesmer must have showed signs of promise, for he was able to get a wide-ranging education despite his parents' lack of means. He attended the Jesuit university at Dillengen, then Ingolstadt university in Bavaria (where Adam Weishaupt later taught and the fictional Dr. Frankenstein was a student).

His first training was in theology to prepare him for the priesthood, but he abandoned that and began studying law in Vienna in 1759. After a year of that he switched again to the study of medicine. His dissertation was on the influence of tides on human health and behavior; much of it was plagiarized verbatim from the work of an English doctor named Mead, who was Isaac Newton's personal physician and wrote in the early part of the 18th century.

In 1768, Mesmer married Anna Maria von Posch, a wealthy widow 10 years his elder. For the next decade he practiced medicine out of her palatial house in Vienna. He was a friend and patron of Mozart's family, and a one-act opera by the 12-year-old composer was first performed in the gardens of Mesmer's house.

The Jesuit astronomer Maximilian Hell (who led an expedition to Lapland in 1769 and has a crater on the Moon named after him) first got Mesmer interested in magnetism. Hell had dabbled in treating ailments by applying metal magnets to the patient's body. (GMs looking for more High Weirdness can assume that Hell found the entrance to the Hollow Earth in Lapland, and learned the secrets of magnetic healing from the Hyperboreans.) Mesmer adopted Hell's ideas about magnetism, claiming (falsely) to have described them first in his (plagiarized) dissertation.

Mesmer soon found that the mysterious healing power of magnets could be transferred to other substances, including water and human beings. The patients responded just as well to "magnetized" objects as to actual magnets. Mesmer decided that there was such a thing as "animal magnetism," a force generated within the body which could be stored and used for healing. He augmented his personal magnetic power with an exciting-looking electrostatic generator which made sparks and gave mild shocks.

For the next few years Mesmer managed a series of heavily publicized "cures" alternating with bitter controversies with other doctors and scientists. His most famous case was of the young blind musician Maria Theresa Paradis. Mesmer supposedly restored her sight, but after a while she went blind again. He blamed her parents for undermining his treatments.

Mesmer went to Paris in 1778, establishing himself in the fashionable Place de Vendome. His wife remained behind in Vienna, and they never saw each other again. In his Paris home, Mesmer set up four rooms with large tubs of "magnetized" water, from which patients could absorb the healing power through iron rods or cords. (There was a fifth room where the poor could get treated for free, but that water was only magnetized by one of Mesmer's assistants.) His place became something of a social rendezvous -- ladies and gentlemen would sit around the tubs chatting, having tea, and listening to glass harmonica music. The establishment had two large doormen in matching livery, and a staff of assistants.

For acute cases, Mesmer would treat the sufferer personally, stroking or pressing the afflicted part while maintaining eye contact with the patient, sometimes for hours at a stretch. At times this treatment could induce fainting, vomiting, and even convulsions, so a padded room was added. Mesmer did accompany his magnetic treatments with more orthodox medical methods -- bleeding, purges, and a variety of drugs. His favorite prescriptions were lemonade and

cream of tartar. (Perhaps Mesmer's reputation as a miracle healer stemmed from the fact that his treatments were less harmful than other medical practices of the day.)

At first he was eager to have his methods tested and studied by the scientific authorities. Mesmer approached the Royal Academy of Sciences, the Royal Society of Medicine, and the Faculty of Medicine. The results were not good. Mesmer expected the doctors to accept his ideas without question, while they dismissed him as a quack.

In 1783, Mesmer established the Society of Universal Harmony with the help of his patient and secretary Nicolas Bergasse. Members paid up to 1,200 livres for Mesmer's instruction. Still, the organization grew, with more than 100 members in Paris, and daughter lodges in France, Belgium, and the West Indies. Lafayette was a member of the Society, and carried a letter from Mesmer to George Washington when he joined the American army. (Illuminated campaigns can assume the letter contained orders from Mesmer to his American mind-slaves.)

The following year King Louis XVI appointed a scientific commission to evaluate Mesmer's claims. The group included such luminaries as Benjamin Franklin, Dr. Joseph-Ignace Guillotin (who later reformed methods of capital punishment), Antoine Lavoisier, the astronomer Jean Bailly, and others. The scientists found no evidence that animal magnetism existed at all. (Interestingly, the commission also produced a *secret* report to the Prefect of Police about the possible risk to the virtue of ladies receiving Mesmeric treatment -- a valid concern given that some descriptions of the effects of magnetic treatment sound suspiciously like sexual arousal. In a conspiratorial game, the secret report contains the *real* facts on Mesmer's powers, and naturally resides somewhere in Warehouse 23 today.) The report was followed by a flurry of refutations, counter-refutations, denunciations, lampoons, and satires.

In 1793, with France still in the midst of revolution, Mesmer returned to Vienna. He was arrested on suspicion of being a political radical, released after a month, and remained under surveillance while in Austria. It is hardly surprising that he removed to Switzerland in 1796. Much of his fortune was in French government bonds, which became worthless with the Revolution, so he lived modestly. In 1798 he returned to Paris, where he published his autobiography and a summary of his discoveries. But with the rise of Napoleon he returned to Switzerland and lived there until his death in 1815.

Mesmer In the Campaign

As a patron, Mesmer has wealth, very good social connections, and whatever benefits his magnetic abilities can provide (10 points for a mundane Mesmer, 15 if he really does have healing powers, and 20 points for a cinematic Mesmer with mind-controlling hypnotic abilities). If he becomes the enemy of a PC, Mesmer's preferred tactics are lawsuits and vitriolic pamphlets, although a cinematic Mesmer could also make use of hypnotically programmed assassins and brainwashing.

Characters in Paris after 1778 may simply be patients of Mesmer's. His home is a good place to meet Contacts and gather information by listening to gossip. PCs can take "believes in Mesmer's healing powers" as a Quirk.

Mesmerism

Treatment by Animal Magnetism seems to be mostly a matter of suggestion combined with patients getting better on their own. In **GURPS** terms, Mesmer has the Hypnosis skill although he doesn't call it that. Like other hypnotists, he can use hypnosis to help patients control pain, relieve stress and stress-related ailments, and possibly cure ailments which are psychological in origin. He cannot cure organic diseases or injuries, although he can sometimes convince his patients that he has.

If the GM wants a Mesmer who really can heal people with his mind, give Mesmer either the Faith Healing advantage or the psionic power Healing at a fairly low power level (no more than 3), and replace his Hypnotism skill with Healing-10.

For a full-bore cinematic Mesmer with the power to cloud men's minds, use the "Hypno-Power" rules from **GURPS**

Warehouse 23 and increase his Hypnotism skill level to 20. That allows him to mesmerize opponents in combat, implant hidden commands, and edit memories -- perfect for adding *Manchurian Candidate*-style paranoia to a **GURPS Scarlet Pimpernel** or **GURPS Age of Napoleon** campaign. This version should also have Weird Science skill and probably some combat abilities.

Obviously, any version of Mesmer whose powers actually work should not have the Delusion disadvantage.

Crossovers

GURPS Scarlet Pimpernel

Mesmer's own politics were vaguely liberal, but he did flee Paris during the Terror. His disciple Bergasse was active in the first phase of the French Revolution. Given the shifting loyalties of the time, Mesmer could easily be on either side. A heroic Mesmer (with psionic healing) would be a good ally, a realistic Mesmer could need rescuing, and a villainous hypnotic mastermind Mesmer might actually be the hidden power behind the whole Reign of Terror.

GURPS Cabal

In the Cabal history, Mesmer is likely a psionic Adept, establishing his own Lodge in Paris after completing his training in Austria. Unlike other Adepts, Mesmer is unusually public in his activities. Is he simply "hiding in plain sight" using quack medicine as a cover, or is he playing a deeper game, pulling the strings of all the revolutionaries in Paris with the goal of transforming Europe?

Other GURPS Settings

By changing his name and the pseudoscientific buzzwords he uses, Mesmer can be a quack healer in just about any era. Obviously, this works best in settings without magical or psionic healing. In a **Cliffhangers** game, Mesmer's cultish Society for Universal Harmony might be the cover for an espionage ring, jewel-smuggling gang, or worse. In the **Atomic Horror** era, Mesmer's overconfident meddling in the very energies of life itself might backfire, leaving the PCs to confront the menace of the Magnetized Man!

A round-faced German gentleman with brown hair (usually hidden by a powdered wig), 5'9" tall, about 180 lbs.

ST 11 [10]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 13 [30]; **HT** 10 [0]
Move 5.

Advantages: Ally Group (Society for Universal Harmony, medium group, 9-) [20], Charisma +2 [10], Reputation (scientific-mystic healer, +1) [5], Status 2 [10], Voice [5], Wealth (very wealthy) [20]

Disadvantages: Delusion (magnetism works) [-10], Greed [-15], Overconfidence [-10], Reputation (quack, -2 among doctors and scientists) [-5].

Quirks: Freethinker, Loves music, Proud, Quarrelsome, Takes credit for others' work [-5]

Skills: Area Knowledge-14 (Paris) [1], Area Knowledge-14 (Vienna) [1], Astrology-11 [1], History-11 [1], Hypnotism-12 [2], Law-11 [1], Literature-11 [1], Mathematics-11 [1], Musical Instrument-12 (clavichord) [2], Musical Instrument-12 (glass harmonica) [2], Musical Instrument-11 (violin) [1], Naturalist-12 [2], Occultism-12 [1], Performance-13 [2], Pharmacy/TL4-12 [2], Philosophy-11 (Aristotelian) [1], Physician/TL4-14 [6], Physics/TL4-11 [1], Savoir-Faire-14 [2], Scene Design-11 [1], Theology-12 [2], Writing-13 [2].

Languages: French-13 [2], German-13 (native) [0], Latin-12 [2].

105 points

Equipment

Mesmer typically wears very fashionable clothing, often appearing in a lilac-colored coat. He does not carry a weapon, but he does have a complete TL4 doctor's kit, along with all sorts of impressive-looking medical devices: electrostatic generators, Leyden jars, magnets, and so forth. His wealth means that he can get almost any piece of equipment if it is available in Paris.

Class Action

The Jack-of-All-Trades

by Steve Honeywell

Everyone is good at something, be that cooking, painting pictures, or swinging a sword. But some people appear to be good at just about everything. They know at least a little about a lot, and know a lot about quite a bit as well. They have a variety of skills that make them not necessarily the best at any one thing, but at least competent at anything they try. These are Jacks- (or Jills-) of-all-trades, people capable of doing anything anyone else can do and more.

In **d20 System** terms, the Jack-of-all-trades, or joat, is someone who has concentrated his abilities on a variety of skills at the cost of combat abilities and spellcasting skill. Many have at least one craft skill and a professional skill to help them succeed in business, and some may have several of each. Joats are capable of possessing every skill available. While there's no guarantee that a joat will have ranks in a given skill, he probably does, and a powerful enough joat can even use skills he doesn't have ranks in. Their high number of skill points means that, given time, any joat will eventually have at least one rank in just about everything.

Because of the high skill point requirement for the joat prestige class, most of their ranks are filled by rogues or multi-classed rogues, and many of them are human. Highly intelligent characters of other classes may qualify for the joat class, but often find it unattractive. Lack of spellcasting progression and reduced bonuses to attacks make becoming a joat uninteresting for those who depend on spells or who find themselves on the front lines of combat. It's a possibility for a very smart human bard who doesn't rely on his spells and wishes to make himself able to do the work of several in a group context (or better take care of himself on the road alone).

NPC joats can be found doing almost anything, as the name of the class suggests. Some hire themselves out as trouble shooters or handymen while others use their various skills to run businesses or other enterprises. For an adventuring party, a joat easily takes the place of the rogue, and with his collection of esoteric skills, he can allow other characters to concentrate their skill points on just a few important ones.

Jack-of-All-Trades Class Details

Hit Die: d6

Jack-of-All-Trades Requirements

To qualify for this prestige class, a character must meet the following requirements:

- **Skills:** Any 8 skills: 10 ranks each, Any 15 skills (including the 8 mentioned previously): at least 1 rank
- **Special:** Must have access to at least one exclusive class skill

Class Skills

The Jack-of-all-trade's class skills are all skills except for exclusive class skills the character has never had access to (Scry and Animal Empathy for a rogue/joat, for example). These exclusive class skills are considered cross-class for Jacks-of-all-trades. Speak Language is still considered a cross-class skill, so a joat who wishes to add another language to his repertoire must spend two skill points to do so.

Skill Points at Each Level: 8 + Int modifier

Table 1-1: The Jack-of-All-Trades

Base Level	Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1	+0	+0	+2	+0	Insight
2	+1	+0	+3	+0	Bonus Feat (Skill Focus)
3	+1	+1	+3	+1	Quick Study
4	+2	+1	+4	+1	Calm Under Pressure
5	+2	+1	+4	+1	Bonus Feat (Skill Focus)
6	+3	+2	+5	+2	Lucky Guess
7	+3	+2	+5	+2	Quick Study
8	+4	+2	+6	+2	Bonus Feat (Skill Focus)
9	+4	+3	+6	+3	How'd He Do That?
10	+5	+3	+7	+3	Perfect Focus

Class Features

The following are features of the Jack-of-all-trades class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: A Jack-of-all-trades gains no additional armor or weapon proficiencies.

Insight: A Jack-of-all-trades may add his Intelligence modifier to any skill check three times per day. If the Jack-of-all-trades has no Int modifier or a negative modifier, he receives a bonus of +1 on uses of Insight. Insight may be not used with skills that have Intelligence as a key ability.

Bonus Feat: At 2nd level and every three levels after, the Jack-of-all-trades receives a bonus feat. This must be a Skill Focus feat for any skill in which the character has at least 1 rank.

Quick Study: At 2rd and 7th level, the Jack-of-all-trades receives a bonus 4 skill points. These must all be placed in the same skill, and must be placed in a skill in which the Jack-of-all-trades has had no previous training.

Calm Under Pressure: At 4th level, the Jack-of-all-trades may take 10 on any skill checks, even under adverse conditions. Calm Under Pressure can be used three times per day. The Insight ability may not be used in conjunction with Calm Under Pressure.

Lucky Guess: Starting at 6th level, the Jack-of-all-trades may reroll one failed skill check per day. The result of the re-roll must be accepted, even if it is worse than the original roll.

How'd He Do That?: At 9th level, the Jack-of-all-trades may use untrained any skill in which he has not trained, using the appropriate ability modifier once per day. For example, a ninth-level Jack-of-all-trades with no ranks in Alchemy may attempt to use the skill, adding his Intelligence modifier to a roll of a d20. The Insight and Calm Under Pressure abilities may not be used with How'd He Do That?

Perfect Focus: At 10th level, a Jack-of-all-trades is truly competent at performing under all conditions. He may take 20 on any skill check three times per day regardless of the situation. Perfect Focus may not be used in conjunction with Insight, Calm Under Pressure, or How'd He Do That?

HeroQuest

by Ron Edwards

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In the back of *Cults of Terror*, a *RuneQuest* supplement published by Chaosium in 1981, I find the following "upcoming products" announcement:

HeroQuest. A new FRP game compatible with but distinct from *RuneQuest*. The mighty of Glorantha enter the lands of myth and legend, penetrating the immortal stories to fight in the Gods War, to crusade against Chaos, or to aid the Lightbringers. A revolutionary concept and approach to myth, magic, and gaming.

By Greg Stafford.

Cults of Terror was published 21 years ago, but this game never appeared. We see its realization only now.

The mythic world of Glorantha dates back to the 1960s, and in the 1970s was well-represented in wargames from Chaosium. When roleplaying appeared on the hobby scene, the Chaosium crew lost no time in publishing *RuneQuest*, a fantasy RPG set in Glorantha. *RuneQuest* has been through a few changes over the years, and that's worth a whole essay right there. It was one of the most single influential roleplaying game designs in history, and Glorantha gained a world-wide fan following.

Stafford now owns the Glorantha setting through his independent company, Issaries Inc., and he enlisted the immensely talented and thoughtful Robin D. Laws (*Feng Shui*,

Rune, The Dying Earth) to write the core rules system -- this new package was first released as **Hero Wars** and is now greatly modified and renamed **HeroQuest**. It represents the full spectrum of epic fantasy, from young heroes struggling to find their place in the world, to near demi-gods questing into myth itself and even changing it.

Egg of Erangalos Karastomabor

Floating a few meters above the surface of land or water, this immense indestructible egg has intrigued philosophers and mystics since Time began. Its purpose and origin are a mystery, although theories abound. The Egg's specific color depends on the race viewing it: pale blue to humans, medium red to elves, pale orange-yellow to dwarfs, and bright blue-purple to trolls.

What is Glorantha?

HeroQuest is set in the fantasy world of Glorantha, which is highly influenced by Scandinavian epics, mid-20th-century fantasy fiction, and classical myth from Greece and the Middle East. It is nothing like the pseudo-Tolkien faux

fantasy in many roleplaying games. Glorantha has a powerful, sweeping feel to it, including story after story full of inspiring heroes and dramatic moments. It is full of magic and wonder.

A character is magic. Everything on Glorantha is magical and mystical. No one is a grunting, surly, atheistic sword-dude. There's no getting around it; your character has a personal, cultural, sincere tie to the beings that Give Life Meaning. How has that tie failed you? What changes do you want to make to it? Answering these questions is the essence of **HeroQuest** roleplaying.

The most important detail is that the Hero Wars have begun. The Lunar Empire, in its quest for a coastline, has run into a rebellious tribe of barbarians in a geographically difficult area called Dragon Pass. At first, it's just another war between an empire and some die-hard rebels, but each side calls the gods into it -- and the wars explode into events that will eventually drive the gods out of existence and redefine the world. What the player characters choose to do, how they choose to fight in the Hero Wars, is going to become the new mythology.

A fair amount of Glorantha material is, if not tongue-in-cheek, at least funny. I can see a tendency on my part to emphasize the serious, mythic, blood-and-passion side of it all, but that short-changes the humor. Examples include those silly Ducks, the Ernalda's priestess' magic feats like "Think-of-the-children Cajole," some of the funkier cultures that are solid satires of other games or fiction, and a lot of the names. If your roleplaying bent is toward the humorous, Glorantha can provide it, but if it's not, then the setting won't force it either.

For the new reader, Glorantha is fascinating and original (in gaming terms; in literary terms its roots are highly recognizable), but it can also be overwhelming, especially since this massive background is implied and referred to in many places across the books. Questions abound: "What's a Lightbringer?" or "What's all this about broos?" or "Where's Dragon Pass, anyway?"

The good news is that Glorantha, unlike many fantasy RPG settings, works very well in small bites added on through play session after play session. There's a lot to learn, ever more rewarding, but very little you have to know at the outset. And **HeroQuest** has been designed to present Glorantha in small bites.

How Does The Game Work?

Characters are created using keywords, terms that carry with them baskets of skills, relationships, and flaws. The most important are Homeland, Occupation, and Magic, so that I might create a character as a Heortling Healer of Chalana Arroy. Just by saying this, the guy has 20-25 skills, magic, and starting scores popped right onto the sheet. Using either a list or narrative method, you (the player) just pile on a bunch more skills and attributes as you see fit. The character is highly "set" by his or her background, but you add whatever you want, making up what you'd like (there is no set skill list), up to and including followers, wealth, and nifty items. The numbers are added very simply later and are very easy -- one number to one term (attribute, skill, item, or anything). No points, no math, no rolls, no allocation.

So here you are in Glorantha. What do you do? Well, quite a lot. The setting is racked with war, and there's simply no way to avoid it. The neat part is that people conduct "heroquests" to the Otherworld, joining and even influencing the stuff of myth, in order to promote their own political and military goals. As I implied above, the game finally realizes Stafford's original intent to introduce the classic, mystic heroquest into roleplaying. It takes myth and literature very seriously and completely ignores the whole concept of adventuring just to improve for the next adventure. Rules and ideas for this mode of play are presented in some detail.

In order to conduct a heroquest, characters need to care about something enough to form their own solution. They form a Hero Band, a group of individuals and their followers who represent a unique solution to the controversies and battles that wrack the land, up to and including bringing an actual godling or god into reality. Again, this is so different from the usual run-around-kill-monsters model that it will leave traditional players baffled (which is good, frankly). If you're thinking in terms of old-style fantasy gaming, with "my guy" being "run through" a "dungeon," **HeroQuest** scenarios will be a big change for you. They occur within communities and are concerned with facing moral crises that arise from societal change. The most important raw material comes from the various relationships, communities, and social roles represented by each player character.

So much for the basic content; now for the system. I do not exaggerate to call it a Great Leap Forward for roleplaying. It uses dice, but utterly abandons building a moment-to-moment reality as the goal. The basics are deceptively familiar: roll d20; check against a target value; compare with the opponent's roll. There's no further rolling or checking, you and/or the opponent simply did really well, did OK, missed by an inch, or screwed up. Same-old thing? No -- because of four things.

#1: Everything on the character sheet is an ability. Skill? It's an ability. Physical descriptor? It's an ability. Character flaw? It's an ability. There are no "attributes" and no "skills" as separate game entities; they're mechanically all the same thing. The result is so much more sensible, and so much easier in play, than anyone might imagine. Hundreds of aggravating things about roleplaying systems and character creation just disappear.

Even relationships are abilities. This is a big deal in play -- one can use "Relationship: brother" or "Relationship: the town" just as one might use "Broadsword." Instead of a combat or spell arsenal with a few skills attached, **HeroQuest** characters are people first, with lives and hates and loves, who also happen to fight and to know some magic.

Just as anything about your character is an ability, all conflicts are conducted exactly the same way in **HeroQuest**. It can be a debate, a fight, a romantic interlude, or the clash of armies, and it's all the same mechanic.

#2: Contests come in two kinds: Simple and Extended. Simple Contests are resolved with a single die roll, while Extended Contests involve rolling dice over several rounds of bidding Advantage Points. However, the distinction isn't about how complex the conflict is in-world, but about how emotionally important it is to the real people at the table. If the conflict at the moment is a way-station to something else, or is "over quickly" in cinematic terms, it's Simple -- doesn't matter if it takes one in-game action, or 20, or a hundred. If it's a big dramatic moment, though, it's Extended, even if it only takes two seconds in "real time."

Therefore, use Extended Contests sparingly! The players, wanting to unload all their Advantage Point whup-ass at every turn, must be reined in. Gamemasters (called "narrators" in **HeroQuest**), used to the idea that in-world complexity sets actual-play complexity, may think they have to be used whenever something complicated is going on. I say, use Simple Contests for just about everything, and save that bidding stuff for the real battles and heart-breaking intrigues. I was reminded of the movie *Gladiator* while trying this out, and I think there are only two Extended Contests in that movie: the ongoing social intrigue between the emperor and his sister, and the big one-on-one duel at the end. Everything else was a Simple Contest, resolved with one or a few rolls.

#3: Every contest has two tremendous modifiers. The first one is Bumping: shifting one's success upward, either by spending Hero Points (experience points) or by having a high enough Mastery (ability rating). Bumping allows the resolution system to scale upward without the usual tail-ends of "hopeless" and "godlike" applied to the same tasks. If you have a great enough advantage over your opponent, you can even bump him down, making your victory even greater.

The second one is my favorite part of the game, called Augmenting: success on one roll (ability) leads to a positive bonus on the next. This is amazing during play. Want to intimidate someone? Roll your Grim ability, and if it does well, then add a bonus to your Intimidate ability. It applies to absolutely anything on the sheet, especially relationships. Thus, if you're chasing some guy, you roll your Running and that's fine, but if you're chasing the guy who's kidnapped your sister, Augment with your "Relationship: Sister," and you're better at Running. Because of Augmenting, every character and every scene in **HeroQuest** becomes unique.

You can even Augment without rolling a die! Any ability you have can provide an Automatic Augment to any other (appropriate) ability. The bonus might not be as great as if you rolled, but then again, you don't risk getting a penalty because you rolled badly. This way, you can automatically get a bonus for being Strong, Grim, and Tough in a sword fight, without having to make half a dozen rolls to figure out how much those abilities help you.

#4: The really shocking innovation is the defining feature of Extended Contests, called Advantage Points. They have no mechanical role during a contest at all. You bid them before acting, and that one roll's outcome might forfeit the bid, get you a big return, or even transfer them to the opponent. That is all the rolls do until the contest is over: just

subtract Advantage Points or move them around.

Some roleplayers, accustomed to constructing an imaginary reality step by sequential step, may very well be confused. What are these Advantage Point things? As long as they stay positive on both sides, they're just atmosphere; you basically "turn up the music" or "hog the camera" by bidding lots of points. Advantage during a contest ebbs, flows, and shifts, based on who's got more Advantage Points at the moment. But when one or both sides go below zero, now you know who wins and who loses. Then, and only then, are the events of the contest interpreted, in retrospect. If you end up on top, that big loss in Action Points two rounds back turns out to have been just a scratch. But if you lost out in the end, wow, that wound you took two rounds back really did you in. (So! No hit points, no fatigue, no endurance, no magic points; all these are subsumed in this retrospective definition of what happened over all the rolls of a contest.)

Now those confused players may howl with rage. Does winning mean you took no damage at all? How about movement modifiers? Pre-empting a faster opponent by a desperate move? Wearing down or annoying the opponent? Weapons and armor differences? Teaming up? And, and, and? Laws' system does in fact take all this into account, but by modifying Advantage Points, not by adding new steps and rules to the system.

Yet another innovation introduces the idea of followers, in that "extras" are treated basically as advantages to the "main guy's" rolls; they are not treated as characters in their own right, with actions and rolls of their own. Does your merchant guy travel about with three brawny helpers? You roll only for your merchant guy in a fight, but he sure gets some kick-butt Advantage Point add-ons when these guys are around, perhaps far better than the fighter dude all on his lonesome. Obviously, this technique cuts way down on play time in general, as a troll and his attendant horde of trollkin are rolled for as a single unit rather than as seven or eight individuals. It also creates kind of an interesting mini-GM effect for the players, as each may be controlling a band of people, rather than just one character.

The Isfalt



What Do *RuneQuest* Veterans Need To Know?

This game presents an amazing 180-degree turn in the basic philosophy of character design. In ***RuneQuest***, you knew everything physical about your character to the most painstaking, quantitative detail, but nothing about his personality or status as a protagonist. In ***HeroQuest***, you start with precisely those elements and let the other details simply spring from there. The best example of this is comparing the magic systems: in ***RuneQuest***, spells were intensely detailed and codified into list after list, god after god, rule after rule. You had so many Magic Points to cast spells, so much POW to match them against targets, so much INT to store them, and each was categorized according to two or three parameters. Here, Theistic magic (the stuff most familiar to most of us veterans) is largely improvisational. Given the Runes and a few examples for each god, the player must actually explain how the desired effect fits with the mythology of the presiding deity. The ***HeroQuest*** rules for magic match the themes of Glorantha far better than the mechanistic ***RuneQuest*** system could ever hope to. Of course, this gives the player much more control over his character, since he can take a single magical ability and use it in many different ways; all it takes is a little imagination.

The difference in actually playing combat is remarkable as well . . . imagine an old ***RuneQuest*** game in which our band

The Isfalt

Just when adventurers think they know what to expect, Glorantha throws another surprise in their way. Sometimes it is a delight or a wonder, but it is unlikely that the Isfalt counts as either of these.

other. Nearly all of this time is dedicated to resolving (1) the order of announced actions and (2) the effects of successful actions.

In **HeroQuest**, these very issues are resolved nearly instantly without being arbitrary. The entire combat might be handled by a single die roll in a Simple Contest! But even if you take it to the more detailed Extended Contest, there may be a bit of Advantage Point negotiation, but the action flows and resolves much faster. The same combat might take under half an hour, and given the player's freedom to define the character's commitment to this fight as it plays, it's far more satisfying to all concerned.

Also, the **RuneQuest** material kept player characters in the wastelands, hellholes, and outskirts of Glorantha, doing dungeon-style stuff like killing Chaos things, collecting Clacks, and building one's skills up to Rune level. This theme (or value-system) is utterly absent in **HeroQuest**. Instead, the "level" of play is up to you from the beginning, and the focus is strictly on resolving mythically and politically significant problems in and within communities. The general arena for suggested play has moved out of Prax and into Dragon Pass. Chaos per se is not presented as the central villain, as most of the violence around Glorantha is presented as arising from the conflict of interests in each place.

Where Do We Go From Here?

Given this focus, local and general cultures must be highly emphasized, and the books really deliver. The support material is astonishing, and far more oriented toward real decisions for players than the mainly descriptive older material. It also includes much new stuff, and at long last much is revealed about the Lunar Empire (the Red Goddess turns out to be a daughter of Yelm-yikes!) and the sorcerous cultures of western Genertela.

Getting a look at the religious panoply across the whole of Genertela yields some insights that never did get well expressed in the detail-heavy, pattern-light **RuneQuest** material. For instance, to the Orlanthi of Dragon Pass, Ernalda is the wife of Orlanth; to the Esrolians, she's the Great Goddess and Orlanth is one of her many paramours; and to the Tarshites, she's not only another daughter of Yelm but also one of the Seven Mothers of the Red Goddess! Another example is that the term "Gbaji" is applied to Nysalor by some peoples, but to his foe Arkat by others. Stafford has been especially clever in making each religious system use the same or similar bits and pieces, reflecting the historical contacts and re-castings of the old stories by the various cultures. **HeroQuest** recasts the world of Glorantha into a new game, using old favorites and new methods to allow and encourage truly mythic games.

Product Information

HeroQuest: Roleplaying in Glorantha is a July release, and will be sold by Steve Jackson Games. At the same time, a complete 64-page book called **HeroQuest Voices** will be available free for download as a PDF file. This book gives additional cultural background information on the 10 homelands detailed in **HeroQuest**, as well as seven additional peoples and races. Visit Issaries' website at <http://www.HeroQuest-rpg.com/products/3001.html> for more information on this item.

Hero's Book: Playing HeroQuest (an August release), **Dragon Pass: Land of Thunder** (an October release), and **Masters of Luck and Death** (a December release) will be the first supplements for the game. The

of heroes has finally tracked down a Thed shaman and his scungy broo crew, engaged in some hideous Chaos ritual. Can you imagine playing this out? Easily three hours of table-scanning, strike rank counting, movement-unit adjusting, chart-checking, and adding and subtracting. I just reviewed those rules, and to resolve one single weapon swipe or spell-cast requires rolling upwards of four times, plus cross-referencing many of the values to something or

first player's book for ***HeroQuest, Imperial Lunar Handbook: The Lunar Empire***, was released in March of this year. Two scenario books compatible with ***HeroQuest, Barbarian Adventures*** and ***Orlanth is Dead!***, are available as well.

HeroQuest: Roleplaying in Glorantha

ISS 1001

288 pages, standard RPG format, perfect bound

\$39.95

[Click HERE for a two-page sample from this book](#)

Pyramid Review

Dragons of the Sixth World (for Shadowrun)

Published by [FanPro LLC](#)

Written by Lars Blumenstein, Elissa Carey, Dan Grendell, Tobias Hamelmann, Eleanor Holmes, Chad Huffman, Steve Kenson, Robyn King-Nitschke, James Maliszewski, Peter Millholand, Steve Ratkovich, Jon Szeto, Peter Taylor, Maliks Toms, & Tobias Wolter with Rob Boyle

Cover by Marc Sasso

Illustrated by Peter Bergting, Storn Cook, Eric Desideriu, Marko Djurdjevic, Steve Ellis, Kjell Eriksson, Chris Lewis, Matt Plog, Steve Prescott, Klaus Scherwinski and Charles Rouse

206-page b&w softcover; \$24.99

At the top of the Sixth World's evolutionary ladder -- and some would say also the food chain -- is the dragon. Since the rise of magic and the Awakening in 1212, a variety of these beasts have appeared and insinuated themselves into the ever-changing world of the 21st century. Some like Dunkelzahn have made themselves very much part of metahuman society; some remain hidden in the shadows from where they can manipulate events to their satisfaction; most have taken an interest in business affairs, with Lofwyr personifying this in taking control of the German-based Saeder-Krupp corporation; the majority renew millennia-old rivalries; and even some just want to party in the new and thoroughly modern age.

With *Dragons of the Sixth World*, the *Shadowrun* GM gets a thorough look at 10 of the Sixth World's Great Dragons -- their histories, assets, allies, enemies, and objectives, all given in the standard *Shadowrun* format. This is done in multiple voices accompanied by a cacophony of commentary -- some of it delivered by a dragon or three! -- all of which is suited to its subject, or rather its subjects, as it cannot be said that anyone individual knows everything there is to know about the 10 Great Dragons on show here. The format makes the book very easy to read and use, as does the writing. In addition, the supplement gives you the low-down on the biology, physiology, customs, and magic of the dragon, on the Draco Foundation, and on another 16 dragons -- both adult and great -- that have made their presence in the Sixth World.

That the Draco Foundation is included is important, because it is carrying out the execution of the last will and testament of Dunkelzahn, the Great Wyrms who ran for office and indeed was elected President of UCAS in 2057, before being assassinated. Despite his death, his influence is still felt -- as evidenced by FanPro's previous release for *Shadowrun*, the campaign book, [Survival of the Fittest](#). This detailed the competition known as the Rite of Succession between the Great Dragons to decide who would take possession of the Jewel of Memory and succeed to the role of Loremaster. The information in *Dragons of the Sixth World* is specifically set after the events of *Survival of the Fittest* (and also [Year of the Comet](#) and [Wake of the Comet](#)), being tied to February 2063, but this information would be still useful to have if the GM has yet to run *Survival of the Fittest* as part of their campaign.

In terms of production, *Dragons of the Sixth World* is up to FanPro's usual standard, though in places the artwork is

perhaps a little cartoon-like in style, which really does not work get across a sense of what a dragon is. To balance this, there are some truly excellent pieces done by Marko Djurdjevic, whose dark tones really imbue Ghostwalker with a sense of menace and Lofwyr with a sense of power.

The opening chapter of ***Dragons of the Sixth World*** deals with dragons in general, starting with their types: the Eastern Dragons of Asia, the legless Feathered Serpents of South and Central America and Africa, the little-known Sea Dragons or Leviathans, the Western Dragons of Europe, and the Great Dragons, essentially what each dragon will eventually mature into. Beyond their biology, physiology, customs, and magic (itself very different from that practiced by the awakened metahumanity), it examines their life cycle, culture, and customs, and having dragons as employers and the nature of their employees (or servants). All of this comes as a report from the Draco Foundation, so there is every possibility that the information it contains is as accurate as it can get in a ***Shadowrun*** sourcebook.

After exploring the Draco Foundation, the supplement presents a chapter-by-chapter examination for 10 of the most prominent Great Dragons of the Sixth World. This is done in alphabetical order from Aden (destroyer of Tehran) to Ryumyo, Japan's Great Eastern Dragon and enemy to Lung, the Chinese master geomancer, also a Great Eastern Dragon. Each chapter contains a box detailing that dragon: its type, gender, coloring, known metahuman forms, primary lair, and the translators they use (dragons cannot actually speak, but use telepathy instead), before giving a concise timeline of their activities since their awakening. Besides the three given above, the other seven are Celedyr, the Welsh dragon fascinated by the Matrix; Ghostwalker, the wyrm that appeared out of the astral rift left by the explosion that killed Dunkelzahn to reclaim Denver as own and upset the appcart on the Front Range Free Zone; Hestaby, who might be the one to take up Dunkelzahn's legacy as the most progressive of dragons; Hualpa, protector of the Awakened, founder of Amazonia, and enemy of Aztlan and Aztechnology; Lofwyr, who dominates Europe and seeks to do so in the dragon-hating Middle East, thus clashing with Aden; Masaru, who works to throw off Japanese (and Ryumyo's) influence in the Philippines and guide it to nation status once again; and Rhonabwy, the other Welsh Great Dragon with a dislike of Elvish power and an enemy off the coast. This last one is the Sea Dragon, a Leviathan who wants her clutch of eggs returned from Rhonabwy's possession.

In some cases a chapter provides a semi-update for a geographical area. For example, the chapter on Aden covers the Middle East and his links to the Kurds, Armenians, and Lebanese dissidents -- much of which is delivered in the form of a Mossad report. It also ties in with a last letter from an old enemy of Lofwyr's, which details some of his Saeder-Krupp operations within the same area, while a news report on the "New European Economic Community" will probably tie in with the forthcoming supplement, ***Shadows of Europe***. The chapters on Lung and Masaru do the same for China and the Philippines, which although giving useful information would have been helped by the addition of maps of the areas in question.

The penultimate chapter contains a brief write-up of some of the Sixth World's other remaining Great Dragons and also several noted Adults of the species. The 16 include one possibly dead dragon (Feuerschwinge, who fell into an irradiated area of Germany), and two new ones: Damon, an Adult Western Dragon that does not scheme and prefers to spend time in metahuman form visiting some of the best nightspots the 21st century has to offer; and Calozerca, who recently appeared to back Polish freedom fighters. One or two, like Schwartzkopf have been previously seen in the German-only ***Shadowrun*** sourcebooks and are new to the English language version of the game, while the Dragon of the Australian Outback previously mentioned in ***Target: Awakened Lands***, is finally given a name here -- Tjurjunga.

The last chapter of ***Dragons of the Sixth World*** is for the GM's eyes only, but really does not give away much in the way of secrets. The first part gives rules for running the beasts, providing the statistics for each species, along with their powers. All this updates and replaces information previously seen in the ***Shadowrun*** core book and the ***Critters*** source book. They also include rules for both types of Drake, first seen in ***Year of the Comet*** and ***Threats 2***: the True Drake and the Bred Drake. These are available as player characters, but given the strengths of such creatures and the fact that any dragon will be interested in having their former servant returned to draconic service, there is the danger that they will become the focus of a campaign. That said, they are suited for high-powered game built around the Draco Foundation.

Perhaps the best parts and also the most useful are those providing concise summaries of what it is like to work for each Great Dragon and what exactly their aims are. These tie back into the chapters on the Great Dragons and help the

GM get to the heart of each wyrm. This is necessary because of the wealth of information that ***Dragons of the Sixth World*** contains -- sometimes it is too much and sometimes it is too little, though this still leaves room for GM to develop and add their own suited to their campaigns.

Although many of these dragons have been mentioned and detailed in previous supplements, it is more than handy to have their updated information all in one place. This provides a lot of detail for the GM, enabling them to run each and every major dragon of the Awakened 21st century . . . which is a big sandbox to have the characters play. Of course if this is what they or their GM wants, ***Dragons of the Sixth World*** is the supplement to support it.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

The Testimony of Jacob Hollow

Published by [Third World Games](#)

Game design by Frank Bustamante, Michael Nickoloff

Additional game design by Jason Jung, Randy Harrington, Eric Devlin, & Keith Kuntz

Graphic design by Dan Smith & Frank Bustamante

120 full-color cards (6 character cards, 15 Locations, 99 terror cards), 12 six-sided dice (6 each of two colors), rules sheet; requires (but does not include) one pawn per player and a way to track Investigation Points; \$19.95

Jacob Hollow is a man, not a place. The place is Castle Bay, and something horrible has happened to it and every person there save one. Jacob is that one person, the soul inhabitant who made it out past the disaster. Everyone wants to know what he knows and what happened there, but Hollow is most certainly mad now. Unfortunately, that doesn't mean the details of *The Testimony of Jacob Hollow*, as crazed as the tale is, aren't exactly and precisely right. The awful events in question are for two to six players to uncover in the new horror card game from Third World Games.

The object of the game is to be the first investigator to start his turn with 10 Investigation Points under his belt . . . or to be the only one left alive at the end of a turn. Each participant receives a character card to play; each of these personalities has a special ability that benefits them a special way over the others. The characters have a measure of Life and Mind -- the former keeps you alive while the latter keeps you sane. Both values can go up and down during play, and either one going to zero means you're finished as an investigator. The player may continue to vex his fellows with whatever cards remain in his hand, but that's all.

A deck of Location cards depicts the areas around (and under) the town of Castle Bay: the Sewer, the Library, the Asylum. If you can evade or defeat the horrors that lurk at each one (gaining Investigation Points for doing so), you may investigate the site for still more IP. This is why it's important to keep your Mind sharp -- the smarter and more together you are, the easier it is to uncover the town's secrets. Some locations also have other effects, making certain combats harder or easier, or costing you IP. You can bolster yourself with the cards in your hand, and opponents will try to do the same for themselves . . . or you may both attempt to hammer the Life and Mind out of the other with your Encounter cards.

Cards are one of four types. Actions are events made to happen, like Summoning something from the discard pile or Hiding from the horrors. Clues like Strange Chants and Research Files represent things you find out as you search Castle Bay, though they often come with beasties of their own that must be overcome for the reward. Items are the gear both magical and mundane you use in your quest, like Chainsaws, Maps, and Giant Larvae. Encounters, like Clues, are often populated by things that go bump in the night like the Killer Fungus, though they may also be run-ins with The Fortune Teller, the effects of which may be to your benefit or your detriment. Only cards classified as a React card may be played out of turn; the rest must be played after you've done your investigations.

All random action in the game is regulated by flips -- that is, turning cards over from the terror deck. Each card has a Horror Value, a number from 0-5 in the corner used to determine random outcomes when combating or evading

monsters, or chancing the use of certain cards. For evasion, a set of numbers is given -- if you can flip a card and get one of those numbers, you have given the monster the slip and may continue your search unmolested (the more powerful beings having the fewest or rarest evade numbers). If discretion doesn't work, you must combat the critter. Characters have a Combat score of 2; for foes, it varies. Your Combat score is how many cards you get to flip in battle. Total the Horror Values, and if you beat the monster's sum you win, often getting an IP reward for doing so. If you lose, you're subjected to damage, which is typically a loss of Life, Mind, or both, depending on how hideous your enemy is.

The pictures come from a number of artists, and while some of the illustrations look bloated or out of proportion when shrunk down, few of the pieces are outright terrible. The cards are hard-wearing items, smooth (though they still clump when you shuffle), and easily read. This is good, because any size group will run through the deck at least once in a game . . . with several players, you'll spend a lot of time shuffling.

To measure the characters' current statistics, the game includes 12 six-sided dice, six of two different colors. These are placed on the character card over the stat block; they fit nicely, but when you consider they'll be used as actual dice only once to decide who goes first, their inclusion in the set seems an unnecessary extravagance. (As an aside, once the package is open, getting the cards, dice, and rules neatly back into the box isn't easy.) The product's real Achilles' Heel is the rules -- not that they're badly written, but it's one of those games where there are still a dozen tiny unanswered questions or vaguely worded cards that will generate arguments aplenty (to say nothing of a FAQ at the website).

Play of the game is quick, and even a game with several players can take under an hour. With two ways to win (or lose -- this is horror, after all), sudden upsets can tilt the balance from one player to another within a single turn. The outcome is always in doubt, stretching a weakened character's potential demise out to knuckle-whitening interminability. Card flipping isn't the handiest method of arbitration, but your heart can sit in your throat as you make the crucial draw.

Although it's hard to be creeped out by a card game, ***The Testimony of Jacob Hollow*** has all the earmarks of horror, from its disquieting artwork to the on-target use of genre conventions. Even if the cards never tell an actual tale, it's an evocative work that proves the scariest thing is that which isn't seen.

--Andy Vetromile

Somewhere Old, Somewhere New

Although I love creating my own home-brew campaigns, I also have an affinity for published worlds. There's something freeing about not needing to come up with every detail of a setting, and I enjoy being surprised by other creators' ideas that force me to think outside the box.

Unfortunately, I run into a problem that many of my other gaming friends have as well. Things go great the first time we run a campaign in a game world, but we run into problems if we want to run a game in that world *again*. For some reason players and GMs feel constrained by what has gone before in the previous campaign, and can find themselves comparing adventures not on their own merits, but with the old series. This can be especially true with more "epic" games, where it is assumed that heroes are an integral part of the plot. (I've known at least eight groups who have played the **Torg** setting, and -- not counting my own campaign -- all of them ran the introductory adventure that came with the boxed set.) And, of course, it can be a common concern with campaigns based on television or movie settings.

What can be done about this difficulty, then? Are published settings only good for one adventure series, and that's it? Well, no. Fortunately there are some simple things that can be done to ensure the new campaign is more than a red-headed step-child of the previous campaign.

Resist the urge to incorporate the previous campaign into this one . . . in particular the old PCs. If the heroes became movers and shakers in the previous world, it's tempting to bring them in, either as integral plot elements or in cameos and as background dressing. Unfortunately, they can also become the Untouchable NPCs That Are Cooler Than The Heroes Can Hope To Be . . . y'know, the bane of many published settings and media-based campaigns alike. "If the Daught Plevince is such a world-shattering big deal, why aren't we calling Luke/Kirk/[Previous PCs]?" Yes, there are ways around this, but I have found that the effort necessary to keep this from being disruptive isn't worth it for what is, in essence, a "wink-and-a-nod" near in-joke. Keeping a clean slate will make sure the spotlight remains on the heroes and not on the past.

. . . Unless the setting is big enough to accommodate them all. The caveat to the above advice is if the setting is broad enough in scope to accommodate them all. In a setting like **Vampire**, for example, which emphasizes the insular nature of vampires and their urban cluster workings, it's easy to set a campaign in another city with another focus. Then, if the protagonists of Hoboken By Night happen to wander to their old PCs' haunting ground of Topeka, having the old characters play a part is a logical option; once the current PCs are done with their adventure, they'll go back to their city and the old characters will fade into the background again. (As a random aside, this is also the reason why I always had an easier time setting a supers game in the DC Universe over the Marvel Universe. In DC it's easy to stop by Gotham City for an adventure and meet the Batman, then wander back to their home city of Vanillavillanellaville and not worry about those characters crossing back over. In the Marvel setting, it's difficult to justify how you can wander down any New York City street and *not* run into members from eight different super-teams.)

In general, the more epic the setting is, the less trivial it is to have previous PCs running around, since those previous PCs were probably doing epic things themselves. Likewise the closer the setting is to the previous campaign's roots, the more difficult it is to differentiate them. Thus **Torg** campaigns were difficult to incorporate prior PCs because the general focus of "save the world" is more or less constant from one campaign to the next. However a **Fading Suns** game that focused more on interstellar trading and smuggling could coexist with a previous one that stuck more closely with scheming nobles.

The monkey wrench is your friend. But for the most part I resist even those temptations, and *really* shake up a campaign setting by altering some of its basic principles. Was **Fading Sun's** Emperor Alexius a noble, heroic leader in the old campaign? Well, then, he may be a conniving manipulative cad in the new game. Or he might be an obvious puppet to some *other* behind-the-scenes power. Or the PCs may watch him get horribly killed in the game's first session. If last time's **In Nomine** campaign was by-the-book, maybe this game is truly bizarre, with the heroes discovering a part of Earth where *no* Celestial abilities work, and its Celestial reality seems to be unraveling . . . it's not going away, and it's getting bigger. Or maybe the rules of this **Changeling** campaign are completely different, with the waking world relating to the Dreaming in a reciprocal manner, so that denizens of the Dreaming have unconscious ties

to our world in the same way we have ties to the Dreaming?

Anyway, the point is to establish, as early as possible, that This Is Not Your Father's Campaign. Although this may still cause grumbling from some who were in the old game -- "Well, these new developments are interesting, but it was more fun before . . ." -- I've personally found the benefits to outweigh the problems. (Long-time Marsh-fans -- of which I'm sure there are 16 quintillion reading this very column -- will remember that my first published work for *Shadis* was an article about alternate *Star Wars* campaign ideas. Luke failed to blow up the Death Star! Darth Vader is a good guy! Big laffs!)

For those who are reluctant to do this (since, really, monkey-wrenching a setting can result in a lot of work), consider the simple expedient of different power levels. Starting a ***Godlike*** game with the PCs as trebly strong heroes will result in a different campaign from a standard game, as will a ***Mage*** game where the heroes start as normal mortals (who will, of course, Awaken to the world of magic . . . eventually).

Pre-existing game worlds can be a lot of fun, and those that are heavily supported can provide a game shelf full of adventure possibilities. But just because you've had one rip-roaring good time with a game world once doesn't mean those possibilities are ever-closed. Even with the same group of players it's possible to create a campaign in the same game world without stepping on the toes of previous games' memories. All it takes is a bit of creativity and lateral thinking.

For example, consider another version of this column that is actually sentient and *evil* . . .

--*Steven Marsh*

Surface With A Smile: The Mona Lisa

"She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave; and has been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their fallen day about her; and trafficked for strange webs with Eastern merchants; and, as Leda, was the mother of Helen of Troy; and, as Saint Anne, the mother of Mary; and all this has been to her but as the sound of lyres and flutes, and lives only in the delicacy with which it has moulded the changing lineaments, and tinged the eyelids and the hands."

-- Walter Pater, *The Renaissance*

To the best of our estimation, she turns 500 this year, although true to her ladylike demeanor, she does not reveal her true age. That is only the least of the mysteries she conceals, gazing coolly out at us from above an unidentifiable landscape, with just a ghost of a smile playing around her lips. A ghost of a smile -- or perhaps, is it the smile of a ghost? She'll never tell, but she invites us to look deeper.

"All will acknowledge that the execution of this painting is enough to make the strongest artist tremble with fear. He also used an ingenious expedient: while he was painting Monna Lisa, who was a very beautiful woman, he had her constantly entertained by singers, musicians, and jesters, so that she would be merry and not look melancholic as portraits often do. As a result, in this painting of Leonardo's there was a smile so enchanting that it was more divine than human; and those who saw it marvelled to find it so similar to that of the living original."

-- Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*

Monna (short for "madonna") Lisa Gherardini was born in 1479, and married the widowed Francesco del Giocondo, a Florentine noble, at the age of nineteen. (Hence *Mona Lisa*'s other title, *La Gioconda*.) At the age of 24, her husband hired Leonardo da Vinci to paint her portrait. He did so, in oils, over a period of four years or so, on a piece of poplar wood that has been cut down (losing two pillars framing the sitter) to 21 by 30.5 inches. Or so the consensus, fortified by Vasari, runs. There are a number of holes in it -- Gianpaolo Lomazzo, who knew Leonardo's executor, in 1584 described the *Mona Lisa* as "a Neapolitan woman." This leads some to identify the subject as Isabella Gualanda, a courtesan in the court of Giuliano de' Medici, Leonardo's patron from 1513 to 1515, as does a 1517 mention by the secretary of Cardinal Luigi d'Aragona of the portrait as a commission from Giuliano. The portrait followed Leonardo to the court of Francis I of France, to enter the royal collection after his death -- unless he willed her to his assistant (and adopted son) Andrea Salai, whose collection the French court also purchased after he was killed in Milan in 1524 by French soldiers. (Hmmm.) Either way, once firmly ensconced in Paris, she joins history, on her way to legend.

"He . . . kept Leonardo's Gioconda in Paris for two years, deceiving the French police, and then took her across the border back to Florence. Do you understand? Back to Florence where she was born, near the Palazzo Vecchio, by the sounds of the bells of Giotto's campanile, able to see the cypresses of San Miniato . . . Only a poet, a great poet, could dream such a dream."

-- Gabriele d'Annunzio, on Peruggia's theft of the Mona Lisa

According to Donald Sassoon's endlessly captivating book *Becoming Mona Lisa*, the key event in the ascension of the Mona Lisa to mythic status was a brief two-year vacation she took in 1911. An Italian painter-decorator working in the Louvre, Vincenzo Peruggia, lifted the *Mona Lisa* out of her frame and smuggled her out under his coat. Paris society was scandalized, and the newspapers played the theft for all it was worth. After two years, the hapless Peruggia tried to sell her to antique dealer Alfredo Geri, who promptly turned Peruggia over to the police. The motive for the theft remains murky -- some claimed it was a [Futurist](#) strike against Renaissance art, or an act of Italian nationalism (this was Peruggia's tactic at trial), or a case of obsessive love for Lisa. An Argentine con man calling himself the Marquis of Valfiero claimed to have hired Peruggia to steal the portrait so that he could sell forged copies to a number of secretive, gullible American millionaires. When she was returned, Valfiero assured each mark that the portrait in the Louvre was the forgery, and they had the original.

"The mirror conducts itself haughtily holding mirrored in itself the Queen. When she departs the mirror remains there ..."

-- Leonardo da Vinci, *Notebooks*

This would be all good fun were it not for the fact that Leonardo himself might have painted more than one *Mona Lisa*. The troublemaking Lomazzo mentions having seen two different paintings called *La Gioconda* and *Mona Lisa*. Vasari, that rock of historical fact, describes the *Mona Lisa* as having beautiful eyebrows -- eyebrows notably missing from the portrait in the Louvre. A painting that very much looks like a Leonardo study, the "Isleworth *Mona Lisa*," turned up in Somerset in 1914, and the St. Petersburg *Colombina* (a copy normally attributed to Melzi) received a surreptitious upgrade under the Soviets. William Henry Vernon, a friend of Benjamin Franklin, returned to America in 1797 with a 16th-century copy of the *Mona Lisa*. Still more annoyingly, Raphael's sketch "Young Woman in a Loggia," usually considered his study of Leonardo's unfinished portrait, changes the hands' position, adds a headband, and presents a different landscape in the window behind the sitter. In the various iterations of the *Mona Lisa*, one begins to see Leonardo's delight in, and fascination with, mirrors. In addition to optical experiments of recondite nature, he wrote in "mirror handwriting," referred to the mirror as "the master of painters," and introduced anomalous twins into his works.

"Might it not have been within the outlook of a Magus that a personality like Leonardo was able to co-ordinate his mathematical and mechanical studies with his work as an artist?"

-- Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*

For instance, in his cartoon of "The Virgin and Child with St. Anne and John the Baptist," the Virgin Mary and St. Anne (her mother) appear to be twins, as (rather more heretically) do the infants Jesus and John the Baptist. (Some scholars identify the "St. Anne" as John's mother, St. Elizabeth, which only makes things worse for Leonardo.) One set of twins is noble and well-lit; the other is darkened with the *facia nigra* of sin. In *The Last Supper*, not only is the (very effeminate-looking) apostle John leaning away from Christ, he wears clothes mirroring those of Jesus. All of this indicates an attitude of dualism and darkness hidden beneath the sun of Leonardo's Renaissance -- and the landscape in the back of *Mona Lisa* is, many have noted, actually two different landscapes in divergent perspective. So what, precisely, was he up to? In *The Templar Revelation*, Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince recruit da Vinci as the core figure in a secret John the Baptist worshipping cult, while Dan Brown's turgid potboiler *The Da Vinci Code* paints da Vinci as a devotee of Mary Magdalene. The standard version splits the difference, following the lead of the *Dossiers secrets* in assigning Leonardo the Grand Mastership of the *Prieuré de Sion* itself.

"If [the Shroud of Turin] be the work of a forger, he must have been a super-genius as an anatomist, a physiologist and an artist, a genius of such unexcelled quality that he must have been made to order."

-- Pierre Barbet, *A Doctor at Calvary*

Perhaps a mission from one or more of his heretical cults led him to commit his own great act of forgery. In *Turin Shroud: In Whose Image?* Picknett and Prince finger Leonardo as the forger of the Shroud of Turin, dismissing earlier Shroud sightings as irrelevant. They further identify the image as Leonardo himself (just as Lillian Schwartz in 1987 identified the *Mona Lisa* as a mirror image of Leonardo), standing in for John the Baptist. Leonardo is known to have designed a camera obscura, which he called the *oculus artificialis*. Picknett and Prince argue that he impregnated a linen cloth with albumen and chromium salts (both easily available to Renaissance painters), focused sunlight into his camera obscura (containing either an actual crucified body or a suitably perfectionist model) with mirrors, and then scorched the cloth to "develop" the bizarre negative image. Their reconstruction of this method reproduced many of the Shroud's distinctive features, and it is interesting that the other use for the camera obscura in the Renaissance was for pretended necromancies, projecting ghostly images onto a wall. Leonardo was, as it happens, accused of necromancy in 1516, necessitating his departure for France -- with the *Mona Lisa*, apparently, in tow. Did Leonardo's necromancy raise [Pepper's Ghost](#) -- or something more sinister?

"La Joconde! The name makes me think immediately of this sphinx of beauty who smiles so mysteriously in Leonardo da Vinci's painting, and who seems to pose a yet unresolved riddle to the admiring centuries. It is dangerous to conjure up such a ghost."

-- Théophile Gautier, review of the play *La Joconde*

What if, in his experiments with mirrors -- and his discovery that mirror images "fill the surrounding air" everywhere -- Leonardo opened the doorway to the [mirror realm](#), the dimension of the [sphinxes between the frames](#) of our

persistent vision? Within it, he first viewed, and then perhaps communed with, the [Dark Lady](#), the [femme fatale](#) that Gautier, that intimate of Rosicrucians, intuitively identified with *La Gioconda*, which painting d'Annunzio called "Sphinx and Chimera." Leonardo, fortunately, was resistant to her blandishments (being gay may have helped him there), and knew, as he wrote in his mirror hand, "there are numberless people who, in order to gratify one of their appetites, would destroy God and the whole of the universe." Perhaps he trapped the Dark Lady within the *Mona Lisa*, suspended above and between two mirrored landscapes, frozen forever on the sacred wood of Hecate, black poplar. (The maiden Dryope and the sisters of Phaëthon were transformed to poplars by Apollo, god of artists, just as the Gioconda was.) But he knew that the Dark Lady always demands a sacrifice -- so he created an image of John the Baptist (the other painting he brought with him to France, complete with smile) with the same mirrored lenses that had almost released the Sphinx, as the ultimate image of blood sacrifice to this ultraterrestrial Salome.

Trapped forever between the images, he thought of only one thing -- immure her forever in the French royal collection, perhaps seeking the aid of the werewolf Cardinal d'Aragona (plagued by [his own Dark Lady](#)) to do so. But the Dark Lady drowned the throne of France in blood and found new lovers: Napoleon slept underneath her gaze, and heard her whispers as he planned world empire. In 1911, she escaped and tilted Europe into world war three years later. In 1963, she visited Washington and gazed into John Kennedy's doomed face. And this year, she will get her own chamber in the Louvre, the better to meet the eyes of five and a half million lovers every year. No wonder she's smiling.

The Flint Age

by [Chad Underkoffler](#)

Art by [Chris Cooper](#)

Genre: Caveman Supers

Style: Proactive Adventure

Fidelity: Low

Themes: Building & Defending; Trade

Campaign Setting and Background Information

Flint Age 1

In a primeval world, two intelligent races contend with wild beasts, the elements, the landscape, and each other for survival. Luckily, many of these sapients have strengths and abilities [far beyond](#) those of their, which helps them -- and their peoples -- prosper in the Flint Age.



What Everybody Knows

Geography & Climate

- *The North:* Scrubby grasslands rising into rocky ridges, and arid desert speckled with rare oases. Minimal precipitation and seasonal change; terrible wind- and sandstorms.
- *The West:* Warm, flat plains, eventually terminating at the Sea. Short, mild winters; long, muggy summers. Plenty of thunderstorms and the occasional hurricane.
- *The South:* Lush, forested foothills climbing into mountains; beyond lies tundra. Long winters with plenty of snowfall; warm, wet springs; short, mild summers; dry autumns.
- *The East:* Rolling hills, patchy forests, wide lakes, and deep valleys. Dry but cold winters; temperate spring and summers with adequate precipitation; chilly, windy autumns.

Fauna & Flora

Here are the names of some of the animals and plants of the Flint Age; note that this is not an exhaustive list. Fauna and flora particularly important to a group (as food, a source of useful products, or domesticated labor) are noted in the write-ups for each of the [Sapient Groups](#).

- *Dinosaurs:* Cutter Fish (ichthyosaurs), Giant Devil-Lizards (tyrannosaurs), Platy Grazers (stegosaurus), Three Spears (triceratops), and Walking Hills

When Are We, Again?

The world of the Flint Age is not Earth; it's Earth-like. The coexistence of dinosaurs and large mammals (like humans) did not occur here, according to current science. Neither have we found evidence of any saurian-descended humanoids, much less those contemporary with Stone Age humans. Then there's the [superpowers](#).

(brontosaurus).

- *Mammals*: Cave Guardians (bears), Giant Leapers (kangaroo), Horned Bounders (deer), Horned Thunders (bison), Knifefangs (sabertooth tigers), Leapers (hares), Nosehands (wooly mammoth), Runners (eohippus), Pack Warriors (wolves), Knife Hairs (porcupines), and Runner Birds (moas).
- *Other Animals*: [sea] Devil Fish (orca), Many Arms (octopus), Tide Barkers (seal), Sea Runner (tuna); [air] Devil-Lizard Bird (pterodactyl), Eye Bird (owls), Squeaker Bird (bats).
- *Common Plants*: Grain Grass (buckwheat), Pod Bean (soybean), Sweet Tuber (yam), Eye Tuber (potato), Red Bean (kidney bean), Yellow Tooth (maize), Gritty Fruit (pear), White Flesh Fruit (apple), Heart Fruit (tomato), Crying Tuber (onion), Furred Fruit (peach), Brain Nut (walnut), Spirit Plant (hemp), Yellow Gourd (squash), Orange Gourd (pumpkin), Sunrise Fruit (Orange), Puff Plant (cotton), Biting Fruit (chile pepper), Heart of Blue (indigo), Tart Plant (mustard), Pebble Grass (barley), Tiny Vine Fruit (grapes), Blue Flower Weaver Plant (flax), Sleepy Head Grain (oats), Leafy Ball (cabbage), White Tuber (parsnip), Happy Bean (lentil), Sprig Grain (rye), and many spices and herbs.

Flint Age 2



Superpowers

One out of every 250 sapient beings (and one out of every 10,000 animals or plants) has strange abilities that others do not: the power to generate spears of intense light (lasers) from their eyes; incredible strength or durability; weird transformations into liquid, gas, or rock; wingless flight; a "sixth sense" that warns of danger; vastly increased intelligence; etc.

With few exceptions, these potent capabilities allow superpowered beings to outperform enemies or rivals . . .

That's why the Fidelity is "Low."

OPTION: How Did Things Get This Way?

So, how did this [superpowered](#) world come about? Some options to consider:

- *Status Quo*: It just is, and has always been.
- *Near Miss*: No iridium meteor impact, and evolution took different paths on different continents. Ketsheeli are colonists/refugees from another continent who lost their ocean-going vessels and the know-how to reconstruct them, and have made the best of things (see also Harry Harrison's *West of Eden*).
- *Meddling*: The world is an elaborate experiment by (aliens/time-travellers/ultraterrestrials).
- *Slidegate*: Dimensional portals opened, bringing dinosaurs, prehistoric mammals, ketsheeli, and early man from four alternate Earths to this Fifth Earth.
- *Rocks From Sky*: Weird Meteors (see [Possible Superpower Origins](#)) have landed before, and their influence both protected, extended, and modified small pockets of the fauna of earlier eras.
- *Planet of the Apes + Jurassic Park + The Land of the Lost*: The Flint Age takes place in a post-apocalyptic earth, after cloning of dinosaurs and recombinant DNA techniques became widespread.

Trade, Commerce, & the Wamla Exchange

The majority of trade in the Flint Age happens in the form of barter: shells for pelts, meat for vegetables, shiny rocks for worked goods, food for services, that sort of thing. Of course,

unless they too are superpowered. Then, earth-shaking battles are joined.

Superpowered beings have allowed groups to survive catastrophes that would have destroyed a group lacking such blessings. Forest fires have been quenched, plagues have been countered; famines have been avoided; and the wise have guided and taught necessary crafts.

And the wonder of Weavertown has sprung into being almost overnight -- in less than 300 years, it has become a thriving metropolis of brick, wood, and stone, the center of the world's trade networks.

The world of the Flint Age is a young one, but growing quickly due to the combination of superpowers and the drive to create.

Sapient Groups

Each group of sapients is given a short write-up, following the template below. (Note that many of these terms are being used in a looser fashion than an anthropologist would, and that all categories are spectrums, and not exclusive choices -- e.g., a group could believe in a combination of Ancestor Worship and Shamanism).

Group Name

Group Species: Human, [Ketsheeli](#), or some mix.

Type of Group: For our purposes, a *Household* is a group of 2 to 20 related members. A *Band* is a group with 15 to 50 members, many of whom are related. A *Tribe* is a group with 75 to 500 members. A *Chieftdom* is a group with anywhere from 750 to 5000 members.

Subsistence Style: *Foraging* means "hunting & gathering." *Horticulture* is cultivation of plants through a mixture of basic gardening, gathering, and slash & burn cultivation. *Agriculture* is intensive food production through the use of the plow, irrigation, and terracing, often focusing on a few key staple plants. *Pastoralism* means herding animals for food and other products. *Transhumance* is seasonal pastoralism, usually involving only a small amount of the population herding the flocks at a distance from the settlement. *Nomadic* means the group moves their settlement often (usually after pasturage is eaten out by herds, fields lose fertility, as game migrates, or due to seasonal change).

Political Structure: *Egalitarian* means all members are equal, though individuals may take temporary leadership in specialized situations. A *Big Man* is a semi-permanent leader with notable prowess (in hunting, battle, diplomacy, wisdom, etc.) and who maintains his position through

sometimes folks won't want to trade their tame Bounder for your sack of tubers-- that's when the canny trader figures out what their target *does* want for their goods, and goes and tries to exchange that sack of tubers for whatever the desire item is.

In Weavertown, simple contracts -- written on clay tablets and fired into pottery -- have begun to be used. An example would be something like: "Og agrees to give Thark a pelt a week for a year to buy Og's mother's house." Each participant in the contract, as well as a disinterested third individual (paid by both named parties), gets a copy of the contract, so as to avoid forgery or accidental breakage. Indeed, a few enterprising Weavertownians have begun serving as general "contract holders" and gaining a supplementary income from it.

The last major form of exchange -- Wamla -- is not normally used for gaining material possessions (though this is not unheard of) so much as prestige. Whenever a deed of note is accomplished, a wamla will be created to commemorate it. "Day-dancer felled the Horned Thunder with one blow!" would be an example of a deed worthy of being immortalized, as would marriages, deaths, births, treaties, and so forth. (A very famous or prestigious person -- like one with superpowers -- could, in theory, produce a wamla that said "Yog the Mighty made this," and that would be a fairly interesting item . . . provided Yog didn't flood the market with them, get his butt kicked immediately afterward by Devilwing, or otherwise lose face.) Wamla can be a carved stone, an incised shell, a bone covered with scrimshaw, a pottery tablet, a string of beads, a belt of dyed quills, etc. The current holder of the wamla shares in the prestige of the deed while he owns the wamla; however, if one holds on to a wamla for too long, it begins to lose prestige -- and wamla exchange value. Thus, it's best to pass a wamla on after a season or two of ownership.

While there are at least a dozen minor wamla exchange rings (sometimes only involving two groups), there are 3 major ones:

- *Blue:* Nisalthu to Weavertown and back,

strength, prestige, and generosity. *Simple Chieftdom* indicates a permanent leadership, held until death; a Chief is higher status than everyone else. *Complex Chieftdom* differs from the Simple type by including a rank of "Advisor/Aristocrat" that has higher status than a "commoner," but lower than the Chief's status.

Degree of Gender Stratification: *Low* indicates there is little difference in status between men and women; *Some* points out that there is a discernable difference between the status of the sexes; *High* shows a great difference in status between the two.

Spouse Selection, Marriage Type, Marriage Residence, & Lineage Type: *Exogamous* indicates that spouses from outside the group are sought; *Endogamous* means that spouses are looked for within the group. *Polygamy* means having more than one spouse at a time is acceptable within that culture; *Monogamy* indicates that having one spouse is preferable. *Patrilocal* couples live near the husband's family after marriage; *Matrilocal* couples reside near the wife's family. *Patrilineal* groups trace descent through the father; *Matrilineal* groups through the mother; *Bilineal* from both.

Special [Technologies or Knowledge](#): Lists specific technologies or information known by the group, possibly unknown outside of it.

Trade Products & Participation: Lists products traded (*Supply*) and traded for (*Demand*) by the group, as well as if they participate in the [wamla](#) exchange ring.

Primary Religio-magical Beliefs: *Animism* means that the group believes that everything in the world possess individual spirits that should be venerated. *Totemism* is a variant of animism where a particular spirit is singled out for extra reverence, and often is seen to have a specific connection to the group. *Ancestor Worship* means that the pre-eminent spirits are those of the dead, who must be appeased. *Shamanism* is a form of animism with a special class of people (shamans) who serve as an intermediary between spirits and people. *Pantheism* is a belief that all phenomena are expressions of a single divine spirit.

Anthropomorphism places a pantheon of people-like gods in charge of phenomena, rather than focusing on the aspect of reality itself as divine. (While magical practices related to these religious types exists, it is unknown if they are effective. See [OPTIONS: Got Magic?](#) for ideas on functional magic in this setting.)

Superpowered Group Members: Lists notable, superpowered group members.

Further Information: Additional notes on the group's history or nature.

Nisalthu

Group Species: Human.

through several groups.

- *Green:* Weavertown to ZZarthka'ssss and back, through several groups.
- *White:* Broken for three generations, the White ring used to connect the Lost Tribe and Weavertown through several groups; unfortunately, after the Lost Tribe vanished, the entire exchange ring ground to a halt. Many of the communities closest to Weavertown ended up joining either the Blue or Green rings. The farthest groups were thus left isolated; they eventually relinked into a minor ring called the "Little White." While they usually trade only amongst themselves, some of the wamla object "trapped" here have managed to return to the major rings.

Most groups only participate in one ring, though a few participate in two. Note that Weavertown, as participant in all three rings, is the most common point for wamla to pass from one ring to another. For example, a shell detailing the birth of Arzurku Sea-Breather now resides in a Ketsheeli tribe that is completely off the three main rings (having passed from Nisalthu to Weavertown, from Weavertown to ZZarthka'ssss, and from ZZarthka'ssss along two minor rings).

Technologies & Knowledge

The presence of beings with incredible senses, increased capabilities, and super-intellecets has led to a strong understanding of some basics of science and technology in the Flint Age. Some have been fully adopted, while others are still "bleeding edge" (new, poorly understood, buggy). In addition to any specialized knowledge possessed by a group, they can know some, most, or none of the ideas listed below. (Note that Weavertown and ZZarthka'ssss are the only two groups that currently understand *all* of these concepts.)

See also [Future Tech](#).

Type of Group: Chiefdom.

Subsistence Style: Foraging (fishing) and aquatic horticulture.

Political Structure: Complex Chiefdom.

Degree of Gender Stratification: Some (after marriage, most women are not allowed to leave the island).

Spouse Selection, Marriage Type, Marriage Residence, & Lineage Type: Endogamous; Monogamy, Matrilocal; Patrilineal.

Special Technologies or Knowledge: Sailing and basic sea navigation.

Trade Products & Participation: *Supply:* Fish and sea-game (Cutter Fish, Many Arms, Sea Runners), shells, shellfish-based dyes, some sea-plants (Ocean Grass), tropical fruits. *Demand:* Grains, furs, meat, cloth. Participates in the Blue Wamla Ring.

Primary Religio-magical Beliefs: Pantheism -- all spirits are aspects of the Great Sea Spirit.

Superpowered Group Members: Many descendants through the male line of Rano Sea-Breather are amphibious, able to swim very fast, and breathe underwater (as well as the air). Their ruler, Arzurku Sea-Breather, also has additional powers.

Further Information: Nisalthu is the name of both the people and the island they inhabit. Their sailing ships come from the West, bearing goods to trade with the mainland peoples. Nisalthu dried, smoked, salted, and pickled fishes are sought after, as is Ocean Grass (kelp) that their amphibious members harvest from the sea floor.

Silpo Tem

Group Species: Human (99%).

Type of Group: Household.

Subsistence Style: Foraging; nomadic.

Political Structure: Egalitarian.

Degree of Gender Stratification: Low.

Spouse Selection, Marriage Type, Marriage Residence, & Lineage Type: Exogamous; Polygamy; Patrilocality; Bilineal (father first).

Special Technologies or Knowledge: None.

Trade Products & Participation: *Supply:* Hides and meat (usually Giant Leaper, Leaper, and Platy Grazer), bone, herbs. *Demand:* Cloth; metal goods; pottery. Participates (at one remove) in the Green wamla ring.

Primary Religio-magical Beliefs: Animism.

Superpowered Group Members: Yog the Mighty.

Further Information: Except for one random factor (Yog the Mighty), the Silpo Tem is an average hunter/gatherer household of the Flint Age. A decade ago, Mele the Childless discovered a black egg floating down the river. She retrieved it, and it hatched in her arms. She decided to raise the infant ketsheeli as her own, naming it Yog, after

Adopted

- Simple Machines (lever, inclined plane, wedge, wheel & axle, screw, pulley)
- The Germ Theory of Disease, Sanitation, and Antiseptics
- Fertilizer (use of mulch piles/compost heaps/middens)
- Herbology (medicinal, dyeing, spicing)
- Zero
- Writing
- Ciphering
- Domesticated plants or animals
- Fences
- Pottery (and adobe)
- Division of labor, Specialization, Assembly line
- Personal Property (moveable goods & residences)
- Communal ownership of fields and herds
- Contracts (see also [Trade, Commerce, & the Wamla Exchange](#)), including (Secured/Unsecured) loans with interest
- Various forms of non-loom weaving
- Brewing
- Winemaking
- Bread
- Cheese
- Tanning
- Food preservation (salting, drying, smoking)
- "Cold" metalwork (copper and tin, mostly)

Bleeding Edge

- Gears (simple, bevel, worm), rack & pinion, cam, crank & rod
- Focused animal and plant husbandry and Mendelian Genetics
- Crop rotation
- Personal ownership of moveable goods, fields, and herds
- Venture capital; joint ventures with shares
- Loom weaving
- Faience & glazes
- Copper and tin metallurgy/smelting
- Civic projects
- Surveying
- Geometry

her dead husband. Her incredible fervor in defending the hatchling forced her in-laws to permit her the eccentricity, though they watched askance, awaiting doom. Quickly, Yog grew, and became one of the band's best and strongest hunters. His superpowers have saved them all from danger or starvation numerous times, and he has finally been accepted as one of them.

The Lost Tribe: The Lost Tribe lived in the snowy south, and was known for its rich trade furs, strange gems, and delicate scrimshaw bonework. Unfortunately, a volcano erupted three centuries ago, burying the valley of the Lost Tribe (and the main pass from the highlands) under feet of ash. This catastrophe was followed by the Great Whiteness, a terrible blizzard that left packed snow in the foothills for three years. This broke the White [wamla exchange ring](#).

Most people of the Flint Age believe the Lost Tribe to have died in the eruption, or failing that, the ensuing Great Whiteness (see [The Lost Tribe](#) for more details).

Weavertown

Group Species: Predominantly human, a few families of [ketsheeli](#).

Type of Group: Chiefdom.

Subsistence Style: Mostly agriculture and transhumance (Three Spears), with mild foraging.

Political Structure: Complex Chiefdom; the three ranks of society are: 1) the Chief; 2) the Chief's family, along with the Spider Shaman and his apprentices; and 3) everybody else (but also see *Gender Stratification*).

Degree of Gender Stratification: Some (virgin women are virtually second-class citizens. However, after getting married or giving birth, they gain comparable status to men).

Spouse Selection, Marriage Type, Marriage Residence, & Lineage Type: Endogamous; Polygamy (including cases of polyandry); Patrilocal, Bilineal (mother first).

Special Technologies or Knowledge: In addition to all of the listed [Technologies or Knowledge](#), Weavertown residents have learned to harvest and work the silk of the Great Weavers (giant gray spiders).

Trade Products & Participation: Supply: Linen cloth, spider-silk, rope, hides, Sleepy Head Grain, Heart Fruit, Yellow Tooth, Pod Bean, Sweet Tuber, Three Spears meat.

Demand: Nosehand meat, furs, hides, all fruits, lumber, copper. Participates in the Blue and Green wamla rings.

Primary Religio-magical Beliefs: Totemism (the Spider) and Shamanism.

Superpowered Group Members: The most notable are Spider Shaman and Flame Shaper, but there are a handful of people in the city who possess some sort of

Contract-as-currency (using a contract as a unit of trade)

- Astronomy

The Ketsheeli

Humans share the world of the Flint Age with another sapient race much like themselves: the Ketsheeli. Humanoid saurians, ketsheeli have several differences in body and mind that set them apart from their mammalian neighbors:

- **Physiology:** Ketsheeli are usually five-foot-tall tailless humanoids covered with horny scales. They have three fingers and a fully-opposable thumb on each hand, and tend to be much stronger than the average man (but there *are* men that are stronger than the typical ketsheeli). While their eyes are large (with a slit pupil), they typically have worse vision than humans; however, their sense of smell is far more acute. Though warm-blooded, these saurians still retain sensitivity to extremes of temperature -- they are sluggish in cold weather, and jumpy in hot (see also *Psychology*). They are omnivores, and reach full physical maturity in five years, sexual maturity in eight. Male and female ketsheeli look almost exactly the same, except that males tend to have a single colorful skullcrest. Early spring begins the mating season, and females that decide to breed select their mates at this time. Near the beginning of summer, they lay eggs in clutches of six. Eggs are usually grayish-white and leathery. (However, some few eggs are black; these almost invariably produce extremely strong -- and extremely dumb -- hatchlings.) Females brood over the eggs until they hatch at midsummer while males guard the nest; both parents care for the surviving hatchlings until the next mating season, then leave the "younglings" to fend for themselves (see

superpowers.

Further Information: Centuries ago, on the advice of their Spider totem, a simple band settled in and around the caves of a large resource-rich canyon. They increasingly turned to horticulture, which eventually developed into full-blown agriculture, just as their hunting slowly changed into herding. Their safe and centrally-located village became the hub of several minor trade routes, many of which coalesced into the three major wamla rings. It grew and prospered under the rule of strong chiefs, advised by the line of wise Spider Shamans. Right at the time the White exchange ring was broken, Weavertown became a full-fledged city. Today, buildings of wood, adobe brick, and stone grow along the cliff walls of the canyon; there is a stone bridge crossing the river; an intricate irrigation system takes water to the fields; and a cobblestone street runs the length of the city. Atop the jutting promontory of the east canyon wall looms the Spider's Tower, sanctum of the Spider Shaman and his apprentices.

ZZarthka'sss

Group Species: Predominantly [ketsheeli](#), some few humans under the chief's protection.

Type of Group: Chiefdom.

Subsistence Style: Foraging, Horticulture, Pastoralism, Nomadic. (In essence, ZZarthka'sss is a mobile city, shifting seasonally, between four established sites.)

Political Structure: Simple Chiefdom.

Degree of Gender Stratification: Low.

Spouse Selection, Marriage Type, Marriage Residence, & Lineage Type: Exogamous; do not mate for life; Matrilocal (for first year); do not care about parental lineage, but identify with their brood-mates.

Special Technologies or Knowledge: In addition to all of the listed [Technologies or Knowledge](#), ZZarthka'sss residents are the pre-eminent miners and coppersmiths of the Flint Age, and have discovered smelting.

Trade Products & Participation: Supply: Copper goods, faience, pottery, Grain Grass, Eye Tuber, Gritty Fruit, Crying Tuber, Spirit Plant, Heart of Blue, Leafy Ball, Nosehands wool and meat, Giant Leapers meat and fur.

Demand: Linen, ore, dyes, fruits, dried fish, silk, Yellow Tooth.

Primary Religio-magical Beliefs: "Sauria-morphism." The folk of ZZarthka'sss believe in a small pantheon of gods much like ketsheeli in form and attitude, who are responsible for aspects of the world -- storms, night, mating, egg-laying, brooding, etc.

Superpowered Group Members: Chief Twocrest, Devilwing.

Further Information: The four "city-sites" of ZZarthka'sss are a solid day's journey apart. Winterhome is a deep cave

also *Psychology*). Ketsheeli have a lifespan slightly shorter than the average human.

- *Psychology:* Ketsheeli are much more driven by their emotions than humans: it is nearly impossible for a ketsheeli to set aside emotional reactions for rational reasons. They also have a physiological sensitivity to temperature extremes that strongly affects their thought processes, becoming depressed and introverted during colder times, and manic and extroverted during warmer times. Furthermore, because of their quick physical maturity, there is less bonding time between mother and hatchling; ketsheeli have stronger ties to their nest-mates than their parents, and tend to form age-related cliques. A ketsheeli's friends are usually close to their own age, and their enemies are almost always significantly older or younger. (Imagine ketsheeli as strong, scaly teenagers with Seasonal Affective Disorder.)
- *Typical Ketsheeli Stats:* Expert Strength, Expert Sense of Smell, Good Armor, Poor Vision, Poor Rapid Temperature Adjustment (Physiological & Psychological).

Future Tech

Here are a few of the technologies that are on the horizon; GMs can feel free to introduce them through NPCs or NPC groups, or allow PCs to discover them.

- Chains & belts, ratchets, pumps (the Archimedes screw).
- Bronze Alloy.
- Glass.
- Charcoal.
- Minted Currency.
- Commodities Markets.
- Taxation.
- Physics.
- Basic chemistry.

system. Springsite is situated on a wide grassy plain. Summerhome is on the shores of a wide, blue lake. Autumnfell lies in a sheltered valley along a river. Non-mobile technological infrastructure (giant ovens, huge smelters, astronomical observatories a la Stonehenge) remain at these locations; ketsheeli warriors will regularly patrol the sites throughout the year.

Generic [Ketsheeli](#) or Human Raiders

Group Species: [Ketsheeli](#) or Human.

Type of Group: Household or Band.

Subsistence Style: Foraging; nomadic.

Political Structure: Big Man.

Degree of Gender Stratification: Low.

Spouse Selection, Marriage Type, Marriage Residence, & Lineage Type: Various.

Special Technologies or Knowledge: None.

Trade Products & Participation: None.

Primary Religio-magical Beliefs: Various.

Superpowered Group Members: Numerous human bands, and at least two ketsheeli bands, are led by superpowered individuals.

Further Information: Nomadic Raider groups are usually made up of between 10 and 30 members, and are thus generally Households or Bands.

Languages

The main languages of the Flint Age are Weaverspeak, Nisalthuan, and ZZarthka'sssian. There are also two pidgin languages used on the major [wamla](#) rings (called "Bluetalk" and "Greentalk") and a host of human and ketsheeli dialects. Southern groups on the Little White ring have their own language ("Whitetalk"), stemming from the trade pidgin incorporating words and grammar from the Lost Tribe's tongue, but it has changed considerably since then.

What Everybody Doesn't Know

Possible Superpower Origins

So, where do superpowers come from? The GM must decide if multiple types of origin are permitted, or if all superpowers must stem from a single source. Options include:

- *Weird Meteors:* The coruscating rays of these sky-rocks warp the animals, plants, and sapients that come too close, granting strange powers.
- *Chosen by the Spirits:* The spirits of the world -- rock, sky, water, stars, plants, animals, the dead --

- Ironworking.

How Super Is Super?

Some superpowered individuals are more powerful than others; this is reflected in the difference between the ranks of a superpower. Take, for example, Superstrength. A character with a Superstrength of Poor is still far stronger than a human with Master (mundane) Strength, but is weaker than a character with a Superstrength of Average or Good. Everything is relative.

Looking at old *Action Comics* comics, Superman is "invulnerable." That means that he normally doesn't take damage from anything ordinary. Extraordinary circumstances -- like being hit in the head with a meteor, getting zapped with a million volts of electricity, being targeted by fifteen howitzers, or being blindsided by a giant robot -- muss him up a little, but generally don't really hurt him. However, being punched by another superstrong individual hurts him as much as a normal punch would hurt a normal man. Obviously, invulnerability is relative to superstrength: they counter each other. GMs should keep this sort of balancing act in mind when determining how superpowers interact or interfere with each other.

Additionally, the Flint Age GM must decide what the "benchmark" capability of an Average ranked superpower is. Is Average Superstrength "the strength of ten men"? A hundred? Two? Adjusting the Average benchmark allows the fine-tuning of the setting: if low, the setting is a bit more realistic; if high, it's much more four-color.

have blessed the being with power for reasons known only to them (see also [OPTION: How Did Things Get This Way?](#), *Meddling*, and [OPTIONS: Got Magic?](#)).

- *Mutation*: While most mutations are negative, a few are beneficial; perhaps Flint Age mutants are just the lucky ones.
- *Mutation 2: Genetic Boogaloo*: If mutations can be passed to offspring (as a recessive trait) and can recombine with other recessive mutations, new and different superpowers could spring up from these hidden potentials.
- *(Contagious) Super-Lysenkoism*: A lifeform's acquired characteristics can be passed to its offspring in superpower form. So, if a character is mauled by a dinosaur and doesn't just live, but recovers fully, any offspring he fathers may have advanced regenerative abilities (and, possibly, saurian characteristics); a woman struck by lightning has a chance of giving birth to a child with electrical powers, and so forth.

The Lost Tribe

They were mighty hunters who called themselves "Esidarra." Possibly due to their endogamy, they had few male children born to them: this engendered a strongly matriarchal culture, where women had more status than men. Each Esidarrian possessed supernatural longevity, unbelievable endurance, and remarkable senses. These advantages didn't help when the volcano blew -- awakened by a superpowered foe -- and the mountain fell upon them.

Options for the Lost Tribe:

- *Dead*: They really are all gone.
- *Handful*: A dozen survivors (11 women and one man) escaped the lava, carrying all they could, and took shelter from the Great Whiteness in a meteor-heated crater in the mountains. They and have recovered their numbers somewhat (25 women), but the last male has just died. Without men, the Esidarra will die out. They have finally found an open pass to the north, and have decided to come down out of the mountains. But first, they plan on exterminating all of the bloodline of that long ago volcano-waker . . .
- *Sole Survivor*: As for "Handful," only by now, a single woman lives. Dyolikeen the Huntress (see below) is the last of the Esidarra. Perhaps it was the blood she inherited from a long line of chieftainesses, maybe the meteor changed her while in the womb of her mother, or possibly the spirits have written her a grand destiny. She has come forth

The Weblines of the Spider

When the Spider Shaman dies, grows infirm, or is otherwise lost, all his (or her -- there have been female holders of the office) apprentices gather inside the Spider's Tower. They then descend into the caves beneath, where the holy indigo-furred Weavers live, and light the sacred fires of aromatic woods. As pungent smoke fills the caves, the Blue Weavers swarm and crawl over the faithful. One of the elect receives the spirit venom of hundreds of holy spiders, granting him their power. When he awakes from the coma of ecstasy, he will be changed, and will take up the Weaver Mask and Cloak of Webs as the new Spider Shaman. (Twice in recorded history, more than one apprentice has received the Weaver's Kiss and been so blessed; however, no apprentice with pre-existing superpowers has ever been selected.)

The Spider totem grants its Shaman several powers through its divine children. He will gain the ability to climb even the most sheer walls (Good), superhuman agility (Master), and mild superhuman strength (Poor). Also, the venom supercharges intelligence, allowing the Shaman to string together facts, theories, fancies, and observations into a web of understanding; this ability, more than any other, is probably most responsible for Weavertown's relative high technology and science. Unlike the other changes, this one is based on the recipient's starting intelligence -- a smarter apprentice becomes a smarter Shaman; thus, apprentices are chosen for their keen minds as well as their purity of soul. Lastly, each Shaman gains a distinct power related to their personality or talents: some examples from past Shamans (and their core trait) include Paralysis Venom (sarcastic repartee), Claws (knife fighter), Sixth Sense (mild paranoia), Webspinning (talented weaver), etc.

OPTION: Got Magic?

to seek her fortune, her mate, and a future for her lost people.

NPC Backgrounds

Chief Arzurku Sea-Breather aka the Sea-Chief: An Expert leader, Arzurku commands the respect and awe of his subjects. Like most of the Sea-Breather line, he is Amphibious, but is by far the strongest and fastest swimmer amongst them (Master) and a cunning Warrior (Expert). Additionally, he is blessed with the ability to communicate telepathically with any form of animal life, including sapients, at Average ability. All of these blessings, however, have made him Arrogant and Stubborn (Poor interaction with anyone other than his subjects).

Devilwing: One of Chief Twocrest's right-hand saurians, Devilwing is a fearsome (Expert) Warrior, on land and in the air. Wings sprout from her back, giving her Expert Flight -- she can even hover in place. She does not possess the temperature sensitivity of her kin. Her sight is also of Expert level, giving her an edge in hunting, scouting, and war.

Oyorda Uzanason Skotson aka Flame Shaper: Born to a potter's family, Oyorda grew up like any normal Weavertown child -- playing in the streets, helping his family at the kiln, trembling in awe at the wisdom of the Spider Shaman. One day, just as he was entering manhood, he was tending the kiln and suddenly found himself aflame -- but unhurt. Not only that, he could make the fire dance and shift by thought alone, mold them into shapes, and even cause them to spring from his hands. His gift increases in power as he ages. While more adept (Expert) at shaping and controlling extant fires, he can generate fire out of thin air at Good rank. He's even learned to fly on fiery wings at Poor rank. He's saved the city from two catastrophic fires since his power has been active. With his help, his family turns out pottery faster than any other. After a discussion with Spider Shaman, he's begun to get interested in applying his powers to metallurgy.

Dyolikeen aka the Huntress: A stranger in a strange land, Dyolikeen is the last of the Esidarra. She seeks a worthy mate (or mates), in order to rejuvenate and restore her people. She will be mother to a new tribe, stronger than the soft-bellied lowlanders. And she will take revenge on the bloodline of her ancestral enemy. She has Good Superstrength, Good Invulnerability, Expert Superspeed, and Expert Supersenses. Additionally, she is a Master Hunter, and believes women are superior in all ways to men -- except in the male ability to father a child.

Betwyr Mayason Samohtson aka Spider Shaman: The current wearer of the Weaver Mask and the Cloak of Webs is an orphan, raised by a kindly uncle, who was one of the few hunters supplying Weavertown with wild game. On these rambles, Betwyr learned to hunt, stalk, and trap as well as any grown man, and was woodwise and worldwise beyond his years from these travels. Blessed with a surprisingly sharp intellect, Betwyr became the youngest apprentice shaman in memory. He learned the ways of the spirit world as quickly as he had learned the ways of the forest. After ten years, the reigning Shaman died, and Betwyr was chosen by the Spider totem to carry on the mantle. He possesses Poor Superstrength, Good Wallcrawling, Master Superagility, Master Superintelligence, and the ability to walk unseen and unheard in shadow at Good rank.

As written, the Flint Age does not include magic. However, some GMs and players may wish to give their PCs magic powers, or superpowers with a magic origin. Feel free to, but note that if magic is a learnable skill, as opposed to something that must be inborn or acquired (like superpowers), there will probably be a many who will make the effort to learn magi, if only to defend against the superpowered.

Also, the determination on whether magic energies and superpowers affect each other, and how, must be resolved by the GM. Would a "sense invisible" spell allow the magician to see the Spider Shaman skulking through the shadows? Will a magic bolt pierce Yog the Mighty's invulnerability? Could Flame Shaper burn a shaman who has cast Resist Fire?

OPTION: Everybody's Got Superpowers

Maybe *everybody* in the setting has superpowers. On the whole, this would probably accelerate technology and scientific discoveries even faster, while making the world a more dangerous place. PCs with superpowers will be less special, the prestige of super-person created wamla would bottom out, and threats and enemies will be significantly more powerful.

Chief Twocrest (of the Sunrise-Over-Oak Brood): The extra green crest on his head is unusual for a ketsheeli, but this is not the only strange thing about Chief Twocrest. He has Average Superstrength, Master Sense of Smell, Good Invulnerability, Good Vision, Master Superintelligence, and is not affected by rapid changes in temperature in the slightest. He is a superior ketsheeli, and makes no bones about letting anyone know that. While somewhat jealous of the grand culture of Weavertown, he respects them as a worthy opponent in trade and war. In addition to his vast Pride, his other main failing is his unnatural -- for a ketsheeli -- Affection for his progeny and his people. He really wants Yog to join the ZZarthka'sss community (and secretly wishes to breed the Mighty One with his daughters).

Yog Yogson Meleson aka The Mighty: Yog is an Expert Hunter, and possesses a few potent superpowers: he is the strongest sapient in the Flint Age (Master Superstrength), tougher than many dinosaurs (Expert Invulnerability), and can even fly without wings (Poor Flight) -- though he generally launches himself with his superstrong leg muscles, only using Flight to control direction and altitude. He shares the Expert Sense of Smell and Poor Rapid Temperature Adjustment (Physiological & Psychological) of ketsheeli, but has Average Vision. He is also somewhat shy and lonely (Poor in interacting with strangers and females) -- he entered sexual maturity two years ago, and has yet to meet a suitable mate. His scales are a deep coppery color; his crest is red; his eyes are gold.

Group Interaction Matrix

This chart indicates current relations between groups, both the public position (and the secret feelings behind them, in parentheses). Only one treaty of note currently exists (see below, [Treaty Belt](#)), between Weavertown and ZZarthka'sss.

Group	Nisalthu	Silpo Tem	Weavertown	ZZarthka'sss
Nisalthu	X	No contact.	Friendly (mild jealousy)	Cordial (curiosity)
Silpo Tem	No contact	X	Unimpressed (afraid)	Friendly (mild jealousy)
Weavertown	Friendly (curiosity)	Dismissive (provincial)	X	Cordial (watchful distrust)
ZZarthka'sss	Cordial (unconcerned)	Cordial (annoyance, except for Yog)	Friendly (seeking weakness)	X

Events & Possible Story Arcs

- Giant Laser Devil-Lizard:* A huge, battle-scarred Tyrannosaur is on a fiery rampage, setting the landscape ablaze with jets from its eyes. It's up to the PCs to stop the power-maddened creature, before their (hunting grounds/cultivated fields/villages) are destroyed!
- Find the Treaty Belt:* After a disastrous sequence of raids and counter-raids a generation ago, the chiefs of Weavertown and ZZarthka'sss agreed their people would never again wage war against the other, and they re-emphasized the ties of trade between them (the Green wamla ring). For the most part, this treaty has held. In commemoration, three treaty belts were woven of silk and decorated with faience beads. Each chief holds one of these belts, and the other is supposed to circulate eternally on the Green ring. However, it seems to have vanished, and tensions are growing high. The chief of one of these groups asks the PCs to trace its path, track it down, and take it to his opposite number.
- The Call Goes Forth:* Something big -- an alien invasion, a natural

disaster, an epidemic, a herd of meteor-maddened animals, war between groups, etc. -- threatens everything the characters hold dear. A call is sent along the wamla rings, pleading that the blessed (those with superpowers) band together to repel this terrifying threat. Will the PCs respond, and join this new avenging league?

Advice, PC Opportunities, & Pitfalls

Proactive Adventure: The Flint Age setting is ripe for development by characters in a building frame of mind. Those with superpowers can change the course of mighty rivers, build fantastic cities, found kingdoms, defend their kith and kin from the dangers and ills of a harsh, prehistoric world. The possibilities are limitless . . . provided that the characters *do something*.

Since the Flint Age is off the beaten-track of supers games, some players may feel at a loss for knowing what to do -- after all, many supers games focus on *reacting* to the plots and crimes of villains and masterminds. The Flint Age could support that style of play in a pinch: just cast one of the NPC group leaders in the Thulsa Doom role.

But it can be more interesting to encourage players to think proactively, on what *they* can do to help their people(s) survive, build, and grow; on forging connections with other cultures; on seeking out new discoveries in the world, in the crafts, and in the sciences; and on protecting their people from natural and unnatural catastrophes.

If all that fails, send in a stampeding herd of radioactive, flame-breathing ankylosaurs.

The PCs' Group: If all the PCs do not possess superpowers, some players may feel a bit excluded; GMs may consider making some form of superpower mandatory. Perhaps the Spider Shaman has been missing for a year, and all of the PCs are apprentices newly-blessed with the Weaver's Kiss: an unprecedented number of new Spider Shamans! (What coming danger is so extreme that the Spider Totem has done this?)

Group-Level Play: An interesting take would be for players to each control the fate of an entire group: their subsistence, trading, building, research, and warfare activities. A superpowered individual character could serve as the leader of that group, and be the player's viewpoint character. While Group-Level Play isn't for everybody, it could lend a more thoughtful, diplomacy-and-trade based gaming experience.

Adapting the Flint Age

Fantasy: In a fantasy campaign, the peoples of the Flint Age may be barbarian tribes whose strangely-powered heroes make them hard to disregard, even to warriors with the best arms, armor, and magic.

Standard Supers: The Flint Age easily could be an "alternate dimension" of a standard supers campaign world -- simply replace the NPCs offered above with modified versions of the supers of the extant world.

Science Fiction: The world of the Flint Age could be an alien's terrarium experiment. Maybe its heroes are the only thing standing in the way of the Galactic Exploiters' Guild from conquering a rich biosphere. The Flint Age could have grown up on Earth after an apocalypse involving vast amounts of radiation, genetic engineering, or nanotechnology. Then again, it could all be just an engrossing, ahistorical VR game.

Flint Age 4



Other Resources

- [... but a Thinking Dinosaur?](#)
- [The Herculoids FAQ](#)
- [The Mighty Mightor FAQ](#)
- Diamond, Jared, [Guns, Germs, & Steel](#)
- [Anthropology at Columbus State](#)
- [History of Horticulture](#)
- [GURPS Low-Tech](#)
- [GURPS Fantasy II: The Madlands](#)
- DC Comics' *JLA*, "The Obsidian Age" arc
- [Money: Bagi and Mwali](#)

Gaudeamus Igitur: Age and Society in Roleplaying

Part I -- Childhood

by Michele Armellini

*"Let's rejoice, therefore,
While we are young.
After a pleasant youth,
After a troublesome old age,
The earth will have us."*

--*Gaudeamus Igitur*, translation from the C.W. Kindeleben 1781 version

The way in which any society works is heavily influenced by assumptions concerning age. Most roleplaying games make little use of this key defining element. Yet, given that many of the social settings of common RPGs are fictional (fantasy, science-fiction, or alternate-history), it would certainly be possible to use age groups and conventions both to make the setting more interesting and peculiar, and as adventure hooks. Also, historical settings would benefit from a realistic representation of the attitudes and expectations that society actually displayed at the time of the campaign.

It is easy to take for granted concepts like youth or old age and hand-wave them from current society to any Fantasy medieval gameworld. It's easy and wrong; a given age is a constant in mathematics, but not in social sciences. **GURPS** does offer a few specific rules, but they could well be tailored to the gameworld's cultural conventions, and other game mechanics could be used, too.

The ideas herein should be useful to everybody, but reference is made to the **GURPS** rules dealing with age. Adventure seeds are provided, too.

Childhood

Today, children in affluent societies are treated in a rather different way than they have been throughout most of history. Children's rights are a very recent concept, and to this day not widespread all over the world. In the past, even the child of a free man might be considered as something of a miniature slave. The father often had a right of life or death over the children, either sanctioned by law (as in classical societies) or informally accepted. The idea that physical punishment might not be good for the child is similarly recent, and harsh disciplinary measures are still used in many countries. Even the most loathsome form of abuses, the sexual ones, were at times considered bad taste rather than crimes, although powerful primitive taboos had taken the form of religious prohibitions against incest. Religion also played an important role in forbidding abortion and infanticide; when it didn't, these were choices a pragmatic, ruthless woman or a family in dire straits could feel forced to take.

A child over five or six years of age might be put to work. While this sometimes requires tools (such as looms) to be specially built, conversely the child's small size is very convenient for certain job descriptions (such as chimney-sweepers and acrobatic thieves). Until the mechanization of agriculture, a farmer having many children was wealthier than a childless one, everything else being equal, because the latter had to hire workers. In the early industrial age, children were paid much less than men, but for that very reason they were less likely to be unemployed. Infamous children's sweatshops are open for business, today, in many third-world countries.

The children of the powerful and wealthy were somewhat an exception to these rules . . . even though one could say they were still exploited, in different ways. Royal offsprings were crucial for their potential role, and often the focus of ruthless power games for the regency; young nobles had to be trained for the role they would play when grown up, and they could be betrothed, even when ridiculously young, as pawns in dynastic alliances. In recent times, a working child could be a fighting child; today, auto-firing, light-weight firearms take away much of the requisites (strength, skill)

only an adult could provide. Children often lack a proper sense of mortality, or this can be reduced by brain-washing, religion, and/or superstition. As such they can become ideally fearless soldiers; they can't be expected to carry out complex tasks, but they are often exploited for suicidal ones that an adult would refuse (such as clearing minefields by charging through them, which happened in the Iran-Iraq war). To this day, children are kidnapped from rival tribes in Africa and trained as little soldiers, as the Ottomans did for their Janissaries.

In wealthy countries -- today and in the foreseeable future -- children are treated much better, they have rights, and they are even decision makers (as anybody can see by watching TV ads aimed at them). They still have a job, though: learning . . . and a tough job it often is. Schooling can easily range from allowing each pupil to develop his own potential to forcing all of them into a mold. From five years up, children can be taught competition.

Children In *GURPS*

In *GURPS*, children as characters basically get lower Attribute scores as per p. B14. They have low IQ levels because *GURPS* IQ is not just raw intelligence but also general experience. Finally, when creating a child character, it's important to remember his Skill selection will be realistically limited, since he cannot have more than $(2 \times \text{age})$ points in Skills.

This treatment is openly intended to create realistic non-player characters more than playing characters. Low attributes and limited skills are already quite penalizing for the poor tykes. Children, however, are usually part of a family and society. Why not using the mechanics *GURPS* offers us to portray this network? For instance, if the parents take the child as a Dependent, then he should have them as Patron(s). If he has got no parents, but a huge extended family, maybe he has a Claim to Hospitality.

Also, the social standing of the children could well be considered, especially if they are meant as PCs, and especially if these are unusual children. For instance, adults will not expect much from an IQ-8 10-year-old brat as to his intellectual capabilities. The GM will simply take this for granted, and it's enough if that's a NPC. But if he's a PC, and a little genius with IQ 14, then the GM should probably thumb through his *Basic Set* and come up with a compulsory Disadvantage: Social Stigma -10 (Valuable property) -- "it usually takes the form of limited freedom and/or lack of intellectual respect"! That's exactly the way adults will treat the PC, at least until they understand how smart he is.

Similarly, all other social advantages and disadvantages might be taken into account. By applying any of them to children, the GM can better define them as characters; are they Literate? Are they Uneducated? Disowned?

Also, Advantages and Disadvantages applied to children will give a peculiar, specific flavor to the fictional or historical society they grow in, or portray their special position within it. For example, Spartan children wouldn't have parents as Patrons, and they'd probably have a Duty even when very young. The children in a dying race might have a very special social standing and careful Patrons. A kid working for a tyrannical master thief (a Fagin) would have Involuntary Duty, low Status, Poor, Uneducated. Of course there are several Disadvantages that seem tailored for a light-hearted campaign with child PCs: Clueless, Distractible, Evil Twin, Insatiably Curious, Klutz, and Short Attention Span (a must!).

Metahuman, Godlike, and Alien Children

The assumption behind the relatively numerous super beings existing in many supers gameworlds (including *GURPS I.S.T.*) is that super powers are inborn. They may be latent and activated by accidents, stress or physical training; but they may also be "operational" from birth, just as it happens with *X-Files* babies. What happens when a powerful five-year-old PK psi wants his lollipop? What happens when he's really annoyed with someone, and he's a pyrokinetic, too? (Stephen King answered this one with *Firestarter*.) Raising, training, and keeping in check these children may be a daunting task, especially if the parents *aren't* metahumans.

The story-telling potential of this situation was already appreciated by ancient Greek authors, who toyed with stories about gods in their childhood. The juxtaposition of super-human strength and a childish mentality may make for

interesting and funny situations.

In a science-fiction setting, of course, aliens may replace gods and demigods. If an adult specimen is overwhelmingly powerful, its young can be a sizable challenge -- especially since they may lack the adult's restraint and self-control.

Are These The Same Species?

Often SF aliens and their offsprings are assumed to deal with childhood as we do. However, sentient aliens may well not be mammals. Several life forms on earth undergo major, sometimes astounding, developments while they grow (these changes are called metamorphoses). The same may happen with extraterrestrials, and the *Alien* trilogy is a remarkable example. However, if the members of an intelligent alien race grow from egg to larva to pupa to adult, it is possible, even likely, that their attitude towards the young is different from ours. For instance, if eggs are laid in the hundreds of thousands because the race originally came from a hostile environment, an adult would probably protect them for the species' sake, but he wouldn't develop a personal attachment to all of them -- indeed, he might also regard someone else's eggs as a source of protein. Moreover, if the race no longer faces natural limiting factors, it would probably need to find ways to restrict reproduction.

Adults might let their young fend for themselves in their immature stages, because they realize that otherwise, they'd be meddling with evolutionary forces they prefer not to interfere with. Or, once they develop intelligence, they might become overprotective, with long-term consequences. Larvae may be amazingly different from adults (such as caterpillars versus butterflies), which might sparkle interesting situations when outsiders barge in.

Adventure Seeds

At School

There are a few games in which the gameworld is a defined space where adults have little or no place. *All* characters are children, and the main thrust of the game is their interaction. These are "school games" -- and here are a few school adventure ideas.

- *Schoolyard Wars*. We all remember: The bully. The joke butt. The fatty. The teacher's pet. And more often than not, there were the schoolyard gangs, too. Face down the enemies by mocking them or fighting them; be merciless and cruel, as only children can be. Just remember it's a dead serious thing for all involved, "child's play" is something only the adults believe in.
- *Microcosm*. Building on the Schoolyard Wars theme, above, why not creating a full gameworld -- contained in a school? Time at home is just something of a dream. The teachers are distant demi-gods, whose desultory interventions are usually more harmful than useful. Children have Social Status, Wealth, Reputation, Stigmas, Favors; all scaled to their life at school. Other children may be Allies, Dependents, Patrons, Contacts -- and Enemies . . .
- *Rat Race*. This is a scientific space colony. There are two castes: scientists and everybody else (from cooks to mechanics). It's a very long-term project, so there are families, and a school for the children. How they perform at school will define what they'll become: revered scientists or despised menial workers. The children of the former, of course, have much better chances, even though, officially, nothing bars a cook's daughter from qualifying for the better courses reserved to smarter pupils. Tests, examinations, repressed social-class rivalry, and challenges are routine.
- *Hate on the Field*. Football is just a game. This year, however, the teachers and parents want to organize a four-team tournament involving two schools. Each team has an unofficial name, too: Serbians, Croatians, Nothing, and Parenthesis (from the symbol on their shirts -- some say it's a half moon, actually). Some teachers are worried, and they seem to expect difficult refereeing and tough play. The place is Bosnia, the time is just before the war, and the story is, sadly, true.
- *The Dare*. The team carrying out the most outrageous, daring and crazy trick wins. The victim must be a teacher.

Ordinary Children

These are ordinary children, but the situation is extraordinary. For "everyday adventuring" with children, see "At School," above, under "At school".

- *Exploitation*. A simple adventure idea can be based on the villain exploiting children. This can take any of the forms mentioned above under "Childhood". Such a villain automatically comes through as loathsome and deserving the kind of retribution the righteous heroes can offer him. This is rather straightforward . . . maybe too much so. What if these working kids' wages are the only income for their families? Or, what if the children really believe their warlord is a mage whose amulets will protect them from mines and bullets? What if the warlord, well, is a mage?
- *From their mouth*. A horrific crime. A couple of witnesses. But . . . they are children. Do they need protection? Where are their parents, what role do they play? Will they be admissible, believable witnesses? Will they stand cross-exam? By reliving the events, will they break, or will they suddenly remember something more? And above all, are they reliable? What if they hated the victim, or the perp? What if one of them changes his version?
- *The innocents*. This isolated Fantasy community desperately needs help, so that they can stop the unseen enemy that kidnaps their children in the night. The children show up again months later, unharmed but very pallid, and they remember nothing. The families want them back, no matter what. The secret is that a wizard is stalemating a dreadful demon he himself has summoned; for doing that he needs *pure* persons, the only ones the demon can't harm, tempt, or control. In the cave beneath the mountain, the wizard and a number of young boys and girls live in a grim routine, with somebody always on guard over the demon's hole. Every few months, the wizard wipes the recent memory of one of the kids and sends him back to his family, but he's finding it increasingly difficult to kidnap replacements. Of course, the children realize that without them, the demon would be unleashed against their own families.
- *Lord of the Flies, II*. Civilized children abandoned on a desert island. Will they replicate the society they come from? Or will they revert to barbarism? What if this is a social engineering experiment, and adults are secretly monitoring them? What if this is actually a cruel media show? What if the Lord of the Flies *exists*, and not only in the children's souls?

Other Children

- *Mutant Kids' Chronicles*. These children look normal, but they have powers; maybe they are supers, psis, weres, or knack mages. This will lead to all sorts of intriguing situations, as they initially have little control, or none at all, over their own capabilities. There will be all sorts of enemies very interested in them, too. The heroes may be the concerned, harried parents and relatives; bodyguards and scientists working for a benevolent (or less malevolent) agency, tasked with protecting and studying the little wonders; or the children themselves!
- *Upside down*. It maybe the devil's, an impish deity's, the fairy's, or an unknown being's work. The fact is, now children rule in this place. Something embarrassing, or inconvenient, or outright harmful happens to anybody over 10 who refuses to obey a child's bidding. The heroes must discover what's going on and try to restore normality; possibly they will have to explain the brats that it's in their own interest. Or, maybe the PCs are children, and very happy with the way things work now.
- *The all-powerful brats*. A couple of spoiled alien children are on the run from their parents -- and they can easily cause planet-sized disasters! The much-less-powerful heroes must: first, open a dialog with the brats (who'll initially think they are little more than obnoxious flies); second, cajole, distract, fool or entertain them so that they won't destroy anything for the fun of it; third, call in the parents!
- *Take us to your leaders, er, parents*. The first contact with this planet's unknown civilization. The explorers land and meet the aliens. They are huge beings, but they seem friendly. Negotiations begin. However, it seems the aliens have a short attention span, and that at times they behave, well, in a childish way. How strange.
- *Intelligent larvae*. On this planet, the explorers, interlopers, or scientists seem to discover two intelligent species, very different from each other. The "superior" beings cull and *eat* sizable numbers of the "inferior," yet sentient, ones. The outsiders take issue with that -- and will be horrified and/or incredulous when the adults explain that those are their own larvae! The problem is that the one and only dominant species on the planet extinguished all natural predators, and they haven't found a better way to control reproduction. What will the off-worlders do?

Do the larvae realize what will happen after the cocoon, or do they think that's death? Do they know what the "butterflies" actually are? Won't they fight against their elders, if given half a chance by some well-meaning but uninformed third party?

Roleplaying Tips

Roleplaying children is not easy, but it can be very interesting, at least for a change. The ideal age bracket is between 10 and 13. Children of that age have a sometimes surprisingly clear (if narrow and slanted) perception of what's going on around them.

The GM and the players should be aware of the limitations the PCs will be subject to. The players should take great care to avoid acting on the basis of their adult knowledge. Every time there's a doubt, they should roll against relevant skills or their IQ rather than simply going along with what they want to do; if there's an infant prodigy, his IQ rolls might well be penalized. This will limit the players' options. On the other hand, there is a special joy in being allowed to act childish!

In traditional fiction, the adult adversaries of children protagonists routinely underestimate them at first, then become very angry at being fooled by the brats, and often resort to brute strength. The children, however, defeat brawn with brains, and the bad guys will discover that if they are evil, a brat can be wicked. This might be the way to go with a playing group.

There is also some disturbing fiction, bordering on horror, where dark events are seen through the eyes of children. This is very difficult to roleplay well, but some players might find it an enjoyable challenge. The GM should keep in mind that Fright Checks can be requested more often if the night-prowling heroes are under 12!

Suggested Reading

- ["The Playing Fields of Mars,"](#) by James L. Cambias

Working for THEM

Adventures of the Trilateral Headquarters on Energy Management in the Firestorm-Effect 1950s

by Brian Rogers

All About THEM

The Trilateral Headquarters on Energy Management was formed in the cautious days of 1945, shortly after the Nagasaki detonation. The Navy had encountered inexplicable problems in the Pacific, having lost three ships to things-not-easily-placed-in-a-report, and [Secretary Forrestal](#) pressed the Truman administration to do something. Truman's response was to place Forrestal as part of a three-man commission (with Army and Air Force representatives) to investigate what Los Alamos scientists quietly called *Firestorm Effects*: biological and environmental changes wrought by A-Bomb detonations.

Forrestal got the Trilateral Headquarters shuffled off his plate in 1947 when he was named Secretary of Defense. This shifted the "first among equals" within THEM to Army General Eugene Stanehurst, who kept that position until his death in 1963. Stanehurst's longevity in the post surprised many; he was named the Army representative as his last post before his retirement, despite his age (59) and poor health. The Army wanted a respected name to balance Forrestal. In 1946, sad events at home caused Stanehurst to throw himself mind and soul into THEM: if his body suffered, well, that wasn't what he had been picked for, was it? Frail even at the start, Stanehurst was quickly wheelchair-bound and using hothouses for offices. By 1963 there were rumors that he was as much a Firestorm Effect as the things his agents hunted.

Stanehurst became affectionately known as The Old Man among his people, from whom he demanded results but gave incredible loyalty. He amassed sufficient clout in Washington to run his agency any damn way he pleased -- despite Army attempts to replace him or adversarial representatives from the Navy or Air Force -- especially once his personal friend Eisenhower became president. This clout would have meant little if he hadn't also been very good at a sticky job.

During the 1950s he forged THEM into a small, efficient agency that knew the exact boundaries of its authority and had few qualms about exercising it. The mandates of the Trilateral Headquarters were as follows:

1. Maintain up to date awareness of advanced energy theory, engineering, and usage worldwide.
2. Insure primacy in such matters for the United States and its allies.
3. Investigate, contain and, if necessary, eliminate Firestorm Effects, with a degree of response dictated by the FE's immediate threat to public safety as determined by THEM personnel.

Under Stanehurst, THEM had a fourth, unofficial mandate: resolving the murder of James Forrestal. Stanehurst was adamant that his fellow THEM founder did not commit suicide, and while politics precluded an aggressive probing, the agency under his command kept a quiet vigil on the subject.

THEM's first and second mandates required close contact with Western scientists to track advances in physics and other sciences. General Stanehurst interpreted the second mandate to include THEM acting as a clearing house for scientists, including those with unusual theories: for any breakthroughs in energy sciences, THEM was either involved at the outset or had agents on the scene shortly thereafter. Aware of the threat of Communist infiltration in this scientific hothouse, THEM maintained tight internal security against espionage.

Naturally, the first two mandates also required THEM to perform similar espionage. Much of THEM's international division was dedicated to this task: infiltrating labs, tracking scientists, and stealing advances from Communist

countries (and, in some contentious cases, from US allies). Occasionally THEM would use sabotage to protect American primacy, though always with deniability. In this way, THEM was very similar to other cold war intelligence agencies.

Their third mandate was more unusual: Firestorm Effects were an unfortunate side-effect of atomic power, and THEM was America's primary defense. THEM focused on having a cadre of highly trained field agents, relying on their ability to call on traditional armed forces if required. Agents would be present to oversee energy research or investigate possible Firestorm Effects across the country. If things went awry, they'd coordinate the response to contain the situation.

Of course, nothing was ever that simple. The armed forces chafed at being commanded by THEM agents, disagreeing with agent decisions concerning proper degrees of force -- THEM forced the destruction of Firestorm Effects that the military would rather have used as weapons, while protecting FE's that posed no immediate threat to public safety from military or public destruction. Rumors persisted that these shielded FE's were recruited, and THEM agents were often called 'the freakshow' by the traditional armed forces.

THEM can be a potent agency within the Atomic Horror setting. With the administration backing and armed forces support, THEM agents wield considerable authority within the Headquarters mandate. They're given comfortable leeway on assignment but are expected to deliver: the Old Man accepts the occasional failure, but not if it includes stupidity, overconfidence, agency embarrassment or civilian casualties. THEM agents make great PCs, adversaries, patrons, allies, or deus ex machina if the scientist, teenagers and retired marine/gas station mechanic prove unable to contain the giant louse infestation on their own. The Headquarters can provide a government counterpoint to TSF from *GURPS Atomic Horror*, but it has other uses as well . . .

Using Firestorm Effects

Firestorm Effects are the Atomic Horror-esque results of mutagenic: inhuman strength or intellect, unusual hybrids (iron-skinned animals lusting after red blood cells, men with insect heads, etc.), telepathy/mind control, energy projection, and the classic uncontrolled growth or shrinking. These can be applied to anything, even whole environments, such as areas where everyone within it become telepathic, or where lightning discharges from the ground . . . though humans and animals are more susceptible. In short, Firestorm Effects are carte blanche to play with the world's rules to create the story.

What causes Firestorm Effects? Atomic power is the most common culprit, either by being exposed to normal radiation or to strange elements such as Brobdignagium, and if the GM wants to keep the world focused, he could run with Atomic effects for some time. Other culprits include chemical spills, biological modification, alien contact/abduction, Orgone, etc. Enterprising GMs can develop hyper-tech: secret weapons such as ray guns or jet packs whose power sources qualify them as THEM's problem when in the wrong (i.e., foreign) hands.

There are other common terms for Firestorm Effects: Monster is one. Super is another. Supers as a genre had fallen out of vogue during the Atomic Horror era, a time when two-fisted heroes battled the personifications of Middle-American fears with a little pseudo-science to get them over the top. All powers were, by definition, "things man was not meant to know", dooming their possessor to social exile, madness, and death (often at the hands of those two-fisted heroes). Heroics were not seen as an option for those touched by the atom.

Change the angle slightly and the Atomic Horror world takes on a different view; rather than condemned a priori, Firestorm Effects might be the ultimate heroes, valiantly suppressing their inevitable madness to help their fellow man. Given that the 1950's public response to supers would be calling the army, such heroes would have to maintain anonymity. With the growing Federal power to track people, they'd have to have some sort of government patron to avoid a Richard Kimball existence. If they acknowledged that their final fate was unavoidable, they may ask someone to be in the position to put them down when the time came.

Enter the Trilateral Headquarters on Energy Management. THEM -- with its secrecy, government connections, and position in the thick of things -- makes a perfect patron for Atomic Horror supers. Stanek believes that you can take

normal people and make them superior soldiers through training, support and a worthwhile adversary. His agents keep an eye out for recruitable FEs, offering them a way to use their curses to protect other innocents from the same fate (and to keep the Reds in check, of course). Some Firestorm Effects, the ones not already driven mad by their powers, gratefully agree. They're trained as field agents and given partners to help them deal with the normal world. In addition to standard THEM training, such partners are armed not only with psychological training to detect warning signs, but sufficient armament to eliminate their FE charges if or when they start the descent into madness. (This can mean some fairly extreme armament!)

The Freakshow

If the GM decides to use THEM as the setting for Atomic Horror Supers game, he should keep some things in mind.

First is the tone. While it is possible to just slot THEM as a super-agents game into the common "supers timeline dead period" between 1945 and 1955, that doesn't take advantage of the joys of Atomic Horror. If they become known, Firestorm Effects will be hunted by the army and press (if not snagged by the Reds or Grays). With the world on the brink from unseen threats, FEs are more terrors than saviors. This is an ideal setting for playing heroes who protect a world that hates and fears them -- even if you strip away the harsher aspects of self destruction, FE heroes are still a doomed patrol that is more tolerated than celebrated, even by the agency that supports them.

Second is balancing the characters. On one hand, you can simply not bother. FE agents are much tougher than their minders; play up the sheer power of FEs compared to normal people and make the inevitable final confrontation that much more ominous. Tragedians can wallow in knowing that when he flips he may kill his best friend, while tacticians may relish the Dark Knight challenge of taking down his apparently-unstoppable charge when the time comes. If you aren't comfortable with disparate power levels, build the PCs on even points but different strengths: a FE with 50 base points + 100 points in powers will certainly be powerful, but no more potent in any session than his 150 points-of-skills-and gear minder. Building the FEs on minimal base points will emphasize their "Cursed Normal People" condition in contrast to the hand-picked and trained THEM regulars.

Third is system. The encroaching madness and death facing FE PCs can be hard to handle, especially in a system designed to handle supers. **Aberrant** already focuses on the inevitable struggle against one's destiny, making it a good engine once you replaced the 21st century aspects with some 1950s chrome, but expect the FE PCs to be quite powerful. **GURPS Horror** has guidelines for handling slow descents into madness, and the baseline reality of the **GURPS** mechanics makes a great foundation for both agents and supers games. **Silver Age Sentinels** emphasizes the heroic ideal, and FE's struggling to fight the good fight in the face of personal tragedy make a ready canvas for heroism: just keep an eye towards slowly assigning more Defects to indicate the hero's fight against time. Likewise, **HERO System** games will readily handle a THEM game's Supers aspects, but will require some tweaking to deal with the Atomic Horror aspects.

Sample THEM Agents in *Silver Age Sentinels*

The original incarnation of THEM occurred in the Silver Age Sentinels playtest, so the sample character stats are given for that game. (This has the advantage of demonstrating how to build cursed FE characters in a sanity-free system.) The Characters are presented as 100 pt THEM agents. GMs should add bolded stats for Atomic Horror Supers, making them 140 pt FEs with their Minder. My Thanks to Stephen Shipman and Tom Ladegard for these Men in Black.

Lt. Col Reed Crawford USMC ret (callsign X-Ray)

Body 10, **Mind** 10, **Soul** 7, **ACV** 12, **DCV** 9, **Health** 125

Characteristics: Appearance (3), Attack Mastery (3), Defense Mastery (2), Extra Attacks (1), Gadgets (2), Highly Skilled (5), Tough (2), Organization Ties: THEM (4)

Powers: Adaptation -- Radiation (1); Special Defense -- Own Attributes (1)*; *Item of Power - Accelerator Pack (9)

gives Environmental Influence: Radiation (1, Area 4, Duration 1), Special Attack: X-Ray Blast (8, Area Attack; Affects Incorporeal), Special Attack: Gamma Blast (7, Drain Body; Penetrate Armor & Force Fields; No Damage); **Item of Power: Goggles (1, Accessible) gives Heightened Senses (5, +4 Vision, X-Ray, UV, Telescopic and Radiation Vision)*

Defects: *Detectable -- Accelerator Pack Use (1)*; Ism -- Roman Catholic in 1950s (1), Red Tape (1), Nightmares (1)

Skills: Electronics --Sensors (3), Gun Combat -- Pistols (2), Interrogation -- Drugs (1), Intimidate -- Politics (1), Languages -- German & Russian (2), Law -- Political (1) Management -- Government (4), Medicine -- ER (1), Physical Sciences -- Physics (3), Pilot -- Helicopter (5), Social Sciences -- Psychology (2) Stealth - Camouflage (1), Wilderness Survival -- Jungle (1)

Reed Crawford was an electrician's apprentice when Pearl Harbor was bombed, and joined the Marine Corps the next day. Trained as a pilot, he racked up an impressive kill record before being shot down over a South Pacific island, surviving there for weeks before being rescued, though the events surrounding that still haunt his dreams. At the end of the war he used the GI Bill to study physics and engineering before being recruited to THEM.

THEM was attracted by his development of an awesome personal weapon system -- his accelerator belt (and its ring-mounted projector unit) and broad spectrum goggles -- and his incredibly high natural resistance to radiation. Reed takes his job with THEM very seriously, and is prepared for the day when he has to use his advanced weapons against his friend and partner.

Dr. William Stanford

Body 8 (14), **Mind** 12, **Soul** 7, **ACV** 10 (12), **DCV** 7 (9), **Health** 155 (225)

Characteristics: Attack Combat Mastery (1), Combat Mastery -- ACV Knockback, Leap Attack (tackle) (2), Extra Attacks (1) Gadgets (2), Highly Skilled (7), Massive Damage -- Football Moves (1), Organization Ties: THEM (4 3), Wealth (1)

Powers: Armor (3), Immovable (3), Enhanced Body (6), Regeneration -- restricted to healing every 10 minutes (3), Speed (1), Super-Strength (1) Defects *Cursed -- In constant pain from muscle growth (1), Maximum Force -- Super-strength (1) Marked -- extremely over-muscled(1)* Red Tape (1)

Skills: Biological Sciences -- Biology (3), Driving -- Car & Motorcycle (2), Management -- Government (2), Gun Combat --Pistol & Rifle (1), Medical -- Surgery & Pharmacy (5) Physical Sciences -- Chemistry (3), Police Science - Forensics (3), Sports -- Football (3), Unarmed Attacks -- Strike & Grapple (2), Unarmed Defense -- Strike & Grapple (1)

A short, stocky block of a man, William Stanford tore up the Yale Football field during his collegiate days before getting his medical degree. During the war he distinguished himself as field surgeon, but upon his return moved into the field of sports medicine, still knitting together bodies torn apart on the field of battle. He began looking for more in life when THEM recruited him.

Recruited is a polite term - Stanford had become obsessed with fixing the "inherent frailty of the human form", to the point of breaking the second rule of medicine: don't experiment on yourself. Initially thinking the project successful, Stanford found himself growing stronger and losing control. When he accidentally knocked over a truck and held off gunfire from a panicked cop, the government was called. Luckily the THEM agents who responded were willing to quietly take him into custody. Stanford feels himself growing stronger every day, and has done the math: he's growing stronger faster than he's growing tougher, and eventually will be so strong that any muscle movement will break his bones. Even with his advanced healing, he'll still be in constant agony and no doubt quite mad. Until that point, he's fighting the good fight and searching for a way to reduce what he's done to himself. He doesn't know that Reed is there to both help him succeed and to stop him if he fails.

Analects Arcane: Dramaturgy

The Play's The Thing! for d20 System

by Owen K.C. Stephens

Journal entry: Sixtieth Day of Summer

I have been long away from my journals, as I have engaged in my least favorite pastime . . . arguing with my patron goddess. Her current avatar is young and foolish, over-sure of herself and her divine power. She still enjoys sowing her wild oats and watching the effect her favors have on handsome young wizards. I know She times her new avatars to be young when the Mage of the North is old, and I understand She depends on me to resist her charms (often literally) and temper her passion for changing the world. But I far preferred dealing with Amara than this young whelp who hasn't even taken a name for her self yet.

Unfortunately, I don't really have a choice in the matter.

As Mage of the North, I am perforce a devotee to the Dark Lady, and one of Her most obvious agents. Most who do not live in Brak Karral assume that the Mage of the North is automatically made a priest of Her Eternal Cult, and thus gain the powers all Her clerics possess. Contrary to this belief, the matter is not that simple. When I passed the gauntlet perilous and took up the staff of this office, the avatar Amara gave me a choice. The mystic powers and skills of any other vocation of spellcasters could be mine. Most of my predecessors leapt at the opportunity to gain the powers of clerics. A few chose to master the magics of nature as druids or feel innate power flowing through their veins as sorcerers. Maragin the Pure even chose to gain the holy spells of a paladin.

I however, had always wanted to learn to play the harp. Young as I was, I asked for the arts of the bards. Amara, trickster she was, didn't even try to talk me out of it. I do miss her.

Of course, from an arcane perspective, bards and wizards are remarkably similar. Though there are a few spells only available to me as the Minstrel of Night (you must forgive me . . . were that mages were forbidden to name themselves until they're older), when it comes to spells mostly the gift has simply given me a greater endurance of lower level arcana. That said, I have never regretted the bardic gift of lore, or the affect I can bring on allies by bellowing out the war odes of my forefathers. Sadly, I have yet to master the harp. As a side benefit, because I have chosen to learn some healing as a bard, most of my enemies and allies alike have never realized where my true talents lie as the Dark Lady's most beloved.

What I have learned in my dual studies of magic as wizard and minstrel is that there is, or can be, magic in all things. While wizards rush to create things that cannot exist without magic, bards learn to call forth the magic to be found in art, beauty, passion and dedication. While this is often a less powerful form of arcana, it is also much more

subtle, and often more versatile. I learned this most forcefully after coming across the Sets of Mirth and Sorrow, a thick tome of dramaturgy, in my tenth year as Mage of the North.

*Amusingly, the volume was not brought to me by one of my dozens of agents I have scouring the globe for books of arcana. Instead, I found it in the tower's own library, nestled among the many mundane books of Brak Karral. Some previous Mage of the North had acquired it as a reference to famous plays. I suppose as a mere wizard I might have similarly dismissed it. But as a bard, I instantly recognized the great power contained within those plays, rough and unformed as it was. It took me months to assume even one dramarcana as a bardic power, but within a few years I not only knew every such magic play within the **Sets**, I had unlocked the secret of using such power as a wizard.*

Which brings me full circle to my argument with Yivenia, current avatar of Her will. With access to all Her knowledge, Yivenia is well aware I am a master dramaturge, and that I have worked hard to keep this fact well concealed. My Winter Masque is a famous festival of plays and opera, but none suspect that I am anything other than an eccentric old wizard who enjoys forcing my social peers to trek into the frozen north or risk snubbing me. Yivenia, wroth as the Red Duke for outlawing unapproved wizards within his lands, would have me dress a version of the Sacrificial King's Tale or him at my next Masque. And I know full well that should I do so, my secret would be revealed, and my Masques never attended again.

Thankfully, of all the members of the Eternal Cult, the Mage of the North alone is free to ignore the orders of the Dark Lady's avatar. So as long as She does not make such a command to me directly, I can keep my secret safe. Of course it is never wise to anger a divine avatar, no matter how young, and thus I must take some steps to appease her. Certainly the Red Duke needs to be put down, and possibly even replaced, and the Sacrificial King might be the tool for the task. But not by my hand and certainly not at my Masque. I do know a rover band who can perform dramaturgy, however, who have also suffered under the Red Duke's new rule. Sending them a version of that dramarcana adapted for the Red Duke and his capitol won't be simple, but I have established many false identities as playwrights over the years . . .

I believe Yivenia shall have the performance she wishes, if not the venue and director she preferred.

*--Arngrim Aignirson
Mage of the North*

Dramaturgy

Dramaturgy is a form of spellcasting that is normally accessible only to bards, though any spellcaster can gain access to it with the proper feats (see Dramaturgist in the New Feats section, below). Dramaturgy works much like other spellcasting except it requires a new component with three elements, the dramarcana (DA).

A dramarcana is a play that has been designed to tap into the magic energy dramaturgy requires. Each dramarcana is geared toward one dramaturgy spell, though it must be adapted for each performance before a dramaturgy spell can be cast. A dramarcana is listed as having a running time (rt), minimum number of performers (mp), and an acting threshold (at).

The running time of a dramarcana is not how long the whole play is, but how long it must run, uninterrupted, before the dramaturgy spell can be cast. The minimum number of performers is how many characters with at least 1 rank of Perform (acting) must be involved in performing in the play, though only the caster need to be able to cast the dramaturgy spell. (In fact, other actors need not even know a spell is to be cast). The acting threshold is the minimum DC at least one actor must make just before the dramaturgy spell is cast. Characters can take 10 on this check, but only if they have practiced the play for at least six weeks. Otherwise they must make a d20 check.

For example, the *sacrificial king* dramaturgy spell is listed as having DA (rt 2 hours, mp7, at 25). This means the dramarcana required to cast this spell must run or at least two hours before it is cast, must have at least 7 characters with 1 rank of Perform (acting), and at least one performer must make a DC 25 Perform check. If any of these elements is not fulfilled, the spell cannot be cast. Any attempt to do so automatically fails, and the sell slot used is lost.

Adapting the Dramarcana

One of the drawbacks of dramaturgy is that each dramarcana must be fine tuned to work under a given set of circumstances. Even if a dramaturgist knows the *great victory* dramaturgy spell, he can't use the associated dramarcana to spur on the troops of the city-state of Gitterdamn to overcome their foes without changing the words, setting, and even some of the characters of the play, and altering the spell elements to match. A pre-written dramarcana is a framework on which the dramaturgist can build real magic.

Adapting a dramarcana requires both a Spellcraft and Perform (acting) check, and may only be done by a character who is capable of casting the dramaturgy spell the dramarcana is being adapted for. The lay must be adapted for performance in a particular venue and against a particular target or area. The base time to do this is one week, and the DCs of both checks are the same as the spell's acting threshold. If a month is taken, these DCs drop by 8. A character may take 20 on these checks, but doing so requires 20 weeks.

Encoded Spells

Though bardic and sorcerous dramaturges have little need for such tricks, wizardly dramaturges often encode regular spells into their written plays. Such works are not automatically dramarcanas, though there is nothing to stop a wizard from encoding a spell into a play that is already a dramarcana.

Encoding the spell takes the same amount of time and money as scribing a spell into a spellbook, but requires a successful Perform (acting) check with a DC equal to the level of the spell encoded +5. Characters who cannot cast dramaturgy spells have no chance of recognizing a spell has been encoded into a play, while those who can cast dramaturgies must make Spellcraft check (DC 5 + level of spell encoded) to notice it. Once noticed, the spell still must be deciphered.

Like learning typical spells deciphering an encoded spell requires a Spellcraft check, but with a limitation. The caster trying to unlock a spell from a play must have the Perform skill with acting as a chosen performance type. The bonus to his Spellcraft check to decipher the encoded spell can not exceed his Performance bonus. For example, Sonja Green has a Spellcraft bonus of +14 and a Perform (acting) bonus of +7. When attempting to learn a spell encoded into a play, she makes a Spellcraft check, but is limited to a +7 bonus, as that's her Perform bonus. If her Perform check were +18, she would be able to use her full Spellcraft bonus of +14.

Dramaturgy Spells

Catharsis

Conjuration (Healing)

Level: Drama 3

Components: V, S, DA (rt 2 hours, mp 5, at 18)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Area: 1 mile/level emanation from point touched

Duration: 1 day/level

Saving Throw: No

Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless)

This dramaturgy spell creates an invisible, immobile field of magic that retards and weakens a specific disease. This gives creatures within its area a +4 dramaturgy bonus to saving throws against a specific disease. The dramarcana for this spell must be adapted for a specific venue, and a specific disease. This spell is normally used to slow or end the spread of plague.

Comedy

Enchantment (Mind-Affecting)

Level: Drama 2

Components: V, S, DA (rt 3 hours, mp 12, at 15)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Area: 1 mile emanation from point touched

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: Will negates

Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell shifts the attitude of all creatures within the area one step better in regards to a specific group, race, or location. Once shifted, the attitude changes in response to the normal interaction with the group, race, or location. The dramarcana must be adapted for venue, group, race or location the attitude s to be shifted regarding, and season the play is performed.

Drama

Enchantment (Mind-Affecting)

Level: Drama 1

Components: V, S, DA (rt 4 hours, mp 12, at 15)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Area: 1 mile emanation from point touched

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: Will negates

Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell shifts the attitude of all creatures within the area one step worse in regards to a specific group, race, or location. Once shifted, the attitude changes in response to the normal interaction with the group, race, or location. The dramarcana must be adapted for venue, group, race or location the attitudes to be shifted regarding, and season the play is performed.

Enlightenment

Enchantment (Mind-Affecting)

Level: Drama 1

Components: V, S, DA (rt 4 hours, mp 2, at 13)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Area: 1 mile/level emanation from point touched

Duration: 1 day/level

Saving Throw: Will negates (harmless)

Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless)

This spell grants all creatures within its area a +1 dramaturgy bonus to all checks made with a particular Knowledge skill. The dramarcana must be adapted for venue, Knowledge skill the bonuses are granted to, and time of day the play is to be performed.

Great Victory

Enchantment (Mind-Affecting)

Level: Drama 1

Components: V, DA (rt 4 hours, mp 20, at 13)

Casting Time: 1 full round

Range: Touch

Area: 1 mile/level emanation from point touched

Duration: 1 day/level (see text)

Saving Throw: Will negates (harmless)

Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless)

This spell grants all creatures within its area a single reroll of an attack or damage roll made within the spell's duration. If the second roll produces a worse result the first roll may be retained. (If using some form of mass combat resolution, simply allow one reroll for the side affected by the dramaturgy, and ignore giving individual characters rerolls).

The dramarcana must be adapted for venue and major opponent most disliked by the general population of that venue.

Horror

Enchantment (Mind-Affecting)

Level: Drama 1

Components: V, S, DA (rt 30 minutes, mp 6, at 18)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Area: 1 mile emanation from point touched

Duration: 1 day/level (see text)

Saving Throw: Will negates (harmless)

Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless)

This spell grants all creatures within its area a +4 dramaturgy bonus to the next fear-based Will save they make within the duration of the spell. The dramarcana must be adapted for venue, and the number of times the play has already been played in that venue.

Midsummer's Night

Enchantment (Mind-Affecting)

Level: Drama 4

Components: V, S, DA (rt 2 hours, mp 15, at 25)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Area: 1 mile/level emanation from point touched

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: Will negates

Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell shifts the attitude of all creatures within the area involved in a relationship that at least one of them considers romantic. This shift moves the attitude closer to love (which can be treated as a step better than friendly). Once shifted, the attitude changes in response to normal interaction. Of course, since some creatures are involved in more than one potentially romantic relationship, much emotional trauma and confusion can result from this dramaturgy. The dramarcana must be adapted for venue, group, race or location the attitude s to be shifted regarding, and season the play is performed.

Sacrificial King

Enchantment (Mind-Affecting)

Level: Drama 4

Components: V, S, DA (rt 2 hours, mp7, at 25)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 1 mile/level

Target: 1 acknowledged ruler

Duration: 1 day/level

Saving Throw: Will negates

Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell forces a selected ruler within its area to make a will save, or suffer a -4 dramaturgy penalty to all Int and Cha based skills for the duration of the spell. If the ruler is present for the performance, he suffers a -2 penalty to his Will save. Anyone who is acknowledged to be head of a area, organization, town, guild, or council may be targeted by this spell. The dramaturgy must be adapted for venue and target.

Tragedy

Necromancy

Level: Drama 4

Components: V, S, DA (rt 3 hours, mp 12, at 23)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Area: 1 mile/level emanation from point touched

Duration: 1day/level

Saving Throw: Fort negates

Spell Resistance: Yes

This dramaturgy spell creates an invisible, immobile field of magic that strengthens and speeds a specific disease. This gives creatures within its area a -4 dramaturgy penalty to saving throws against a specific disease. The dramarcana for this spell must be adapted for a specific venue, and a specific disease. This spell is normally used to create and epidemic or hasten the spread of plague.

New Feats

Dramaturgical Spell [Metamagic]

You can work a spell into a play performance.

Prerequisites: Must be able to cast three or more dramaturgy spells.

Benefit: A spell cast as a dramaturgical spell must be performed as part of a play, and must have one or more targets (not an area or effect) who are among the audience. If the Perform (acting) skill check of the director is greater than 10 + the level of the spell, the spell has no outward visual effects. The spell still requires all its normal components, but these are worked into the play and do not seem magical.

Additionally, if the Perform (acting) check of the caster is higher than the hit dice of a target, that target suffers a -2 dramaturgy penalty to any saving throw allowed by the spell.

A dramaturgical spell uses a spell slot two levels higher than normal.

Dramaturgist [General]

You have learned to perform a few forms of dramaturgy.

Prerequisites: Able to cast 4th-level spells.

Benefit: Choose a number of dramaturgy spells equal to your Cha modifier (minimum 1). You may now choose these dramaturgy spells as you normally select spells. If you are a cleric or druid, they become part of your divine spell list. If a sorcerer, you must select them as spells known. If a wizard, you must scribe them into your spellbook.

Normal: Only bards have access to dramaturgy without taking this feat.

Special: This feat may be selected more than once. each time you take it, you gain access to additional dramaturgy spells equal to your Cha modifier (minimum of 1).

Pyramid Review

Time of Crisis (for Mutants & Masterminds)

Designed by [Super Unicorn](#)

Published by [Green Ronin Publishing](#)

Written by Christopher McGlothlin, M.Ed.

Cover by Keron Grant & Cully Hamner

Illustrated by Greg Kirkpatrick, Tom Fowler and Craig A. Taillefer

Colored by Scott Case and David Self

Cartography by Rick Achbeger and Sean Glenn

64-page full-color perfect bound softback; \$16.95

Time of Crisis is the first scenario to be released for Steve Kenson's Origins Award nominated [Mutants & Masterminds](#) superhero game, which reworked the d20 system to get a slimmed down version of the rules more suited to the genre. Designed for six characters of Power Level 10, it means that the adventure is aimed at beginning level characters -- for whatever system the GM wants to use. The simplicity of how statistics are presented in *Mutants & Masterminds* means that they can be converted with relative ease to most other superhero RPGs.

Physically, *Time of Crisis* is up to the standards set by both *Mutants & Masterminds* and *Freedom City*, the game's default city and setting book. It is printed on decent paper stock, and with a lot of full-color superhero comic-like illustrations it all looks very professional. In particular, the center spread of the "Primate Patrol" superhero team is a great image and certainly one to show the players when they are encountered. The adventure is also well-written and a pleasure to read, but its heading titles do occasionally become a little more tongue-in-cheek, and perhaps a little too adult than they really should be.

One of the joys of reading through the *Freedom City* supplement was the spotting and identifying its many, many "Easter Eggs" or little bonus references to comics, their creators, and various people within the industry. To some extent this is true of *Time of Crisis* -- there are at least four, and those are the easy ones to spot.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The plot to *Time of Crisis* ties in with the *Freedom City* setting, though if the GM uses another for his own campaign, it would be just as easy to substitute other names to suit. A decade after his attack on Freedom City, Omega -- Lord of Terminus and master of entropy -- has decided to change his method to destroy the universe and thus expand his domain. Until recently he has been doing this dimension by dimension, but now he plans to detonate devices at the weakest points of the omniverse and thus shatter the universe through several precise blows. Unfortunately -- or fortunately for the universe as we know it -- all of those lie within Freedom City or versions of it in other parallels.

Enter the player heroes just after foiling a raid on a downtown casino -- a task the police were reluctant to let them do, except for the fact that all of Freedom City's premier superhero teams are busy elsewhere . . . A flash of white light and

they find themselves standing on a chunk of rock, fortunately one with an atmosphere, amidst a dark void. They find out what is going on from the Norn, the Guardian of Life who explains Omega's plans and how they can be prevented from happening by sending the heroes back in time to four dimensions and stopping the cosmic bombs from exploding . . .

Aided by the Norn, the heroes are first sent to a world in which the Nazis won, and they perhaps have the chance to help a legend from their own world; then onto a world of primates in which the heroes are mistaken for agents of Omega; from there to their own world, but "Through A Glass, Darkly"; before finally coming back to their own world. There is plenty of opportunity for battle and roleplaying along the way, and the GM is provided with lots of good advice, especially on handling the various NPCs that the heroes have to fight.

At the end of it, the characters will have saved the universe, and perhaps earned enough Power Points to have risen to the next Power Level. The GM will have basic descriptions of three new dimensions that they may have the player characters revisit sometime in the future, as well as a fine range of NPCs, some of whom are sure to want to exact their revenge. Once saved, the GM can always do a "Post-Crisis Reboot," if he wants to make changes to the team's home dimension or the others that they have visited during the course of ***Time of Crisis***. Several suggestions are given for this option.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Let us not kid ourselves here; ***Time of Crisis*** is one big fat cliché drawn in glorious Technicolor. This is no bad thing in all honesty, and doing the superhero cliché is to some extent the point of ***Mutants & Masterminds***, and even more so Freedom City. Think of ***Time of Crisis*** as the setting's *Crisis on Infinite Earths* and you would not be far off the mark . . . This is a highly enjoyable affair that should provide several good sessions of play -- for whatever superhero RPG the GM wants to use.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Night of the Ill Tempered Squirrel

Published [by Alien Menace](#)

Game design by Tyler Sigman

Squirrel logo by Lynn Cook

Graphic Design by Marc Davis

Additional contributions by Edward Evans

100 cards, six playmats, rules (all black and white), in an envelope within a ziplock bag; \$7.95

Gone are the days of terrible movies made by talentless directors with half-applicable titles -- but on the plus side, now there's a game about them. Behold, *Night of the Ill Tempered Squirrel* from Alien Menace, the game of making bad flicks you'd be embarrassed to see on late-night TV for free.

The object of the game is to produce the worst film possible. Art is a subjective thing, so the only way to keep track of whose movie is the most repugnant is to award them stars just like reviewers do. If you come out with the fewest stars in your film at the end, you win the game and not one Oscar.

Each player (three to six budding writer/producer/directors, but they really want to act) has a playmat with spaces for keeping track of their Movie Elements. Elements are all the things you can't afford for your flick -- the actor, the plot/script, the monster, a title, the set location, your special effects, and of course a big finale. The game is played in two stages: Filming and Release.

During Filming, players take turns playing a card and drawing back up to five from the Filming deck. You only get to play one card per turn, and once cards are played no one may look at them unless another card allows it -- you're all essentially working blind, which confirms a few theories about some directors in Hollywood. For this round to end, every slot on every player's playmat must be occupied by at least one card, thus completing all the movies. The Movie Element cards you get will be rated from one to five stars -- if you get a low-star card, you'll want to play that on your own slots. On the other hand, you can play cards to fill other players' slots as well, so if someone fills your actor slot with a bad card (and even without looking, you know it's not going to be a good one), you may be forced to put the one-star loser you wanted for your picture in someone else's film. Fill your own slots, or someone else's? Play the three-star plot now, or hold off and hope to draw a one- or two-star plot?

Movie Event cards can change a number of these things about play. Some cruel competitor may see to it your flick gets extra funding -- now you can afford an additional Element, curse the luck. If industry spies get the low-down on your production, they may hire away your actor. On the other hand, an actor might quit in a fit of pique -- good if your opponents saddled you with big-name teen idol Bradley Pits, bad if they play it when the best actor you could score was Hank the Dog. Every event you play is one more slot on a playmat you don't get to fill, but it may be better than being forced to play the right card on the wrong person . . . and passing isn't an option.

Once all the movies have finished filming, it's time for the Release phase. Hollywood is abuzz about the big new releases and, God willing, yours isn't one of them. This phase plays the same, but it's much shorter: Each player gets two cards (from a smaller Release deck), the play-and-draw format remains the same, you still don't get to look at your

cards, and now you're trying to fill everyone's Review slot. There are a few Release Events as well, like big openings that draw unfortunate attention to your turkey, or idiot reviewers who might confuse your picture with another.

Once everyone's Review is in place, everybody flips their cards over and, in order, reads out their story with as much gusto as one can manage for such low-budget schlock. You total up how many stars you got from all your Movie Elements and your Review, and the player with the fewest stars wins and never works in this town again.

The game package claims the game takes half an hour, but it doesn't actually take that long if you know what you're doing. Play is rapid, and for a game that doesn't let you see what's going on, it's amazingly engaging. And if you think you're laughing hard while trying to put together a film blindfolded, wait until players get to let loose on their descriptions.

As far as components go, the cards and playmats are good, stacking together nicely. This is a surprise because they feel like they were made from the poster board kids use for school projects -- it's smooth and almost glossy on the back, and dry on the face. This friction also makes them difficult to shuffle, and the ink may not last. At the very least, it seems a little of it comes off on your hands, though the art doesn't seem to smudge or smear.

The art is a mix of clip-art elements, lazy cartoons, and the occasional bit of decent (if uninspired) line art. The cards are clear and easy to read (though both Filming and Release decks have the same Squirrel logo backing), which isn't hard to do when you dedicate card text to large, simple, legible language and not endless rules verbiage. The mats hold all the Elements -- well, one end of each kind of card anyway -- though they could have been laid out to mirror the order in which the cards are read at the end of the game. It all comes in an envelope, and this in turn is stuck -- tightly and without explanation -- inside a ziplock bag. Replay value may be limited since there are only so many Elements in the deck, but Alien Menace could also conceivably release new and inexpensive additions ala Cheapass Games' ***Deadwood***.

Though the game plays like an enormous round of ***Concentration***, there are still understated strategies that form in your head as you play. If someone is eagerly playing cards on himself, he's probably got some decent stuff that requires interference. Similarly, someone who gets pounded early in the game by opponents is obviously less of a threat in later rounds. With the exception of the Movies on Parade! card (which forces all players to rotate movies to the left - it has its uses and may solve some internal design problems, but it's disappointing since it's a deadly upset in a game already tightly focused on a single, difficult strategy), ***Night of the Ill Tempered Squirrel*** is a well-woven, creative game with genuine laughs. Like the movie culture on which it's based, the game is cheap and fast entertainment.

--Andy Vetromile

Heroes On The Sidelines

I had a few minutes last night to peruse some comic books (my first chance in over a month). One of the stories was a two-parter from *Peter Parker: Spider-Man*, which I will indulgently describe now.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

This Spider-Man story centers on the return of the Sandman, long-time Spider-Man villain and general bad hombre composed of sand. He had been broken down into his component sand particles (don't ask), and was reforming . . . only this time he had been split into multiple beings, with each being representing some facet of his personality (child, criminal, would-be do-gooder, caregiver). The rest of the story -- this was a two-parter, remember -- revolves around Sandman gathering up these alternating aspects and incorporating them into himself.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Those of you playing at home may note that there was a considerable dearth of Spider-Man within this two-part Spider-Man story. Oh, to be sure, he was around, tagging along with Sandman, getting squished into tight taxis, and generally scratching his head quizzically at appropriate times. But for the most part I got the impression that ol' Spidy could've been replaced with a plush [Kitty Kitty Kitten](#) and the story wouldn't have suffered much.

The lesson of this? Never get broken down into your component sand particles.

Er, wait. There's something a bit deeper here . . . think think think . . . Ah! Got it.

There's a natural tendency in many kinds of adventures to have the heroes along for the ride, reacting to strange events, odd locations, or wild and powerful NPCs. This is an ancient and noble tradition, stretching all the way back to *Wizard of Oz*.

Unfortunately, done incorrectly this can be a wholly unsatisfying type of tale; the players quickly realize that their interactions have little effect on the events . . . the best they can hope for is to stay out of the way and try to survive. This can be especially true in adventures involving a metaplot for an established game universe; there is often one predetermined outcome, and that result will happen, by gum. In terms of arcade games, these are often like "track shooters" -- arcade shoot-'em-ups where you move automatically along a predetermined path (like the quarter-pumping equivalent of a roller coaster), with only minor variances depending on whether certain goals are met.

Now, again, that's not to say this type of adventure should be verboten. Rather, there are a few tips -- dare say I, "random thoughts" -- that can be used to make it work better.

The focus is the heroes. Now, I've harped on this one before, but it bears repeating. Even in a big epic struggle -- say, World War II -- it's possible to have a personally involving story . . . such as *Saving Private Ryan*.

Avoid utter powerlessness. I suspect one of the big reasons these kinds of adventures can be distasteful to many players is because, at their core, they are pretty realistic. We're constantly presented with situations where we cannot hope to affect the outcome, from day-to-day interactions with people who hold power over us, to macro events of governmental decisions and policies. Given the general unpopularity of playing characters who are [weaker](#) than the rest of the world, it's no surprise that many players enjoy RPGs because it gives them a chance to play characters who *can* make a difference in the world.

Although I'm guessing there are many ways of keeping the players from feeling powerless, the one I'm personally most fond of is always making sure there's one obvious way out . . . then working to make sure the players have incentive to stick around and not use that escape. For example, I ran an adventure where the heroes got tied up in a power game in a foreign kingdom. Its hook and tie to the heroes was a murder, which one of the PCs' allies was accused of. They had little chance to affect the outcome of the greater struggle, but they knew that they could pack up and leave for their

own kingdom at any time, without too many terrible consequences (especially after they resolved the ally's involvement with the murder). Their own curiosity to unravel the events that led to the murder kept them involved; they eventually learned enough to satisfy that thirst for knowledge, came to the conclusion that they were in over their heads, and pulled the emergency cable to end the adventure train.

In other adventures I've used similar techniques, ranging from the ability to shunt away those involved or flee themselves to the heroes having the power of life and death over *all* the powers involved (albeit only in an "all-or-nothing" kind of way). While this emergency switch is never presented as the best option -- or even a *good* option -- it is at least a viable choice, and goes a long way toward dispelling any feelings that nothing they do matters.

Make sure the heroes seem like they have an effect. Of course, ideally the players *would* feel like they could do something. Even in an adventure that was originally designed where the heroes aren't expected to affect the outcome, this can usually be mitigated by including a secondary goal they *can* influence. For example, in the *Quantum Leap* episode "Lee Harvey Oswald," where the protagonist Sam Beckett leaps into . . . well, Lee Harvey Oswald shortly before the Kennedy assassination. *[SPOILER ALERT!]* In that episode, Sam finds himself unable to prevent the assassination of the president, but it's revealed that, in the original timeline, Jackie Kennedy also died in the shooting; Sam prevented the secondary tragedy. *[END SPOILER ALERT]* Of course, it takes a fair bit of finesse on the part of the GM to make that secondary goal seem like something worthwhile, and not merely tacked on:

"GREETINGS, MORTALS. YOU SHALL WITNESS THIS DAY AN EPIC BATTLE BETWEEN INCARNATIONS OF CHAOS AND LAW. OH, AND A PUPPY MIGHT GET HURT, TOO."

Provide roleplaying opportunities. This is a no-brainer, but it's easy to forget. If the whole point of an adventure is to have the heroes witness the interactions of powerful NPCs or events they can't influence, then make sure they have the opportunity to actually interact! If rival CEOs are determining the fate of Urbapolis, make sure the heroes get that private dinner with one CEO and the cyberspace encounter with the other *before* the climactic interaction between the two on the private cruise ship.

Just because an adventure involves characters removed from the PCs doesn't mean the PCs should be removed from the adventure. With a bit of work, you can make this type of adventures work even when the outcome is strongly plotted. And hopefully the players will feel the exhilaration of being on a roller coaster, instead of the horror of being stuck on the "It's A Small World" ride.

--Steven Marsh

Designer's Notes: GURPS Age of Napoleon

A Gazetteer of Napoleon's World

by Nicholas HM Caldwell

This gazetteer of the nation-states of the Napoleonic era was omitted from the final version of *GURPS Age of Napoleon* for space reasons. It supplements the book's chapters dealing with the history, personalities, and everyday life of the era, by providing more in-depth detail on the human geography, society and politics of the individual nations.

Europe

Great Britain

England was beginning an agricultural and industrial revolution. Agricultural experiments with new crops and crop rotations, enclosure of common lands, and animal breeding on private estates had increased yields tenfold. Other landowners followed suit, promoting Enclosure Acts through Parliament to acquire village common lands. The poorest peasants had to choose between becoming permanent laborers or emigration to the industrial towns.

By 1800, there were over 50 towns with more than 10,000 residents -- Birmingham had reached 45,000, Liverpool 78,000, and Manchester 84,000. The industries which encouraged this urban explosion varied considerably: textile mills (Lancashire), pottery (Staffordshire), iron and steel foundries (Sheffield), mining (Durham and Newcastle), shoemaking (Northampton), and hosiery (Leicester and Nottingham). Mechanization entered manufacturing in fits and starts: the water-powered spinning machine was adopted in 1769, but it was 30 years later before the arrival of the powered weaving loom left another group of semi-skilled workers jobless.

The factory workers were poorly paid, employed in unhealthy and dangerous conditions, and housed in slums. However for the prosperous, the growing towns became ever more pleasant, with better water supplies and fire prevention measures, elegant architecture, and cultural diversions such as theatres, libraries, and coffeehouses.

A burgeoning canal system and an improving road network provided England with an effective inland transport system. Meanwhile the great ports of London, Bristol, Hull, and Liverpool continued to attract more of the world's maritime commerce, thanks to British naval supremacy and an expanding colonial and trading empire. By 1790, there were more than 9,000 British merchant ships at sea.

Daily newspapers had existed in London since 1702. By 1780, there were 158 newspapers and periodicals being published throughout England. The newspapers were usually single large sheets, printed on both sides and folded once to make four pages. The content of the provincial publications drew heavily on the popular London newspapers. Popular periodicals such as *The Spectator* sold 20,000 copies per issue, but circulation remained low for most newspapers until the invention of the stream-press in 1814. As these ephemeral publications were relatively expensive, copies were normally shared or rented in coffeehouses. Press freedom, controversial journalists, and cruel caricaturists ensured that political and military news as well as society scandal and gossip propagated beyond the ruling elite, producing an informed -- albeit frequently by biased sources -- reading public.

Scotland

The immediate effects of the Act of Union between England and Scotland had been to worsen conditions for Scotland, lending encouragement to the Jacobite Rebellions of 1715 ("the Fifteen") and 1745 ("the Forty-five"). The power of the clan system had been broken after the Forty-five, with severe penalties being levied on any Scots who bore arms or

wore clan plaid or kilts. These laws were finally repealed in 1782.

As the Highlander nobles became mere proprietors and large-scale sheep farmers, clansmen drifted into crofting, fishing, and the army. Thousands emigrated to America. (Later many took the "high road" -- emigrated -- to England.) The vain hopes of a Jacobite restoration continued to stir the clans even into the 1770s, though the self-styled James III of England (and VIII of Scotland) had died in 1766. His elder son, Charles Edward Stuart ("Bonnie Prince Charlie" or Charles III), died in 1788. His younger son (the *soi-disant* Henry IX) became Cardinal York, dying in 1807, and ending the legitimate Stuart bloodline.

The later 18th century saw "North Britain" (as the English styled Scotland) benefit from better roads and increasing industrialization. Until American independence, the tobacco trade created many fortunes in Glasgow. After a brief slump, the linen and cotton industries became the Clyde Valley's largest employers.

Scotland's 1,600,000 people were represented by a mere 45 Members of Parliament (30 county MPs and 15 representing its 65 royal burghs) and 16 peers in the House of Lords. However, as there were only 3,000 actual voters (1788), manipulating the Scottish elections was easy and the Scottish bloc vote in the House of Commons could be relied on to support the incumbent government. The Scots were sympathetic to the American Revolution and advocated a widening of the electoral franchise after the French Revolution.

Wales

Wales remained stolidly rural with a population of 600,000 (1800) and no towns larger than 7,000 inhabitants. Wales elected 32 Members of Parliament; local government was dominated by the gentry who served as Justices of the Peace and county sheriffs. The richest aristocrats in Wales were actually English peers whose main estates were in England. The Welsh nobility and gentry were not as rich as their English counterparts, but the social gulf between them and their tenants was much wider. Owing to absenteeism among the landlords, estate stewards became powerful intermediaries. Successful stewards eventually became lesser gentry themselves.

Enclosure of land in the 1790s led to gradual agricultural improvements and local unrest. This coincided with extensive canal building by private entrepreneurs who recouped their investments through tolls. Previously the poor Welsh roads had made sea trade important. The new canals boosted the Welsh wool, leather, and mining industries, increasing exports of coal, copper, iron, lead, and tin.

Ireland

"John Bull's other island," as Ireland was sometimes styled, was treated by England as another unruly colony rather than as part of Britain proper. It had been finally conquered by the English following the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688 and William III's defeat of James II at the Boyne (1690). As the Catholicized Norman and native nobility emigrated to Europe with their retainers, they were replaced with a Protestant Ascendancy subscribing to the established Church of Ireland, ruling over the 85% Catholic majority and the dissenting Presbyterians in Ulster.

Ireland's population rose from 2,700,000 (1771) to 4,200,000 (1791). Most lived in the countryside, farming potatoes or flax and weaving linen. Despite the efforts of English merchants to exert Parliamentary influence at Westminster to break Irish commerce, trade with America flourished from the western ports of Cork, Galway, Limerick and Londonderry, and smugglers exported Cork silver and Waterford glass to Europe.

Though some Ascendancy nobles were absentee landlords financing a life in England through Irish rents, the rest had become Anglo-Irish and sought a more equal relationship with England. Though hopelessly corrupt (two-thirds of the seats were "rotten boroughs" where the electors' votes were for sale to the highest bidder), Grattan's short-lived Parliament achieved some commercial concessions. Ireland was still governed from Dublin Castle by the Viceroy and his ministers. Irish legislation required the assent of both viceroy and King.

Dublin itself was the second largest city in Britain, with Ascendancy wealth rejuvenating its architecture. Parklands such as St Stephen's Green and Phoenix Park remained intact. Dublin was home to Ireland's sole university, Trinity

College, established by Queen Elizabeth I for the education of Anglicans, and matched in quality only by Edinburgh. Philosophical, agricultural improvement, and cultural societies flourished. The popularity of the faked *Ossian* poems and authentic translations from the Gaelic led to harps appearing in Ascendancy homes. Nevertheless, poets such as Oliver Goldsmith sought fame and fortune in England.

Irish cities and towns were mostly populated by workers and beggars, leavened by a small middle class. In the countryside, most farmers leased their land under the "conacre" system, growing potatoes for themselves and managing grain and cattle for the landlord. Dwelling in mud cottages with their livestock, these Gaelic-speaking tenants subsisted on potatoes and skimmed milk. Short leases denied the peasantry any security of land tenure, making them subject to the arbitrary whims of landlords and their agents. Secret societies such as the Whiteboys committed acts of sabotage and occasional violence against landlords, their agents, and their property in retaliation for landowner brutality. Taxes and tithes (to the Church of Ireland) were ruthlessly levied. Beneath the conacre farmers was a large itinerant class of beggars, gypsies, tinkers, and *gombeen* men. The last sold clothing and salt to isolated communities, offering credit at usurious rates of interest.

Ulster and the Penal Laws

Ulster was Ireland's most prosperous province. The great landowners enjoyed a lavish lifestyle. Longer land leases had created a yeoman farmer class while the linen industry provided employment for thousands. Whaling, salmon fishing, and illegal whisky distilling supported coastal and isolated communities.

Western Ulster was predominantly Catholic; eastern Ulster was Presbyterian. Both Belfast and Londonderry had religiously mixed communities. Belfast had expanded to 18,000 thanks to the linen, cotton and ship-building industries, though many of the new inhabitants lived in cramped slums. Barred (like Catholics) from attending Trinity College, Presbyterians acquired Enlightenment ideas at Edinburgh and Glasgow universities and from American traders, so that Belfast's Presbyterian middle class became the most radical segment of Irish society. Land hunger kept sectarian hatred alive in the country with rivalry between the Presbyterian "Peep o' Day Boys" and Catholic "Defenders" flaring into frequent violence.

Throughout Ireland, the Penal Laws were enforced to ensure Catholics and Catholicism was unable to threaten the Ascendancy. No Catholic could vote or hold parliamentary office, or seek legal redress. They were excluded from careers in law, the judiciary, and the navy, and forbidden from attending any British university. (Medicine was their only permitted profession.) Catholics were educated by priests and at foreign universities. No Catholic was allowed to bear weapons or own a horse worth more than five pounds. They were required to divide all land equally among any sons. (An eldest son who converted to Protestantism inherited everything.) The equal land division was often foiled by sham conversions or transferring the property to a Protestant friend prior to death who then returned it to the intended heir. Bishops were banned from Ireland on pain of death by hanging, drawing, and quartering. Only 1,000 priests were legally permitted and they were forbidden to teach the Catholic faith. Nevertheless more were trained in continental seminaries and returned to work in secret. Many educated Protestants found the Penal Laws distasteful and assisted Catholics in evading them.

France

His Most Christian Majesty, Louis XVI, ruled over a nation of some 26 million inhabitants, exercising his authority through the same administrative machinery created a century earlier by Cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin and the Sun King himself, Louis XIV. The royal palace at Versailles outside Paris was both the seat of the royal court and of the French government. The purchase of noble titles had elevated higher officials into the aristocracy while marriages between the *noblesse d'épée* and *de robe* gradually reduced the effective social distinctions and enabled the ancient families to recover some measure of political power.

The King's government was undertaken by a small number of ministers, responsible for law, finance, home and foreign affairs, the army, and the navy, and some 34 *intendants* appointed as regional administrators. Originally created as the monarch's agents to control the aspirations of local nobles and enforce the royal will, the *intendants* had become

aristocrats themselves and in the ensuing conflicts of interest, they frequently acted on behalf of their region (or its most vocal and powerful political factions). Subordinate to ministers and *intendants* was a large and unwieldy bureaucracy.

Various institutions in France such as the guilds and the Church enjoyed special privileges which mitigated the supposed absolutism of the regime. Provincial nobles agitated for further powers to be restored to their regional Estates from the central government. The 13 *parlements*, particularly the *parlement* of Paris, were attempting to acquire veto authority over new laws (rather than simply registration) in addition to their status as appeal courts.

Agriculture was the main-stay of most French families. The larger farms of northern France yielded comfortable incomes for their tenants; the west, south, and southwest were dominated by struggling sharecroppers with small plots.

Some 15% of the population lived in cities or towns, where municipal charters shielded the residents from rural feudal obligations and some taxes. With the exception of Paris and Lyons, the urban centers witnessing the greatest growth in prosperity were the coastal ports, such as Bordeaux, Le Havre, Marseilles and Toulon, thriving on overseas and colonial trade. The wealth of Nantes was derived from the linked commerce of sugar and slaves. Bordeaux spent its riches in its new theaters, shops, and fine buildings. Lyons, the second city of France (with 150,000 people) was the center of the silk industry, though workshops and small factories rather than steam-powered "dark satanic mills" predominated.

Switzerland

The Swiss Confederation and its allied communities of Geneva, the nominally Prussian fief of Neuchâtel, and the republic of Valais formed an extremely loose and disunited federation, lacking any central administration, legislature or constitution. Rent by internal religious divisions, the Swiss avoided foreign intervention, relying on their military reputation and difficult Alpine passes for their defense. More than 40,000 Swiss served as mercenaries abroad, though recruitment grew steadily more difficult as agriculture and manufacturing became more lucrative. Cotton, silk and lace-making became key industries in Zurich and St. Gall, while Geneva and Neuchâtel became renowned for watch-making.

The Forest Cantons of Schwyz, Unterwalden, Uri, and Zug remained dominated by Catholic nobles and clergy. Other rural cantons functioned as corrupt, popular "democracies" where the peasants sold prestigious offices to wealthy families and appropriated foreign pensions.

The urban cantons were ruled by town councils. In Zurich, the guilds ruled, regulating every aspect of life from dress to pastimes. Though half of Basel's inhabitants were citizens, the merchants' guild monopolized all high posts. Bern was governed by an exclusive patrician class of 68 families whose occasional six-year tenure of one of 60 bailiff posts enabled them to rebuild or enlarge their fortunes. Rural areas were neglected by the urban cantons. The common bailiwicks (under multiple cantonal jurisdiction) were misruled by bailiffs who recouped the office's purchase through levying fines.

Geneva's 25,000 people were stratified into four classes: office-holding citizens, voting burghers, *natifs* and newly arrived *habitants* who could neither vote nor hold office. A revolt in 1781 led to the temporary elevation of some *natifs* but was repudiated by the patricians supported by French intervention in 1782. Thereafter Geneva was ruled by its Small Council, and became a major financial center.

Though lightly taxed, the sharp social distinctions, censorship and legalism encouraged an attitude of seeking advantages from the States without doing anything in return. Swiss neutrality was quickly sacrificed by Napoleon. His Helvetic Republic (1798-1803) gave Switzerland a single government. Its treasuries were looted by France, while foreign armies and internal revolts led to anarchy and Napoleon's formation of a Helvetic Confederation under the Act of Mediation (1803). Switzerland languished as a satellite state until Napoleon's downfall, when an enlarged independent and neutral confederation was established.

Spain

Since the accession of Philip V, Duke of Anjou, as His Catholic Majesty, Spain had been ruled by a Bourbon dynasty descended from Louis XIV of France. He had abolished the constitution of Aragon, placing the entire nation under the laws of Castile and requiring all public business to be conducted in Castilian Spanish. From the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) onward which assigned Gibraltar to Britain, the British were seen as the enemy and the French as natural allies. Though Spain lost control of the western Mediterranean, the Spanish Navy expanded throughout the 18th century, defending the far-flung colonies and undertaking voyages of exploration.

Spain's population rose to 10 million (1800) with a hundred thousand living in Madrid. Half a million Spaniards claimed noble status; of these, only the 700 *grandees* and *titulos de Castile* enjoyed great wealth and influence. Links between the Spanish aristocracy and other European noble castes grew, with many Spaniards proving receptive to the writings of French and English thinkers. While the Inquisition remained active, its unwillingness to prosecute powerful *grandees* weakened its ability to halt the spread of subversive ideas

Population and prosperity migrated from the center to the Peninsula's periphery. The provincial nobility sponsored the foundation of regional economic societies between 1765 and 1789 to encourage investment and promote technical knowledge. Catalan and Basque merchants benefited from the opening of colonial trade to all ports by 1778. (Previously Cadiz and Seville had monopolized all commerce with the Americas.) Shipbuilding, coastal fishing, iron, and steel production expanded in the Basque region. The cotton and domestic industries enriched Catalonia. Valencia became a center of medicine and culture as well as the hub of the Spanish silk industry.

Agricultural improvements remained few; the great landowners were satisfied with the revenues from their estates while the peasants eked out a living on tiny plots and the common land. The landless laborers of southern Spain suffered most from increasing prices and rents.

The preference of many noblemen for French styles and fashions was equaled by the favor shown to native styles and customs by other sections of society and many noblewomen. Bullfighting, formerly popular only in Andalucia, became a national entertainment. Similarly flamenco singing and dancing spread throughout Spain.

A substantial French presence in Spain's commercial cities and a later flood of French émigrés propagated Revolutionary ideas and news of events north of the Pyrennees to ordinary Spaniards despite the best efforts of government censorship. Initial enthusiasm for the French Revolution collapsed with the execution of Louis XVI and the Terror. Basque and Catalan regional patriotism redirected itself against republicans, and the Spanish people united against the perceived Jacobin threat. The later loss of colonial trade and crippling military costs combined with disease epidemics caused severe hardship to many Spaniards, enflaming the discontent which erupted in violence against Godoy's ministry and during the War of Liberation.

Portugal

The discovery of gold and diamonds in Brazil had ushered in a Golden Age for Portugal during the first half of the 18th century. Bullion paid for the construction of new palaces, churches, and noble residences. Portugal's economy was linked to Britain's by the enduring Methuen Treaties which ensured preferential treatment for Portuguese wines (in British territories) in return for unhindered sales of English textiles in Portugal. Fish and corn were also imported from British North America. All problems were (temporarily) solved by judicious gold payments; meanwhile English expatriates consolidated their hold on commerce.

The Lisbon earthquake of 1755 shattered the easy complacency of the House of Braganza, and caused many intellectuals at home and abroad to doubt the merciful nature of God. The city center was destroyed and the English Quarter was badly damaged. Directed by the Marquis of Pombal, chief minister of His Faithful Majesty Joseph I, Lisbon was rebuilt to a grid pattern. Though the homes of the nobility and the rich were quickly restored, housing for the poor took the form of huge shanty towns which grew in the areas around Lisbon's seven hills. Under Queen Maria, a royal police force preserved law and order in Lisbon aided by the introduction of street lighting. Little was done to improve the road infrastructure of the nation.

Maria's reign witnessed Portugal's population rise to three million with the bourgeois expanding to include some 80,000 traders. Over 100,000 craftsmen supplied Portuguese needs. The armed forces recovered their professionalism after the long stagnation under previous rulers. The Catholic Church regained its influence in society. Both the monasteries and the rural squires retained their feudal dues and medieval rights (e.g. in blacksmithing and milling). Though Portugal possessed thousands of lesser nobles and impoverished knights, the grandees numbered a mere 50 titled families. Emigration to Brazil provided a safety-valve for the disaffected youth of the smaller towns.

Portuguese merchants felt increasingly patronized and exploited by the heretical English who lived in fine fashionable homes in the suburbs of Lisbon and Oporto. Strenuous efforts were thus made by Portuguese traders to develop new industries and markets.

As Brazil became more self-reliant, Lisbon's merchants exported low-quality goods to Angola and created a triangular trade in slaves to Brazil. Careful only to sell cargo space to slavers rather than purchasing the slaves outright, the shipowners profited regardless of whether the slaves lived or died en route. Payment was accepted in gold, cotton, Peruvian silver, and sugar -- the colonial estates were always in debt to the home merchants. The silver was re-exported to India while the sugar was sold to Mediterranean customers. The cotton supplied the flourishing textile industry around Lisbon itself. The capital became noted for its numerous goldsmiths and booksellers.

Portugal's other city, Oporto, was the center of the wine trade to Britain, with shipments being sent to London, Hull and Bristol. Portuguese wine was sufficiently coarse to induce English merchants to fortify it with French brandy before selling it in England. Low prices induced landowners in many wine-growing regions to return to the cultivation of cabbages, cereals, olives, and the newly introduced potato. Thousands of artisans near Oporto became involved in the flax industry, performing piecework at home rather than in factories. The center of Oporto remained the city's commercial heart. Colonial returnees flaunted their wealth in miniature palaces in the eastern suburbs, while the English community gravitated to the western districts.

Portugal's bourgeois magnates briefly hoped that the French invasion would permit them to escape from British competition. The behavior of Napoleon's marshals swiftly disillusioned them. Selling supplies to the British forces provided a new source of income. Nevertheless, they were greatly aggrieved by the Anglo-Portuguese Treaty of 1810 which allowed the British direct access to the Brazilian markets.

The Italian States

Despite a population rising to 18 million, Italy remained a mosaic of small states ruled by powerless dynasties. Victories and defeats in the diplomatic conflicts of the continental European powers were translated into transfers of Italian states and duchies from one hegemony to another. New rulers invigorated their kingdoms, reintegrating Italy with Europe. New roads connected northern Italy through the Alps to European markets, while sea trade boomed in the free ports of Ancona, Leghorn, Trieste, and Venice. Northern Italy exported silk especially to France; oil, corn, and wine remained the principal exports of the south.

The luxurious Renaissance villas of the nobility and classical monuments contrasted with the hovels of a mostly illiterate peasantry. The warm climate encouraged most to spend their waking lives outdoors. The wealthy had their sons schooled by private tutors or in the Jesuit academies; their daughters prepared for eventual marriage with a convent education. Though attached to Catholicism, popular and aristocratic morality was little influenced by its tenets. Despite the censors, printers published Enlightenment works in French and in translation; the native thinkers responded by emphasizing Italian (rather than classical) history and urging the use of Italian (rather than Latin) for cultural thought. Following the French invasion (1796), careers in the universities, academies, schools, the military and journalism became attractive alternatives to law and the Church for intellectuals. As Italy suffocated under Napoleon's Continental Systems, Jacobins channeled desires for an independent united Italy through numerous and popular secret societies such as the northern *Adelfi*, central *Guelfia* and Neapolitan *Carboneria*.

The House of Savoy ruled Piedmont and Sardinia as an absolute monarchy, reorganizing both territories to ensure the preeminence of the ruler and stifling enlightenment thought. Although Sardinia was a rural backwater, Turin and Nice enjoyed significant expansion. Determined to expand territorially, Savoy's Victor Amadeus III exploited the balance of

power between France and Austria.

Mantua and Milan (population 131,000) combined to form Austrian-ruled Lombardy. Divisions between town and country had been reduced by a reorganization of the Lombard provinces to ensure urban and rural participation in each administrative unit, while church influence was curbed. Agricultural innovations improved the standard of living and increased the wealth of the great landowners. With the extinction of the Medicis, Florence (population 72,000) and the Grand Duchy of Tuscany were ruled by Austrian Habsburg princes. Peter Leopold's reforms abolished torture and the death penalty and instituted free trade policies. Despite this "Enlightened" despotism, most peasants were sharecroppers or heavily indebted, the bourgeois were politically weak, and the landholders supported only the changes which were in their interests. The Este Duchy of Modena was an Austrian satellite.

The Bourbons governed the joint Kingdoms of Naples and Sicily. The Neapolitan barons were ill-versed in trade, preferring the extravagance of the court at Naples (population: 400,000), and allowing commoner parvenus to lease or purchase their estates to pay off debts. Heavy business taxes on commoners limited commercial and industrial growth. Agriculture concentrated on cultivating fruit, vegetables, grapes, and cereals. Seizures of monastic lands, the suppression of the Inquisition, and elimination of the right of sanctuary shifted power away from the Church. Sicily was ruled by a viceroy from its capital of Palermo (population: 140,000) -- however, the baronial parliament ensured the retention of aristocratic economic and social privileges. Another branch of the Bourbons ruled the duchy of Parma.

Reduced after the loss of Corsica to a city-state, the Republic of Genoa was still under the absolute control of the oligarchy of the Bank of St. George. The impoverished nobility and gentry subsisted on the salaries obtained from filling the minor posts of the army, administration and diplomatic service.

The Most Serene Republic of Venice was a shadow of its former glory. Its ruling oligarchy had declined to a mere 50 families. The city population had stabilized at 137,000. New walls were erected to protect Venice from flooding. The mainland territories were completely subordinated to the needs of the city and willfully neglected, lacking even a network of roads. The country towns emulated the city in lording it over their rural neighborhoods. Increasingly isolated from the outside world, Venetian foreign policy was to hide from all attention; its people and its rulers were gripped by a "terror of the future."

The Papacy was at its nadir of prestige. The Papal States and the Church were run by a ruling class of courtiers, "nephews" of cardinals and popes, and feudal nobles, for their own benefit. Divided by the Apennines, the southern papal domains consisted of large fiefs (worked by sharecroppers) and unhealthy marshes, while the northern regions exported hemp and silk, and enjoyed a measure of commercial prosperity. The University of Bologna sufficed as the center for Enlightenment thought. Rome itself (population 162,000) was filled with beggars and priests -- fully a third of the inhabitants of the States were in holy orders. The reforming ambitions of Pius VI (pontiff 1775-99) foundered; his successor Pius VII (1800-1823) had more urgent concerns.

The Dutch Netherlands

The Dutch Netherlands, then called the United Provinces, had declined from their peak in the 17th century, becoming a second-class power. Holland still dominated the federation. Although officially a Calvinist state, the two million inhabitants of the United Provinces included 700,000 Catholics and 200,000 Jews and Protestant Dissenters, who were excluded from all military posts and commercial office.

Political tensions in the United Provinces included the House of Orange's desire to convert their hereditary title of *Stadtholder* into an effective ruling monarchy, the rivalries between the nobility of the landward provinces and the merchant patricians of Holland, and the desires of the burghers (the self-styled Patriot factions) to obtain some share in the States-General which constituted the government. The aristocratic families, known as Regents, monopolized all positions of power and influence, even forming cabals to ensure vacant offices were transferred to appropriate holders. Though society became more stratified, wealth was a passport into the regent families.

The decay in the fortunes of the Netherlands was most visible in the cities and towns. By the 1790s, Amsterdam's inhabitants numbered less than 200,000; elsewhere towns steadily depopulated. Urban areas became filthier, dead

animals were common sights in the canals, and outbreaks of typhus, cholera and fever increased in frequency. Gin drinking became a widespread vice as the traditional meat, bread and dairy diet was eschewed in favor of gins, adulterated brandy, and low-quality tobacco. Begging increased in the towns, while robber bands prowled the countryside.

Devastating cattle plagues forced Dutch farmers to diversify more, raising sheep and cultivating asparagus, clover, chicory, flax, madder, potatoes, and tobacco. Fishing and whaling declined owing to a lack of qualified native sailors and supporting crafts. Dutch ships remained small and traditionally designed, while other nations constructed larger, faster ships, dredged their harbors effectively, and avoided the need for Dutch middlemen. The Dutch remained the premier smugglers in the New World -- this led to Dutch bankers supporting the rebellious American colonies with substantial loans and the importation of American revolutionary ideas into the Patriot cause. Manufacturing of textiles and ceramics collapsed from foreign competition, causing skilled workers to emigrate. High taxes (for the maintenance of the Barrier Forts guarding the borders) and guild restrictions (which increased prices) added to Dutch misery. The rise of Amsterdam as a world banking center did little to reassure the elite, who continued to fret about whether the United Provinces had exceeded their resources or reached the maximum extent of their wealth.

The Austrian Netherlands

The Austrian Netherlands (sometimes called Belgium and including modern Luxembourg) was granted by the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) to the Austrian throne. The Habsburg emperors modernized the previously Spanish governmental institutions, making appointment to public office depend more on merit than influence or status. The three million Flemings and Walloons came to be ruled by a combination of Viennese officials, Belgian administrators, native nobles with a French outlook, and Catholic prelates. The cities of Antwerp, Bruges and Ghent were governed by their leading burghers. The subordination of Flemish to French as the language of officialdom and the upper classes caused some resentment among lower-class Flemings who neither spoke nor understood French.

Under Maria Theresa, the Austrian Netherlands enjoyed an era of increasing prosperity with agricultural progress being matched with growth in manufacturing (such as cotton and woolen goods) and mining activities. Wages remained low and the ongoing blockade of the Schelde estuary by the Dutch prevented Antwerp's recovery as a port. For the well-to-do, it was a time of revelry, dancing and feasting. Enlightenment ideas percolated into employment, education, health and religious affairs.

Emperor Joseph II's attempt to lift the Schelde blockade failed; his administrative and religious reforms threatened the political autonomy of the Austrian Netherlands and the powers of the native aristocracy. The latter triggered an unlikely alliance between conservatives and progressives, culminating in a middle-class revolt (the Brabant Revolution) in 1789. The coalition fractured and Austrian control was reasserted by Leopold II in 1790.

The fall of the Austrian Netherlands to French Revolutionary armies brought annexation to France. Revolutionary and Directorial France abolished all traditional privileges, suppressed the Catholic Church, and eliminated all vestiges of autonomy. Extensive military conscription led to rural revolts (1798-99) and savage repression. The Consulate and the Empire introduced the Code Napoleon and restored religious worship under the Concordat. As an integrated part of France, the economy, especially in the coal, metal, and increasingly mechanized textile industries actually grew, unlike the other satellite states. Napoleonic control of Holland effected the removal of the Schelde blockade, restoring Antwerp as a port and staging ground for a French invasion into the unprotected eastern counties of England.

The German States

Germany was not a single nation; instead there were hundreds of mostly small states forming the Holy Roman Empire -- which was neither holy, nor Roman, nor an empire. The German rulers were ostensibly vassals of the Emperor in Vienna. In their own territories, these nobles could behave as absolute rulers.

The states had varying characteristics. There were about a thousand imperial barons and knights, mostly in the south-west and in the Rhineland, who held small fiefs as direct vassals of the emperor. Hereditary castes of senators governed the imperial free cities of Frankfurt-on-Main, Hamburg, Nuremberg, and some 50 lesser municipalities.

Unusually, Hamburg prohibited nobles from owning property within its confines; however this bourgeois bastion had nine levels of citizenship. The larger principalities in the west, numbering some 250 states, were endowed with landed nobility and bureaucracies, with small farmers working the land. Feudal obligations were frequently "bought off." Only Baden, Bavaria, Hanover, Hesse-Darmstadt, and Württemberg were of significant size. In eastern Germany, serfs and near-serfs grew cereals on the large estates of the *Junker* nobles of the major kingdoms of Brandenburg-Prussia, Mecklenburg, and Saxony. Serf revolts were frequent.

The state's religion normally mirrored its ruler's, though the conversion of a ruler did not necessitate mass conversions among his subjects. Each state was represented at the "Perpetual Diet" in Regensburg (which met until the empire's dissolution in 1806), providing a forum for diplomacy and dispute resolution without recourse to war among the minor powers. Citizens and nobles had recourse to two imperial courts (one in Regensburg which had a huge case backlog; the other in Vienna). To simplify administration, the tiny states were grouped into imperial districts which functioned as regional federations.

The nobility constituted about 1% of the total population. Imperial aristocrats married within their own class in order to preserve their votes in the Diet. Ruling nobles created elaborate courts (in proportion to their wealth) with entourages of secular and religious advisors, entertainers, and servants. The upper classes' demand for luxury goods adversely effected the economic development of the states.

The clergy remained a privileged order. Many Catholic bishops enjoyed opulent lifestyles, delegating their pastoral duties to assistant bishops who were usually of commoner and burgess stock. The Protestant clergy recognized the local prince as governor of their church.

Everywhere in Germany, from the secular courts of Munich and Dresden, the cathedral cities of Cologne and Mainz, to the university town of Göttingen, beggars formed up to a quarter of the population. Some indigents were bourgeoisie citizens who had been bankrupted, former officers, even nobles fallen on hard times. Hygiene was nonexistent, with filth even to the very walls of palaces; the absence of plagues was miraculous.

Prussia

Six million Prussians acknowledged the rule of Frederick the Great in 1769. His scattered domains were reflected in his multiplicity of titles -- Margrave of Brandenburg, Grand Duke of Silesia, King *in* Prussia (as its territories were not part of the Empire), and Duke of Ansbach, Bayreuth, Cleves, East Frisia, Mark, Minden-Ravensburg, and far-off Swiss Neuchâtel.

Though the Prussian territories embraced multiple faiths, royal decrees granting religious freedom forestalled any sectarian violence. Prussia was the most tolerant of German states in this respect, but for pragmatic rather than liberal reasons.

Likewise, pragmatic requirements for aristocratic support during his wars forced Frederick the Great to concede greater powers over their serfs to the *Junker* nobility. Military and civil appointments were monopolized by the Junkers. Contemptuous of mere trade, the haughty Junkers were frequently in debt -- though Frederick bailed many out, increasing their loyalty. They quickly became a disciplined and obedient elite, performing their tasks efficiently in the bureaucracy and the army. On their own estates, they were paternalistic overlords.

To ensure an officer corps, Junkers' sons were required to attend cadet school in Berlin from age 12. Armed "escorts" were used to prevent parental feelings interfering with a punctual departure for school. The ordinary soldiers were recruited from each canton. The exclusion of urban burgesses and property-owners ensured that this burden fell on the peasants.

Prussia's healthy economy was based on a combination of agriculture, commerce, and manufacturing. Many bourgeoisie became rich; some astute property developers even received leases to royal lands. However, wealth could not purchase a noble title in the fixed Prussian social hierarchy.

The Austrian Empire

The Habsburg dynasty had held the title of Holy Roman Emperor since the election of Albert II in 1438, and it remained their preferred title. It was not, however, a hereditary title -- each new Habsburg monarch had to seek election from the electoral college consisting of the Electors of Bavaria, Bohemia, Brandenburg, Hanover, and Saxony, as well as the Archbishops of Cologne, Mainz, and Trier. The end of each reign and the beginning of the next presented opportunities for the electors to extract concessions from weak monarchs in order to assent to their election. The true power of the Habsburgs lay in their own "crownlands" of Austria, Bohemia, and Hungary, rather than in their tenuous hold over the German States (see above).

Even in the crownlands, Habsburg monarchs were required to rule through consensus with the regional elites. The crownlands had been united by "personal unions" of Habsburg princes with the previous ruling dynasties rather than by conquest; hence the existing governmental structures had been preserved and each local nobility resisted the establishment of a homogenous constitution. The discontinuous territories and the central European location of the crownlands ensured that some part of the empire was always threatened by foreign intervention, denying the monarchy any opportunity for forcing internal reform. As the regional Diets would support defensive wars, Habsburg foreign policy emphasized coalitions maintaining the balance of power.

Unlike their fellow monarchs, Their Apostolic Majesties (as the Habsburgs were styled) were relatively well-informed upon conditions of their ordinary subjects. This was due to Joseph II's predilection for travelling incognito at home and abroad as "Count Falkenstein," both as prince and co-Emperor. Joseph's fact-finding trips inspired many of his reforms.

With a total population of 27 million, the crownlands had the usual high proportion of nobility and Catholic clergy, but most were peasants on noble estates and proprietors of small farms. The gradual reduction of the hated *robot* (compulsory feudal labor services) and an increase in rural manufacturing led to better conditions for the peasantry. Towns remained small.

Vienna was the empire's capital owing to its central location between Prague, Graz, Innsbruck, and Pressburg. Its population had grown to 300,000, with a third living in the suburbs. Vienna supported a substantial bourgeoisie class as well as many urban poor. Court and royal life centered on the Schönbrunn Palace.

German was instituted as the official language of the crownlands in 1784, replacing Latin and displacing national tongues such as Magyar. Public education was widespread. In rural areas, children received moral, religious, and vocational training. In urban areas, children learned reading, writing, and arithmetic. Burghers' children proceeded to a "middle school," focusing on either academic or vocational skills. The brightest and the wealthiest were finally sent to the regional gymnasium in preparation for university.

Road building and river dredging initiatives, an internal free trade zone, and the elimination of guild privileges led to a commercial boom. There was even a thriving sea trade with the Ottoman Empire and the East Indies.

The Revolutionary Wars forced a monarchic reaction against Enlightenment. The secret police expanded and censorship was enforced. The wartime inflation enriched many farmers.

The Habsburg Dominions

In addition to Austria, the Habsburgs ruled the kingdom of Bohemia (including Moravia), the kingdom of Hungary, the former Ottoman territories of Croatia, Slavonia, Banat, and Transylvania (much of which were still classified as the Military Border regions, home to scattered military colonies providing a permanent defense against the Ottoman Empire), Polish Galicia (see Poland), Lombardy (see The Italian States), and the Austrian Netherlands.

The Slavic lands, i.e. Bohemia, Moravia, Slavonia, Croatia, and Polish Galicia, had both the wealthiest landowners and the poorest peasants in Europe. In Bohemia, the *robot* for bondsmen was several days of labor per week; many nobles exploited their serfs even more. Three-quarters of a million Bohemians and Moravians were employed in manufacture,

particularly in the textile industry. Brno became known as the Moravian Manchester in this era -- although its Castle Spilberk became infamous as a prison for revolutionaries and radicals. Czech nobles continued to govern Greater Bohemia from the Hradcany Palace in Prague, which with a population of 80,000 was the second-largest city of the crownlands.

Hungary was controlled by the numerous belligerent Magyar nobility. Only a few (such as the Esterházy family) were great magnates; the rest drew their wealth from horse breeding and cereal farming. Hungary exported livestock, grain and wine to the other crownlands. Hungarian peasants had a better standard of living than their Polish or Czech contemporaries owing to a much lower *urbarium* (equivalent to the *robot*). Decades of peace had encouraged a rise in population and re-established an artisan class. Colonists and Balkan immigrants had repopulated the southern and eastern regions. Pressburg had reached 30,000 inhabitants; the twin cities of Buda and Pest on opposite banks of the River Danube housed 50,000.

In urban areas of Hungary, the arts were flourishing. The great nobles constructed new palaces, while the wealthier towns founded theatres and orchestras. Newspapers, reading clubs, and Masonic lodges multiplied. In more rural areas, converted mosques reminded the traveler that while Hungary had been detached from the Ottoman Empire for decades, it had yet to be fully absorbed into the European mainstream.

Denmark

During the 18th century, Denmark possessed the Germanic duchies of Schleswig and Holstein, the kingdom of Norway, and the ancient Norwegian territories of the Faeroes, Iceland, and Greenland, as well as three Caribbean islands (St. Thomas, St John, and St Croix) and trading posts in India and Ghana.

Denmark proper had a population of one million, of whom a tenth lived in semi-autonomous Copenhagen, where nobles and a large garrison mixed with merchants, craftsmen, sailors, and fishermen. With the decline of the Dutch, commerce had flourished, though Denmark was limited in its exports to meat and oxen, with its inferior grain being shipped to the captive Norwegian market.

Denmark was temporarily governed in 1770-71 by Johann Struensee, physician and Queen Caroline's lover. A conservative coup then reversed the Germanization of the court, leading to the restoration of Danish as the official language of the military and the government. Foreigners were prohibited from serving the Crown from 1776 onward. These "Danish" policies invigorated the national literature while Denmark's neutrality during the American War boosted maritime trade. A special treaty with England protected the vital Norwegian timber exports.

Nine-tenths of Denmark was divided into some 1,000 estates owned by several hundred landowners. From the 1780s, the magnates introduced various reforms, commuting seigniorial dues into money rents and increasing the process of enclosure. The lot of the peasantry, who were also taxed and tithed, improved, through an underclass of day laborers and cottagers appeared due to the shortage of available land.

Crown Prince Frederick's military and foreign policy of merchant convoys and neutrality in the 1790s served Denmark well until 1801. After the forced dissolution of the Baltic armed neutrality pact, it was only a matter of time before the Danes were compelled to choose sides. Vacillation led to the second British assault on Copenhagen and Danish incorporation into a Napoleonic alliance and the Continental System. Its overseas holdings were seized while British squadrons prevented communication with Norway and the Atlantic possessions. Though half the Danish merchant fleet was lost, Danish privateers enjoyed some success against British Baltic shipping. Widespread smuggling through British-held Heligoland ameliorated the impact of this unpopular war in the German Duchies.

Though Denmark forfeited Norway at the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars, it recovered its Caribbean possessions and retained control of Iceland, Greenland, and the Faeroes.

Norway

United from 1536 with Denmark, Norway remained a distinct realm. During the 18th century, its fiefdoms were

replaced by a system of shires and bailiwicks, administered by governors and bailiffs appointed by the Danish crown. Norwegians could appeal the decisions of these officials to the king.

The 800,000 Norwegians were thinly scattered in coastal communities. Three-fifths of Norway's farmers owned their own land; in the north of the realm, the great landowners preferred to offer limited tenancies to preserve their own hunting and fishing rights. Farming, timber, mining, fishing, and shipping formed the sole Norwegian "industries," with merchants and burghers garnering fortunes during the wars of the 18th century. Taxation was lighter than in Denmark, owing to successful Norwegian defenses against Swedish incursions. Nationalism began to appear in the upper classes at the close of the century.

Inclusion in the Continental System brought bankruptcy, hardship, and isolation from Denmark. Ruled by a commission and threatened by Sweden, Norway was granted a temporary dispensation in 1809 from the System to renew trade with England, but suffered famine in 1812. Despite short-lived resistance, Norway was severed from Denmark and united with Sweden in 1815.

Sweden

Sweden had been in decline since its 17th-century apex of power, though it retained title to much of Finland and the Caribbean island of St Bartholomew. Gustav III's coup had ended the "Age of Freedom" which had degenerated into factional political strife between the "Hats" (supporting the nobility and bureaucracy) and the "Caps" (espousing the "people" and lower Estates). Rule was returned to the monarchy and the powers of the four Estates (nobles, clergy, burgesses, and peasantry) were reduced.

Three-quarters of Sweden's two million people depended on agriculture for their living. In response to the ever-present threat of famine, the Swedish farmers adapted English agronomic theories, introduced potatoes and turnips, and accelerated the process of enclosure of common lands. Insufficient work existed for the growing lower-class population; alcohol, especially gin, became the preeminent vice, especially as the government was unable to stop illegal distilleries.

Gustav III's reign witnessed an upsurge in cultural activity, especially in the theatre, opera, and belles-lettres. His policies led to the restoration of a healthy currency, a reorganization of Finland's administration, naval strengthening, and the abolition of torture. Enclosure of common lands in Finland led to discontent among the rural population and defenses against potential Russian encroachment were limited. In foreign policy, Sweden gradually became opposed to Denmark and Russia, as Gustav made little secret of his interests in detaching Norway and Russian-ruled Finnish provinces from his Baltic neighbors.

After Gustav III's assassination, Sweden had little direct contact with the rest of Europe between 1792 and 1804. Gustav IV concentrated on balancing Swedish finances and seeking a rapprochement with Denmark. An inability to form any alliances with Directorial France led Sweden to join the League of Armed Neutrality. After the collapse of this pact, friendly relations were restored with England, not least because Sweden exported half of its iron and steel output to Britain in return for commercial goods. Understandably fiscal policies were generous toward the minor industries of manufacturing and mining.

Napoleon's execution of the Duc d'Enghien drove Gustav IV into the Third Coalition and this personal animosity kept Sweden in the alliance despite Russia's defection after Tilsit, Denmark's alliance with Napoleon, and Russia's conquest of Finland. Turned into the scapegoat for all Sweden's ills, Gustav was deposed and a new constitution instituted which reduced the privileges and tax exemptions of the upper classes.

Bernadotte (as Charles John) gave Sweden its first secret police and espionage system as well as encouraging a resurgence of "Scandinavianism," the desire for a union of the Baltic states.

The Partitions of Poland

The "Royal Republic" of Poland ended in tragedy. At the beginning of the era, its population of nine million included

some 750,000 gentry and nobility, mostly landless lords with excessive privileges. The peasantry were defenseless, the bourgeoisie had dwindled, and even the clergy were demoralized. Catherine II of Russia had arranged the election of her ex-lover Stanislas Poniatowski as King of Poland in 1764. Though his affection for Catherine influenced his foreign policy, Stanislas nevertheless sought diplomatic alliances with Austria and France. Internally he balanced Polish finances and limited the *liberum veto*, the principle which required decisions of the governing Diet to be unanimous.

Worried by these reforms, Austria, Prussia and Russia acted in concert, forcing Poland to surrender huge territories under threat of invasion. The First Partition gave Galicia as far as the Vistula river to Austria, all lands between the Dvina and Dneiper rivers to Russia, and West Prussia and the northern portions of Great Poland to Prussia (though they temporarily returned Danzig and Torun). Having shorn Poland of defensible borders, they imposed a Permanent Council on Stanislas, hoping to hamstring his rule. Instead he turned it to his advantage, increasing his popularity by being seen to seek consensus.

Russian preoccupation with the Ottoman Empire enabled Stanislas to convene the Great Diet from 1788-1792. By its constitution, the nobility renounced many traditional privileges. Polish citizenship was defined, with burghers of chartered towns being entitled to send delegates to the Diet, and the peasantry was placed under government protection. The *liberum veto* was abolished and the monarchy henceforth was to be hereditary in the House of Saxony.

Dissatisfied aristocrats "invited" Russian intervention, which took the form of armed invasion (1792) while Prussia repudiated its neutrality. Stanislas surrendered and the Second Partition was enacted (1793), whereby Prussia gained Great Poland, Masovia, Danzig, and Torun, and Russia acquired the eastern parts of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish Ukraine. The brief revolt in 1794 led to the final Third Partition (1795): Austria gained Polish Galicia between the Pilica and Bug rivers; Prussia secured Warsaw and environs; and Russia the rest of Lithuania and the Duchy of Courland.

The Poles endured systematic Germanization by Austria and Prussia and repression under Catherine. Her successors were more conciliatory -- the Polish Prince Adam Czartoryski became a trusted minister of Alexander. Ineffectual conspiracies proliferated. The valor of Polish exiles who had enlisted in Napoleon's armies led to the temporary Grand Duchy of Warsaw (1807), a bureaucratic state modeled on France. After the Congress of Vienna, Poland was divided into five portions: the diminutive Republic of Krakow, Austrian-held Poland, Prussian-held Poland, the Kingdom of Poland, and the Lithuanian-Ruthenian territories.

Russia

Under Catherine the Great and her successors, Russia supported a population of 25 million people. Half a million were "nobles," entitled to own land and serfs. Courtiers, magnates, civil service officials, military officers, and provincial gentry alike were classified and pigeonholed according to the "Table of Ranks." Dedication to the nation through service was rewarded with elevation in the Table of Ranks, with the highest levels granting hereditary titles. Service demands and the attractions of the court prevented any close ties developing between absentee landowners and their estates. This divorce from rural and commoner concerns was exacerbated by many young nobles spending their formative years at the Land Cadet Corps College, where they studied languages, literature, mathematics, geography, and history as well as military and genteel skills. (Russian noblewomen were well educated in foreign languages at the expense of their native Russian.)

Free from direct taxation, the nobility could develop or dispose of their estates at their discretion. The richest nobles lived as independent princes on their estates, with scores or even hundreds of serf-servants. Armies of serfs could be raised to perform the slightest whim of a noble who had the power of life and death over them. Disobedient serfs could be beaten, exiled to Siberia, or sent to the navy. Three-quarters of the "nobility" owned fewer than 100 serfs; half owned fewer than 20. Many of these poorest nobles sank back into the peasantry.

Between the nobility and the huge peasantry were the clergy and the merchant classes. Though reduced to salaried officials of the state, the Russian Orthodox clergy, from ignorant village priests to the educated celibate "black" monks who formed the hierarchy, remained influential in the lives of ordinary Russians. The merchants were frequently

conservative "Old Believers" harking back to the traditions of old Muscovy. Ennobled merchants were encouraged to engage in industry, using serfs as an involuntary work-force. Separated from home and village life, housed in barracks, brutally punished and ill-paid, the unwilling serfs proved too unproductive and were gradually replaced with free laborers. With the connivance of nobles, even serfs rose to become the *de facto* owners of the factories and merchants.

Rural serfs lived in wooden huts with tiny windows (closed with dried animal bladders or shutters), and no chimneys. Inside, a large stove served as cooker and heat source. Furniture was minimal and crudely made. An effigy of Christ or the Virgin Mary was usually the sole decoration. Clothed in skins, linen or wool garments, and a full-length frock fastened by a girdle at the waist, devout serfs wore a crucifix around their necks. They lived on a diet of black bread, cabbage, cucumber, garlic, mead, and fruit liquors. Entertainment consisted of visits to the local bathing house, taverns, and occasional fairs. Obligations for the local noble ranged from three to six days' work per week, grudgingly performed, as well as incidental services such as carting or building. The village council regularly redistributed the common land among the serf families, dissuading anyone from making improvement measures. House serfs were trained as artists, craftsmen, and professionals, or formed into ballet troupes and orchestras to entertain their masters. Quotas of conscripted serfs formed the rank and file of the Russian armies.

Imperial Ambitions

Starting in the reign of Tsar Peter the Great, the ruling classes of Russia had been compelled to shift customs and behavior from Asiatic Mongol to Enlightenment Europe. French was the official court language. French cuisine and Western dress were common among the nobility. The imported culture formed a veneer of civilization which did not reach the lower classes.

The capital was St. Petersburg on the River Neva, where a population of 270,000 endured a dreadful climate and sickly marsh mists, and an elite enjoyed the magnificence of the royal court. The annual freeze of the Neva from November to March dissuaded most merchants from residing in St. Petersburg, preferring accessible Moscow. The lower classes ebbed and flowed through the city according to the season. The cost of living was high owing to the necessity of importing all goods.

The Tsars ruled from the luxurious Winter Palace and the Hermitages. Among the thousands of rooms in these vast complexes were the sovereign's private libraries, galleries and theatres. The nobility spent their winters in fine townhouses situated in the broad, straight squares or overlooking the canals and spacious squares of the city. During the summer months, they resided in their huge palaces south of the city. Occasionally they opened their gardens to the public. The mornings saw the wealthy tour the city in carriages or sledges; the afternoons were spent taking naps or playing cards; the evenings concluded with parties, balls, or theatre outings. Immigrants, British merchants, sailors, and naval officers, foreign doctors, and language tutors swarmed in St. Petersburg, with swindlers and adventurers fleecing the more naive Russians.

The old capital, Moscow, was larger still, with 300,000 inhabitants. Overflowing with priests, monasteries, convents, and churches, Moscow remained the heart of the Orthodox Church as the "Third Rome."

The empire itself was divided into provinces ruled by royal governors, and further subdivided into districts whose administration was elected by the local nobility.

The Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire was slowly shrinking in size, with only diplomacy and "Great Power" rivalry forestalling a much swifter collapse. Its population of 25 million was spread over three continents: 11 million lived in Europe, 11 million in Asia and 3 million in North Africa. Constantinople itself was home to over 300,000.

At the apex of Ottoman society was the Sultan and his family. The eldest male now succeeded automatically to the throne; the remaining princes lived in the "gilded cage" of the Topkapi Palace, awaiting their turn or death. The Topkapi Palace was a "forbidden city" constructed as a series of diminishing concentric circles. The public were only

permitted into the first courtyard; the second courtyard was reserved for those with official business to present to the Divan (royal council), while officials were allowed into the third courtyard. The remaining sections were the preserve of the Sultan, the royal family and their retainers. The Sultans associated themselves with the *ulemas* (Muslim religious) and spent their wealth on building mosques, fountains and other public works.

The real power had shifted to the viziers and provincial pashas, whose families and households supplied subordinate administrators. Political marriages cemented alliances, so divorce and polygamy were rare among the upper classes, though the former was common among the ordinary people.

Ottoman society was divided into the *askeri* (the ruling class) who included the *ulemas*, the *kadis* (judges), the *muftis* (law interpreters), and the military, and the *reaya* who were the empire's merchants, craftsmen, and peasants. The military were mostly trained in obsolescent weapons and tactics. The once famed Janissary warriors, formerly children of Christian subjects trained as elite troops, had become a Muslim caste. The Janissaries were now garrison troops, who found additional employment as artisans and enforcers offering "protection" for businesses.

Religious *shariat* law applied to Muslim subjects, while the Sultan devised laws for those of other faiths and circumstances not covered by the *shariat*. The Orthodox faith was protected by the Sultans as a bastion against Catholicism and pro-Western sympathies. Though Orthodox clergy were exempt from taxation, each new Patriarch paid the Sultan 20,000 *piastres* (\$15,000) for the privilege of succeeding to the office.

Some foreigners enjoying special status ("capitulations") were subject to their own nation's laws while in the Empire, and exempt from taxes and customs, (Other foreigners had no protection.) Non-Muslims dominated trade. The Empire imported coffee, dyes, and coffee, and exported cereals, hides, tobacco, and wool. Its subsistence farmers also grew olives, fruit and vegetables.

In the towns, homes were partitioned by gender into *selamlık* and *haremlık* spaces for men and women respectively, and furnished with raised platforms covered with cushions. Men frequented coffee houses while both sexes enjoyed the markets with their storytellers and puppet theatres. The Sufi brotherhoods and lodges provided a focus to the religious and social lives of many. The larger lodges included living quarters, classrooms, libraries, hospices and even tombs.

The cities were primitive, congested, and filthy. Epidemics even of bubonic plague occurred often. Strangulation of rivals, beheadings and the staking out of felons' bodies reminded westerners that the Ottoman rulers remained capricious and ferocious.

The Lands of the Sublime Porte

The Sublime Porte, as the court-government of the Ottoman Empire was styled, had limited control over its provinces. The city of Dubrovnik sent cash payments to the Sultan, but in all other respects behaved as an Italian city-state. Noble families such as Suleiman's descendants ruled Baghdad, Ali Bey ruled Egypt, and Ali Pasha held Epirus.

In the Balkans, Albania, Bosnia, and Montenegro paid nominal tribute to Constantinople. Villages elected their own notables, some of whom abused the tax-raising powers for self-aggrandizement. The *armatoles* (or Christian militia) frequently doubled as bandits. The Balkan peninsula suffered from increasing depopulation during the second half of the 18th century; peasants who wearied of Ottoman rule simply left to live in its hills, mountains and vast forests. The Turkish population was concentrated in the towns and cities as administrators, troops, craftsmen and merchants.

Moldavia and Wallachia retained their native boyar nobles, but the Sultan selected their princes from leading Greek families who intrigued and paid huge sums for the positions. The princes could expect to earn much more, even during short tenures, from tax-farming and serf labor.

Ottoman Greece supported an elite of native scholars and clergymen. These families, known as the *Phanariots*, became wealthy through their services as interpreters, agents and diplomats for the Empire. They secured control over the Orthodox Patriarchy and looked forward to the overthrow of the Turks and the restoration of a Greek Empire as a second Byzantium. Greek mainland villages were governed by their own notables and granted relative autonomy in

return for prompt tax payments. The communities of the Peloponnesus archipelago elected delegates to their own senate.

The Arab provinces, especially Egypt, were dominated by the Mamelukes. Initially purchased as slaves, the best of these soldiers were educated in the households of their generals, manumitted, and gradually rose to positions of power. Egypt became effectively autonomous from Constantinople during the period. In Arabia itself, the Wahhabi movement (led by Abdul Wahhab and later Muhammad ibn Saud) denounced the "degenerate" rule of the Sultans and demanded a return to the strict teachings of the Prophet. They menaced Ottoman control of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina.

In North Africa, ostensible vassals such as the Dey of Algiers continued their piracy and slave raids. (The Sultanate of Morocco was never part of the Ottoman Empire.)

The New World

The United States of America

Prior to the Revolution, the 13 American colonies had each been administered by a royal governor, an appointed colony council, and an elected assembly. The franchise to vote and hold office in the assembly was limited to white males. Both council and assembly could propose legislation, which was then subject to the governor's veto. If he approved, the new law required ratification by the English government. After the Revolution and the Philadelphia Convention of 1787, each state admitted to the union was entitled to elect two members of the Senate and one member of the House of Representatives per 30,000 franchised voters. The frontier lands beyond the borders of the states were administered as territories under appointed governors, being allowed to petition for elevation to statehood on surpassing 60,000 inhabitants.

By the mid-1760s, the population of the American colonies reached two million, doubling to four million by 1790 and to eight million by 1814. The slave population rose from half to three-quarters of a million.

The New England colonies of Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Rhode Island supported flourishing timber and maritime industries. Boston (16,000 residents) in Massachusetts and Newport (11,000 inhabitants) in Rhode Island thrived as shipping, fishing and whaling ports.

The "Middle Atlantic" colonies of New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania were better suited for agriculture than New England. The Hudson and Delaware rivers were critical trade arteries. The cities of New York (25,000 residents) and Philadelphia (45,000 inhabitants) dominated this region.

The "South Atlantic" colonies of Georgia, Maryland, North and South Carolinas, and Virginia harbored half the American population. The Chesapeake region continued its cultivation of tobacco, while wheat and corn plantations increased in the interior of Maryland and Virginia. North Carolina added timber and naval stores to its tobacco exports. Baltimore was the principal town and port for these three states. Rice and indigo were the mainstays of Georgia and South Carolina with Savannah and Charleston (properly Charles Town) being the only significant urban centers in the south.

Wealth rather than noble lineage determined status and influence in America, before and after the Revolution. In the rural areas, planters with large estates controlled political power; in the cities, financiers and merchants formed the colonial and post-revolutionary elite.

The Western Frontier

Despite the Royal Proclamation of 1765 forbidding further settlement in Native American territories, American land speculators and pioneers continued to covet the western territories. After the Revolution, expansion into the frontier territories (Ohio, Indiana, Tennessee and Kentucky) gathered momentum, leading to confrontation with the indigenous Native American tribes.

The territories which later became the states of Ohio and Indiana were home to a number of settled tribes such as the Delaware, Iroquois, and Shawnee. Strife between settlers and tribesmen led to pitched battles. American victory at Fallen Timbers (1794) broke Indian power in Ohio, requiring them to concede substantial lands. Ohio became a state in 1803. Continued immigration produced renewed hostilities in Indiana. The Shawnee chief Tecumseh and his brother, the Prophet, attempted to raise a native coalition against the entirety of the American border in conjunction with British military support in 1811. The Prophet was defeated that year by Governor Harrison at Tippecanoe. Tecumseh died at the Battle of the Thames in 1813. The British defeat at New Orleans weakened their negotiating stance, preventing them from realizing their demand of an independent Native American nation in the northwest. Indiana became a state in 1816.

In Tennessee, American pioneers were largely independent of royal authority, prior to the Revolution. Early cordial relations with the Cherokee tribesmen degenerated to intermittent violence as permanent settlers superseded trappers and traders. Volunteers from Tennessee fought in both the Revolution and the War of 1812, and their territory was the first to receive statehood (1796).

Daniel Boone was the first successful American explorer of Kentucky. He was followed by waves of settlers in the 1770s, despite the belligerence of Shawnee and Cherokee tribes, who were encouraged to attack by the British during the Revolution. Immigration increased after independence and Kentucky was detached from Virginia's jurisdiction and recognized as a separate state in 1792.

Canada

Britain's original intentions were to assimilate Canada by encouraging Anglo-American immigration and reorganizing its administration on American colonial patterns. Territorial changes to New France added coastal Labrador to Newfoundland and mainland Acadia to Nova Scotia. Though several hundred English-speaking families arrived and quickly assumed economic control, British governors preferred the French seigniors, clergy and professionals to the pushy merchants, and sought their loyalty. Under the Quebec Act of 1774, Catholics were allowed to hold office while French law and the seigniorial system were upheld. The newly established Catholic clergy persuaded their congregations against rebellion; the English-speaking Nova Scotians' reliance on military-naval subsidies and English trade kept them loyal.

After the American revolution, the United Empire Loyalists buttressed Canadian allegiance to Britain, mostly settling in Cape Breton Island and New Brunswick, and on the frontier in western Quebec.

Though French Quebec rejected the rationalist ideals of France's Revolution, tension continued to rise between the English and French communities. The British response was the 1791 Canada Act, which partitioned Quebec into Upper Canada (west of the Ottawa river) where English law and land tenure held sway, and Lower Canada where the French system prevailed. The English-speaking merchants of Montreal were again disappointed in their attempts to obtain an elective assembly and the jurisdiction of English common law which would have aided them in ousting the French citizens from office.

Newfoundland became a crown colony. Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick were provinces administered by elective assemblies. Cape Breton Island had an appointed council, while Rupert's Land was run by the Hudson Bay Company. The unknown lands beyond were merely claimed.

The Maritime Provinces grew slowly, reaching a population of 100,000 by 1812. Prosperity came from fishing and trading local timber and foodstuffs with Britain and the West Indies. By 1812, land speculation and immigration of Scots, Irish, and Americans into Upper Canada created a loyalist landed oligarchy.

Lower Canada's population expanded to 300,000. Montreal itself was home to 30,000, and the city's merchants continued to control the fur trade. The "Chateau clique" of French ecclesiastics and seigniors, and English merchants dominated Lower Canada's government, though commoners and professionals successfully manipulated the assembly on key issues.

French Canadians' fear of assimilation into an American superstate, British Canadian loyalism, the presence of regular British troops, and American failure to attack Montreal decisively all preserved Canada in the War of 1812.

Louisiana

The Louisiana Territory, ranging from the "Stony" Mountains (later renamed the Rockies) in the west to the Mississippi River in the east, and from Canada in the north to the Gulf of Mexico in the south, was originally part of France's vast North American empire. Ceded to Spain as compensation for the Spanish loss of the Floridas in the Seven Years' War, the 50,000 French settlers remained sentimentally attached to France despite their abandonment. A brief revolt in 1768 was swiftly suppressed by the Irish-Spanish governor, Alejandro O'Reilly, who instituted and adapted conventional Spanish colonial government to Louisiana.

The new governor and *cabildo* (council) of New Orleans took over every aspect of civic and regional administration, fixing prices for essential commodities, maintaining the streets which became dustbowls in dry weather and quagmires in wet weather, licensing all medical practitioners, and so forth. The French practices of licensing traders and sending gifts to important Native American chiefs were continued and the tribes remained mostly peaceful. From Louisiana, Spanish forces harassed the British during the American Revolution, capturing West Florida.

Despite being almost totally destroyed by fire in 1788 and 1794, New Orleans rebuilt itself twice as a flourishing port of 10,000 residents. A gay city of high living and loose morals, New Orleans was the quintessential blend of wealth and poverty. The rich enjoyed masked balls, the theatres and the opera; the poor preferred the abundant taverns. All classes enjoyed the legal dances and the illegal gambling.

The 1780s saw a resurgence of tobacco cultivation in Louisiana in addition to its strong indigo industry. The tobacco expansion was too sudden; the produce was badly packed, spoiling quickly, and the export market simply collapsed. Cotton replaced tobacco during the next decade.

Louisiana failed to develop into a typical Spanish colony. Trade concessions made it a popular smuggling route to Spain's other possessions. A failure to attract sufficient Spanish and European Catholic immigrants meant it was unable to halt Anglo-American expansion, requiring Spain to grant American settlers navigation rights on the Mississippi and trading privileges in New Orleans. Hence from 1795, Spanish policy aimed at returning Louisiana to France, so that the latter could shield the Viceroyalty of New Spain from American continentalism. Unfortunately for Spain, Napoleon repudiated his word.

The Spanish Americas

Spain's American empire included most of Central and South America as well as portions of western North America. South America was governed as three viceregal dominions. The Viceroyalty of La Plata was the newest with 350,000 residents and its capital at Buenos Aires. From Lima, the Viceroyalty of Peru ruled one and a half million inhabitants. Two and a half million people lived in the Viceroyalty of New Granada which stretched from the Brazilian to the Mexican border. The seven million people of Mexico and beyond to California belonged to the populous Viceroyalty of New Spain.

Below the ruling viceroys, presidents, and captain-generals, the territories were subdivided into provinces administered by *intendants* responsible for all branches of government. Spanish towns were run by elected councils and appointed *subdelegados*. The officials were generously paid, efficient, and disliked by the colonials. Defeats in the Seven Years' War encouraged increasing militarization, with peace-time conscripted militias being reinforced with professional regiments from Spain.

New Spain became the empire's major silver producer. Despite the assistance of foreign experts, mismanagement and conservative techniques limited effective production to a few rich mines.

Salt beef and leather exports from the La Plata plantations and native settlements flowed through the thriving port of Buenos Aires. European goods destined for Upper Peru went overland from Buenos Aires; cargoes for coastal Chile

sailed round Cape Horn.

Catalan merchants established permanent bases for their fishing fleets in Chile. The sea bream and conger catches were salted for sale in Upper Peru. The Patagonian whalers exported whale oil directly to Barcelona.

The South American Indians forgot their own agricultural expertise and were slow to adopt European techniques. The Spanish *haciendas* (plantations) employed thousands of natives cultivating native crops such as potatoes and maize, as well as introduced crops such as rice and bananas. These inefficient and overextended estates strove to be self-supporting but largely failed.

Zealous missionaries led Spanish settlement and Native American conversion northward through California after 1768. The Jesuits were followed by ranchers and prospectors, leading to the creation of new towns at San Diego and San Francisco in California, as well as San Antonio and Albuquerque. This countered the expansionistic tendencies of Russian traders operating from Alaska and British claims to the Pacific shores of Canada.

Elsewhere an uneasy truce existed between the Spanish and the British logging settlements in Honduras. The settler population in the Dutch Guyana colonies of Berbice and Demerara-Essequibo became predominantly of British extraction, and surrendered to the British rather than join the French Empire. Disease-ridden French Guyana served as a penal colony for Revolutionary France.

Spanish American Society

Economically, Spain's colonies were bound to European markets, particularly England with its insatiable demand for raw materials and agricultural products. Mercantilist policies protected Spanish manufacturers, inhibiting industrial organization in the New World, though many independent master craftsmen serviced colonial needs. A preference for land and trade reduced the available capital for industrial investments. The removal of trading restrictions between the provinces from the 1760s onward encouraged legal commerce and colonial road-building, though the mountains still required mule and llama trains. Despite the risk of privateers, smuggling remained common, especially in war years. By 1797, Spain permitted its colonies to trade with neutral powers.

Spanish American (or Creole) society seemed ordered and prosperous, exuding self-confidence in civic splendor and lavish townhouses. Officials, senior clergy, and owners of plantations and mines spent most of their time away from their stoutly-built haciendas, which were used more for storage than as residences.

Creole society was highly stratified into castes. At the apex were the *gente distinguida* who included senior officials and clergy, professionals, wealthy landowners and mine-owners, and merchants. Some *mestizo* (mixed-race) families who could trace their ancestry back to the original conquest were accepted in high society. Mixed-race shopkeepers and artisans formed the colonial middle-class, with impoverished white immigrants determined to avoid manual labor and the natives making up a discontented proletariat.

Creole social life focused on the provincial courts and the local cathedral or church. Salon society as practiced in continental Europe was unknown. The theatre and bull-fights were equally popular pastimes. Though censorship was enforced, it was too slow and haphazard to prevent Enlightenment and revolutionary ideas circulating. However, the Creole learned societies concentrated on practical matters and periodical publishing.

Hostility grew between Creoles and Peninsular Spaniards, with the former styling themselves *Americanos* to differentiate themselves from the Peninsular immigrants and the *mestizos*. Though Creoles did become viceroys, competition for the lesser posts and well-paid sinecures in government and church was much greater. Catalan merchants disrupted cozy monopolies and preferential treatment received by low-born immigrants offended the sensibilities of Creole patricians. Gradually Creole loyalty to Spain eroded.

The Portuguese Americas

Discoveries of gold in the 1690s created Brazil's mining industry. By the mid-18th century, the economy had

diversified to include cattle ranching, whaling, sugar, and tobacco cultivation. Interior provinces such as Minas Gerais became self-sufficient, while the coastal plantations adhered to mercantilist policies. By 1801, Brazil's population stood at three million, with a steady influx of immigrants from Portugal and the Azores ensuring the colony remained Portuguese. A shortage of white women meant that the sons of mixed marriages were educated and allowed to hold minor offices. However, the military and religious orders were much stricter on race.

Brazil was organized into 14 regional "Captaincies." The towns were administered by municipal councils consisting of up to six aldermen, two magistrates, and one attorney. These councilors were selected from patrician families or elected by complex annual ballots. European and Brazilian-born Portuguese had equal opportunities to enter the councils, except in the largest cities. These bodies enjoyed the right to correspond with the monarch, a privilege frequently exercised by those of Rio de Janeiro and Bahia.

Portugal had various rights, privileges and duties with regard to missionary work. In return for bearing the cost of proselytizing, the monarchy had the right to collect tithes and appoint bishops in its colonial territories. Papal desires to rescind these concessions (so that Rome could more effectively organize the missionaries) led to conflict with the monarchy. As in Portugal, leading Brazilians joined lay confraternities (*misericórdia*) which focused on charitable works. Membership in these associations was considered an honor.

Brazil's rural aristocracy came from humble origins. Their practice of endogamy -- cousins marrying cousins and uncles marrying nieces -- kept their estates undivided. Many families owned vast lands in the interior. Commissions in the militia were sought as status symbols but the regular army and navy were avoided. (The rank and file of these services were recruited from ordinary citizens and mulattos.) The Crown sold all offices which even potentially generated revenue, and was unable to prevent its officials from making fortunes during their tenure. Merchants became rich from crown monopolies -- this also encouraged smuggling by the less fortunate traders.

The American struggle for independence encouraged some of the Brazilian elite to consider the desirability of ousting the Portuguese leadership so that they could form the new apex of society, even to the extent of forming conspiracies with American collaborators. The rebellion of 1789 in the mining province of Minas Gerais demanded economic freedoms, subsidies to attract white women to emigrate from Portugal, and the establishment of a militia. It was vigorously suppressed by the authorities. The deteriorating situation and eventual massacres of settlers in Haiti (former Hispaniola) reminded the Brazilians of their own discontented underclass. Though it was crushed, the 1798 rebellion of *mestizos* and blacks indicated how quickly Jacobin ideas had propagated through Brazilian society.

West Indies

Spain's major Caribbean possession was Cuba, a center of naval shipbuilding and already a tobacco exporter to North America and Europe. After the Seven Years' War, Cuba's fortresses were reinforced and slaves were introduced to establish sugar plantations. Spain also owned Santo Domingo (the eastern half of Hispaniola), Puerto Rica and Trinidad, though settler numbers remained in the low thousands.

French holdings included Martinique, Guadeloupe, Saint-Domingue (western Hispaniola) as well as St. Lucia, Tobago and islets such as Les Saintes. Martinique was the seat of government for the French Windward Islands. Both Martinique and Guadeloupe were prosperous sugar producers, but easily eclipsed by Saint-Domingue, which was responsible for two-thirds of French overseas trade. Annually 1,500 ships carried sugar, coffee, cotton, and indigo from the colony's 8,000 plantations to Europe and to British North America in return for cash, grain, fish, timber, and horses. Merchant houses in Bordeaux, Marseilles, and Nantes reaped vast profits, while racial and class tensions seethed among the 40,000 white settlers, the 40,000 mixed-race "mulattos" and freed slaves, and the half-million slaves. (Slaves who married French subjects were immediately freed.)

The Dutch islands of Curaçao and St. Eustatius used their free port status to prosper as clearing houses for manufactured goods and colonial products.

The British West Indies included Antigua, Barbados, Dominica, Granada, Jamaica, Montserrat, Nevis, St Kitts, St. Vincent, and the Virgin Islands. The older colonies were worn out from overcultivation of sugar. The West Indian

group in Parliament lobbied for lower sugar duties, cheaper slaves, and restrictions on trade with other sugar producers. The home merchants simply wanted cheap sugar and molasses, plus captive markets for slaves and manufactured goods.

The West Indian interests failed to avert war with the American colonies, but resisted overtures to join the rebellion, recognizing their reliance on the Royal Navy for defense. During the war, all the British islands save Antigua, Barbados, and Jamaica were (temporarily) captured by Franco-Spanish attacks, but the status quo was restored by treaty. Afterward price increases in timber and food imports from Canada, devastating hurricanes and rising sugar duties led to attempts to find new crop plants to replace the sugar monoculture.

The ambition of most white planters was to manage (and then own) an estate, retiring to Europe on the proceeds. The unhealthy climate, the absence of cultural pursuits and educational facilities for children, the lack of society, and the ever-present fear of slave revolt encouraged absenteeism. Attorneys and resident planters supervised the plantations of absentee neighbors, and became the leaders of island society, deputizing for officials, who preferred not to leave the mother country, and serving on elected assemblies and appointed councils.

The Rest of The World

India

India had perhaps 200 million inhabitants by 1800, mostly Hindus and Muslims. The Mughal Empire had contracted to an impotent city-state -- the old emperor Shah Alem was blinded by Afghan invaders in 1788 and eked out his life in Delhi's Red Fort. Agra, Jaipur and Delhi were administered by a protege of his former Maratha vassals. Sikh power was concentrated at Amritsar in the Punjab, while Muslim emirs and chieftains ruled Sind and frontier territories. Former vassals such as the pro-French Nizam of Hyderabad acquired legitimate titles from the emperor and acted as kings in their own domains. By avoiding dynastic proclamations and never striking coinage in their own name, they became independent without ever challenging the current emperor. By 1800, India had fragmented into 562 states.

The Marathas Confederacy had received permission to tax central India in the early 18th century. By mid-century, their interpretation of this as a license to raid, conquer, and *then* tax, had made them the greatest Indian power. The Confederacy was divided into five states ruled by distinct clans -- the Rao rajahs of Satara, the Gaekwar in Baroda, the Holkars in Indore, the Sindhia in Gwalior, and the Bhonsle in Nagpur. Though the Rao clan nominally headed this pentarchy, the Sindhia clan was the most powerful.

Mysore under the usurpers Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan contended for supremacy in southern India. Like the Marathas, imported Arabian horses gave Mysore better cavalry forces than their lesser rivals. Only Hyder Ali was sufficiently prescient to urge a Hindu-Muslim alliance to expel the British while this was still possible in the 1780s.

Although the French had been reduced to defenseless trading posts at Pondicherry, Mahé, Karikal, Yanaon, and Chandernagore, all of which were quickly captured by the British in the Revolutionary Wars, French mercenaries commanded and trained Indian armies, and manned their artillery units.

The British spread outward from their outposts and presidencies of Surat, Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta, preferring to support puppet rulers than attempt outright conquest initially. The Company gained tax rights over Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa. Under Cornwallis' Code of 1793, private ownership of land in return for fixed rents replaced the Indian system of lifetime land grants for local law and order. British provincial courts replaced Indian courts with Company officials serving as both police and magistrates. Internal duties were suppressed while the Company obtained monopolies over salt import and sales as well as opium production and sale. The latter provided it with a non-specie export for the Chinese market. Methodical and fair rule, annual rather than multiple taxation, and land settlements bound India's peasantry to the British Empire. Subsidiary alliances (where Company troops replaced the ruler's own military) and systematic force reduced the power of native princes and brought peace to the continent. By 1820, Calcutta was a capital of a quarter of a million inhabitants.

The East Indies

Ceylon

Until 1796, the Dutch East India Company controlled most of Ceylon from Colombo and protected the interior kingdom of Kandy. Large profits were made from cinnamon, pearls, and elephant sales (the last to India). The Dutch respected the existing structures of Ceylon society, including the local nobility who helped them administer the island. The British East India Company ousted their Dutch rivals in 1796, and Ceylon became a crown colony in 1802. An attempt to conquer Kandy failed in 1803, but succeeded with the aid of local chiefs in 1815. After a rebellion in 1818, Kandy was integrated fully into the colony. British rule led to agricultural progress, abolition of slavery, and a replacement of land grants with salaries for service.

Malaysia

Malaysia remained dominated by shifting sultanates whose subordinate chiefdoms were prone to waging civil and foreign war with their neighbors. The Dutch held the trading post of Malacca. The British East India Company purchased Penang Island in 1786 to assist in supplying the Chinese markets. In 1819, Sir Stamford Raffles purchased Singapore on behalf of the Company, eventually transforming it into the region's greatest port.

Indonesia

Indonesia was styled the Dutch East Indies. Dutch assistance in a series of succession wars in Java and elsewhere in the archipelago during the early to mid-18th century had established the Dutch East India Company as the preeminent power in the region from its bases in Batavia (now Jakarta). The native nobles remained in place as tribute collectors (of produce) for the company within its directly held territories. Elsewhere company trading posts became (through intimidation) the sole export routes for the semi-independent territories. Smuggling, corruption, and administrative expense led to the dissolution of the company in 1799, with the Dutch government taking direct control. French control of Holland brought eventual French rule in Java by 1806. Despite impressive fortifications, Java was conquered by the British East India Company in 1811, and Stamford Raffles was appointed governor. His attempts at centralizing the Javanese regencies and integrating the island into the British trading bloc were undone by its return to Holland in 1815.

The Philippines

The Philippines were ruled by a Spanish governor-general from the capital of Manila. As the natives were at least nominally Catholic, the archbishop wielded great political power and Church institutions became wealthy through the accretion of estates. Priests and friars, fluent in the indigenous languages, spread in the provinces, assisting the colonial administrators, educating the Filipinos in European agricultural techniques, and attempting to eliminate animistic religious survivals among their congregations. Lay Spaniards enriched themselves, trading Chinese silk for Mexican silver.

Other Lands

Africa

European knowledge and direct intercourse with Africa was confined to its coasts. North Africa was ruled by Ottoman pashas and independent Muslim princes. The Barbary States were infamous for piracy and slave raiding. East Africa was a patchwork of urbanized Somali peoples and Swahili-speaking nations, culturally influenced by the Arabian slave traders.

Scattered European trading posts and coastal colonies were established on the west coast of Africa. The French outposts were at Gorée and in Senegal. The British, Danish, Dutch and Spanish founded sturdy forts to protect their

slaving interests on the Gold Coast, though they could easily have been overrun by neighboring native townships. The British created Sierra Leone, a colony for emancipated slaves, though settlement was limited to Freetown. From here, European influences seeped into West Africa. Meanwhile native nations and tribes such as the Ashanti, Dahomey, Oyo, and the Fulani (of Sudan) were all expanding toward the slaving coasts. Further south, the Portuguese dominated Angola, inciting war among its tribes, undertaking sporadic missionary work, and introducing New World crops such as cassava, maize, and sweet potato.

Owing to the milder South African climate, the Dutch base at the Cape of Good Hope blossomed from a mere port-of-call for ships en route to India and New South Wales to a colony of 20,000 settlers.

Australia

Britain decided to settle the New South Wales territory in 1786, ostensibly as a penal colony. The First Fleet (under Arthur Phillip) arrived with 1,000 marines, convicts, and free settlers in 1788, founding Sydney. Despite disease, hostile aborigines, and the lack of farming skills among the convicts, the colony survived with its population augmented by new batches of convicts, expanding the settled region around Sydney and in Tasmania. Australian whalers traded with the Maoris of New Zealand, introducing firearms to the tribal struggles.

The colony's governors were all military officers. This did not prevent clashes with the New South Wales Corps, whose leader, at the urging of a civilian coalition, deposed Governor William "Bounty" Bligh in 1808. The coup leaders were summoned to Britain for trial. Bligh's successor, Lachlan Macquarie, spent his term in office balancing the contending "exclusive" (former officers and free immigrants) and "emancipist" (former convicts) factions.

China

China, ancient, arrogant, and vast, was home to 300 million people. The Manchu emperors, like previous dynasties, considered China to be superior to all other nations. The Ch'ien-lung emperor (reigning 1735-96) patronized the arts (but censored any literature criticizing the Manchus) and funded military expeditions to secure and expand the frontiers. During his son's reign as the Chia-ch'ing emperor (1796-1820), piracy, localized revolts, and increasing opium addiction afflicted China.

While Shanghai became the principal port for Chinese traders, European merchants were restricted to Canton from 1759 and required to transact business in tea and silk with the association of firms forming the *cohong* monopoly. The favored Portuguese held a trading outpost at Macao near Canton. The East India Company convinced Admiral Drury in 1808 to seize it for Britain, officially to preserve it from the French. Macao seized, Drury was persuaded to continue to Canton. Civilians hurled projectiles from the banks at his barge while Chinese navy junks barred the river. Drury withdrew, receiving a letter later from Chia-ch'ing ordering him to quit Macao, which was restored to the Portuguese.

Japan

Japan was ruled by the Tokugawa shoguns on behalf of the emperors. Natural disasters combined with peasant revolts throughout the 1780s to unsettle the nation, with unrest reaching the cities in 1787. Attempts at reform to reconcile the monetary economy of the cities with the idealized and desired rice-based economy of the countryside failed. The samurai suffered poverty while the despised merchants enjoyed great wealth and richer farmers exploited their poorer neighbors, reducing them to mere tenants.

As part of the shogunate's isolationist policies, only the Chinese and the Dutch were allowed to trade with Japan, and only at Nagasaki. By the 1800s, Russian merchants were requesting and being denied commercial access to Japan. The Russians retaliated with sporadic attacks on outlying northern islands between 1804 and 1807. During a hunt for Dutch merchant vessels, *HMS Phaeton* entered Nagasaki harbor unopposed in 1808. This dishonor led to the ritual suicide of the port's governor and generals. Thereafter Japan was left alone.

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Blight Of The Silvery Moon

by Alice Turov

Introduction

"Blight Of The Silvery Moon" is designed for a wide variety of Space campaigns with slight variations. It presumes the existence of interstellar travel, and is much better suited for "space opera"-style games (such as *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, and *Fading Suns*) than more hard science universes. It assumes the adventurers have some degree of autonomy while being part of a larger organization; it also assumes the heroes have access to their own spaceship. (These last assumptions can be tweaked, if necessary.) The existence and importance of Earth is assumed, but that world can easily be replaced with another planet of import, should that world be unavailable or the adventure's McGuffin prove to be too great.

Pop Goes The World

The adventure begins when the heroes are called on to investigate an anomaly in a poorly charted area of space. The exploratory scoutship *Allegretto* missed a scheduled contact appointment while surveying an Earth-like planet, currently named Robin's Egg. The vessel was charged with investigating the solar system, determining the viability of colonizing that planet (and determining if sentient life already occupied it), and discerning if there were any obvious threats.

The solar system in question originally had six planets, of which the habitable one was the second from the star. (The closest is an *incredibly* small inferno; the other four are all large outer planets.) Unfortunately, the solar system has undergone . . . renovations.

When the explorers arrive, they will probably note that their scientific readings seem off. The gravitational mass expected from Robin's Egg is there, but there is no actual sign of the planet. Upon moving further into the system -- and within closer range of the sensors -- they realize that the planet is there, but it has been reduced to rubble through some cataclysmic force. Any standard attempts to contact the *Allegretto* will meet with failure.

This scene will obviously play out differently depending to the limitations of the faster-than-light travel within the game universe. In a world with hyperspace, where ships appear close to the target world in question, it's entirely possible to appear *within* the rubble of the planet (thus enabling a reenactment of the similar scene from *Star Wars*). In a world where ships appear at the edge of the solar system and glide in from there, the mystery and uncertainty of the situation can be played up much more (again, depending on the speed of the ship).

Scientific investigations should reveal that the planetary destruction is a recent event; it happened some time after the *Allegretto* arrived but before they were to report. Savvy explorers may well conclude that the exploded planet might have something to do with their failure to give an account, and they would be correct. (Especially skilled or lucky scientists will note that the mass of material remaining is greater than can be expected from a planet as described by the initial survey results.)

Assuming they are near or within the rubble of the planet, just as the heroes are preparing to give up investigation (or declare their efforts useless) they will receive a faint signal bearing the *Allegretto's* signature.

Tracking it down will prove a difficult and daunting task, pushing the skills of the entire crew. The signal is coming from the *Allegretto's* "black box," a beacon designed to survive and protect the final pieces of information accumulated from the research vessel. (Alternatively -- especially if there is a PC doctor -- it can emanate from a lifepod containing a disoriented and dying member of the team who personally knows the same information as the beacon.) The beacon is -- or is in danger of becoming -- lost in the rubble of Robin's Egg. Some possibilities include:

- The beacon has crashed on a large meteor and requires skillful reconnoitering by an away team.
- It is floating amid a busy patch of rubble, its trajectory being so unpredictable that it requires skillful piloting and a risky space walk to recover.
- It has floated amid a large number of similarly-massed objects and requires scientific know-how to reconfigure the tractor beam, robotic arm, or similar device to recover.

This scene should be spiced up according to the game world in question. Space pirates may have descended on the world to snatch up valuable free-floating minerals, interplanetary creatures might be lurking within the rubble, looking for more sources of energy to feed upon, or the like. It should be difficult but not impossible to acquire the beacon; the adventure cannot progress well without it. If the heroes get discouraged and plan to leave, make sure they realize that this is probably their only chance to get the beacon.

If they acquire the beacon (or rescue the team member), they can learn the following:

Unknown to initial cursory surveying efforts, Robin's Egg was a normal planet, devoid of any signs of sentient life. It *did* have a moon, and that moon had some unusual properties that the captain of the *Allegretto* was curious about. At a casual glance it strongly resembled Earth's moon; careful scientific analysis indicated that it was *very* similar to Earth's moon, with sensors indicating nigh-identical masses, measurements, and elemental composition. The external markings on the moon were different in many ways, but since those are primarily caused by meteors and other external phenomena, that's not unusual.

The crew of the *Allegretto* also noted something else unusual about the moon: a chasm several kilometers wide, seemingly the result of a meteor strike. The beacon (or crewmember) is uncertain what happened after that; there are intermittent reports -- interrupted by static -- of a series of underground caverns, intelligently designed and complete with lighting and incomprehensible seeming machinery. The final broadcast was from the away team head saying, "I think I've figured it out . . ." Within minutes energy signatures from the moon were off the charts; shortly thereafter the moon had exploded, in a force designed and controlled enough to obliterate its neighboring planet as well. The *Allegretto* was also obliterated itself, save for the beacon or lifepod.

Back At Headquarters . . .

Assuming the heroes report this information back, their superiors will have some troublesome news: Almost two years ago interplanetary researchers discovered *another* near-identical moon, also orbiting an Earth-like planet, complete with a revolution and rotation pattern seemingly identical to Earth's moon. The organization has kept this information secret since it leads to concerns about the nature of the galaxy; learning that the Earth's most significant satellite is, in fact, seemingly an artificial construct is troublesome in a number of ways.

Now the higher-ups of the organization are even *more* concerned about keeping a secret; learning that the moon is a construct is difficult philosophically, but learning that it's also a planet-destroying bomb is likely to cause planet-wide riots.

In short, they need to know more. So far the research team investigating this other similar moon has not reported any abnormalities or concerns. But efforts to contact them upon the party's return using FTL radio communications (if such exist in the game world) have so far proven unsuccessful. Communication scientists suspect that the subspace relay for that sector of space has been damaged; regardless, they need someone to go in person. The organization needs the heroes to investigate . . . quickly.

Secrets Of Another Luna

The planet in question is also on the outskirts of explored space, although in a different direction than the sector Robin's Egg was in. The planet is called Geodesa, and the research investigation is lead by Captain Askimoto Hoyu and Dr. Agnes Rolsh.

Captain Hoyu is an astrophysicist and the captain of the starship *Vanishing Point*. He is ostensibly in charge, but those

in the know -- or those who do research and/or contact gossip contacts within the organization -- agree that this is only the case on paper. Captain Hoyu has a fairly low-key leadership style, and Dr. Rolsh's more dominant personality has permitted her to make all the *real* decisions.

The trip to the solar system with Geodesa will be uneventful, although sadistic GMs may make inquiries as to who is at the science station, request bogus piloting rolls, and the like. However, it *will* be quickly apparent that there does seem to be some kind of communications problem; although sensor readings on the planet will be normal (as well as the *Vanishing Point*, when it's within sensor range), attempts to contact the ship, planet, landing crew, or anyone else associated with the research effort will be met with silence.

Once the investigators' ship gets close, they will note a shuttlecraft from the *Vanishing Point* coming toward them. Again, there is no standard communication from it, although as it gets closer it will use a Morse code transmission with its lights (or comparable system): "GREETINGS. I AM CAPTAIN HOYU OF THE VANISHING POINT. OUR COMMUNICATIONS HAVE FAILED. I COME IN PEACE."

The shuttlecraft will take no aggressive action, nor will it be insistent on boarding. (In honesty, the crew would like it if the investigators just went away . . .) The shuttlecraft will continue communicating via Morse code, should the heroes be suspicious, although the GM should point out that it's a fairly slow and frustrating communication method.

Assuming some kind of amiable contact, Captain Hoyu will be friendly but distracted. (Those who researched him ahead of time will know this is normal.) He will give a report of the *Vanishing Point's* progress to date:

They are a larger secondary research team sent after an earlier exploratory effort revealed the anomaly of a moon near-identical to Earth's. They have been doing research, but so far they have found nothing unusual or noteworthy (certainly nothing of the sort the heroes describe, should they reveal what they know). The *Vanishing Point's* communications went out a while ago after some unexpected solar flare activity knocked out the relevant systems. They had planned on reporting their findings in person when they had completed their initial scheduled tour, but so far there has been nothing interesting enough to report more immediately.

Captain Hoyu will seem to be forthright and immediate in his responses (if a bit scatter-brained). However, almost everything he tells the heroes will be a lie.

In fact, the *Vanishing Point* discovered the oddities of the similar moon some time ago. Dr. Rolsh pressured Hoyu into keeping it a secret; she convinced Hoyu (correctly) that the organization would probably try to suppress the moon's significance, especially if it tied into Earth's own moon. She played on Hoyu's desire for a scientific legacy -- as well as her own dominant nature -- to keep him silent.

Captain Hoyu will allow the investigators to board the *Vanishing Point*, should they be so inclined. If they wish to speak with Dr. Rolsh, he will explain that she is on the moon's surface doing more research, and is not expected to return for several days. (This is partially true; she is *not* expecting to return for a few days, but she is currently exploring the moon's tunnel system.)

Although all is not as it seems aboard the ship (or with its research), it will be up to the players and the GM to pace how this is revealed. Suspicious investigators will probably demand to speak with Dr. Rolsh immediately, and set out to look for her. Any scientific characters may note that few of the pieces of their story withstand close scrutiny; there is no evidence of a solar flare, nor do the *Vanishing Point's* own records indicate any such activity. In fact, their communications equipment is all working perfectly, except for a feeble software lock placed to keep it from activating. (Of course, getting close enough to those parts of the ship to discover this may require maneuvering, diplomacy, or stealth.) More personable investigators may interact with the crew and note that they are under orders to maintain radio silence; none of them will have heard about the solar flare.

Regardless, the next course of action is probably an attempt to track down Dr. Rolsh. Depending on the attitudes and actions of the heroes, this shouldn't be too difficult; Hoyu will not volunteer the information himself, but will not fight terribly strong to keep them from learning her location from the rest of the crew. (Hoyu will actually be supportive if they convince him that she is in danger.) If the adventurers are more belligerent or forceful, they may need to take

legal action, as permitted by their patron organization; the commanding officer of the *Vanishing Point* is obstructing an investigation that may be vital.

The coordinates given for Dr. Rolsh's lunar excursion will be fairly accurate; they will indicate a surface locale, which is where Rolsh has a camp, but she is currently underground, exploring the secret of this moon.

Geodesa's moon, like those of Robin's Egg and Earth, is actually a gargantuan bomb, seemingly like some kind of "reset button" for the habitable world it orbits. These moons are definitely a technology of the precursor civilization (however that is defined in the universe in question), complete with elaborate shielding devices that cloak its inner secrets from most sensing devices. Worse, these moons are on a long-term countdown that began in time immemorial . . . *and* they have elaborate tamper-resistant countermeasures to keep them from being easily comprehended, let alone disarmed.

In her extensive research on the moon orbiting Geodesa, Dr. Rolsh found a sequence of microwave frequencies that opened up an entranceway into the hidden chambers underground. She has since posted a sentry on the entranceway to guard it and the return shuttlecraft, and has taken the other three members of her team to explore.

Dr. Rolsh has found the inner chamber of Geodesa's moon; she is in the process of decoding some (but not all) of its inner workings, and is about to press the proverbial Big Button. This is not good; she believes this will disarm the humongous bomb, but will in fact set it off.

How this scene proceeds from here depends on the pacing of the adventure. If the heroes use stealth or subterfuge, they may intercept a transmission from Dr. Rolsh to the sentry, where she indicates that she is close to unlocking the artifact's power. Otherwise they may be able to force or cajole the sentry into revealing information; he knows most of what's going on, although like the rest of the crew on the *Vanishing Point* he does not know that his superiors are actually doing anything wrong.

The heroes will have their work cut out for them; the corridors are enormous, and it will take a considerable amount of time to get to Dr. Rolsh. If the heroes don't have any suitable transport, there is one other four-person hovercraft in the return shuttle. (This may be a good opportunity for any scientific miracle workers in the party to rig it to go faster.) They may find themselves struggling to convince Dr. Rolsh to cease her activities via communicators, trying to cause a distraction at the entrance (so she stops and investigates), or barreling through at break-neck speed trying to get to her first. Any diplomatic attempts will be difficult, since she will likely believe the heroes are attempting to stop her; unknown to all, she hopes to harness the power of this artifact for her own selfish needs. This scene will depend on the ingenuity of the heroes and the whims of the GM.

There are two obvious outcomes; either Dr. Rolsh is stopped (either by convincing her or getting to her in time), or they fail and she succeeds in tripping the moon's defenses. If they fail, they will experience first-hand the energy reading spikes that were present on Robin's Egg; at that point they have a few minutes to escape and (hopefully) get clear of the inevitable blast. Of course, if the heroes don't investigate the moon or otherwise learn what's going on, Dr. Rolsh will also trigger the moon's explosion. (Ironically they may have an easier time in this case, since they won't be within the moon's chambers.)

Again, this scene can be spiced up with any dramatic trappings of the universe in question. Any other sinister sources who might be seeking the secret of the moon may infiltrate the corridor, resulting in a low-gravity battle with space-suited heroes.

Regardless of the outcome, the heroes will probably have to deal with the improprieties of the *Vanishing Point* and its crew (assuming they survive). Should the heroes report in to their patron organization, it will send them to explore one last piece of the puzzle: Earth's moon.

The Moon Next Door

Ever since the heroes first learned about the incident at Robin's Egg, the organization has sent increased patrols to

protect the Moon; it has taken no other measures because it didn't know enough. If the heroes learned enough from Geodesa, they will have more pieces of the puzzle, including the location of the entranceway chamber (its coordinates are the same) and the electromagnetic key sequence necessary to open it.

If the heroes have been reasonably successful to date, the heroes will be asked to see this mystery through to conclusion.

The frequency key will, indeed, open the hidden corridors of the moon, and (after a long exploration) the heroes will make it to the inner chamber. And here they will encounter the truth . . . and a decision.

In the final chamber the heroes will encounter a dizzying display of precursor technology, with a holographic display depicting the moon in its position around the Earth. (The similar display in Geodesa's moon was destroyed by a botched effort of Dr. Rolsh.) Assuming the heroes have a skilled scientist, he will be able to discern two things (after a fair bit of investigation). First, the Moon is on a countdown to explode in 37 years, five months, and less than 21 days. (Geodesa's moon is on an identical timer.) Second, he will -- if at the previous sites or permitted to view the research - understand that a failed attempt to disarm the bomb will set it off.

The scientist will also believe he can disarm the bomb . . . and he will be mistaken. The bomb is deceptively complex, and one of its hypnotic effects is to convince those deciphering it that they can disarm it. (If the heroes seem likely to accidentally set off the bomb, lucky or perceptive characters may recall that the investigators of the *previous* two moons believed they could harness the moon's power as well.) Regardless, the heroes will now face a difficult decision with two obvious choices. They can attempt to disarm the moon's trap (and they will fail), or they can leave it alone (putting it in the organization's hands). If the heroes do nothing, there is no immediate danger; the world has over three decades to sort out the problem and come up with a *real* solution . . . although the consequences of failure would be catastrophic.

This portion of the adventure is designed to be quieter than the rest of the adventure, although it can be certainly spiced up with any space operatic stormtrooping adversaries that cling on to the periphery of such tales.

Conclusion

The adventure will resolve (for the time being) if the heroes explain the situation to the organization, leaving it to come up with a solution. Unfortunately, like so many problems that affect the world on a global scale, this one is complicated. There will be many who believe they can resolve the issue immediately, the best solution will take a long-term approach to arrive at (although it will take at least two decades of research to solve it for real), and the easiest solution is to ignore it and hope the problem goes away.

Extra Spice

As mentioned before, there are any number of complications that can be added to this adventure. All it takes is someone else to learn the secret (or pieces of the secret) to attempt to intercept or thwart the heroes; these agents could be as subtle or overt as desired.

As it stands there are many opportunities for different character types. Pilots, scientists, diplomats, fighters, and bureaucrats can all have elements tailored to them.

It may be entirely possible for the heroes to want to investigate Earth's moon directly after the Robin's Egg part of the adventure. Although the organization would discourage this, they won't forbid it. However, the heroes will have a *very* difficult time; they will have neither the location nor the means of gaining entry on Earth's moon. Given enough time they should be able to duplicate Dr. Rolsh's efforts on Geodesa's moon, but in that time Dr. Rolsh will have destroyed Geodesa and the heroes will be devoid of a vital clue they need to keep them from making the wrong choice.

Alternate Recipes

GMs may be understandably reluctant to place a planet-smashing bomb in Earth's back yard. Fortunately the adventure can work just as well with another planet substituting; the basic core of the tale -- a long-term bomb in a planet's moon -- will work with any world. All that is truly necessary is for the world to be significant . . . either an important hub of activity, another alien race's home world, or the like. The players are more likely to be experimental if they don't care about the endangered planet.

Alternatively (especially for darker campaigns), this entire affair may be a colossal conspiratorial hoax. In this case, not much is required to stage the adventure: a solar system with significant asteroid activity (to represent the destroyed remains of a fictitious Robin's Egg), and a corridor system constructed on another planet's moon (ideally one that's similar to Earth's), along with an accomplice Dr. Rolsh. In this scenario the heroes would *not* be permitted to visit the Earth's moon in the final scene; instead the organization would use this opportunity to do whatever it likes. Anything -- from sequestering the best scientists of the universe to the evacuation of the Earth -- would be possible if the organization is successful in its deception . . . which they may well be, if they have the heroes discuss their findings in front of an important meeting of eminent leaders.

Side Salads

If knowledge of the Moon's secret were to get into the hands of the wrong person, it could be disastrous . . . especially if he's willing to throw his life away to set off the bomb.

This adventure can work well with delays and additional adventures between the three parts; simply make it so that the patron organization doesn't learn of Dr. Rolsh's progress until later, and it takes longer to analyze data and permit the heroes to investigate the Earth's moon.

And, of course, there may well be *other* moons out there, ready to be discovered by unwitting explorers. And is there a pattern to these random, deadly satellites?

The Whisperer

for *d20 System*

by Darren Miguez

Art by Brendon & Brian Fraim

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"The Whisperer" is an out-take from the *Penumbra Fantasy Bestiary* from Atlas Games. The more than 220 entries that fill this weighty volume's pages go beyond the atmospheric description, evocative illustration, and solid stats for which Penumbra is known, providing adventure seeds designed to inspire GMs and players alike, and extras like new gods, spells, and magic items. Springing from history, myth, and imagination, these creatures are suitable for any fantasy *d20 System* campaign. For those looking for more meat in their monsters, and more creativity in their creatures, comes the *Penumbra Fantasy Bestiary*.

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The Whisperer

The whisperer is an insubstantial air elemental that requires sound to survive. Though these creatures can live forever on the crashing roar of a waterfall, or the treacherous screaming winds of a vast canyon, after a time these sounds, while filling, lose their flavor. New sounds, on the other hand, are intoxicating, and prompt the whisperer to rash acts; the sound of combat -- the clash of metal on metal occasionally punctuated by the scorching blast of a fireball or the ear-shattering thunder of a lightning bolt -- is like a drug to the whisperer. Once it has experienced the thrill of a violent combat, the whisperer will go to great lengths to repeat the experience.

The invisible whisperer will follow a group of adventurers, and if they seem to not be soon to battle, the whisperer will take matters into its own hands, and attempt to provoke a confrontation using its ability to create sound. It will lure dangerous subterranean beasts to the party as they camp, whisper insults into the ear of drunken tavern patron in the

Whisperer

hopes of starting a tavern brawl, or amplify the sound of a band of monsters so that the opposing spellcasters use more dangerous and flashy spells.

Normally, the whisperer is little more than a nuisance, though. A rare few groups of adventurers, especially those led by bards, have even managed to work out agreements with whisperers, wherein the creature scouts out underground areas or other dangerous locales, in return for the promise of a particularly violent battle. While such groups are highly effective in exploring ruins and caverns, they are generally not appreciated when the whisperer continues to cause mischief in civilized areas.

A rising and falling of wind, a series of echoes, or the bubbling of a hidden underground stream, all of which sound a little too regular to be naturally occurring: these are signs that the unseen whisperer is present. It usually communicates by repeating sounds it has heard, and often imitates voices that a listener will find shocking, such as his own or the voice of an enemy. If observed by someone who can see invisible creatures, the whisperer appears as a rapidly whirling tangle of vapor that constantly throws out and absorbs tendrils of cloudy mist.

Adventure Seeds

- The PCs meet a proud and beautiful minstrel traveling through the wilderness. She tells them her sad tale: at a local festival dedicated to a god of music, her music disappeared and her lute became almost silent. This not only embarrassed her, but made the high priest think her a bad omen, so that she was banished from the god's temple. The minstrel offers a reward if the party can cure her of her affliction. While the party tries to determine what ails the minstrel, the whisperer that is secretly feeding on the bard's music understands that it might be in

danger, and begins to lure in dangerous wildlife to harass the party. It confuses bats with high-pitched sounds and sends a horde of them to plague the party's campsite. It creates the howling of a she-wolf in heat close to the campsite to attract these predators. Finally, it insults bandits throughout the forest, heckling them from the treetops and daring them to attack the PCs, while making mention of the possessions they carry. Each attack grows more dangerous, but the minstrel follows the party if they manage to acquit themselves well in any combat that occurs. Can the PCs figure out how to rid the minstrel of her new admirer?

- The PCs are part of a military force that goes to fight for the good of the kingdom against barbarian invaders. If their force is lost, the kingdom may fall. On the way, however, a whisperer that has had some past experience feeding off of the sounds of combat sees the small army as a possible food source. It begins to lure monsters and beasts to attack the band of warriors, slowly diminishing their number as it consumes the clamor of battle. Can the PCs stop the efforts of the whisperer to embroil the force in meaningless battle? Can they explain to the whisperer that a grander meal awaits at the end of this trek, or even turn the whisperer against their enemy, the more warlike, loud, and rowdy barbarian force? Will they preserve the army, or will it be too weakened to fend off the barbarians?

Whisperer

Medium-size Elemental (Air)

Hit Dice: 3d8 (13 hp)

Initiative: +4 (Dex)

Speed: Fly 100 ft. (perfect)

AC: 18 (+4 Dex, +4 natural)

Attacks: Slam +6 melee

Damage: Slam 1d6

Face/Reach: 5 ft. x 5 ft./ 5 ft.

Special Attacks: Spell-like Abilities

Special Qualities: Audiophagy, Body of Air, Darkvision 60 ft., Death Burst, Immunities, Natural Invisibility, Spell-like Abilities, Vulnerabilities

Saves: Fort +1, Ref +7, Will +5

Abilities: Str 10, Dex 18, Con 10, Int 12, Wis 18, Cha 14

Skills: Concentration +4, Listen +12, Knowledge (nature) +4, Perform (song) +8, Perform (mimicry) +8, Spot +7

Feats: Alertness, Weapon Finesse (slam)

Climate/Terrain: Any land

Organization: Solitary

Challenge Rating: 4

Treasure: None

Alignment: Usually neutral

Advancement: 4-8 (Large), 9-14 (Huge)

Whisperers speak Auran, and can understand Common.

If a character is within 20 feet of a whisperer, he can make a Listen check (DC 18) to determine that the natural sounds that the whisperer cloaks its presence with are not natural at all; the source of the sounds is known to be unnatural and its location is known, though the true nature of them is not immediately apparent.

Audiophagy (Ex): If near a combat or other phenomenon above the volume of a normal conversation, the whisperer will absorb the sound around it, making muting sounds as if they were heard through earmuffs. This causes a -6 circumstance penalty to all Listen and musical or choral Perform checks within a 20-foot radius of the whisperer, and makes understanding speech conducted in or through this area very difficult. It takes a Listen check (DC 13) to understand more than one-word sentences.

Body of Air (Ex): Because its body is made of air, all corporeal attacks against the whisperer have a 50% miss chance. The whisperer can manipulate physical objects when it chooses to focus on such things, but generally tries to manipulate the world around it with sound. A whisperer can pass through objects that have some kind of opening, such as bars or nets, though it cannot pass completely through solid objects such as a wall unless there is at least some small aperture it can seep through, such as a keyhole or under a door. The whisperer leaves no trail that can allow it to be tracked.

Death Burst (Ex): When a whisperer dies, unless it is in an area affected by a *silence* spell, it expires in one last burst of deafening sound. All within a 20-foot radius of the whisperer must make a Fortitude save (DC 11) or else be rendered deaf for 1d4 days; deaf characters suffer a -4 penalty to Initiative checks, cannot make Listen skill checks, and suffer a 20% chance of spell failure when casting spells with verbal components. A *cure blindness/deafness* spell will remove this condition.

Elemental: An elemental is immune to poison, sleep, paralysis, and stunning. Elementals are not subject to critical hits or flanking and have Darkvision with a range of 60 feet. A slain elemental cannot be *raised* or *resurrected*, although a *wish* or *miracle* spell can restore it to life.

Feats: Whisperers receive Alertness free as a racial bonus.

Natural Invisibility (Su): This ability is constant, allowing the whisperer to remain invisible even when attacking. This ability is inherent and not subject to the *invisibility purge* spell.

Spell-like Abilities: This creature can use the following spells as if cast by a 8th-level sorcerer (or a bard of 8th level, in the case of *sculpt sound*). The DC to resist these abilities is 12 + the spell level. The range of the *ventriloquism* spell is measured as if it were a long-range spell (640 feet). The whisperer can use its Perform skill to attempt to mimic the voices of people it has heard with its *sculpt sound* ability. The whisperer can only use *locate creature* to locate a bard or other performer it is currently infatuated with; see Vulnerabilities, below.

3/day -- *gust of wind*, *shatter*, *shout*

At Will -- *ghost sound*, *ventriloquism*, *sculpt sound*, *locate creature*

Vulnerabilities (Ex): The whisperer lives on sound. If it is targeted with a *silence* spell and fails its saving throw, it is immediately slain. The whisperer is also intoxicated by the music of bards or other performers, and if it hears such music it must make a Will save (DC equal to the performer's Perform check total) or else be affected as if by a *charm monster* spell, with a duration of one day per level of the performer. If separated from its minstrel companion, the whisperer can seek out its performing friend with its *locate creature* spell-like ability.

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Pyramid Review

CORE Command Player's Handbook

Published by [Dream Pod 9](#)

Written by Marc A. Vezina with Paul Lippincott

Illustrated by Patrick Boutin-Gagne

160-page b&w softcover; \$24.95

The Canadian publisher Dream Pod 9 has recently re-presented the Silhouette mechanics it uses for all of its games from *Tribe 8* to [Gear Krieg: The Roleplaying Game](#) into a single CORE book. The aim with the **Silhouette CORE Rules** is to present them as a basic set of rules for any game (and not just those published by Dream Pod 9), but by also including a set of **d20 System** conversion rules, making them compatible with the terms of the Open Gaming License. Beyond the basic rules of the **Silhouette CORE Rules**, any of DP9's games can be played with the addition of a "Player's Handbook" for that setting, each of which will include rules adjustments and additions as well as setting material for that game. The first of these Player's Handbook turns out to be not for one DP9's previous lines, but for a whole new one, launched with the release of the **CORE Command Player's Handbook**.

CORE Command falls into the space opera genre, and as an RPG it is a space opera drawn on a grand scale, with a reach that spans five galaxies, where spaceships are big (a star fighter is the size of a 20th-century battleship), and the technological level is high, very high. For **CORE Command** takes to heart the Arthur C. Clarke adage: "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." This is an adage that takes on a particularly interesting aspect when the designers start applying the mechanics and magic of *Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition* to a very far future space opera background.

Physically, the **CORE Command Player's Handbook** is decently done for DP9. The layout is pleasing on the eye and the artwork has a softer, more rounded feel than in their other games, although it still retains an anime-like touch . . . Unfortunately, the writing is once again let down by a lack of proofreading, a trait all too common to DP9's releases. Fortunately it is not as bad in this book as it has been in others. A nice touch is the organization of the statistics for both games into boxes and tables, with the majority of the Open Gaming License content dropped into OGL Stat Blocks, as was done with DP9's first **d20 System** book, the **d20 Mecha Compendium**. Silhouette GMs wanting more detail for their gear would be well-advised to check out the OGL Stat Blocks.

The setting for this game is that of five neighboring galaxies: the Andromeda and Spiral galaxies, plus the smaller Tucanae, Trianguli, and Doradis galaxies. It is possible to cross between them via FTL travel that takes weeks, though faster methods such as the Hyper Tunnel Network and the Galactic Express are available; this latter method is a massive accelerator that is fueled by a single star each time it is used. Though there remain plenty of pockets of unknown space to be explored, several races have spread out from their home world across the galaxies to explore and colonize. On their travels they have encountered a race known as the D'vor, which travel in huge artifact fleets of ships and work to disrupt subspace with the aim of recreating the universe to their own satisfaction. In the setting of **CORE Command**, they are the default bad guys, though others -- some of which operate alongside the fleets -- are also present.

Many races have formed an alliance against this threat: Humanity; the highly intelligent and jellyfish-like Orb-Shakra (which use robotic servo-shells to get around) that can form direct mind links; the secretive-though-ever-alert Murans, with their arrogant and condescending manner; the diminutive, happy-go-lucky, space-wandering Dimni; the aquatic humanoid Cyran; the Sanrok, with their rock-like skin that needs an acidic chemical bath or particle shower to get

clean; the semi-shape changing Proteans; and strangest of all, the Mi-Compilers. They are the interpreters for the huge planet-sized computer known as Fractal that sits at the center of Alliance Space. While they may be of any racial stock, implants within their skin help them interpret Fractal's data.

Fractal serves as the alliance's data core, compiler, and central bureaucracy and the planet it orbits is home to, and known as the Academy. This is where those wishing to join CORE Command train before entering service. Though the exact meaning of the term "CORE" has been lost to time -- the Alliance is millennia old -- CORE Command is the Alliance's fleet, working as both its military and its exploratory service, tasked to make contact with civilizations, explore the unknown (inside and outside of Alliance territory), and defend against the danger of D'vor Star Devourer Fleets.

Within this setting, the player characters are members of CORE Command; though other roles are perfectly possible, they are outside of the scope of the **CORE Command Player's Handbook**. As members of CORE Command, characters are diplomats, Mi-Compilers, soldiers, scouts, spies, and Quantek Users. What are the latter? Basically, they have strips of Quantum Hypertechnology implanted within their bodies and these strips draw upon subspace to power a range of effects -- tractor beams, force fields, and weaponry. They require the use of Quantek Interface skill and each has a limited number of uses per day, between which they need to recharge.

Under the Silhouette rules, characters receive 50 Character Points for attributes and another 70 for skills, along with perks and flaws to create a member of CORE Command. Under the **d20 System**, characters are rolled up as normal and a class selected that equates to one of the roles given above -- Fighter for soldier, Bard for diplomat, Rangers for scout, Rogue for spy, Cleric for Mi-Compiler, and Wizard for Quantek User. In equating the Wizard for the Quantek User, the cleverness of the game design becomes apparent. Simply, each sliver of Quantek implanted within a character lets them take another spell-like effect that is perfectly modeled by one of the spells from the **d20 System**, which also works for the divine spells of the Cleric or Mi-Compiler.

This is exceedingly clever in terms of design, but the Open Gaming License content of **CORE Command Player's Handbook** can only take a referee so far. Because it is not **d20 System** compliant, the book lacks the kind of material you would expect from the core book of a new setting -- classes, feats, skills, and so on. Yet this should not hamper the experienced GM or DM, who can happily plunder the **d20 System** books on their gaming shelf with abandon to get what they want. The neophyte on the other hand may be in need of some help; this the book's biggest weakness is perhaps this inability to convert from system to setting . . . That said, the best resource for running a **CORE Command** game -- after the **Dungeons & Dragons Player's Handbook** -- will be another pair of core books for differing game lines. The feats, skills, and character generation rules from [Traveller T20](#) may prove useful, but [Dragonstar: Starfarer's Handbook](#) will probably be a better choice as it does include magic as part of its setting (or is that Quantek implants?). Both might be useful for creating characters and campaigns set outside of CORE Command's aegis, but still within the setting.

Unlike the **Dragonstar Galaxy** setting the outlook of **CORE Command** is entirely optimistic and upbeat. There is no conspiracy within CORE Command itself, or really within any of the setting's background, and the threat of the D'vor presented within the game is entirely external. This is interesting, as the D'vor or "Dvor" previously appeared in the "Outworld Changlings" setting published by DP9 in the **d20 Mecha Compendium**. A far bleaker setting, "Outworld Changlings" suggests that the "D'vor" and "Dvor" are not the same, and the name is purely coincidence . . .

CORE Command also introduces robots: not just simple servo shells, loading drones, and combat drones, but also the Recorder Hero. Available in three models -- the standard agile and fast Type I, the electronics specialist Type II, and the monstrous Type III -- they are as much cyborgs as they are robots, and designed as playable vehicles with a crew of one. That "one" is the personality and memories of a player character or deceased agent of CORE Command who has reached Grade 20 and above. (Members of CORE Command are ranked by Grades that equate to the **d20 system's** levels.)

There is a fair amount of new technology and gear for players to get to grips with. Perhaps the most interesting is the "Staze Node," a micro bubble of nothingness implanted in the neck of agents of Grade 5 and above. When an agent is about to die, the node is automatically activated and it expands automatically to encase them in an ovoid of

nothingness wherein they are impervious to the effects of time and everything else. The galaxies are littered with agents still held and protected within these nodes, waiting until someone -- say, a team of player characters -- can recover them.

Other "Tools of the Trade" include Memeware, cloned from the donor's tissue and implanted back into them to provide extra space to store and access knowledge. This is equal to 10 Skill Ranks or Character Points worth of knowledge. Unfortunately, it is not unknown for a head injury or access malfunction to result in the hard locking of some of this data, so that it cannot be erased and the Memeware reprogrammed. Characters can be accompanied by an Orb (a floating, automated information storage and retrieval device that holds an encyclopedia's worth of data), or by a Defense Drone, which can provide a very personal force field when the character needs protecting.

There is also a range of futuristic weapons: vibrating Cutter Blades, Gaussian and Beam weapons, Quantek-powered Buster Guns that provide anti-vehicular firepower in a handy package, Sliver Blades (with a force screen along the cutting edge), Firesheet Blades (which emit plasma close to the blade for melee combat or can fire it at range), and Wizard Gloves. The latter can be worn singularly or as a pair, and project a force field as either a shield, piston, or blade. The pinnacle of personal protection are the suits of Mercury and Lightning Armor, each allow the wearer to shift the degree of protection to where it is needed; the first suit is made of liquid nano-metal, while the second is constructed from force fields.

The spaceships of CORE Command are big, with even the smallest two-man star fighter being the size of the *USS Missouri*. This is because the engines necessary to get a vessel across interstellar distances have to be very big. The **CORE Command Player's Handbook** does cover rules for space combat within this setting, though only for the Silhouette rules and not for the *d20 System*. These scale up the rules -- there is a fair bit of this in the **CORE Command Player's Handbook** when dealing with technology and spaceships -- in the Silhouette CORE Rules, such as increasing the size of basic hex from 5km to 500km and providing rules for handling squadron to squadron engagements. These are necessary, as no single ship could deal with a D'vor Star Devourer Fleet. Also included are guidelines on just how damage much it takes to destroy anything from small asteroids and mountains, right up to large stars!

For the GM there are full write-ups of D'vor Bioships, including the Star Devourer, as well as the forces they use on the ground, and the two races that co-exist with their fleets. The reptilian Kabayans follow the D'vor, since they are entranced by the song that emanates from the bioships (actually a system of modulated waves used as ship-to-ship communication). The Grob are much smaller than the Kabayans, but live alongside and occasionally work for them. They will also trade with members of the Alliance, but they are far from easy to deal with. Another species are the insectoid Kom'Sov, which are four-legged and very aggressive; despite a herd-like mentality they established a sizeable empire in the Trianguli galaxy. It is the Kom'Sov that represent a threat suited to more advanced games of **CORE Command**.

The chapter on "Gamemastering CORE Command" presents solid but not spectacular advice, while the bulk is given over to a set of tables for creating random adventure outlines. These are actually adapted from the tables designed by James Maliszewski for the same purpose in **Gear Krieg: The Roleplaying Game**; the fact that they are included here is indicative of their status as one of the few good things to be found in that game. The use of the tables is fully illustrated with an example waiting for the referee to expand upon. More interesting are the final three pages of **CORE Command Player's Handbook**, which explains the setting's background, what is really going on, and what has happened to the Earth -- a question that arose while reading through the book. That the planet Earth does not appear to be within Alliance space is really a minor issue, but the reason *why* is interesting in itself . . .

The aim of **CORE Command** is to take the themes of the tried and tested classic fantasy genre and then map them onto the science fiction genre. Thus the Paladin becomes a CORE agent, the Wizard in his tall tower is a scientist at a remote research station, and that magic item a piece of Quantum Hypertechnology. In this the designer has been successful, because although the actual elements and objects so mapped are obvious from the one genre to the other, they sit equally well in both.

As a setting book for the **Silhouette CORE Rules**, the **CORE Command Player's Handbook** works well enough, and

its optimistic outlook is a pleasing change from DP9's other pessimistic games. Yet because it essentially draws from all of the elements of ***Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition*** and then sheaths them with a new outer cover and a new name, ***CORE Command*** works better as a ***d20 System*** game. This is despite the fact that it is only Open Gaming License compliant; this content actually supports the Silhouette system, as the statistics in the OGL Stat Blocks are more detailed than those given for the Silhouette rules.

Although there is plenty of detail in the ***CORE Command*** setting, its scope leaves plenty of room for the GM to add their aliens and sectors, as well as throwing in anything they want to take from other ***d20 System*** supplements. Further, a GM need not use either set of mechanics to run a ***CORE Command*** game, as the OGL Stat Blocks, together with their descriptions, are enough for the GM to use whatever other system he prefers. Both ***GURPS*** and the ***HERO*** system could work very well in this regard.

Whatever the mechanics a GM decides to use, he will find that the ***CORE Command Player's Handbook*** will give him a space opera setting that has epic proportions in scope, damage, and age. The latter is because the ***CORE Command*** setting really does feel ancient or at the very least millennia old. Curious GMs will also enjoy the successful re-sheathing of one genre and the themes of one game -- ***Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition*** -- into another game and genre: that of space opera and ***CORE Command***.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Urban Arcana (for *d20 Modern*)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Designed by Eric Cagle, Jeff Grubb, David Noonan, & Stan!

Cover by Dave Johnson

Interior art by Jason Alexander, Kalman Andrasofszky, Lee Ballard, Justin Hampton, Kagan McLeod, Ken Meyer, Jr., Dean Ormston, Jake Parker, Puddnhead, Christopher Shy, Chad Michael Ward, Jonathan Wayshak, & Sam Wood

Cartography by Robert Lazzaretti

320-page color hardcover; \$39.95

What goes well with a fantasy-meets-modernity RPG like *d20 Modern*? A setting, of course. But then, that's just what you were expecting Wizards of the Coast to do. Using some of the fantastic elements found in the *d20 Modern* book, *Urban Arcana* presents a somewhat more fully realized world setting.

Between the world of the mundane and the fantasy world next door lies a gulf called the Shadow. For reasons not fully explained or understood, the tides of Shadow periodically reach a critical mass and begin dropping the hapless fantastic creatures and races of some unknown world of magic into our considerably more ordinary cities. Those who make the trip find that not only can they not get back, they cannot remember much of what the previous world was like. They may retain certain skills -- magic included -- but they must now make their way in a modern setting.

Ordinarily an orc pumping gas at the local filling station would draw a good deal of attention, but the Shadow (or one of its aftereffects) keeps most people in this world from piercing through to see what Shadowkind are really like. Bugbears seem to most to be nothing more than big, ugly, hairy men. A town engulfed in flames isn't the result of a dragon strafing but an unfortunate gas main explosion. People see what they want to see, but a few -- like the heroes -- penetrate the veil and adjust accordingly.

Player characters may be the lost souls who came across the Shadow, or they may be regular natives of this world who discover the new creatures inhabiting their lands (a revelation that usually follows a harrowing encounter with the Shadowkind). They may also make use of some of the strange transgressions of physical laws that these visitors bring with them (a.k.a., magic). Once the two sides have started intermixing, there's no going back. They'll find common friends in The Displaced, a kind of missionary effort for new arrivals; common enemies in the Fraternal Order of Vigilance, a group of racist (specist?) purebloods who want the Shadowkind dead; and those who just want to know what the hell is going on in the Paranormal Science and Investigation Society. (And Department-7 once again rears its nosy head here.)

The new advanced classes are the Arcane Arranger, a sort of "go-to" guy who gets what you need; the Archaic Weaponsmaster, whose abilities with stereotypical fantasy weapons is without peer; the determined Shadow Hunter, seeker of secrets; the Internet-savvy Shadowjack mage; and the Tarzanesque Wildlord, tossed into a new kind of

jungle. Fully seven more are provided. Once you're ready for a prestige class, you can be the Archmage, master of magic; the Artificer, creator of the oh-so-rare-here magic items; the Ecclesiarch, a cleric whose turning abilities aren't limited to the undead; and the Holy/Unholy Knight, defender of the faith.

There's nothing new about mixing the modern and the magical, and in truth there's nothing new about **Urban Arcana's** take on the subject. That said, the book is a full-thrust engine for bringing such a world to life. There's a bestiary with old favorites like the beholders and standbys like big cats and vermin, but they're given a new take and a new place in the reformed hierarchy. These sit side-by-side with new additions like cockroaches that steal your skin, violent dumpsters that take your life, and breathsnatchers that . . . well, you get the idea. There's not a lot of overlap, should buyers be worried about paying too much for rehashed material.

The authors took particularly evil delight in developing the goodies lists. Magic items as they appear in **Dungeons & Dragons** aren't all that common -- magic takes a heavy hit in this land -- but the gear they provide is as much satire as it is clever crossover treasure. (Indeed, this restriction on the rarity of magic items is liable to take a hit -- or maybe the GM who isn't forthcoming with the goods will *get* hit . . .) Tattoos are imbued with mystic protections. Chainsaws drip blood before you ever get to your victim, and you'd better be a psycho (or at least not of good alignment) if you want to use it. Cameras really *do* steal souls, magic coveralls allow you to turn to gas and drift through the villain's air ducts. And if you pick up a magic cell phone, there's no telling *who* will answer. Vehicles have similar perks, enhancing everything from the "armor" to the tires. But if that's not enough to trick out your wheels . . .

Spells. Most of the new magics offered to spell casters deal with technology, in keeping with the book's setting. These can beef up your car; bags of holding give way to back seats of holding. They can even *create* a car, or weapons, or bullets. "Rogues" can suppress security systems, and Internet users can teleport themselves almost anywhere you can send E-mail.

To bring the two worlds closer together, there are chapters that deal with running a crossworld game. It may sound elementary to the experienced GM, but they've done a good job dropping one setting in with the other (though no details whatsoever are given about the fantasy world -- GMs must provide their own), and this extends to the refereeing sections. It builds an adventure from the ground up, gives the GM an idea of the PCs' place in the world, and debates how much magic to put in your games.

There's material for bringing characters over from a pure **Dungeons & Dragons** campaign (along with their foes), and to make the modern world that much more real they describe it all. The locations chapter gives you plenty of places to work your voodoo, along with useful maps of several choice spots. The part played by locations isn't limited to the site itself; the book talks about the importance of the location to the city at large, and several real-world example are given. The equipment section not only lists weapons and armor, it describes what you can expect to find in squad cars or fire trucks (among others), and this all sits next to weapons with a decidedly exotic flair (water pistols and dwarven axes, for example).

The book is rounded out with some basic but effective adventures to introduce PCs to their new digs, in which:

[SPOILER SPACE!]

The heroes pick sides when a fight breaks out in a fast-food restaurant run by Shadowkind. Having gained the trust of some of the players in that drama, they're recruited for a rescue operation that will hopefully lead to the only man who knows how to return home across the Shadow.

[END SPOILER SPACE]

The spattered paintings, slick characterizations, gangly elves, and stumpy dwarves give a favorable graphic insight to the game; combined with an unpretentious writing style (with the occasional in-joke: the Swiss Juncture of Gnomes?), **Urban Arcana** is a good starting point for a classic magic-meets-technology campaign. Whether intentional or not, the game leaves much to the GM, but gives him the tools to realize that best game of games: the one that ultimately transcends its own source material.

*Note: **Urban Arcana** contains no Open Game Content.*

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

UNTIL Superpowers Database (for HERO System)

Published by [Hero Games](#)

Written by Steven S. Long

Interior Artwork by Nate Barnes, Storn Cook, Andrew Cremeans, Keith Curtis, Jonathan Davenport, Nick Ingeneri, Eric Lofgren, Bryce Nakawaga, Scott Ruggles, Greg Smith, and Chris Stevens

272-page b&w softcover; \$24.99

The **HERO System** has arguably the most detailed and involved power creation system of any superheroic RPG. As discussed in the review of the [5th Edition](#), powers are not categorized into real-world classifications that have defined abilities -- such as a Gravity Blast power -- but instead broken down into the component effects of the power. Thus in the **HERO System** our Gravity Blast power may cause some damage, make the victim lose some Strength, and/or keep him immobile.

This system is great if you are creative around a set of rules and know how to come up with cool powers. But if you *don't*, it can be a royal pain; there isn't as much of a "shopping list" of interesting abilities that can spark your imagination. Thus many first-time **HERO System** characters are some variation of Flyingenergyblastingforcefieldman, covering the triad of basic offense, defense, and movement.

The **5th Edition** book went a fairly long way in addressing this concern with large numbers of sidebars detailing specific applications of powers and power groupings. But there are still those wanting *more* . . . those who would benefit from a superpower supermarket approach. For those people, the **UNTIL Superpowers Database** may be the answer they've been looking for.

This book is a hefty collection of powers, with chapters grouped around special effects (which are an important concept in the **Hero System**). In turn, each chapter is subdivided into Offensive, Defensive, Movement, Sensory, and Miscellaneous Powers. These aren't new "powers" in the **HERO System** sense, but new applications of existing powers and power modifiers. Each power is given a description at the beginning that details what it does, how it fits in with the special effect, and how it works in simple terms.

For example, the power Let's Wrap This Up, under the Speedster Powers chapter, is the stereotypical speedster ability to pick up ropes, chains, or other nearby restraints and run around a target really, really fast until they are tied up. In game terms it's described as an Entangling attack that has a "focus" (appropriate materials of opportunity), no range, takes extra time (however long it takes to get the materials), and Cannot Form Barriers (which the normal Entangle attack can do).

Each power is then given a number of tweaks to affect its cost and abilities. For example, "Let's Wrap This Up" offers options for stronger or weaker wrapping, and a ranged wrap-up (he's so fast that he can just run over to the target and back). Each chapter offers between three and 10 pages of powers, with most pages containing three to five powers each. In a book weighing in at 272 pages thick, that's a *lot* of powers.

The most impressive aspect of its book is the depth and breadth of material here. Writer Steven S. Long has taken a number of special effects that are usually overused, seemingly limited, or otherwise lacking in possibilities and

expended their potentials. For example, an ability that is normally seen as a one-trick pony -- Precognition -- is expanded to include power examples that can let the character dodge ("Saw it coming!"), sense danger (Permonitions), or have extraordinary fortune (Precognitive's Luck). He can even take Looks Like I Win Again, which turns the Gambling skill into a power . . . don't play Poker with a precognitive!

The special effects covered range from the obvious (such as Fire And Heat, Water, or Animal powers) and some less-obvious ones (such as Cyberkinesis, Luck, or Sleep And Dream powers). Although the categories aren't exhaustive, they should still do a good job of sparking ideas to help create an incredible number of super-powered characters. In addition, new rules or guidelines are provided to help GMs and players use some of these powers. For example, the Emotion Control chapter gives rules for game effects for many kinds of emotions, while the Weather Control section offers rules for changing the weather and the effects that causes. The last chapter is also noteworthy, since it details some "Miscellaneous Powers," a collection of 11 comic-book powers that readers may be curious about how to replicate in the **HERO System**. (For example, the Darkseid-esque "Nega-Beam" -- a blast of energy which follows the victim around until it connects -- is treated as a Summon!) Wrapping up the **UNTIL Superpowers Database** is an Appendix, with a couple of examples of how to use this book. There is also a brilliant new rule called the "Power Skill," which allows players to use other abilities in-game at a *greatly* reduced power level, thus permitting for flashier or creative use of powers. For example, a water-based character may need to make a bridge of water to get some innocents to safety from a sinking yacht; but he doesn't have an appropriate power; through some finagling of his abilities, he manages to create a *very* weak, exhausting bridge that does the trick . . . barely. This one rule alone goes a long way in combating much of the genericness of **HERO System** powers.

Also scattered throughout the book are various sidebars detailing intelligence that UNTIL has gathered on various superpowered individuals; the powers of these individuals tie in with the chapter in question, so we get a discussion of "Thunderbolt I" in the section on Electricity Powers. These sections are, for the most part, forgettable; fortunately, they do not take up much room, and help the book from feeling *too* much like a collection of random powers.

Physically, the **UNTIL Superpowers Database** is up to the standards of the latest series of **HERO System** books. The artwork ranges from adequate to quite impressive (although, again, many pieces look like they *really* want to be in color). The layout, writing, and editing are clean (although the binding on the copy reviewed has shown some signs of wear), and there is a massive three-page index of all the powers in the book.

The **Advanced Marvel Super-Hero RPG** from the mid-1980s had the **Ultimate Powers Book**, considered by many to be the best book from that series. Now the **HERO System** has its own answer to that classic with the **UNTIL Superpowers Database**. Its greatest flaw is that it isn't of much use to anyone who *isn't* using the **HERO System**. Its next greatest flaw is probably that it, technically, isn't an essential book, since everything within can be replicated with the basic **HERO System 5th Edition** core rulebook. But for those who love the system and need to get creative juices flowing (or who just need to create interesting characters at the spur of the moment), this will be a great addition to your library.

--Steven Marsh

Time Enough To Run Out Of Time

Ordinarily when I'm pressed for a column idea I mercilessly rip off whatever movie I've seen most recently, file off the serial numbers, and go from there. Unfortunately I find myself stuck with *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle* as my skull-etched source film for this week; I have little to say about it, except that I was proud with myself for having gestured wildly and yelled at the screen only *once*.

So now I find myself looking for another topic, and running out of time. And at present I find myself torn between a number of obligations, all pulling for my attention. There's nothing too unusual about that; I've found that burning the candle at both ends is good for amateurs, but for those looking to *really* save time, there's nothing like taking a blowtorch to the center of that wax stick.

Anyway, thinking of my personal time crunches, I found myself remembering days I've been in the player's seat, saying things like:

"So we have two days before our ship sets sail? Okay; during that time I go into town, get my equipment repaired, go shopping for a gift for the Queen, meet with the council elders, give the Queen her present, and check in with my underworld contacts. Oh, and in my spare time I'm trying to learn archery."

In short, our games generally assumed that downtime was this nigh-infinite cache of time, disrupted only by the occasional would-be cataclysmic event that needs to be dealt with ASAP before getting back to shopping for horses and flirting with royalty.

Of course, this isn't very realistic. For one thing, if you get the two confused you may wind up checking a princess' teeth and marrying a palomino. But more importantly, the world tends to move on, regardless of the PCs' actions. . . and quickly.

So how do you represent this in an RPG? Well, first off you don't want to be *too* obsessive; after all, [downtime](#) is often one of the most fun parts of a campaign. On the other hand, keeping the relentless pressure of time constant as a reminder will make the heroes appreciative both of truly quiet times, *and* make them enjoy the stress of the busier times more (since they'll be accustomed to a more hectic pace).

There are two easy ways to keep track of time in a game, allowing for more stressful normal interactions; one is a bit more abstract than others.

The first method is to keep track of the actual downtime available; in the same way that you might keep track of gold pieces or megacredz. Each day assign the number of available "points" to players (perhaps in the form of chips or glass counters . . . gamers love glass counters); thus they may get 15 counters to represent the 15 available waking hours to them. Have a list of available activities with their relative "costs" in time, then have players spend time appropriately; you can probably round to the nearest hour or half-hour:

Buying Stuff	1 hour (per type)
Dealing with City Bureaucracy	1 hour for simple tasks 3 hours for difficult tasks more?
Traveling from one quadrant of city to another	1/2 hour
Visit organization (religious, professional, etc.)	1 hour for brief visit 2 hours for thorough visit

etc.

Many RPGs -- such as **GURPS** or **Dungeons & Dragons** -- assign a cost in hours to training, spell memorization, or the like. Those tasks can be represented easily with this system; simply deduct the number of hours spent at those tasks from the available points per day; thus if you need 100 hours to get the Basket-Weaving skill, you can deduct them 10 hours a day for 10 days, or one hour a day for almost four months.

This system, although fairly complex, allows for a fair bit of tinkering, as desired by the gaming group. For example, players may gain extra "points" to spend each day by giving up sleep, only to be at (for example) -1 to skill rolls for each hour or two gained in this way. Various advantages and disadvantages become more workable, too, like "light sleeper" or "needs less sleep"; simply adjust available points per day.

GMs can also allow players more leeway in their point-spending per day. For example, the GM may allow a player to get a +1 to skill rolls per extra point (hour) spent at shopping, bureaucracy, or similar attempts; if you're willing to browse the bazaar all day, you should have a better shot at finding what you want and getting a good price.

The second method sacrifices realism somewhat, but it's simpler, more fast-paced, and places more effort on the players to be creative. Simply reduce the number of tokens the players get per day (to, say, five or six), dispense with the list of stuff, and have the *players* decide their value and how they spend them. This method is good for games that assume characters have lots of daily activities they usually accomplish (such as **Vampire's** daily feedings, contact maintenance, court attendance, and so on), with a limited amount of time left over. These tokens are more nebulous in nature, but should be enough to accomplish one easy-to-moderate task; their exact value is left to the players:

Player 1: I spend one token hiding that body from last adventure, one token researching that artifact I found, two tokens trying to improve my animal-control powers, and one patrolling the city looking for signs of that mysterious illness.

Player 2: I'm spending one token to buy a new car, one token training with these so-called 'computers,' and I'll spend one token trying to track down my sire. Oh, and I want to check out that illness, too, but I want to spend more time doing it; I'll use my last two tokens for that.

Player 3: I'm still *persona non grata* in court after the Sewer Incident, but I'm trying to rebuild my reputation. I'm spending all five tokens to hang around in court; if I can do any favors to improve my standing with anyone influential, I will.

And so on. Some gaming groups may find this method too nebulous, but others may find it a good bridge between meticulous record keeping and free-form "do what thou wilt" methods of handling downtime.

Either way, players generally love spending points on stuff, and points they get back every day can be even snazzier. They can actually make downtime more special and active -- since some players will *hate* to let those daily points go to waste -- while allowing for more interesting conundrums when time is tight; how do the heroes react when they are injured, their equipment is trashed, they have a dozen scrolls to decode, two of their loved ones are missing, and the Agent of Inky Darkness is due in town in two days? (And watch them sweat when you only give them a few of their normal tokens and tell them, "Let me know where you are when you use that last one . . .")

Of course, before you can *use* this system, all you need to do is find the time to make a list of activities for your game, maybe make a travel map for the city, find tokens, instruct your players . . .

Wanna borrow my blowtorch? You might find a use for it . . . especially if you've seen **Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle** lately.

--Steven Marsh

In Her Majesty's Service

Weapons And Equipment Of The Late Victorian British Soldier

by Hans-Christian Vortisch

*"We're marchin' on relief over Inja's coral strand,
Eight 'undred fightin' Englishmen, the Colonel, and the Band;
Ho! Get away, bullock man, you've 'eard the bugle blowed;
There's a regiment a comin' down the Grand Trunk Road."
--Rudyard Kipling, Route Marching*

This article details the armaments and equipment of the British Army and Navy for use in both historical campaigns ([GURPS China](#) and [GURPS Old West](#)) in the late 19th century, as well as a number of popular fictional settings, including [GURPS Castle Falkenstein](#), [GURPS Deadlands](#), and [GURPS Steampunk](#). The information will also prove valuable for *Cthulhu By Gaslight* and especially *Space: 1889*, although no game stats are provided for these systems.

A very short but useful introduction to warfare in the Victorian era can be found in *GURPS Steampunk* (pp. ST54-60); the sidebar on p. ST55 gives British Army ranks and unit organization.

Personal Equipment

During the Victorian era, most line infantry and Highlander units stationed in the British Isles still wore their famous redcoat dress: a scarlet jacket, blue trousers with red stripes down the legs, and white helmet and load-bearing equipment. Scottish troops from the Highlands substituted a kilt (or trews, tartan-patterned trousers). The white helmet and load-bearing gear were often stained with tea to reduce the highly visible contrast. Those units stationed in India wore more suitable khaki uniforms from 1885, and similar subdued dress was issued in limited numbers and on special campaigns from 1884; it was not until 1896 that khaki field dress started to fully replace the old colored types in all British Army combat units.

Each infantry soldier carried a greatcoat, spare shirt, trousers, socks and drawers, towel, and soap wrapped into a blanket and waterproof cape. This pack weighed 14 lbs. Together with the mess tin (1 lb.), a two-pint canteen (3 lbs.), boots and clothing (12 lbs.), Pattern 1884 combination entrenching tool (3 lbs., could be used as pick or shovel, p. HT95), and two days' rations of biscuits (2 lbs.), each man carried 33 lbs. apart from his weapons and ammunition (and not very comfortably -- the load-bearing arrangements were ill-designed, increasing Fatigue when on the march or in combat). Tents or other bivouac gear was seldom available; if it was, it was stowed on the pack animals.

In 1888 the Slade-Wallace valise (load-bearing) equipment was adopted, which had two belt pouches for .450 Martini-Henry ammunition; one held 40 rounds (3 lbs. for the ammo alone), the other 30 (2.25 lbs.). In 1889 pouches for .303 SAA ammo were introduced, which held 50 rounds (2.8 lbs.) and 40 rounds (2.25 lbs.). These were replaced in 1890 with new pouches holding 50 rounds each. For a short time, a separate pouch for a single magazine for the Lee-Metford Mk I was carried as well. From 1882, Cavalry and Mounted Infantry wore a cartridge bandolier holding 50 rounds over the left shoulder instead of the valise equipment.

Instead of the rifle and associated equipment, officers carried a sword, revolver, ammunition pouch with 20 rounds (1 lbs.), and field glasses or a telescope (pp. HT102, ST90). Many also chose to carry a small flask of whisky, pipe and tobacco, matches, and notebook and pencil.

Swords

The Cavalry, Horse Artillery, Foot Artillery, Engineers, Bandmen, and Hospital Corpsmen were issued a slightly curved, single-edged broadsword for all ranks, and officers of all services also carried one. Infantry types included the Sword

Pattern 1864, Pattern 1882, and Pattern 1885, which proved too light and bent or broke too easily. They were therefore replaced by the slightly heavier Sword Pattern 1890. Although the latter was intended for both cutting and thrusting, it was not optimally designed for either.

All had a 34.5-inch *Average* blade and a bowl hilt (treat as basket hilt, p. CII23). The weight given in the table excludes the scabbard (+1.6 lbs.).

Cavalry swords included the Pattern 1885 and the Pattern 1890; these had the same blade lengths, but were lighter than the infantry types, as were their scabbards (+0.6 lbs.).

The shortsword issued to Foot Artillery was shorter, with a 23.5-inch *Average* blade and a bowl hilt (treat as basket hilt, p. CII23). The weight excludes the scabbard (+0.4 lbs.).

Lances

The Cavalry used lances until 1903. The standard weapon was the Lance Pattern 1868, a nine-foot long bamboo shaft with a small point and a ball butt. Bamboo had the advantage that it did not warp in tropical climates. However, it was replaced by an ash shaft when the Pattern 1885 was introduced (which was otherwise identical).

Revolvers

All senior NCOs (Military Rank 2), trumpeters, and team drivers were issued a revolver. Officers had to acquire their own sidearm (see BOX).

Adams Mk II, 11.5×18mmR (.450 Adams), Great Britain, 1872 (Holdout -1)
A double-action revolver of hinged-frame design, based on the earlier .450 Adams Mk I. That was a converted percussion-fired .442 Beaumont-Adams (p. HT109). The Adams Mk II fired a blackpowder cartridge. Also see p. HT109.

The *Mk III* (1872-1880) was practically identical.

Enfield Mk I, 11×18mmR (.442 Enfield), Great Britain, 1880-1882 (Holdout -1)
This double-action revolver was a classic English hinged-frame design. It replaced the *Adams Mk II* and *Mk III*. Those for service in India were nickel-plated to protect them against corrosion. It fired a blackpowder cartridge.

Enfield Mk II, 11.7×22mmR (.476 Enfield), Great Britain, 1882-1887 (Holdout -1)

This weapon replaced the *Enfield Mk I*. The chief difference was the larger caliber. The soft lead bullet of the blackpowder-loaded .476 Enfield had a clay wedge in the tip, which caused it to expand massively (not unlike a Hollow-Point, pp. HT7, MF4-5). This made it effective, but also led to its ban under the 1899 Hague Convention.

Webley Mk I, 11×18mmR (.442 Enfield), Great Britain, 1887-1894 (Holdout -1)

The successor to the *Enfield* designs, the Webley Mk I was also a hinged-frame, double-action design, but based on the commercial Webley-Green weapon. It featured a self-ejector. While chambered for the 11×18mmR (.442 Enfield), it was also able to fire the 11.5×20mmR (.455 SAA) and 11.7×22mmR (.476 Enfield). The grip's shape was of the so-called bird's head design and featured a lanyard ring. Most went to the Navy. Also see p. HT110.

Webley Mk II, 11.5×20mmR (.455 SAA), Great Britain, 1894-1897 (Holdout -1)
Slightly modified *Webley Mk I*, chambered for the new standard ammunition and also featuring a new hammer with larger spur and reconfigured grip shape.

Privately Purchased Handguns

British officers were expected to furnish their sidearms at their own expense, typically bought at Richard-Westley's of London, or the famous Army & Navy Co-operative Society outlets. While many chose the regulation revolvers, some opted for other weapons, especially customized and longer-barreled high-end revolvers such as the Webley-Kaufmann or Webley-Wilkinson (p. HT110), the latter being sold together with a sword produced by the famous maker of cutlery.

Some officers selected less obvious choices, including so-called "howdah" pistols and early automatic pistols. Winston Churchill himself, then a lieutenant and war correspondent, used a Mauser C96 (pp. HT108, W94) instead of a revolver in the 1898 Omdurman campaign.

Lancaster Pistol, 12×22mmR (.476 Enfield), UK, 1885-1900 (Holdout -2)
This "howdah"-type handgun

The *Mk I** (1894-1897), *Mk III* (1897-1899), and *Mk IV* (1899-1904) were functionally identical.

Rifles

*"When 'arf of your bullets fly wide in the dirch,
Don't call your Martini a cross-eyed old bitch.
She's human as your are -- you treat her as sich
An' she'll fight for the young British soldier."
--Rudyard Kipling, The Young British Soldier*

Martini-Henry Mk III, 11.43×59mmR (.450 Martini-Henry), Great Britain, 1879-1889 (Holdout -7)

The perfected version of the Martini-Henry single-shot breechloading rifle that had started to replace the Snider-modified Enfield Pattern 1853 (p. HT113) in 1874. It continued in service for a long time, into the 20th century with some units. The cartridge was loaded with blackpowder. Also see p. HT113.

Martini-Metford Mk VI, 7.7×56mmR (.303 SAA), Great Britain, 1889-1890 (Holdout -7)

Originally known as the Martini-Henry Mk VI, this was converted from the Martini-Henry Mk II by replacing the barrel, breech block, extractor, sights and other smaller components, in order to fire the newly adopted small-bore blackpowder cartridge. All conversions were made by the Birmingham Small Arms & Metal Co. Most were directly sent to the colonies, including to Australia, Canada, and South Africa.

Martini-Metford Mk I Carbine, 7.7×56mmR (.303 SAA), Great Britain, 1892-1894 (Holdout -6)

This was a converted Martini-Henry Mk I cavalry carbine rechambered to the new small-bore caliber by the Henry Rifled Barrel Co.

The *Mk I**, *Mk II*, *Mk II**, *Mk III*, and *Mk III** were very similar.

Lee-Metford Mk I, 7.7×56mmR (.303 SAA), Great Britain, 1889-1892 (Holdout -7)

Adopted in December 1888 and first issued in 1889 (but not widely seen until 1895), this weapon slowly superseded the Martini-Henry designs with the British Army. It combined the turnbolt action and magazine of James Lee and the rifled barrel designed by William Metford into a quick-firing, accurate weapon. The magazine was fitted with a cut-off, to allow use as a single-shot weapon (conserving ammunition). The shooter would reload after every shot, but could use the full magazine when necessary. Furthermore, the magazine was removable, which allowed it to be quickly replaced in an emergency (for a time, each soldier was issued two magazines, one in the weapon and one as spare on the belt). Also see p. HT114.

A cleaning rod was carried below the barrel, inserted into the forestock. An oil-bottle and jag were stored in the buttstock. When fitted with the 12-inch *Average* bayonet (+0.9 lbs.), use Spear -1 skill (Dam thr+3, Reach 1, 2).

The rifle was made at the Royal Small Arms Factory, Enfield (RSAF), as well as the Birmingham Small Arms & Metal Co. Ltd. (BSA) and the London Small Arms Co. (LSA).

had four barrels bored into one rectangular barrel block. It had a unique and fast double-action trigger, which allowed very rapid fire. The usual chambering was the contemporary British service caliber, but it was also made in .380 Webley (Dam 1d+1), .450 Adams (Dam 1d+2+), and .500 Webley (Dam 2d+). Lancaster pistols were popular with British officers, as the gun was more reliable than revolvers. Hunters used it as close-in defense weapon against tigers and other predators. Also see p. HT111.

Borchardt Mod. 1893, 7.63×25mm Borchardt, Germany, 1894-1897 (Holdout -3)

The first successful self-loading pistol, developed by Hugo Borchardt and made by Loewe & Co. of Berlin. It had a toggle-lock action similar to the later Luger pistol (Georg Luger was assistant to Borchardt at the time), and fed from a detachable magazine in the grip. However, it was a bulky and clumsy weapon, and difficult to shoot single-handed (-2 to Guns (Pistol) skill). Most people used it as a take-down carbine, as it was delivered with a detachable shoulder stock. This featured a leather holster and allowed the weapon to be carried on the belt or saddle ring. It was sold in a presentation case with matching stock, four magazines, and accessories; it was apparently popular with British officers (even though regulations required a weapon able to chamber the .455 SAA). The round was interchangeable with the 7.63×25mm Mauser, but slightly weaker.

In 1892, it was improved to the *Mk I** configuration. The chief modification was the introduction of cordite ammunition (smokeless propellant, pp. HT27-28) instead of blackpowder, which necessitated different sights.

Lee-Metford Mk II, 7.7×56mmR (.303 SAA), Great Britain, 1892-1895
(Holdout -7)

This weapon was, like the *Mk I**, intended to fire smokeless ammunition. In addition, it introduced a double-row 10-round magazine in place of the old single-row 8-round magazine.

The *Mk II** of 1895 differed in minor details such as a slightly longer bolt and a new safety.

Lee-Metford Mk I Carbine, 7.7×56mmR (.303 SAA), Great Britain, 1894-1895
(Holdout -6)

This cavalry carbine was based on the *Mk II* rifle, but differed in the shorter barrel, smaller magazine, and various minor details. Issued from 1897.

Lee-Enfield Mk I, 7.7×56mmR (.303 SAA), Great Britain, 1895-1902 (Holdout -7)

Much the same as the *Lee-Metford Mk II**, differing only in the rifling, since the Metford rifling was eroded by the hotter cordite. Issued from 1900.

Machine Guns

Machine guns were originally only used by the Royal Artillery and Royal Navy; most campaigns of the era were fought with naval weapons crewed by sailors detached to regular Army units. In 1891 machine guns (especially the Maxim patterns) first became available to Infantry, Mounted Infantry, and Cavalry units as well. However, the full potential of the machine gun was never appreciated in the entire period, it being seen as an auxiliary weapon, an inferior version of the artillery.

Machine guns were nominally attached at brigade level (some 3,000 men), but often assigned to smaller units in colonial warfare. They were grouped in two-gun sections, each with one officer and 17 enlisted in the Cavalry or Mounted Infantry, or 12 enlisted in the Infantry. Seven respectively four of the enlisted were team drivers. In addition, two two-horse carts with ammunition and one with foray for the horses were included.

Gatling Mk I, 11.43×63mmR (.450 Gardner-Gatling), Great Britain, 1874-1880s

*"The sand of the desert is sodden red,
Red with the wreck of the square that broke.
And the Gatling's jammed and the Colonel dead
And the regiment blind with dust and smoke."*

--Henry Newbolt, *Vitai Lampada*

The Gatling gun was an icon of its era. It was patented by Dr. Richard Gatling of Indiana in 1862, and originally had four barrels. The prototype used percussion-

Ammo Supply

Ammunition for the Martini-Henry, Gatling, and Nordenfelt came in sturdy 0.54-cf wooden boxes holding 600 rounds and massing 80 lbs. They were tin-lined and tightly closed with screws to protect the contents against the elements. This proved to be a very unfortunate arrangement, when in 1879 at Isandhlanwa the troops became hardpressed for ammo, and not enough screwdrivers (not to speak of quartermasters) were at hand to open the boxes -- the soldiers desparately hacked at the copper bands with axes and bayonets . . . and suffered a sound defeat at the hands of the Zulus.

A crate of .450 Martini-Henry ammunition was \$15.

Notes on Mechanical Machine Guns

The tactical use of early machine guns was ill-understood at first. They were almost invariably mounted on heavy artillery carriages, and some of the early guns couldn't even be traversed, which means the whole carriage had to be moved to aim the gun, just like an artillery piece. Many early guns therefore fired multiple projectile rounds like Shot (pp. HT18-19, MF8) to give at least some spread of fire. Consequently, they weren't used very effectively, proving their worth only on the defensive and in fortified positions. With time, however, the mounts lightened (until eventually the tripod appeared in the 1870s), and generally allowed a 180-degree arc of fire. At the same time,

fired 14.7mm paper cartridges which were inserted into steel cylinders and fed from a gravity hopper (pp. HT117, OW87). The feed system was copied from the earlier Coffee Mill Gun: the cylinders were dropped into the hopper, a crank on the right side of the breech was turned, firing a round and ejecting the cylinder. At the same time, the next barrel was brought with a new round into position. Six of these were made by Greenwood & Co., but they were destroyed in a fire before any could be sold.

Later that year, Gatling offered an improved 6-barreled pattern chambered for the then modern 14.7×44mmR (.58 Berdan) rimfire cartridge. It was mounted on a wooden artillery carriage, which was pulled by a limber and horse team. The weapons were made on his behalf by McWhinny, Rindge & Co. Twelve M1862 guns were bought by General Butler of the Union Army and used during the American Civil War. The *New York Times* acquired three which were manned by staff in June 1863 against rioters in New York City (but never fired).

The M1866 in 12.7×53mmR (.50-70 Government), made by Colt, was the original series production model, the first 50 being taken into U.S. Army service in 1867. It was mounted on an artillery carriage, pulled by a limber and four horses.

Armstrong & Co. of England made a similar model under license, known as the Gatling Mk I, which was adopted in 1870 by the British military and chambered for the 11.43×63mmR (.450 Gardner-Gatling) blackpowder cartridge. The guns were not delivered until 1874, and most went to the British Navy; consequently, many colonial operations included a detachment of Naval gunners. The Mk I had ten barrels and used Broadwell drum magazines, which consisted of a circular cluster of several gravity magazines. The 352-round Broadwell drum had 16 vertical cells, each holding 22 rounds, while the 250-round drum (AWt 50) had 16 vertical cells, each holding 15 rounds. After all rounds of a vertical cell had been fired, the gunner (or preferably, a loader) had to manually rotate the drum so that the next cell was aligned with the feeder (2 seconds). Installing a new drum took 10 seconds. The weapon was mounted on a wooden artillery carriage and required a limber (387 lbs.) and four horses for movement. It was less reliable than other Gatling variants because of the British Boxer-type cartridges, whose rims were ripped apart by the extractors, causing a jam.

See p. ST52 for illustration (note Broadwell drum). ***GURPS High-Tech, First Edition***, p. 62 shows a Colt-made Gatling M1877, which was similar.

Gatling Mk I, 16.5×97mmR (.650 Gatling), Great Britain, 1875-1878

The Royal Navy used the Armstrong-made Gatling Mk I in a larger caliber as deck-mounted gun from 1875. It had ten barrels and fed from a 60-round Broadwell drum, with 10 cells each holding 6 rounds.

It was also mounted on a carriage for land-use; the limber was 888 lbs.

These weapons were first used in the 1877 clash with the Peruvian gunboat *Huàscar* and then in land warfare against the Zulus.

Hotchkiss Q.F. 1-pr Mk I, 37×94mmR Hotchkiss (1-pounder), Great Britain, 1884-1889

Benjamin Hotchkiss, an American living in France, invented a machine cannon externally similar to the Gatling weapons in 1871 (pp. HT117, OW87). In 1875, he built a factory in St. Denis near Paris, and started producing the weapon for

rates of fire, ammunition feeds, and the ammunition itself were improved.

As detailed on pp. HT73 and VE107, rate of fire of mechanical machine guns depends on the gunner, calculated from a formula depending on gun type (note that the formula given here differs from what those books say; it is based on the actual rates quoted for the weapons):

Gardner/Gatling/Nordenfelt -- maximum RoF is (skill+ST)/2.

Hotchkiss -- maximum RoF is (skill+ST)/5.

All guns have a mechanical upper limit, which cannot be increased regardless of skill (noted as $RoF = n$ in this article, where n is the maximum number of shots possible). For example, early Gatlings couldn't fire faster than RoF 5, even if skill and ST would allow for more. Also, the faster the gunner cranks, the higher the chance of a jam or other malfunction -- Malf will get worse by one level if RoF exceeds 5 or 66% of the listed maximum RoF, whichever is higher.

Alternative Machine Guns for Fictional Adventures

Although these specific weapons -- fictional in these chamberings and configurations -- were never adopted by the British military, the guns (and the technical principles underlying them) are real, and all dates of appearance are historical. They are well-suited to small group campaigns, since they are lighter and more easily transportable

the world market. The basic gun had five revolving barrels and was designed to fire a 1-lbs. blackpowder shell (SAPLE), the smallest exploding round allowed under the 1868 St. Petersburg Declaration. Its intended use was the defense against the torpedo boats then gaining popularity (the contemporary torpedoes had a range of 400 yards, while the guns typically opened fire at 1,000 yards). Other, less commonly used ammo was Solid (Dam 10d++), Canister (Dam 1d++, 1/2D 150, Max 500, WPS 1.6), APLE (available from the late 1880s, Dam 6d×2(2) plus 1d-4 [2d], WPS 1.5), and from around the turn of the century, SAPHE (Dam 10d(0.5) plus 1d [3d], WPS 1.5). It fed from an open 10-round gravity-feed hopper. A loader could top up the hopper with 10-round charger clips or loose rounds while the gun was firing. A shipboard installation weighed 1,181 lbs. (a traversing pintle mount, including gun), the weight in the table is for the gun and an artillery carriage. The limber stored 200 loose rounds and 100 rounds in clips.

Armstrong & Co. in England made it as the *Ordnance, Quick-Firing, 1-pr Mk I* for both the Royal Navy and export from 1884.

Gardner Mk I, 11.43×63mmR (.450 Gardner-Gatling), Great Britain, 1884-1889

This weapon was invented in 1874 by William Gardner of Ohio. The Gardner had two fixed barrels side-by-side, both sheathed in a common brass jacket for protection. Upon turning the crank on the right side, the barrels fired alternately. Each barrel fed from a top-mounted Parkhurst feeding rail, which could be topped up during firing by a loader. The Gardner was considered to be more reliable than the Gatling. It was also cheaper and lighter. From 1875, small numbers of guns were made by Pratt & Whitney of Connecticut. However, main production of the Gardner took place at the Royal Small Arms Factory, Enfield. The Mk I detailed in the table and adopted as standard weapon by the Royal Navy was a deck weapon mounted on a pedestal mount with gun shield (PD 4, DR 10). It used 30-round Parkhurst feeders.

In 1889, the Gardner Mk I was adopted by the British Army in 11.43×59mmR (.450 Martini-Henry), superseding the earlier *Gatling Mk I*. It used 20-round Parkhurst feeders and was mounted on a light folding tripod; Malf Crit, Dam 5d+, Ewt 138+40, AWt 4, RoF =10*, Shots 2×20, Cost \$300.

Nordenfelt Mk I, 11.43×63mmR (.450 Gardner-Gatling), Great Britain, 1884-1890s

This weapon was invented in 1873 by Helge Palmcranz of Sweden (p. HT117). The businessman Thorsten Nordenfelt took out patents under his name, set up factories in Sweden, Spain, and England, and the gun was soon adopted by most European navies. The weapon consisted of a number of barrels side-by-side, which were fired in sequence by working a lever on the right side of the gun back-and-forth. It fed from a hopper magazine.

The Nordenfelt Mk I of 1884 was made in England by the Nordenfelt Guns & Munitions Co. As a standard shipboard anti-personnel weapon in service with the Royal Navy, it was chambered for the .450 Gardner-Gatling cartridge. The gun had five barrels and a closed 100-round hopper magazine. The parapet mount was 168 lbs.

The *Nordenfelt Mk II* of 1886 was used by Army and Navy, and slightly lighter at Ewt 133, but otherwise identical.

Nordenfelt Mk I, 25×94mmR (1-inch), Great Britain, 1878-1890s

than the contemporary issue weapons, and more readily embody the modern picture of the machine gun.

Gatling Mk I Camel Gun, 11.43×63mmR (.450 Gardner-Gatling), Great Britain, 1875

The U.S. Army acquired the M1874 Camel Gun in .45-70 Springfield, so named because it was proposed to be mounted on a camel saddle and fired from the back of the animal (lying down -- *not* on the move). While this was almost certainly nothing but a selling ploy (and the U.S. Army did not regularly employ camels anyway), it could also be fitted to the howdah of an elephant (or Martian *ruumet breehr* . . .). Even without such an animal, it was very useful because of its much lighter weight than other Gatlings.

The (fictional) Gatling Mk I Camel Gun was made in England, chambered for the standard British machine gun cartridge, and issued to colonial troops. It had shorter barrels than the standard *Gatling Mk I*, encased in a bronze sleeve. It was also much lighter. Apart from the saddle mount (\$110), it could be fixed on a tripod (45 lbs., \$125), or small cavalry cart (925 lbs. including gun and ammo, \$300), which required only one horse on good roads (two on bad ones) and stored four loaded 250-round Broadwell drum magazines and 2,000 loose rounds in ammo chests.

Electric Gatling Machine Gun Mk I, 7.7×56mmR (.303 SAA), Great Britain, 1893

In 1893, Dr. Gatling patented a fully electric weapon based on his earlier designs, chambered

The Royal Navy made much use of the four-barreled Nordenfelt Mk I, adopted in 1878 to replace the .650 *Gatling Mk I*. It was the first gun in history to fire AP ammunition (pp. HT7, MF6, VE101), another answer to the threat of torpedo boats.

See **GURPS High-Tech, First Edition**, p. 119 for illustration (note closed hopper magazine).

Nordenfelt Mk I, 11.43×59mmR (.450 Martini-Henry), Great Britain, 1887-1880s

In 1887, the British Army adopted the three-barreled Nordenfelt Mk I in 11.43×59mmR (.450 Martini-Henry). It was mounted on a light wheeled carriage.

Technically, the Nordenfelt guns were made obsolete by the *Maxim*, but they continued to see service for years. During the 1900 Boxer Rebellion in China (pp. CH98-99 and MA8-9), the Royal Marines used one of these defending the Legation Quarters in Peking.

From 1898, many British Nordenfelts were converted to the 7.7×56mmR (.303 SAA) cartridge (Dam 6d+2, Ewt 110), and used for fortress defense.

Vickers-Maxim Mk I, 11.43×59mmR (.450 Martini-Henry), Great Britain, 1889-1897

Vickers-Maxim Mk I, 7.7×56mmR (.303 SAA), Great Britain, 1889-1912

*"He stood upon a little mound
Cast his lethargic eyes around
And said beneath his breath:
'Whatever happens we have got
The Maxim gun, and they have not.'"*
-- Hilaire Belloc, *The Modern Traveller*

Invented by Hiram Maxim in 1883 in a small shop in London, this was the first truly automatic firearm, and a milestone in the history of machine guns (pp. HT117-118). It introduced the self-loading action and made popular the ammunition belt. It was water-cooled (the sleeve around the barrel was filled with 7.5 pints of water). By 1887, after years of improving his design, Maxim had a few pre-production guns made for him at Vickers of Crayford, Kent, chambered for the 11.43×59mmR (.450 Martini-Henry) blackpowder round; Dam 5d+, 1/2D 700, Max 2,500, Ewt 60+100, AWt 32, RoF 10, Shots 333, Rcl -1. Three were ordered by the British Government for testing.

In 1889, it was adopted in slightly modified form by the British Army in both 11.43×59mmR (.450 Martini-Henry) and the new smokeless 7.7×56mmR (.303 SAA). Both variants were originally mounted on an artillery carriage (1,456 lbs. including gun and limber), but from 1897 also on a tripod (48 lbs. without gun). The carriage was pulled by one horse in Infantry units, and by two horses in Cavalry and Mounted Infantry units. The tripod allowed the mount and gun to be carried by a single mule. The belts were stored in heavy wooden chests; because of their excessive weight, a 150-round belt was introduced for the .450-variant in 1893 (AWt 20).

They were made by the Maxim-Nordenfelt Guns & Ammunition Co., whose board included Maxim, Thorsten Nordenfelt, and Albert Vickers.

for the 7.62×59mmR (.30-40 Krag) round. It was a 10-barreled weapon, water-cooled and with the motor included *inside* its bronze housing. (Already in 1890 the Crocker-Wheeler Motor Co. had experimentally attached an external motor to an M1889-pattern gun, but this less satisfying arrangement never caught on.) The cyclic rate attainable was a marvelous 3,000 rounds per minute (a RoF of 50 that would not be reached again until the General Electric M61 Vulcan cannon was introduced in 1953; see "[Autocannons in GURPS](#)"). The Electric Gatling Gun was designed for naval use, where the ship's generators could provide electrical power. It was never made in production quantities.

The (fictional) Electric Gatling Gun Mk I, made at Enfield, was instantly adopted by the British authorities, who insisted on the weapon being chambered for their new smokeless .303 cartridge (it being thus the TL(5+1) equivalent of the General Electric M134 minigun introduced in 1963, pp. HT119-120). The gun fed from the side using 20-round metal feed strips.

The Electric Gatling Gun Mk I is a perfect weapon for steam-powered automata or battlesuits (pp. ST76-77), and would be especially deadly against airships (pp. ST80-81), light liftwood vessels, and other aerial vehicles. Note that it is a different weapon from the entirely fictional *Electrical Gatling* on p. ST88.

Nordenfelt Mk I Single-Barrel Machine Gun, 11.43×59mmR (.450 Martini-Henry), Great

The weapons reached the troops in 1891 in batteries of two, and were first used in Rhodesia in 1893, then Afghanistan in 1895, and from then on, everywhere the British fought. In 1912, it was replaced in production by the Vickers Mk I (pp. HT118, W96), which was an improved version.

(In 1889, the British Navy also adopted the *Maxim Q.F. 1-pr Mk I*, which was an enlarged version firing the same 37×94mmR shells as the *Hotchkiss Q.F. 1-pr Mk I*. See "[Autocannons in GURPS](#)" for a description and stats.)

Cannons

*"They sends us along where the roads are, but mostly we goes where they ain't
We'd climb up the side of a sign-board an' trust to the stick o' the paint
We've chivied the Naga an' Looshai, we've give the Afreedee-man fits,
For we fancies ourselves at two thousand, we guns that are built in two bits --
'Tss! 'Tss!*

For you all love the screw-guns . . ."

-- Rudyard Kipling, *Screw-guns*

Royal Gun Factory 2.5-inch R.M.L. Mk II, 63.5mm (7-pounder), Great Britain, 1879-1880s

The 2.5-inch Rifle, Muzzle-Loaded, Mark I was adopted in 1879 by the Royal Artillery for service as a light mountain gun. It had been proposed two years earlier by Colonel Le Mesurier, who envisioned a steel gun made in two parts (to allow transportation on pack animals) which screwed together. The breech portion was 201 lbs., the muzzle portion 199 lbs. Thus it received its famous nickname, the "Screw-gun." The Elswick Ordnance Co. made 12 Mk I guns in 1879, and after successful service in Afghanistan that year, a much larger number were made as the *Mk II* by the Royal Gun Factory. Gun and carriage were carried by five mules or four camels (alternatively by four Martian *gashants* or Venusian *pacyosauri*), with additional animals required for the ammunition. (Note that occasionally, stampeding animals could and did rob entire units of their only artillery support.) A battery had six guns, but typical deployment was in sections of two, one always on the move, covered by the second. The Screw Gun could be assembled and loaded in 20 seconds by a trained crew. Apart from LE, it also fired Shrapnel (Dam 10d+, Max 3,300, WPS 10), Canister (Dam 10d+, 1/2D 130, Max 650), and Starshell. Even though it was actually one of the heaviest weapons of its type, and a blackpowder muzzleloader when many countries adopted modern breechloaders, it was considered the finest mountain gun of its day. It became obsolete with the widespread introduction of smokeless powder -- each time it was fired, it created large amounts of smoke, thus announcing its position to the enemy. This became painfully clear during the Boer War, and it was removed from service in 1903.

Rockets

Hale 9-pr War Rocket Mk I, 63.5mm, Great Britain, 1867-1899

The Hale gunpowder rocket was invented by William Hale in 1844, introducing spinning propulsion to dispense with the guidance stick of earlier designs like the Congreve pattern (p. ST89), which made it both more accurate and lighter. It was fired from a *rocket machine*, a trough on a light tripod. Some 2,000 57mm (6-pounder) rockets were available to the U.S. Army Rocket Brigade in the Mexican War (1846-1848). Hale rockets were also adopted by several European forces, notably the Austrian Rocket Corps, the Dutch colonial troops, and the Russian

Britain, 1882

This (non-fictional) weapon was a single barrel light machine gun version of the Nordenfelt designs, which was not officially adopted by any military, but offered unheard of mobility and firepower for a small section (the first light machine gun in history!). Fewer than ten were purchased by the Royal Navy for trials; it doesn't stretch credibility for the British Army to adopt it in larger numbers in a fictional campaign. It functions like the multi-barrel Nordenfelt guns above and feeds from a gravity hopper magazine.

It was mounted on a small folding tripod (15 lbs) and featured a wire shoulder stock.

Basil Zaharoff Maxim's "Merchant Of Death"

Basil Zaharoff (1849-1936) was one of the most important arms dealers in the early 20th century, supplying and spying for the Allies during WWI. Also known as "the mystery man of Europe," he was highly decorated by the French and knighted for his efforts by the British (and immortalized as Basil Bazarov of Korrupt Arms GmbH in the comic series *Tintin* . . .).

Born Basileios Zacharias in Mugla, Turkey, he spent his youth in Russia, before working for his uncle in the cloth trade in Istanbul. In 1866, he was sent to London for education, and in 1870 became his uncle's London representative. Two years later he was accused of

Artillery.

Although Hale rockets were used experimentally in the Crimean War, the Royal Artillery was late to see their advantage (even though the British had used rockets of earlier designs extensively during the early 19th century). The pattern detailed here was finally adopted in 1867. However, from then on, it was widely used in the various colonial wars, showing its age first in the 1890s, when modern breech-loading artillery made it obsolete. The last were bought in 1899, and the British Army disbanded the Rocket Artillery in 1901. From 1870, the British military used only 9-pr and 24-pr sizes, and the latter was only used from ships and for sieges. The 9-pr was popular since it was light enough to be carried on pack animals, and could be used in areas like swamps, where even light mountain guns were of no use. It was launched from a trough in land service, or from tubes in naval service. A mule could carry two packs of six rockets each (a load of 202 lbs.); the disassembled trough and its associated carrying equipment added 32 lbs.

embezzlement, but acquitted of the charge. He left London for Greece under the assumed name of Z.B. Gortzacoff.

Soon, he was made sales agent of Nordenfelt for the Balkans. In 1888, Maxim and Nordenfelt joined forces in the Maxim-Nordenfelt Gun & Ammunition Co., which broadened Zaharoff's range of wares *and* his area of operations, extending to all of Eastern Europe, including Russia. When Vickers Co. purchased the company in 1895, he found he had still more weapons to offer and more markets to serve. Later he was made director of Vickers-Armstrong Co. Zaharoff became a millionaire from arms sales, and was reputed to hold shares in the German Krupp and Czech Skoda armament firms.

Zaharoff was fluent in several languages, and personally knew many important European statesmen. In the 1920s, he was accused of fomenting warfare and of secret political intrigue (in some German circles he was called the *Dämon* of Europe). He would be a valuable Contact to acquire for any PCs in need of heavy armaments as early as the 1880s, or could play a shadowy background figure in a Victorian *Espionage* adventure.

Notes

Swords use Broadsword

Weapon	Type	Damage	Reach	Wt	Min ST	Cost
Infantry Pattern 1885 imp	cut thr	sw+1 1	1	2.4	8	\$45
Infantry Pattern 1890 imp	cut thr	sw+1 1	1	2.6	8	\$50
Cavalry Pattern 1885 imp	cut thr	sw+1 1	1	2.1	8	\$45
Cavalry Pattern 1890 imp	cut thr	sw+1 1	1	1.9	8	\$50

Shortswords use Shortsword

Weapon	Type	Damage	Reach	Wt	Min ST	Cost
Foot Artillery Hanger imp	cut thr	sw 1	1	1.9	7	\$40

Lances use Lance

Weapon	Type	Damage	Reach	Wt	Min ST	Cost
Pattern 1868	imp	thr+3	4	6	12	\$10
Pattern 1885	imp	thr+3	4	6	12	\$10

Revolvers use Guns (Pistol)

Name	Malf	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt	AWt	WPS	RoF	Shots	ST	Rcl	Cost	TL
Adams Mk II, 11.5×18mmR	Crit	Cr	1d+1+	10	2	120	1,350	2.7	0.3	0.05	3~	6	11	-2	\$20	5
Adams Mk III, 11.5×18mmR	Crit	Cr	1d+1+	10	2	120	1,350	2.6	0.3	0.05	3~	6	11	-2	\$20	5
Enfield Mk I, 11×18mmR	Crit	Cr	1d+2+	10	2	150	1,500	2.8	0.3	0.05	3~	6	11	-2	\$25	5
Enfield Mk II, 11.7×22mmR	Crit	Cr	2d-1++	10	2	150	1,500	2.8	0.3	0.05	3~	6	11	-2	\$25	5
Webley Mk I, 11×18mmR	Crit	Cr	1d+2+	10	2	150	1,500	2.8	0.3	0.05	3~	6	11	-2	\$25	5
Webley Mk II, 11.5×20mmR	Crit	Cr	2d-1+	10	2	150	1,500	2.8	0.3	0.05	3~	6	11	-2	\$25	5

Pistols use Guns (Pistol)

Name	Malf	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt	AWt	WPS	RoF	Shots	ST	Rcl	Cost	TL
Lancaster Howdah, 11.7×22mmR	Ver	Cr	2d-1++	10	2	150	1,500	2.7	0.3	0.05	4~	4	11	-2	\$25	5
Borchardt Mod 1893, 7.63×25mm with shoulderstock	Crit	Cr	2d+1-	11	3	150	1,800	3.2	0.3	0.023	3~	6	11	-2	\$35	5
				12	6			4.2					10	-1		

Rifles use Guns (Rifle)

Name	Malf	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt	AWt	WPS	RoF	Shots	ST	Rcl	Cost	TL
Martini-Henry Mk III, 11.43×59mmR	crit	Cr	5d+	15	10	700	2,500	9.1	0.056	0.056	1/4	1	11	-2	\$25	5
Martini-Metford Mk VI, 7.7×56mmR	crit	Cr	6d+2	15	10	800	3,100	8.8	0.056	0.056	1/4	1	11	-2	\$25	5
Martini-Metford Mk I Carbine, 7.7×56mmR	crit	Cr	6d	12	8	500	2,800	8.1	0.056	0.056	1/4	1	11	-2	\$28	5
Lee-Metford Mk I, 7.7×56mmR	crit	Cr	6d+2	14	11	800	3,100	10	0.45	0.056	1	8	11	-2	\$30	5
Lee-Metford Mk II, 7.7×56mmR	crit	Cr	6d+2	14	11	800	3,100	9.9	0.56	0.056	1	10	11	-2	\$30	5
Lee-Metford Mk I Carbine, 7.7×56mmR	crit	Cr	6d	12	8	500	2,800	7.7	0.34	0.056	1	6	11	-2	\$33	5
Lee-Enfield Mk I, 7.7×56mmR	crit	Cr	6d+2	14	11	800	3,100	9.8	0.56	0.056	1	10	11	-2	\$35	5

Mechanical Machine Guns use Gunner (McMG)

Name	Malf	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	EWt	MWt	AWt	WPS	RoF	Shots	Rcl	Cost	TL
Gardner Mk I, 11.43×63mmR	16	Cr	5d+	20	9	700	2,500	92	168	6	0.075	=10*	2×30	-1	\$1,000	5
Gatling Mk I, 11.43×63mmR	15	Cr	5d+	25	9	700	2,500	444	(incl MWt)	60	0.075	=10*	16×22	-1	\$1,300	5
Gatling Mk I, 16.5×97mmR	16	Cr	9d+1++	25	9	1,000	4,400	817	(incl MWt)	30	0.25	=7*	10×6	-1	\$1,900	5
Gatling Mk I Camel Gun, 11.43×63mmR	15	Cr	5d+	25	9	700	2,500	135	45	60	0.075	=10*	16×22	-1	\$925	5
Hotchkiss Q.F. 1-pr Mk I, 37×94mmR	16	Cr	5d×2(0.5)+1d-3[2d]	25	10	900	3,300	1,047	1,092	16	1.5	=2*	10	-1	\$1,200	5
Nordenfelt Mk I, 11.43×59mmR	16	Cr	5d+	20	9	700	2,500	93	45	12	0.075	=5*	77	-1	\$1,000	5
Nordenfelt Mk I, 11.43×63mmR	16	Cr	5d+	20	9	700	2,500	154	45	15	0.075	=15*	100	-1	\$1,200	5
Nordenfelt Mk I, 25×94mmR	16	Cr	5d×2(2)++	25	9	1,000	4,500	440	260	24	0.6	=4*	40	-1	\$1,500	5
Nordenfelt 1-Barrel Mk I, 11.43×59mmR	16	Cr	5d+	20	9	700	2,500	15	15	4	0.075	=3*	40	-1	\$750	5

Machine Guns use Gunner (MG)

Electric Gatling Mk I, 7.7×56mmR	crit	Cr	5d+	25	10	800	3,100	250	50				1.3	0.056	50	20	-1	\$2,000	5+1
Maxim Mk I, 7.7×56mmR	crit	Cr	6d+2	20	10	800	3,100	60	48	25	0.056	10	250	-1	\$125	5			
Maxim Mk I, 11.43×59mmR	crit	Cr	5d+	20	10	700	2,500	60	48	34	0.075	10	250	-1	\$125	5			

Cannons use Gunner (Cannon)

Name	Malf	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	EWt	MWt	AWt	WPS	RoF	Shots	Cost	TL
R.M.L. Mk II, 63.5mm	16	Cr	7d×4(0.5)+6d[4d]	25	10	800	4,000	400	400	-	12	1/11	1	\$1,500	5

Rockets use Gunner (Rocket)

Name	Malf	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	EWt	AWt	WPS	Shots	Cost	TL
Hale 9-pr Mk I, 63.5mm	16	Exp*	6d[4d]	-	6	1,200	3,400	27	-	8.4	1	\$2.50	5

Ewt: Empty weight of the gun, in pounds.

Mwt: Weight of the usual mount, in pounds.

AWt: Weight of the standard ammunition container, in pounds.

WPS: Weight of a single round, or of a single projectile and loose powder, in pounds.

Cost: Cost with mount and limber, as applicable. Given in U.S. dollars; for most of the period, \$5 roughly equal 1 pound sterling.



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* * *

Special thanks go out to Volker Bach (for the quotes and photos), Nigel McCarty-Eigenmann (info on blades), andi jones (edits and illustration), Tony Williams (material on the Hotchkiss revolver cannon), and the Hellions for the usual support.

Lean Gaming

Tips for Trimming the Fat from Your Sluggish Adventure

by Aaron Webb

If your GM style tends to be gravity challenged, chances are your players are suffering from the effects of adventure obesity. Take heart! There are many ways to trim that unwanted fat and whip your gaming sessions into shape.

Level of Detail

Start by committing to memory the phrase "I will not take myself too seriously." It's true. One of the main reasons for unnecessary bulk in an adventure is cramming in too much detail, oftentimes caused by the GM's own infatuation with his world. While not enough detail leaves quests lifeless and bland, too much can bog down the entire evening. And while realism helps players to relate their fictitious escapades to their actual lives, too much can make them rue the day they decided to join the party. The trick is to find a good balance and apply that balance consistently.

Here are a few suggestions for trimming down the level of detail:

- **Avoid long-windedness.** Watch out for lengthy introductions, filibuster speeches by NPCs, unrelated background information, and puzzles or items that require extensive reading. The players came to play, not to be an audience for the GM's performance.
- **Keep it real, but not too real.** When Reco the Bullheaded lowers his shoulder to smash through the dungeon door, he shouldn't have to worry about getting splinters. Some things are better left to real life. Most hiccups in this department stem from the GM's desire to inflict damage or consequences for non-plot-related actions. Before assigning penalties for character actions, ask: "Does this penalty relate to the plot or the environment?" If not, maybe the foolish actions of the PCs can be overlooked this time. Give them a warning or clever remark, then move on.
- **Too much stuff!** While it seems hardly possible to have too much money or too much equipment, at times having to keep track of all those copper pieces and the daily conversion rates to electrum can really put a damper on things. Consider using a single coin currency system or making general entries in equipment lists such as "clothes" instead of "underwear, socks, boots, belt, breeches, etc."
- **Less min-maxing and fewer specializations.** Min-maxing is the not-so-subtle art that many players practice of taking advantage of discrete groupings of ability scores and skills. A classic example is a warrior who consults the Intelligence table in the rulebook to see how low a score he can have before suffering a penalty. And many players get sucked into the bottomless pit of specialized options. While not always the case, a frequent result is that players become enamored with statistics and numbers instead of the soul or personality of their character. There's nothing wrong with wanting a character to be interesting or powerful, but if the focus is too much on the minutia, the game may grind to a halt as players consult the rules for their one-armed, min-maxed, dragon/elf half-breed during the middle of combat. Sometimes a good old warrior with an axe goes just as far. Fans of exceedingly complex characters may be surprised by just how refreshing it is to revisit classic simplicity.
- **Downsize it.** If you find that storming the castle or the police depot has become a loathsome and time-consuming task, try reducing the number of people or places the characters will encounter. Focus on the essential, and remove unimportant personalities or rooms.
- **No mazes.** Players who actually appreciate and enjoy navigating mazes are extremely rare. Most detest the thought of playing lab rat for the GM. Use the time that you save by not creating sprawling, complicated complexes, by putting it back into fewer but more interesting engagements or a richer plotline.
- **Use random events wisely.** Sometimes GMs add random or unusual encounters to their adventures in an attempt to simulate real life. These things have no bearing on the plot, but the players can't tell the difference. They treat the bunny that stumbles into the forest path as a dangerous adversary because they don't know that the GM just threw it in there for realism. A mere 20 minutes later, after scouring the bushes for hidden traps and

sketching out a detailed plan of attack, the bunny hops away. It's okay to throw in colorful or humorous events here and there, but make sure that they aren't accounting for more than their fair share of game time.

- **The Rule of Three.** Maybe great minds can handle all the intricacies of 10 sub-plots going on at the same time, or 20 different possible murder suspects, but most people prefer to have their options limited to a manageable number. Having too many plotlines or important characters to remember can leave players feeling lost or disinterested. If possible, avoid having more than three major options or developmental plotlines at any given time. This way, things remain interesting and uncertain but well within the average player's ability to grasp the situation fully and enjoy it.

Time Management

A good GM manages his time effectively and respects his players enough to see them off by a reasonable hour. There are few hardcore gamers who haven't had their share of all-night adventures lasting well into the morning, but typically those kinds of gaming sessions involve players who know what they're getting into. For weeknight get-togethers or for people who can't afford to go all night like they did in their youth, the responsibility falls upon the GM to set the pace and determine when the game will conclude. The GM is the only person with all the answers, the one who knows how many monsters and rooms are between the PCs and their final goal.

While no GM can perfectly predict the actions of the players or estimate exactly how long any encounter will take, most develop the aptitude for budgeting time into reasonable portions defined by phases of the storyline. It's usually a good idea to have an outline of the adventure, even if it's rough, with an estimation of how long each section of the adventure will last. Good GMs learn to pad their estimations to account for bathroom breaks, food, and general messing around. It's typically not a good idea for a GM to wall himself in by packing the allotted time with too much to do. In those cases, the adventure will usually run over the allotted time. By the end of the evening, the faithful players will be stifling yawns and watching the clock as they think about work or school the next day. Sure, it's always possible to cut off any adventure right in the middle and pick it up later, but it's even better when players are rewarded with a measure of plot resolution.

Here are some strategies for managing time effectively:

- **Mark the halfway point.** Even if a GM doesn't make a rigid schedule, sometimes it helps to identify the halfway point of the adventure. When that point is reached, a rough estimate can be made of when the adventure will conclude. If it becomes necessary, the GM can cut out portions or speed play to stay on track during the second half.
- **Give players a mental compass.** If players dawdle or slow down at a particular point in the adventure, consider helping them out by having them review out loud all of the facts that they already know. Sometimes an act as simple as this is enough to get them going again.
- **Have various speeds of game play.** Just like a VCR, GMs can fast forward the dull parts of the story. Cross-country journeys, ocean voyages, lengthy skill research, hunting, and many other time consuming tasks need not always be roleplayed, nor must they be completely devoid of character decision making. Consider using "condensed decisions" whereby the GM offers two or three options of varying danger, difficulty, time, and cost. For example, if an adventure requires that the characters travel by starship to the Moon of Solitude, allow them to select from a direct route that may take them through pirate space, or a safer route that will take longer but will avoid the dangers. A simple roll of dice can determine what ill effects, if any, befall the characters along the way.
- **Bypass planned portions of the adventure.** If things are lagging, sometimes the easiest way to conserve time is to simply bypass planned portions. Certainly, skipping an encounter is preferable to forcing the PCs to press through an adventure that the GM miscalculated. It's not the players' fault that the GM couldn't budget adventure time. Why should they suffer? In most cases, the GM won't lose the hard work that went into planning the skipped rooms or encounters; they can be incorporated into other adventures in the future.
- **Remove distractions.** Players can be easily distracted by real life. Whenever possible, make sure the players are well fed and ready to participate in the adventure. If a GM finds that players are more interested in bouncing a squishy ball off a sci-fi movie poster, consider getting rid of the ball (or the poster).

Being a great GM isn't only about having fantastic ideas or incredible plotlines. It's also about managing time and serving appropriately sized portions for the adventure-hungry players. The next time that work of genius fails to deliver the expected smiles and cheers, don't scrap the idea completely. Maybe all it needs is a little adjustment in the waistline keep it lean and mean.

Designer's Notes: GURPS WWII: Weird War II

by Kenneth Hite with William H. Stoddard

"Train them! Excite them! Arm them! . . . Then turn them loose on the Nazis!"

-- tagline, *The Dirty Dozen* (dir. Robert Aldrich, 1967)

And that, pretty much, is what I did. Captain Kinder calls the original Dirty Dozen "the most twisted, anti-social bunch of psychopathic deformities I have ever run into!" to which Lee Marvin responds, "Well, I can't think of a better way to fight a war." And with "cadre of professional writers" being the understood modern polite term for "twisted, anti-social bunch of psychopathic deformities," I can't think of a better way to write a game book.

This was, in fact, the approach I had decided on ever since Gene Seabolt first proposed **GURPS World War II** as a separate line. I wanted to see a book covering everything from Operation Sealion to the Hollow Earth, from Projekt Saucer to Superman, in one swell foop. But I didn't want to write the whole thing -- I didn't have the time then, and I still don't have the hard smarts now, needed to boil Goering's heroin dreams down to **GURPS'** brass tacks. So I proposed an "anthology book" like **GURPS Y2K**. I'd assemble a crack team of ragtag heroes -- er, top game writers -- to put the weirdness boot into the Axis. Then I'd write the outline, cherry-pick the easy stuff (the campaigning chapter and the four sample settings, including One With Everything), and set everyone loose with a chapter. Once they'd finished, I'd edit the thing together, insert box text and page references where necessary, and index the whole megillah from "Abwehr" to "Zombies." (As it turned out, I indexed it from "A-bomb, German" to "Zuse, Konrad.") Gene liked the idea, put me in touch with the only slightly less maniacal "Wild Bill" Stoddard (see "The Stoddard Narrative" box), and sold the package to Steve.

For the Alternate History chapter, I knew I could count on my collaborators on **GURPS Alternate Earths** and **GURPS Alternate Earths 2**, Mike Schiffer and Craig Neumeier. I knew this because I'd already talked them into helping write the outline for that chapter. Bill Stoddard justly demanded the Weird Science chapter, and knowing a good thing when I saw it, I made him take the Monsters, Aliens, and Supermen chapter as well. (Those of you who follow Bill's campaigns vicariously on the message boards know that he's run some dandy 1930s-era games featuring superheroes and alien contact. That should teach you not to talk about your campaigns where developers can hear you, Bill.) For the Conspiracy chapter, I tapped Mark Cenczyk, an old hand from the twisty backstory of White Wolf -- if he could make sense of **Wraith** cosmology, he could track down the Fourth Reich's bank statements. And Patrick Sweeney, creator of Monster Island and San Angelo alike, was a natural for the Weird Places chapter. During the assignment process, I came up with a brilliant mechanism (if I do say so myself) for Cargo cult magic, so I snaffled the Magic chapter for myself, and my work was done.

The only hard part left was coming up with the name. By the time this book could be proposed, Shane Hensley had already used **Weird War II** (my original working title) for his **d20 System** line of wartime horror books. I knew there was no way Shane would let that perfect title out of his

The Stoddard Narrative

In somewhat the same way that the United States and Germany both came up with the idea of an atomic bomb during World War II, Ken Hite and I both came up with the idea of a "weird science" supplement to **GURPS WWII** at about the same time. I submitted a proposal for an entire book on WWII alternative technology; Ken submitted a proposal for a book on all the weird aspects of WWII, with alternative technology as one section. Gene Seabolt, the line editor, asked us to talk with each other -- and happily we managed a more peaceful settlement than Germany and the United States! *[Plus, Bill is way smarter than Hitler. -- K.H.]*

Originally I was just going to do weird science and alternative technology. But knowing my enthusiasm for superheroes and aliens, Ken offered me the chapter on monsters, supers, and aliens as well . . . and found me unable to resist. *[I also made him write mechanics for the Philadelphia Experiment. Sucker!! -- K.H.]*

In fact, I ended up doing that chapter first; it didn't

grasp, so I suggested **World War Weirdness** and **World Weird II** and other horrible ideas until Gene suggested I stop pestering him and just ask Shane's permission to use his title for our book. By a stroke of amazing good fortune (and Shane's amazing good fellowship) he gave it, and **GURPS WWII: Weird War II** was officially christened, launched, and under weigh.

Of course, like any other wartime project, plans changed once we met the enemy -- in this case, tight word count. Even "Slasher" Seabolt couldn't pound the whole book into its allotted VSPs; between Armanic Rune Magic, a "greatest hits" list of mysterious wartime assassinations, and psionic Power to electrical power conversion notes for Kirlian motors, cargo space was at a premium. (I also had to give topics like Japanese revanchism, military folklore, and German anti-gravity research short shrift. Plus, in the time since I finished the manuscript I discovered, among other things, an experimental WWII stealth technology called Project Yehudi, and a German expedition to Brazil in 1940 that can't have been up to any good. Perhaps for **GURPS WWII: Weird War II 2**. Or **Weirder War II**. Or . . .) These two Stoddard-built vehicles, suitable for inhuman invasions, got cut from the Weird Places chapter, and Motor Pool 18 was already too full to take them, thanks to my giddy delight with experimental Luftwaffe aircraft. So here they are, in all their para-historical glory, left behind on the developer's beach:

Atlantean Crawler TL(6+n)

The crawler is the Atlantean equivalent of a tank: a war vessel designed to walk across the rugged floor of the deep ocean. The standard models are designed for warfare between Atlantean city-states; this model is adapted to warfare with air-breathers by adding some experimental technologies. The standard crew is a driver and two gunners, but there is sufficient life support for an additional passenger.

Subassemblies: Body +4, eight Legs [U:Body] +1.
P&P: Radium batteries, 45 kW, with 40-kW legged transmission.

Occupancy: 3 CS. **Cargo:** 0.

Armor

Body: 4/30

Leg: 3/15

Weaponry

2×Slow Autoloading Torpedo Launcher, 44mm [Body:F]
(57 rounds each)
1×Extra-Heavy Water Cannon [Body:F].

involve designing **GURPS** vehicles, which made it go a lot faster. It did involve some new mechanics, some monster template design, and some interpretation of cultural themes. The new mechanics was mainly the Giant Monster Design System, intended to produce **GURPS WWII-compatible** stats for everything from the Giant Rat of Sumatra to Mothra; to produce it I started with the **GURPS Robots** design rules, tweaked them to so that a 150-lb. human being would have exactly standard human stats, and then provided rules for creatures with odd numbers of heads and limbs. Templates came from a variety of sources, but the most important were the German horror films of the 1920s, many of which I saw for the first time. Finally, I tried my hand at Hite-style interpretation of themes, with monsters as embodiments of natural disasters (or, for the Japanese, the atomic bomb), supers as idealized images of military men, and aliens as symbols of foreign invaders (as they have been since H.G. Wells).

The technology chapter involved a lot more research, variously conducted at the nearby university library, over the Web, and by sending frantic e-mails to Ken and Gene asking for sources. [*Mwah-ha-ha-ha!* -- K.H.] The creativity of the German aviation industry gave me most of my designs, usually with barely suitable statistics. Probably the most perplexing was the Triebflügel, a bizarre German VTOL experiment that I could only approximate by combining the **Vehicles Expansion 1** rules for two or three different nonstandard designs. By contrast, Willy Ley alone gave me more material than the book could hold (and in some cases, more than **GURPS Vehicles** designs require!) on German rockets and spacecraft designs. Ken's draft outline for this chapter covered very nearly all the topics I had on my list [*This is Bill's polite way of saying "Ken is stark staring mad, and there was no way to fit it all in."* -- K.H.]; the only thing I added to the outline was a short overview of the real role of science, technology, and industry in the war. Looking into this further turned up any number of strange things, from the Pingfan Institute's biological warfare program in Manchuria to Vannevar Bush's differential analyzer, an analog computer so sophisticated that it blocked any effort to develop digital computers for solving mathematical equations.

World War II is remembered in the United States as both "the golden age of comics" and "the golden

Equipment

Body: 5×Ink discharger; life support, water-breathing, 4 man-days; limited rotation unit for body, 11° per second; sealed body.

Statistics

Size: 12'×8'×7' *Payload:* 1,067 lbs. *Lwt.:* 38,475 lbs.

Volume: 120 VSPs *Maint.:* 70 hours. *Price:* \$6,500,000.

HT: 7.

HP: 405 *Leg:* 75.

gSpeed: 18 *gAccel:* 1 *gDecel:* 20 *gMR:* 0.75 *gSR:* 3

Low Pressure. Off-Road Speed 14.

Design Notes

The maintenance interval for the crawler is based on the cost of the vehicle *excluding the radium batteries*, which comes to only \$8,000. The radium batteries are a sealed system that is maintained only by Atlantean scientist/priests. They weigh 13,000 lbs. and occupy 23 VSPs; only the nuclear programs of the major surface powers would be able to reverse-engineer them.

The listed statistics are for performance underwater; the crawler's body is filled with water, but the weight of the water does not affect its performance, being at neutral buoyancy. For performance on land, add 18,750 lbs., which reduces HT to 6, gSpeed to 14, off-road speed to 11, and rotational speed for the body to 8° per minute.

The torpedoes have speed 20 yards/second, endurance 2.5 seconds, and range 50 yards. Damage is 20d and is purely concussive, since fragmentation is largely ineffective underwater. A set of 6 torpedoes occupies 0.1 VSP, weighs 25 lbs., and costs \$45. The water cannon normally causes 4d damage as knockback only (a human target is knocked back 1 hex for each 8 points of rolled damage), with SS 5, Acc 8, 1/2D 90, and Max 120; it can also be set to produce a narrow stream, which causes 1d cutting damage and has 1/2D 180 and Max 240. Either use requires 25 kW and sprays out 0.11 VSPs of water per second (34 lbs./second); spraying for 550 seconds will empty the vehicle of water.

Martian Tripod TL(6+n)

The tripod is a variation on the mecha concept, designed to represent the vehicles used by the Martian invaders in Orson Welles' *The War of the Worlds* radio broadcast (and in the H. G. Wells novel it was based on). This version is modified from the version in **GURPS Mars** (p. MAR97) by using more primitive technologies that would have made more sense to World War II engineers. As a result, its capabilities are impressive but not beyond any hope of Earthmen fighting back. It provides space for a driver/gunner, a loader, and an observer.

Subassemblies: Body +4, three Legs [U:Body] +2.

P&P: Atomic pile with 600-kW power tap and 600-kW legged drivetrain. 20,000-kWs batteries for auxiliary systems.

Occupancy: 3 CS. **Cargo:** 37.5 cf.

Armor

Body: 4/200

Leg: 4/100

Weaponry

Heat Beam [Body:F] (18 chemical power slugs) with stabilization.

1×81mm Mortar [Body:T] (64 dispersal shells with Black Smoke).

Equipment

Body: Life support for three Martian-days; minicomputer with Compact and Genius options (Complexity 2); navigation instruments; radio transmitter (30 miles) and receiver (×3). *Body and Legs:* Chameleon system (-3 to be seen or hit if still, -1 if moving); sealed.

Statistics

Size: 12'×12'×40' *Payload:* 2,840 lbs. *Lwt.:* 71,685 lbs.

Volume: 170 VSPs *Maint.:* 10 hours. *Price:* \$734,000.

HT: 6. *HP:* 525 *Leg:* 90.

gSpeed: 41 *gAccel:* 3 *gDecel:* 20 *gMR:* 0.75 *gSR:* 2

Moderate Pressure. Off-Road Speed 27.

Design Notes

The tripod is designed using three pairs of legs for a Very Heavy Walker, but each nominal "pair" is actually a single leg. Cutting the weight, cost, HP, and size by 20% exactly covered the change in design.

Two systems are especially designed for the tripod: the chemical infrared laser and the chameleon exterior. The atomic pile is a TL(6+n) spacecraft design to minimize weight. The armor is made of advanced materials that multiply weight by 2/3 and cost by 6.67. The body is roughly cylindrical, 12' in diameter and averaging 4' high, though it rises to nearly 6' in the center; this suits the relatively squat Martian body plan.

The heat ray inflicts 6d×7 burning damage on its targets. It has SS 20, Accuracy 20, 1/2D range 4,200 yards, and maximum range 12,600 yards. It fires one shot every other second, using chemical fuel cartridges that must be reloaded; if one of these is forcibly opened, it inflicts half damage on anyone in the same hex in the form of corrosive chemical burns.

Black Smoke

The deadly Martian Black Smoke can be represented as a dispersal weapon (p. W:WW77); since its particles are extremely finely divided, it has 10 times the standard range. Black Smoke is a respiratory poison that coats the lungs. A HT roll is required each turn while breathing the smoke; failure does 2d damage to the victim. Survivors who have inhaled Black Smoke may suffer crippling respiratory injury (see p. B129). The smoke is totally opaque and vision is effectively zero while in the cloud (-10 to combat and orientation).

A wet, finely woven cloth covering the nose and mouth provides some protection against its effects; halve all damage results, rounding down, and treat critical failures as normal failures. A TL6-7 gas mask grants a +3 to the HT roll, plus the above protection. An airtight room, vehicle, or garment, or a TL8 or better gas mask, offers total protection from the smoke. GMs may wish to have Black Smoke inflict radiation damage as well; as for giant monster attacks (p. W:WW104), 10 rads is a suitable dosage, but multiply dosage by 1d if the smoke is inhaled.

Cost of Black Smoke is \$1.00 per dose.

Appendix Z: What Happened Today?

by Matt Riggsby

The PCs are waiting for something. Maybe they've got an enemy's house staked out. Maybe they've gotten to town before the contact they're hooking up with. Maybe the kidnapper will be calling again in three days. If the players aren't going to make their own fun, you'll have to say "the time passes uneventfully." Or you can roll 2d6 and consult this table.

Many of these events may be "under the radar" in a modern metropolis, but are appropriate to a historical or pseudo-historical fantasy city or relatively modern small town. PCs may just be witnesses, or they may be drawn into events (the runaway slave happens to barrel into them, the itinerant preacher points them out as examples of immorality . . .). The significance of any event in the greater scheme of things is, of course, up to the GM.

Roll	Event

1, 1	Game/sport: Many societies lacked dedicated sporting arenas, and those were usually used only by professional athletes. This might be a horse race through the streets, a ball game, or some other game.

1, 2	Construction: Characters witness construction on a nearby street or building site.

1, 3	Fight: Dueling rakes, brawling thugs, relationship ending badly, or religious or political argument taken to the next level.

1, 4	Beating: A fight, but very one-sided.

1, 5	Fire: Fires are a major threat in wood-heavy premodern cities. A small fire is a distraction and a moderate threat. A large fire is a danger to everybody.

1, 6	Public punishment: Many criminal punishments involve public display or humiliation: public flogging, exposure in stocks, or being paraded through the streets in an embarrassing fashion (naked, wearing a silly hat, backwards on a donkey, etc.).

2, 1	Fugitive: Someone running away from authority, such as an escaped criminal, heretic on the lam, or escaped slave.

2, 2	Runaway animal: For example, a mad dog, spooked horse, greased pig, herd of sheep, or angry bulls.

2, 3	Religious procession: For example, a procession displaying an idol or relics or a party of pilgrims setting out or arriving.

2, 4	Troop column: These may be soldiers on their way to or from battle or simply a show of force by the city guard.

2, 5	Funeral: A dead body (possibly on display) and a party of mourners. If the deceased was particularly notable, this could turn into a major public event.

2, 6	Official procession: A nobleman or official on his way somewhere with a party of retainers.

3, 1	Unseasonable weather: Heat in winter, a downpour in the dry season, etc.

3, 2	Unpleasant weather: Strong wind, heat, or precipitation. Most people will get out of it while it lasts; characters remaining outside will be uncomfortable and conspicuous.

3, 3	Controversial speaker: A street corner speaker advocates dangerous or

unpopular views, possibly provoking the authorities

- 3, 4 **Crime:** Pickpocketing, mugging, or smash-and-grab theft from a shop. Characters may, of course, be either witnesses or victims.
- 3, 5 **Persistent salesman:** Someone tries to sell the characters something they don't want and won't take no for an answer.
- 3, 6 **Friendly stranger:** Characters encounter someone who is interested in them. It may be casual curiosity, or he may have an agenda.
- 4, 1 **Interesting stranger:** Someone out of the ordinary and interesting. For example, an obvious foreigner, someone wearing unusual clothes, a person distributing small gifts to everyone he sees.
- 4, 2 **Mysterious visitor:** Characters see someone loudly mysterious: cloaked, hooded, or wearing a mask, clearly trying to conceal his identity.
- 4, 3 **Routine announcement:** Public notice is made of something of little immediate interest. For example, a noble wedding, a trivial new tax, the arrival of a merchant vessel, or the death of a minor official.
- 4, 4 **Notable announcement:** A public notice stirs up comment: a war starts or ends, a major public figure dies, a major new tax is being imposed.
- 4, 5 **Political demonstration:** A group of people agitating for or against something (a politician or official, taxes, blue laws, etc.)
- 4, 6 **Unusual meal:** At their next meal, the characters are presented with [unfamiliar dishes](#).
- 5, 1 **Public entertainment:** An individual entertainer starts performing, such as a juggler, solo musician, or man with a trained animal, or a troupe of performers (theater group, impromptu circus, etc.) sets up.
- 5, 2 **Arrival:** A large body of new people comes to town, such as a caravan or band of refugees. Characters will start seeing a lot of new people in town.
- 5, 3 **Unusual merchandise:** Characters notice peculiar merchandise for sale. This might include arms or expensive jewelry in a poor neighborhood, out-of-season produce or spices from a distant land.
- 5, 4 **Nosy Official:** An official (constable, goods inspector, religious orthodoxy enforcer) takes an interest in the characters. He may be near-hostile, or simply friendly and curious.
- 5, 5 **Investigation:** Police or other officials make a thorough search of the area and question bystanders.
- 5, 6 **Celebration:** Public celebration of a wedding or holiday. This may involve dancing in the streets or free food and drink.
- 6, 1 **Public ceremony:** Public prayer or sacrifice, creation of a nobleman or holy man, christening or naming ceremony, etc.
- 6, 2 **Personal accident:** Something bad happens to an individual. For example, someone falls out of a window or off of a roof, a porter drops his burden, which breaks and scatters all over.
- 6, 3 **Vehicular accident:** A vehicle or animal runs over a slow pedestrian, two vehicles collide, a wheel breaks and falls off a cart, goods roll from the back of a wagon.
- 6, 4 **Other accident or disaster:** A building collapses, a water line breaks and floods

a street, an earthquake strikes.

6, 5 **Omen:** Lights in the sky, a dozen birds roosting the shape of a character's first initial, goat speaks with human voice, or some other event of superstitious or ominous importance.

6, 6 **Roll twice, ignoring further 6, 6 rolls.**

Analects Arcane: The Tome Sound and Fury

Sonic And Speech Spells for the d20 System

by Owen K.C. Stephens

Workbook Entry The First

I never know how to start these passages. Who am I writing to? Is this supposed to be a record for my own use, that I may go back and remind myself of something forgotten? Or is it a missive to those who come after me, or even a scholarly work for my contemporaries? Whenever I ask my master, he tells me only that it will be what I make it. Of course it is he who controls access to the library vaults, and so I have little say over who sees my older workbooks. Certainly, I have avoided placing thoughts too private down in these pages. "Never write what you would not say aloud in an open market."

In any case, this is my first entry in my fifth book. I have recorded these rambling thoughts, as my master commands, for seven years of apprenticeship. I am far from being the senior of his servants, though I am no longer the most junior. As in most things -- appearance, bravery, talent -- I fall somewhere in the middle. Once this realization would have brought me a blue mood for days, but I have long since realized there are far worse things than to be merely average in my selected vocation.

There are, of course, areas in which I am a cut above average, and in these I take great pride. Of the 20 of us here under Master Vuterung's protection, I am within the top three in matters of penmanship, memory, research, logic, and diplomacy. Certainly these are not the flashiest of a mage's skills, but neither are they inconsequential to his success. It is largely due to my diligence searching the older vaults for snippets of arcana and compiling them that our collection of spells rivals that of the Mage of the North. We may lack his resources to beg, borrow and steal new books of lore, but the post of Master of Rings has been held many generations longer. In my lifetime I shall not clear out the vaults of forgotten scrolls, gathered by 20 of my master's predecessors.

In principal, all my collections of spells, culled from old and incomplete works, should follow a logical, methodical categorization method. In practice, there isn't a good, accepted, universal method for codifying spells by anything other than school and rank. I suppose it's hubris on my part to rail against this ancient tradition, but often it's only of use to specialists and beginners. Once a wizard can manage spells of most difficulties, and if he is free to use spells of all schools, is not utility, or at the very least theme, the more important measure of a spell's type?

So I sort my collected works by these criteria. There is often great overlap of course -- divination spells tend to be informative and necromancy tends to deal with undead, but this is not always the case. My works on fire spells alone include divination, conjuration, evocation, and abjuration magics. Of course this means I often have a dozen or more collections in progress at a time, as I wait to find

enough spells of a matching theme to fill a particular compilation.

Today, for example, I have just finished sewing the pages of my **Tome of Sound and Fury** into a single signature, and tomorrow I shall bind it into its cover. Once that gains my master's approval, it will take little more than a week to make a dozen copies. Some shall take their place among the other arcane analects in the Study of Rings, while others shall be sold, given as gifts, returned to the vaults, and even hidden in caches in case of disaster. I believe I shall keep a copy for myself as well, for these spells are of a bend that matches well my own temperament.

Within the **Tome** I have gathered 14 spells all dealing with sound, thunder, and speech. The most powerful of these are, to my mind, those that allow communication over large areas, with only select groups, or with any speaking creature, though these are certainly not all of high arcane rank. For my own needs, communication is more useful than weapons or even scrying; my ability to reason and negotiate has pulled me through far more difficulties than my ability to kill or strike terror into my foes.

Even in violent arenas, however, my **Tome** can be of use. Not only does it contain spells that damage through sound, an attack form often overlooked when foes prepare their defenses, it also provides some magics that hinder foes without harming them. A few defenses against thunder spells, means of secret communication and more traditional defenses round out the collection nicely. By focusing on one element rarely used by others a mage could gain great diversity and benefit from the synergy themed spells often provide. As an added bonus, the spells all have bardic forms, giving the book a wider, and thus more profitable, audience. Try making those claims with a book that focuses merely on ranks and schools!

Enough self-congratulations for now, however. I am charged with producing no fewer than 20 collections each year, and have fewer than nine fully finished so far this year. While my stitching settles and glue dries, I need to go back down to the vaults to seek the final touches of open works, and look for inspiration for new ones. My plans for the future depend on a strong recommendation from my master, and I shan't gain it by lounging about.

Rowan Armage

Journeyman of the Blue Sash

Third Day, of the First Week, of the Seventh Month, of the Seven Hundred and Forty-Fifth year since the Fall of the Iron Citadel.

The Tome of Sound and Fury

These slim spellbooks were compiled by Rowan Armage during his years as an apprentice of The Master of Rings. Like all Rowan's works from this period they are commonly found in older academies and extensive private libraries. Rowan is known to have made thirty of these books himself, though numerous copies have been produced using cheaper materials.

Rowan's original tomes are all bound in heavy red leather covers, with runes for Thunder and Voice engraved on the front and spine in gold, and a heavy iron rung running through the top of the spine (allowing the tomb to be hung from a hook, though the ring is simply an identifying mark of the Master of Ring's library). The pages are high quality parchment, with the letters inked in a dark blue color.

In addition to 14 new spells (detailed below), the book's 60 pages over uses for more common sonic-based spells. The most space is given to the use of the *silence* spell to foil enemy mages by casting it on a swift combatant (often a ranger or monk) at the beginning of a fight and have the silenced combatant move close enough to have the enemy spellcaster in the area. While within the area of the *silence*, the opposing spellcaster cannot complete spells with a verbal component, often severely limiting his options.

New Spells

1st Level Sorcerer And Wizard Spells

- **Inner Voice.** Hear yourself even if deafened.

Evoc

- **Shriek.** Targets in a cone deafened for 1d4 rounds.

Trans

- **Booming Voice.** Make yourself heard over a large area.

2nd Level Sorcerer And Wizard Spells

Conj

- **White Noise.** Sphere garbles all sound that passes through it.

Illusion

- **Dopplespeaker.** Sound like another speaker or creature.

Trans

- **Singing Sword.** Enhance a piercing or slashing melee weapon to do an additional 1d6 sonic damage.

3rd Level Sorcerer And Wizard Spells

Conj

- **Sea Shell.** Sounds travel from one shell to another.

Div

- **Group Voice.** Create a secret language for up to six creatures.

Evoc

- **Sharp Note.** Create a pulsing sphere of sonic damage you can direct.

4th Level Sorcerer And Wizard Spells

Abjur

- **Protection From Words.** Creature touched gains immunity to language-dependent spells.

Ench

- **Howl.** Loud howl causes targets to be shaken.

Evoc

- **Wall of Thunder.** Flexible curtain of sound blocks sound and damages those who passthrough it.

Trans

- **Soliloquy.** Targets in a cone hear a long speech instantaneously.

5th Level Sorcerer And Wizard Spells

Div

- **Interpreter.** Understand all spoken languages, and be understood by all creatures who can speak.

Booming Voice

Transmutation [Sonic]

Level: Brd 0, Sor/Wiz 1

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Long (400 ft. + 40 ft./level)

Area: Cone

Duration: One minute/level

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

The *booming voice* spell allows things shouted by the caster to be heard over a large area. Only things spoken by the caster are affected, words said in a normal tone or whispered are no more easily heard than normal. Shouted words are carried throughout the area, and are clearly audible even over shouting, roaring, and the cacophony of combat.

Dopplespeaker

Illusion (Figment)

Level: Brd 1, Sor/Wiz 2

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Personal

Target: Caster

Duration: 10 minutes/level (D)

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless)

Under the effects of this spell the caster's voice can duplicate the sound of any creature, allowing him to sound like a specific speaker or creature. The caster must be familiar with the sound of the speaker or creature to be imitated, which is chosen at the time of casting and cannot be changed for the duration of the spell. The caster ceases to sound like himself during the spell.

Thus a caster with this spell could duplicate the sound of a wolf howling, or make himself sound like the local town mayor or an orc shaman. This grants the caster a +5 bonus to a Disguise check to emulate a specific person (+10 if the caster is only heard and not seen). This spell does not allow the caster to speak or understand additional languages, however.

Group Voice

Divination

Level: Brd 3, Sor/Wiz 4

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Target: Up to six willing creatures touched

Duration: One hour/level

Saving Throw: Will negates (harmless)

Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless)

This spell allows the targets to speak in meaningless gibberish, but still communicate with one another. It does not create an actual language, thus spells designed to translate languages (such as *comprehend languages* and *interpreter*) cannot decipher it. The magic of the spell allows the targets to babble incomprehensible when speaking (if they desire), and understand the meaning of the babbling of others targeted by the spell make. This in effect allows them to communicate in a private language that cannot be translated by others. Only spoken gibberish can be used this way -- the spell has no effect on written words. The spell also does not make the targets better able to hear each other in adverse conditions.

Howl

Enchantment [Fear, Mind-Affecting, Sonic]

Level: Brd 3, Sor/Wiz 4

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)

Area: Cone

Duration: One minute/level

Saving Throw: Will negates

Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell causes a horrid, spectral howl to issue forth from the caster's mouth. The howl can be heard for up to a mile per level of the caster, but its real power is limited to a medium cone. Creatures within this area who fail Will saves are shaken for the duration of the spell. A shaken creature suffers a -2 morale penalty on attack rolls weapon damage rolls and saving throws.

Inner Voice

Divination

Level: Brd 0, Sor/Wiz 1

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Personal

Target: Caster

Duration: One hour/level

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless)

This spell causes the caster to hear in his head everything he tries to say, regardless of whether he can actually speak or not. Though the caster must still speak to fulfill verbal spell components, and thus cannot cast while in the area of a *silence* spell, he can hear himself even if deafened, and thus has no chance of mis-casting a spell due to deafness.

Interpreter

Divination

Level: Brd 4, Sor/Wiz 6

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch
Target: One creature
Duration: One hour/level
Saving Throw: Will negates (harmless)
Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless)

The *interpreter* spell grants its target the ability to understand all spoken languages, and be understood by any creature that uses a spoken language. Even secret languages and ciphers are clearly understood by the target, though not magically protected speech (such as that created by the *group voice* spell).

This spell does not grant the target any special ability with written languages. Creatures that know more than one language hear the target speak in their native tongue.

Protection From Words

Abjuration
Level: Brd 2, Sor/Wiz 4
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Touch
Target: One creature
Duration: 10 minutes/level or until discharged
Saving Throw: Will negates (harmless)
Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless)

While under the effects of this spell, the target cannot be affected by any language-dependent spell. A total of one level of spells per caster level are negated for the target, as the spell simply prevents him from hearing the words of language-dependent spells. This has no impact on his ability to hear or understand other kinds of speech or noise. If a language-dependent spell uses more levels than the spell has left, the spell ends and the target is given a +2 circumstance bonus to any save required by the language-dependent spell.

As a side effect, the target is treated as having 30 extra hit points for purposes of determining what power word spells effect him. The target does not actually gain any bonus hit points, nor do these spells count against the total number of spell levels the *protection from words* defends him from.

Sea Shell

Conjuration
Level: Brd 2, Sor/Wiz 3
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Touch
Target: Two seashells
Duration: 10 minutes/level
Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless)

This spell can only be cast on two sea shells, each larger than two inches across and no larger than six inches. It causes all sounds that reach the first shell touched to be transferred to the second shell touched. It does not matter how far away the two shells are, as long as they remain on the same plane. Thus, for the duration of the spell, anyone listening to the second shell hears things as if he were at the location of the first shell.

Sharp Note

Evocation [Sonic]
Level: Brd 3, Sor/Wiz 3
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)

Area: 5-ft.-diameter sphere

Duration: 1 minute/level

Saving Throw: Reflex half

Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell creates a pulsing mote of concentrated sound, which appears as a sphere of ripples in the air. It flies at 80 ft. a round as the caster directs, and can move through openings as small as one foot in diameter. If it enters a space with a creature it stops for the round, doing 5d4 points of sonic damage, though a successful Reflex save halves this damage. The caster may also have it sit next to an inanimate object or even a wall for a round, in which case it deals 5d4 at the end of every round it sits still.

The sphere has no strength or physical form, and cannot be used to push or pull anything. It does not operate underwater, and if the sphere is fully submerged the spell ends.

Shriek

Evocation [Sonic]

Level: Brd 0, Sor/Wiz 1

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 20 ft.

Area: Cone-shaped burst

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: Fort negates

Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell creates a sudden, ear-piercing shriek. Creatures in the area must make a Fort save or be deafened for 1d4 rounds.

Singing Sword

Transmutation [Sonic]

Level: Brd 1, Sor/Wiz 2

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Target: Piercing or slashing melee weapon touched

Duration: One minute/level

Saving Throw: Will negates (harmless, object)

Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless, object)

Despite this spell's name, it can be used on any piercing or slashing melee weapon. The spell gives this weapon an enhancement that deals an additional +1d6 sonic damage on each successful strike. A weapon so enhanced hums loudly, making a sound similar to a vibrating crystal and causing the bearer to suffer a -10 circumstance penalty to all Move Silently checks. This spell fails if cast upon a weapon that already deals additional sonic damage.

Soliloquy

Transmutation [Sonic, Language-Dependent]

Level: Brd 2, Sor/Wiz 4

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)

Area: Cone

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

Soliloquy allows the caster to make a lengthy speech without risking interruption or debate. Everyone within the area hears the words spoken by the caster, which may take as long as a minute per level of the caster, in a single moment of time. The caster may not use this accelerated speech to do anything but talk -- it is not possible to cast additional spells or even use multiple command words with this spell -- nor does it allow those who do not understand the caster's language to comprehend his speech. The spell does guarantee everyone in the area hears one speech of the casters without interruption, even if the area is quite noisy or others are currently speaking. Creatures outside the area hear only a burst of unintelligible noise.

Wall of Thunder

Evocation [Sonic]

Level: Brd 3, Sor/Wiz 4

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)

Effect: Translucent sheet of sound up to 10 ft. long/level

Duration: Concentration +1 round/level (D)

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: Yes

A *wall of thunder* appears as a shimmering vertical sheet of rippling, roaring air. It is not opaque, although Spot checks made past it suffer a -4 circumstance penalty. No sound or sonic affect can penetrate it, and any Listen check made within 20 feet of it suffers a -10 circumstance penalty. Listen checks mad within 40 feet suffer a -5 circumstance penalty.

The wall may be straight, curved, or made into a series of complex overlapping shapes, as long as it remains vertical and the total length does not exceed 10 feet per caster level. The wall forms around any obstacle when first forming, making it impossible to catch creatures in the wall or cut apart objects with it. Once cast, the wall is immobile.

Any creature or object passing through the wall takes 2d6 points of sonic damage, +1 per 2 levels of the caster (maximum +10).

White Noise

Conjuration

Level: Brd 1, Sor/Wiz 2

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Area: Up to a 20-ft.-radius

Duration: 10 minutes/level (D)

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

This spell creates an immobile spherical area, the size of which is set by the caster and cannot be changed once the spell is cast. Those within the area can hear and understand noises that originate within the area, but sounds from outside are garbled to a degree that makes them unrecognizable. Similarly, those outside the area cannot identify or understand any sound or speech originating within the sphere. The volume of sound is unchanged, but the garbling makes it impossible to eavesdrop through the barrier of the spell.

This spell is generally used under very specific circumstances, when a group wishes to have a private conversation without increasing the chances they can be snuck up on. This spell provides protection from language-based spells, but not other forms of sonic attack.

Pyramid Review

When The Sky Falls (for d20 System)

Published by [Malhavoc Press](#)

Written by Bruce R. Cordell

Illustrated by Kieran Yanner

Cover by Alan Pollack

64-page b&w softcover; \$13.95

Should a meteor of a particularly destructive size ever hit this planet again, our options and reactions will be somewhat limited: (a) scream, cry and panic; (b) call Bruce Willis and Steve Buscemi to see if they can save us; and (c) see (a) above. Actually, in game terms, the impact of a planet killer will be the subject of Eden's *Odyssey Prime RPG* setting, published under their Odyssey imprint. This will be for a modern or near future set game, but the question remains, "What happens if a meteorite hits the average *Dungeons & Dragons* fantasy world?" Such a question is addressed in *When the Sky Falls*, authored by Bruce A. Cordell, whose previous noted *d20 System* titles include the Origins Award-winning *Return to the Tomb of Horrors* and the *Epic Level Handbook*. This is the second "Event Book" to be published by Monte Cook's Malhavoc Press, the first being Cook's own *Requiem for a God*, an excellent sourcebook that explored the possibilities wrought by the death of a god!

The aim of an Event Book is to shake up a campaign, in this instance by having a meteor strike a world . . . and do so hard. The effect is at least to make the ground tremble and leave behind an impact crater, but in the Afterfall, there could be firestorms, a tsunami, showers of acid rain, changes in weather or climate -- and all this from simple meteorite. The author takes the DM through the step-by-step process that has him consider where it should hit, whether the fall can be foreshadowed, the immediate effect of the impact, and the long-term changes to both the physical world and nearby civilizations. There are plenty of ideas included in addition to various adventure hooks, from which the DM can select to work into his campaign. The rules for all of the impacts assume an object some 30-feet in diameter, but a set of guidelines are given so that the DM can scale this up or down as desired.

Beyond the basic chunk of ferrous metal or rock, *When the Sky Falls* explores the effects of two other types of impacts. The first of these is the "Thaumaturgic Meteorite" or Thaumeteorite Fall, essentially a meteoroid that is charged with magic, such that when it strikes, it does so with a singularly interesting effect, something akin to that of a detonated nuclear device. Where such an explosion sets off an EMP or "Electro Magnetic Pulse," the impact of a Thaumaturgic Meteorite also has its own EMP effect, the cleverly named "Ethereal-Material Pulse." This does not blank electronics, but rather subjects every magical item or creature within a 30-mile radius to a targeted *dispel magic* spell!

The second type is the "Engram Ark," the last psychic remnants and memories of the inhabitants of a world conquered and torn apart by a darkly malign psychic force known as the "Dark Plea." The impact of each of these two types will be accompanied by the additional impacts of the lesser meteorite types -- a Thaumeteorite will be accompanied by ordinary meteorites, and the Engram Ark by both ordinary types and Thaumeteorites.

The after effect of either impact or Afterfall is where this supplement begins to get really interesting. Besides the EMP, a Thaumeteorite leaves behind globes of thaumeteorite iron or Starmilk that can be used to forge weapons that also inflict *dispel magic* upon a struck opponent and it also infuses the "Arcanosphere," the "theoretical" medium that

underlies all magic and propagates its effect, with magic of its own. This can alter each of the various schools to the advantage or disadvantage of the player character spellcaster (as decided upon by the DM), as well as introducing Astromancy to the world. Available as a feat of the same name, this is a new category of magic rather than a new school, which the Astromancer has access to in addition to his normal arcane or divine spells. These spells are derived from the power of a meteor hitting a world, and the Astromancer's power and abilities can be enhanced if the celestial bodies are in the correct alignment and over the horizon; this harkens back to the birth aspects that could enhance magic in SPI's *DragonQuest* RPG. Psionic characters can also take advantage of thaumeteorite strikes and become Astromancers, though their powers will be just slightly different.

Where a Thaumeteorite benefits the spellcaster, the contents of an Engram Ark will be of potential benefit to all character types. Falling to the surface and protected by self-released Ark Guardians or Plasma Dragons, within the ark itself is a pocket of space containing a rune sea, rich with Engram. Each of these is the runic remnant of an individual from the alien world of Kure, torn asunder by the Dark Plea. Coming in a range of colors, a character can wear a single Engram as a tattoo, the type determined randomly by immersion in the rune sea. Further immersions will randomly change the Engram. White Engrams grant skill boosts; blue benefits arcane spellcasters and green divine spellcasters; red give psionic boosts; and black bestow a random effect that could be either good or bad.

Two organizations detailed in *When the Sky Falls* might arise in the Afterfall, or already have existed, predicting the impact itself. Sky Callers are a cult that sees meteorites as destruction untapped, which they call the Vengeful Sky. They believe that they can guide the course of meteoroids to cause further destruction, hold impact sites to be holy, and are led by clergy known as Ruin Priests, who embody pure chaos and evil. More benign are the League of Astronomers, who explore the threat and the potential inherent within each type of impact. Four Prestige Classes tie into these two organizations -- the aforementioned Ruin Priest, as well as the Astrogineer, who study Astromancy; the Engram Adept, able to wear more than one Engram and even pluck it from their skin to throw as weapon; and the Lord of Silence, who take strength from both the soundless void between worlds and the demiplane of silence, the Soundless.

Several new feats are introduced in addition to that of Astromancy, most related to the four Prestige Classes, plus over 30 new spells, also related. The chapter on Afterfall magic items introduces the weapon qualities of voidwrought -- the weapon appears to suck in light and lets the user to see in complete darkness; and starshine, which inflicts plasma damage whenever a critical hit is made. Both of these qualities can only be added to a weapon if they are constructed from the pure metals that evaporate and condense from a meteorite. Besides describing actual weapons with these qualities, several items are included, such as the Engram Wallet, which allows an extra Engram to be stored away from the Rune Sea ready for use or exchange; and the Bag of Night Terrors, from which can be drawn random nightmares or meteors to be thrown at an opponent.

When the Sky Falls is rounded out with five more fleshed-out ideas ready for the DM to use. One involves the literal fall of an angel to earth, a second the fall of a war machine deployed in the war against the Dark Plea, and another the arrival of a clot of demon's blood. All five are built around the idea that a meteorite impact need not be that of a hunk of rock. Indeed, one could even be that of a lump of Godsflesh, as detailed in the previous Event Book, *Requiem for a God*.

Like the first Event Book, the layout and presentation of *When the Sky Falls* appears to be without error, a pleasing professional touch. It retains the same format, utilizing sidebars to provide a very handy explanation of each chapter's key terms and also a checklist of points for the DM to consider in using said chapter's contents. The book's artwork is sparse, but Kieran Yanner's dark pencils are eminently suited to the subject. Unlike *Requiem for a God*, this book is more capable of standing on its own and does not require quite so many other sourcebooks.

Although the contents of *When the Sky Falls* are designed to affect a fantasy world, there is the feeling that they would work much, much better upon a more technologically advanced setting as opposed to that of the atypical fantasy world. They would even work well with a Victorian steampunk setting or perhaps in conjunction with the recently released *Urban Arcana* sourcebook for *d20 Modern*. The aim is not much to destroy a world, but to help build a story around an event and in addition to introduce what is, essentially, star-aspected magic. However a DM decides to use its contents, *When the Sky Falls* is another fascinating sourcebook from Malhavoc Press, presenting an intriguing set

of tools with which to change a campaign.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

HârnQuest 4 (for the HârnWorld Campaign Setting)

Published by [Columbia Games Inc.](#)

Written by Peter Leith, Kerry Mould, Patrick Nilsson, Jonathan Davidson, Jerry Holland-Hibbert, & John Sgammato

Illustrated by Richard Luschek

Cartography by Patrick Nilsson, Jonathan Davidson, Jerry Holland-Hibbert Edited by Tom Dalglish, Grant Dalglish, John Sgammato, & Cal Stengel

50 loose-leaf b&w pages, two color maps; \$24.98

HârnQuest #4 is the latest issue of Columbia Game's quarterly supplement to their excellent *HârnWorld* campaign setting. *HârnWorld* has been in print since 1983, but there have been several dry spells with little new material getting published. Old fans will be glad to see new material flowing regularly again, and new players will find this a great time to explore this dynamic setting.

HârnWorld is a medieval fantasy setting that emphasizes realism, consistency, and detail. On the surface *HârnWorld* appears relatively mundane, and is much like Europe of the 10th-13th centuries. However, behind this veil are all the fantasy elements popular in most games: elves, dragons, wizards, mythical beasts; there is even a god residing on the main island. This subtle blending of fantasy and realism allows individual GMs to fine-tune the setting to their personal taste, from gritty historical realism, to multidimensional high-powered fantasy. The fantastic is never too intrusive to spoil the fun of historically minded gamers, but is easily at hand in interesting and creative forms to be added at will. There are no rules, so the setting is easily adaptable to your favorite roleplaying system, and numerous rules guidelines are available on-line, including the *d20 System* and *GURPS*. Alternatively, Columbia Games also publishes an RPG called *HârnMaster* tailored to the setting.

One quality that makes *HârnQuest #4* so unique and enjoyable is the manner of its publication, which may take a bit of explanation to those who are not already familiar with *HârnWorld* products in general. All material for *HârnWorld* is published as a series of individually numbered articles, collectively referred to as the *Encyclopedia Hârnica*. Each article details a particular aspect of the overall campaign setting such as a location (a kingdom, or castle), an organization (a craft guild, a religion, a tribe), a bestiary, or general background (heraldry, tournaments), to name a few. The articles are loose-leaf and are designed to be placed in three-ring binder in any order you choose to create your own personal version of the Encyclopedia.

The *HârnQuest* series follows in this tradition with each issue containing about three to five articles, totaling around 48 pages of material. The articles may be purchased separately after they are released (generally at \$3-\$10 each), or by a subscription, which gives you all the articles in the issue at a slight price break as well as free shipping.

HârnQuest #4 contains four articles with a maritime theme. Two articles are detailed descriptions of coastal locations in the Kingdom of Mælderyn: Kârvéth Castle and Glenoth Keep (20 pages plus color map, each. Glenoth is a small keep in a fishing village located on a remote island and is home to a chantry of the Shèk-Pvâr (Mages Guild). Kârvéth

is a seaside castle surrounded by a market town that serves as home to a large fishing fleet. The third article, *Aquatics* (six pages), is a bestiary describing four mythic and mundane creatures encountered in marine environments, one of which is unique to Hârn. The last article (four pages) contains general background information about fishing practices in *HârnWorld*, and is probably only of interest to dedicated Hârn fans.

HarnQuest #4 is full of well-researched, richly detailed material. Each of the location articles gives you the sense of a working, living, medieval town. The major members of the community are described in a few sentences each, including the cost and quality of any services they offer, making it easily accessible in the heat of a gaming session. Several buildings are depicted in each location, including beautifully rendered and precise maps. As with every aspect of the articles the maps give an authentic and accurate medieval feel (right down to the bathrooms!), and are some of the best in the industry. Neither location contains pre-set adventures, however plot hooks abound on every page. Each description-whether it is of castle, village, or individual character-inspires numerous ideas for working them into a larger story.

All of the articles are enriched with numerous naturalistic black and white illustrations of characters and environments, as well as medieval-style woodcuts, which contribute to the historic sense of the product. The artwork is all of exceptional quality and makes an excellent complement to the product.

The creatures and several major characters are given statistics for *HârnMaster*, Columbia Games' roleplaying system. The information is minimal and is contained in sidebars so as not to be intrusive to readers using other systems. *HârnMaster*'s human attributes are based on a 3d6 range, and the skill system is percentage based. Therefore they are easily converted to many other popular roleplaying systems.

Either location article would make a good jumping off point for GMs looking to begin a new campaign in *HârnWorld*. The only materials required to make use of these supplements are the *HârnWorld Box Set* and your favorite rules system. The single drawback for a new player is the unavailability of the *Melderyn Kingdom* adventure, which is currently out of print. Though the information in the Kingdom module is not absolutely required to use and enjoy these articles, some of the richness and detail of their place in the larger setting will be lost. However, it is still possible to glean a workable understanding of them from the context of the article.

All in all, the quality of production shown in these articles is some of the best in the fantasy gaming industry. They make an excellent contribution to the development of the *HârnWorld* setting, yet are generic enough that they may be of use to GMs looking for developed places to add to their campaign. The ability to purchase each article separately creates a wonderful opportunity for a curious gamer to get a sample of the *Hârn* setting for a small price. All of these qualities combine to create a product that is likely to thrill both old fans and those experiencing *Hârn* for the first time.

--B. N. Pasinella

Death Be Not Deadly

I tend to take a "different strokes for different folks" approach to this column, and to my gaming in general. Really, it's not very often that I make a strong recommendation. So, for once, I'm using my lofty post to tell you . . . don't do it.

It's tempting . . . heaven knows it is.

I mean, you're looking for a plot . . . some new means of challenging or surprising players and characters. Or maybe a PC got squicked unjustly, and you wanted to right the scales just a bit. Or maybe the game world has it as a "feature."

Regardless, you've done it, or you're tempted by it:

You want to thwart the grim reaper. Whether through pseudo-scientific trickery, magical malarkey, or just plain "I got better" hand-waving, you intend to bring a character back from the dead.

If so, consider the consequences *very* carefully.

In the real world, death is generally considered to be about as bad as it gets. It is almost universally regarded that murder is the worst crime one can commit, and the death penalty is considered the worst punishment possible in a civilized society (ever since "covered with honey and left hog-tied in the desert" was struck down by the Supreme Court in 1997).

This finality is also reflected in almost all great stories and serious literature; when Bambi's mother [*SPOILER ALERT!*] gets shot and killed, [*END SPOILER ALERT*] she doesn't come bursting back through the forest at the end of the story to save Bambi's life as Thumper tosses her a blaster and exclaims, "You! I thought you were dead!!!"

But in popular media the finality of death gets tossed out the window, and folks seem to come back from that undiscovered country with surprising ease. *Star Trek* wrecked it with a movie, wherein Spock was resurrected after almost a week of death; Buffy came back around 87 times or so; Gandalf recovered; and even the thoroughly mortal and quasi-realistic Sherlock Holmes cheated the scythe.

Sometimes it's bad enough just even to *lessen* death's grasp; for example, in a series like *Star Wars*, the emotional impact of Obi Wan's death is reduced by the fact that he becomes Luke's personal voice and snow globe. Like they say, "It's hard to miss you if you won't go away."

And, of course, comics and soap operas have stretched the futility of death beyond any rational ability to suspend disbelief. Almost without exception, any time a significant character dies, the audience nods and goes, "Okay; so when's he coming back?" (Or, to quote a *Radioactive Man* comic, "Who killed Sergeant Fluffy *this* time?")

So why is this a problem? Because by lessening the power of death, you get rid of quite probably the only -- *only* -- certain means of finality in a story. In any kind of cinematic world -- and, let's face it, if death isn't the Big Enchilada then we're probably talking a cinematic world -- the fact that death can be thwarted means that everything else is probably fair game as well. Friend has severed limbs? Cast that *regeneration* spell and dance the Macarena! Family member's soul been devoured by demons? Go check Wal-Mart; there's a sale this week. Loved one lost in the Himalayans? Leave the porch light on; he'll turn up.

Even if the angel of death isn't kept at bay in every case, that fact that it's thwarted at all can affect players' reaction to all deaths. Unfortunately, in many games (and other media) the only characters who come back from the dead are important ones . . . meaning if the character dies and doesn't come back, no one cared about the death in the first place. It's similar in many ***Dungeons & Dragons*** games, especially in earlier editions; the only characters with access to high-level resurrection abilities -- or enough money to pay for it -- are higher-level characters. In other words, those characters with the *most* ability to have a meaningful and fulfilling death are those most likely to come back!

"I died while trying to keep a dracolich from harnessing the eldritch energies of the Stone of Fate's Judgment for his world-ending schemes. Fortunately my chums were able to recover most of my body, so here I am, right as rain!"
"Really? Huh. I died when I critically failed kicking opening a door; my leg broke and I bled to death. <pause> Still dead."

So, my recommendation is this:

If you're a GM, consider -- *strongly* consider -- a mandate that says, simply, "Dead is Dead."

Now does this mean that I recommend never dealing with the afterlife, cheating death, and all that other good stuff? Not at all; but do it *smart*.

See, the "Dead is Dead" edict is, in essence, a line in the sand. You are drawing it for your players so they know that, if the line is crossed, it cannot be uncrossed. And then *don't uncross it*.

So for example, you say you like undead, and "Dead is Dead" interferes with that? No problem; simply phrase the mantra:

"If someone dies, it cannot return with its former mind and/or mental state."

So while you *could* reanimate, say, your deceased wife, she'd be a shambling bloodthirsty zombie with no memory of her former life and a hunger for brains. . . which will probably put a strain on the relationship.

Likewise you can have characters knockin' on death's door, slip into and out of comas, and so on. But if there's a body and a funeral, and you've given the players and the NPCs a chance to roleplay the emotional effects of an honest-to-goodness death, then resist the urge to bring that character back. You may or may not explicitly state a "deadly death" policy to your players, depending on your preference. Players can learn the hard way that there are no second chances, or you can tell them your reasoning. Depending on the game world you may need to tell them: "Sorry; *resurrection* isn't an available spell, brainbank downloading isn't possible, it's unclear if the dead are *really* communicating through mediums, and as far as you know there are no modern reports of people coming back from the dead."

If you don't have a Death is Dead policy, your game may run into problems . . . especially if you ever decide you *do* want a genuine affecting death. I know of what I speak; about a year ago in our recent LARP the narrating staff brought back a master villain from death. And it was a big surprise, all the players love it, and everyone had a great time. About six months later, struggling for plot, we had a famous hero in the LARP come back from the grave; there was a fair bit of interest, but the reactions seemed a bit off from some of the players. Just over a month ago another character came back from the grave . . . and his return -- his escape from the clutches of the inky void of the afterlife, which in our world would be viewed as nothing less than miraculous -- was greeted largely with indifference. "Aren't you surprised?!? I came back . . . from the *dead*!" "Yeah; there's been a lot of that lately. Oh, hey! We saved your stuff!" In short, it didn't quite have the emotional impact we'd hoped for.

Consider this a warning: If you gave the players a chance to react to a character's death, and it comes back, you've in essence tricked them. If that character dies again, there's no way that reaction will be as strong. If you give the players the idea that death can be undone, they will seek to undo it at some point. And if escaping death's clutches becomes less taxing and takes less time than paying off student loans, you're depriving the campaign of one of the most basic and universal of human responses and shared experiences; regardless of our lives, regardless of our backgrounds and history, we *all* understand death on some level, and fail to understand it on another. And we all also confront our own mortality . . . and will do so, ultimately, one final time.

"But wait!" I hear you cry. "My campaign already . . ." or, "But can't I . . .?" or, "Wow . . . there are a lot of ellipses in this week's column . . ." Fear not, gentle reader; I already have a sequel in mind to this installment, and I should be able to prepare it for your perusal within a few weeks.

Unless I die in the interim; then you may need to wait a bit longer.

--*Steven Marsh*

Dungeons: The New Frontier in Eco-Tourism

by Stephen McKenzie

It grew out of a touring freak show called "Moseley Woods' Freaks and Monsters," which toured in four states and was eventually seen by the emperor himself. Mr. Moseley, an ageing dwarven adventurer whose career and reputation were on the wane, decided to take one last trip into the hinterlands -- but this time, he was going to bring those monsters back alive. The first show featured a live white dragon, which the dwarf had patiently subdued. It was the first time most people had ever seen one in the flesh, and many paid big money to come back and see it again the next night. Moseley was set for life -- as were a host of other showmen who copied the trend.

That was a generation ago. More recently, a bright spark called Spender had the idea of taking paying customers to see the legendary creatures of the Underdark in their natural habitat. "Rather than kill that purple worm," he thought, "why not charge the curious town-folk for a glimpse of it -- from a safe distance, of course . . ."

* * *

Adventuring and tourism may sound a strange mix at first, but when you think about it, it's a pretty logical connection. People often want to be guided through unusual and dangerous parts of the world, either on sightseeing expeditions, or because they need to travel for some more important reason. By setting up your party as "guides" or "tour operators," you will give your characters an inherent shared rationale and a mode of operation that is often lacking in parties composed on individuals thrown together just for the sake of adventure. The would-be tour operators are trying to set up a business -- they know what they are doing, and why, as we shall see.

This article gives players and GMs tips on how to include an element of "adventure tourism" in their campaigns. It is focused on a standard "dungeon exploration" campaign, although the ideas could be expanded to include wilderness or even space exploration. The first section, "A Player's Guide to Dungeon Tourism," is for both players and GMs. If you want to use this material in your campaign, then the "A GM's Guide To Setting Up A "Dungeon Tourism" Game" and "Broadening the Tourism Idea" sections are for your GM only!

A Players' Guide to Dungeon Tourism

So, you're interested in trying your hand as an adventure tour operator? Good luck! It may be possible for you to start up a tourism operation in your campaign without any prompting from your GM, but may also be wise to discuss the idea first, as it will give the campaign a particular flavor; the emphasis will almost always be on humor and low fantasy rather than on serious quests, and at the end of the day, what you'll end up with is money, experience, and a few good memories, rather than any truly noble accomplishment. If your GM is agreeable, here's how you might proceed:

Identifying your Target Market

First, you'll need to find out whether or not there are actually people interested in dungeon tourism, and who they are. It's best to be based in a city with a fairly large and wealthy upper-class sector. A streak of decadence and entropy in the dominant culture will help; your target market should be rich, bored, and jaded, rather than noble and upstanding. Visit the local racetracks, gladiatorial arenas, and the more prestigious gambling dens and find out who your first clients are likely to be. Next, find out about any "Hellraiser" or "Thrillseeker" clubs in your local area; rich gentlemen's establishments are certainly your best option here. You can even make some preliminary inquiries: "How much would you pay us if we showed you a dragon incubating her eggs . . . without her knowing you were there?"

Once you have ascertained that there are enough rich fops or would-be heroes in your local area to make your efforts worthwhile, you can start thinking about who is actually going to man the show, and how you are going to fund it.

Manpower and Capital

Let's get this straight right from the outset: There is no way you can manage an adventure tour operation on your own. If you don't already have people to play the following roles, you'll need to advertise; traveler's inns are a good place to start.

- **A Showman.** You'll need someone with a gift of the gab, a flair for advertising, and an ability to spot a potential client. Part of the appeal of going on a tour is to listen to the spiel of the tour guide. If you just keep your mouth shut and point to the monsters, your customers won't come back.
- **A Scout or Ranger.** You'll need someone with good animal and monster lore skills, tracking, and any other skills that are useful in finding large creatures and predicting their behaviors.
- **A Healer.** It's vital to have someone along who can quickly repair any damage done to any of your guests as they undergo their adventure experience. The presence of this person will make them feel a lot safer, and your reputation will survive the odd mishap (an escaping monster, etc.) if your guests always leave your premises essentially unharmed.
- **A Handyman.** In order to make your dungeon tourist friendly, and to keep the monsters where you want them, you'll probably need to alter it quite a bit. Hire someone with a good knowledge of masonry, woodwork, mining, and in a particular, skills in constructing and maintaining doors and barricades.
- **Hired Muscle.** These people always have their uses: calming unruly monsters, persuading guests who are not keen to pay, or keeping out intruders or competitors. Hire at least one.

You'll also need cash. If you haven't already got it, you'll need to get enough to set up the dungeon (see "Making A Base") and to pay at least four weeks' wages (not a problem if your staff are prepared to work for free until profit starts coming in). Financiers for such an operation will expect their funds remunerated with a healthy profit, or even a stake in your company, so be careful about what you agree to. In terms of finding financiers, the kind of folk interested in going on a dungeon tour are the kind of folk with enough cash to fund one; see "Identifying your Target Market," above, and think about asking your first prospective customers for money in advance.

Finding a Product

Third, you'll need a product -- something to pull the punters in. Monsters are best, but spectacular ancient architecture or even interesting cave formations will do at a pinch (you can always build your customers up to wanting more next time). It may well be the case that you have already explored part of a nearby dungeon or cave system and found some monsters. If not, seek out a dungeon or unexplored ruins in or near your local city (or alternately, try your hand at a wilderness tourism operation). Explore the first two or three levels as best as you can; but if you *do* come across any monsters, flee, leaving large amounts of food behind. Well-fed monsters are less likely to attack guests.

What kind of monsters are best? To start with, find creatures that behave instinctively rather than intelligently; those that have predictable movement and behavior are safest. You don't want anything that can fly or otherwise move around in unpredictable ways, or anything with a ranged attack. You also don't want anything that is too intelligent or well-organized. Eliminate all monsters that do not fit with your plans. Obviously when you've gotten a bit more advanced these guidelines can be ignored.

Making a Base

Once you have found your monsters, you'll need to make a base for yourself. See about getting legal rights to the entrance, so that other adventures can't come in and spoil your show. This can be tricky if the entrance is out in the country or wilderness, but if you can find a city with a cellar/dungeon network that abuts onto the cavernous underworld, you can try to seal off an underworld entrance so that it is exclusively yours. If you can't get legal land ownership rights to the area, you may need to hire extra muscle to guard against intruders.

Establish yourself on the first few levels, making them safe for visitors. Seal all the entrances with doors and barricades, especially the ones leading to where the monsters are (you don't want the stars of the show escaping or

wandering about too much). Build ramps, steps, ladders, and railings to make the dungeon easier to navigate, especially if it is a cave (you may be intrepid, but your guests are almost certainly not). Investigate the behavior of the monsters in the area to build up a profile of what they are likely to do and when, so you can determine the best time to run your tours. If possible, find or create a viewing gallery; a place high up in natural cave overlooking somewhere where the monsters congregate is perfect. From there, you can lecture your guests on the behavior they see below them, and possibly even rig up a plaque or some other kind of interpretive display.

Trial Runs, Advertising, and the Big Launch

A trial run is highly advisable. Scout out the dungeon area to make sure those monsters are still where they should be according to your profile. Then send in a tour party composed of your guide and a couple of your team members, who must pretend to be uninitiated and require help to navigate the dungeon. A trial run will iron out problems you might not have thought of in a purely theoretical run-through.

Next, advertise. If you've already got a first client, you might want to wait for the testimony of that client, and let word of mouth do the work for you. Alternately, revisit those gentlemen's clubs and gambling dens and spread the news of your opening with broadsheets and posters, if they exist in your world. Resist the temptation to get the town crier involved. You will want your clients to think they are entering into an elite and prestigious world, and if your tours are advertised at the local marketplace, you will damage the image you are trying to create.

Finally, the big day will arrive. You may want to make sure your guests know they are your first ones, if that will give them prestige in their social circles. Alternately, you can pretend or suggest that of *course* you have run the tours many times before without mishap, and that they are completely safe. With appropriate pomp and ceremony, lead your guests down through the known portions of your dungeon, and into the greatest adventure of their lives . . .

Tips to Keep the Operation Going

- **Get more lackeys.** Once you have established your dungeon base and underworld entrance, you can lease out time in the unexplored sections of your dungeon to would-be adventurers. This works particularly well in areas where all the dungeon entrances are explored or taken. Doing this has a two-fold advantage; first, you're getting paid to do nothing; second, the adventurers are facing the dangers in the lower levels, and exploring new areas for your customers. Spin the new adventurers along with the idea that one day you'll let them join the firm.
- **Keep your monsters well fed.** You might make this part of the daily show; watching those giant ants devour the food you bring them might entertain your guests. If they are a particularly bloodthirsty group, try throwing a lesser monster into the clutches of a greater monster and explaining the combat to your guests blow by blow.
- **Invent your own mythology.** Most people will have heard of dragons, but you may find coaxing people in to see your gooey black slime monster a difficult prospect. If you find a way of inserting your monsters into local folklore (by hiring a bard to write songs about heroes who were slain by them, for example), your guests will enjoy their experience all the more. No one will check the validity or provenance of the folklore, either. People just don't care that much.
- **Get more monsters.** The public may get tired of your initial display, and if you want to attract guests back for more you will need to make sure you have a steady supply of monsters. Breed the ones you do have, if possible, and import them from other dungeons or wilderness areas if you are running low. If worst comes to the worst, make temporary monsters by collecting small creatures (rats, spiders) and magically enlarging them for the benefit of your guests. Alternately, use illusions.
- **Charge as much as you think the market will bear.** You are providing a unique luxury entertainment service and should price yourself accordingly -- think about how much equivalent tours might cost on Earth (a dive in a deep-sea submarine, a mountain-climbing excursion, or the like).
- **Make secondary merchandise.** After your guests have witnessed the main show they may want to buy souvenirs. Mock swords and armor are popular; guests like to buy these so they can pretend to be valorous. You may also want to sell food and drink, or perhaps even provide theme-based musical entertainment while they relax after their dungeon crawl. Once you've got 'em in, their money is yours! The possibilities are endless.

"There she is," said Spender, holding up the spot-lantern so that Lord Roader could see the enormous beast below. "She hasn't eaten in days. Watch closely as her keeper flies over and drops the sheep down for her. She'll have it as quick as a flash . . . if you blink, you'll miss it."

*"I see," said Lord Roader, sipping his port and leaning up against the balcony. "In Wren and Malone's Dungeon, you can actually throw the sheep down yourself. And they've got a **real** dragon, not just an overgrown lizard. I think I want to see something else . . ."*

A GM's Guide To Setting Up A "Dungeon Tourism" Game

There are a number of ways of including an element of dungeon tourism in your campaign. Here are four of the most obvious:

- You include an existing dungeon tourism establishment in one of your cities.
- One of your NPCs approaches the party with a "one-off" dungeon tour proposal. This NPC -- a rich eccentric -- wants to come down into the dungeon the party are exploring and see the sights. After that, the idea goes no further (or alternately, the players realize its potential).
- You set up a campaign in which dungeon tourism is a theme and introduce the ideas to your players.
- Your players want to set up a tourism operation in your ongoing campaign.

Of course, the players' guide above makes the process of setting up a business sound pretty straightforward, whereas you'll want to make it complex enough to be a real challenge. But don't put up so many challenges that you squish the operation too soon.

Having your party set up and run a business within your campaign world can provide an excellent structure for party stability and cohesiveness, as well as being the backdrop for adventures. All the activities and issues of the business world -- product and marketing, cash flow and competition -- must be undertaken and dealt with so that the enterprise may be successful. There's no need for you to make this process any more difficult than it already is until after the first few tours have been completed.

Dungeon tourism will work best in a campaign setting in which the following features exist. Think about including most or all of these features in a tourism game, whether you are starting from scratch, or inserting the idea into an existing series of adventures.

- Create a large underworld, filled with various kinds of monsters which is joined in a number of places to a cellar and dungeon complex beneath an inhabited area.
- Create an ethos in which a fascination for the monstrous and bizarre is prevalent in the population.
- Allow the PCs to find a previously undiscovered entrance leading to an area in which there are powerful but non-intelligent monsters dwelling.
- Set up the structure of the initial underground areas so that tourism is possible; provide a viewing gallery if you like, and don't include too many perilous descents or flooded river tunnels. Plain old cave floors will do nicely in the upper levels.
- Let the first tourism operations go smoothly (so long as the party have prepared adequately). Allow the players to build up momentum so that when they do encounter challenges, they have something to protect, rather than simply giving up after the first attempt because it all looks too hard.

So, you let the first few tours pass by successfully and uneventfully. The guests have "oohed" and "aahed" at the monsters and other dungeon features from the safe distance of the viewing platform and have left suitably impressed. Word of mouth is picking up and the players are feeling optimistic. Now, its time to add some spice! Throw any or all of the following challenges at your party.

Unhealthy Competition

Your players aren't the only ones who have thought about running a tourism operation! Either your party is getting in on an established trend, or else they are the trendsetters and will soon find others getting in on the act. This could simply mean that your party must work harder to keep their business going. Alternately, you might decide that competition in the tourism industry is less than friendly, and use the following ideas to liven things up:

- A valued customer pulls out of a tour and the party is keen to find out why. After much probing, they find out that there is a rumor circulating which discredits them; they are cheats, drug runners, or nefarious in some other way. Someone has been bad-mouthing the party's operation in order to draw business away. The party may be able to save their reputations . . . but perhaps it might be easier to discredit, or even frame, the competition?
- The party hears a rumor that another tourism operation is showcasing a dragon! All of a sudden, business drops away. Then the party hears from another source that the dragon is just an illusion. How do they prove it, thereby winning back their old customers? Looks like a sneak trip into their competitor's dungeon might be in order.
- On the party's latest touring operation, they find that someone has set a nasty trap aimed to kill or injure guests or party members. Alternately, some of those prized monsters appear to have been killed. Someone has been getting into the party's precious dungeon and mucking things up!

In the long term, the party should eventually triumph over the competition, and establish themselves as the premier tourism company in the area. Using some of the tricks described above on their competition is a good way of going about this. Alternately, members of one of the rival companies may be involved in something far more sinister, leading into a new and more heroic phase of the campaign.

The Unimpressed Guests

Not all the guests are quite as easy to please as the first few groups. In this scenario twist, the party runs into a group of guests who are less than amused by what they have seen. This might simply mean that the party's reputation suffers. Alternately, it may be more complicated . . .

- The guests are unimpressed, and demand to be taken deeper into the dungeon, threatening to ruin the party's credibility if they don't get their money's worth. This calls for a bit of off-the-cuff dungeon exploration, with some drunken guests in tow, making belligerent comments all the while.
- One of the guests is injured (by a fall or by a minor monster attack) and threatens to sue the party (or otherwise cause them grief if you have no litigious legal system in your campaign). In the worst-case scenario, the person is badly injured or killed, and the family initiates a death feud with the party.
- One of the guests mysteriously vanishes while down in the dungeon. This could be the act of a monster, or perhaps a rival touring company has done it to discredit the party. In any case, the person's friends demand that the party perform a thorough search of all the areas in the dungeon until the person is found.

Remember that any of the guests could easily be agents or spies for a competing tour company, who want to get an insight into how the party does things, and also want a chance to mess things up. In this case, the guests will be unimpressed no matter *what* the PCs show them; will be seen by one of the party deliberately tripping over in an attempt to fake an injury; or alternately, will arrange to magically remove themselves from the dungeon so it will appear that a monster has taken them.

Escape from the Under Dark

Of course, there are tunnels beneath the players' nice safe "touring dungeon" that are home to all sorts of creatures, some of them intelligent and highly mobile; sooner or later one of these is going to get curious about all the activity going on upstairs. In the final twist to the scenario, unexpected monsters get into the dungeon during a tour, or even break through to the surface areas where the party is based. Here are some suggestions for monster types that might make tourism a tricky proposition.

- Slime Monsters (such as *Dungeons & Dragons'* Green Slime) drop from the ceiling onto one of the guests, hideously disfiguring him. Slime monsters are useful because it is feasible to have them drop on anyone in a group, meaning that the guests will be difficult to guard. Alternately, one of the guests contracts a disfiguring

disease. Either way, the heroes have got their work cut out for them in order to preserve their reputation.

- An undead or spirit creature enters the body of one of the guests and takes him over. This does not immediately become apparent; it is only when the serial killings begin in the neighborhood that folks begin to ask questions. The truth comes out when the man's wife finally realizes he has been possessed, and seeks the party's help to restore him. Alternately, the creature must revisit its underground lair every few days to regenerate its power.
- Well-organized evil humanoid creatures ambush a tour group and attempt to kidnap several guests (demanding large sums of money for their return if they succeed). The party will discover that a network of tunnels beneath their dungeon leads to a large humanoid kingdom that has also been discovered by other adventurers. The focus of the campaign shifts away from dungeon tourism and on to exploring the underworld civilization.

Broadening the Tourism Idea

Dungeon Ownership

If you are going to run a tourism game you will need to think about property ownership in your legal system. In the scenario described above, it is assumed that people would have legal ownership of entrances to the underworld (i.e. cellars, vaults, shafts, etc) and would then stake out claims in areas beneath their entrance that will be legally recognized. You may decide that there is in fact no backing for an underground claim in your legal system, and that anyone can go wherever they like underground (although they still cannot use other people's entrances if that would involve trespassing on their above-ground property).

If you decide that the whole notion of property ownership over dungeon entrances is not for you, consider a scenario in which the dungeon entrance is in a wilderness area, and part of the tour is a three-day trek just to get to the entrance. If the location is secret, your party will have to be alert that your trek is not being spied upon by others keen to know where your entrance is. Alternately, there may be other adventurers or tour guides at the location, and staking a claim will be a matter of defending in with all the muscle you can find.

Finally, consider a scenario in which your newly formed adventuring party is trying to find the way down into the underworld, but all the entrances have been taken. Until they move up in rank, power, and prestige, they are going to have to bite the bullet and do what all the other beginners have done before them: Lease a dungeon entrance from an established dungeoneering company at a daily rate!

The Traveling Freaks and Monsters Show

Setting up a traveling show might be an easier (and more realistic) option for your party. In this scenario, the party travels to dungeons or outlying wilderness areas in search of monsters that can be drugged, subdued, or imprisoned, and then bring them back to civilization to put on a show. Perhaps your party will need to team up with a traveling circus troupe in order to make a name for themselves. Or perhaps the industry is already so large that there is money to be made simply by procuring monsters and animals for the exhibitions of other people. In any case, the scenario has a built-in inbuilt rationale as to why your NPCs would want to go traipsing through the wilderness, as well as providing the additional challenge of capturing rather than killing the monsters that they encounter.

The Genuine Wilderness Guide

Of course, there are other situations in which your party could function as tour operators or travel organizers that would involve them in far more noble causes than the ones that have been mentioned in this article. Imagine any of the following scenarios as good "party set-ups":

- A peaceful kingdom is being overrun by goblins and many citizens have become refugees. The party moves back and forth across a dangerous mountain range, taking refugees one way and taking back supplies to the resistance movement.
- A kingdom has been entirely occupied by an evil power and a resistance movement has sprung up. Resistance

fighters need places to lie low or even escape, and the party is well suited to leading people through the underworld out of the kingdom into safety.

- Clerics need to visit a holy place in the mountains in order to perform rituals, but the mountain range has become overrun by monsters. The party guides groups of devotees from the city up to the sacred site and back down again.
- A team of archaeologists is interested in exploring the ruins of an ancient site out in the desert. Who better than the local people (the party) to guide them safely to and from the place and guard them from danger?

Whatever the scenario, your party should ideally have a shared common goal from the outset, rather than simply being a group of strangers who get together in an inn. Guides and touring operations are just of many interesting and amusing "party rationales" you may wish to consider in your campaign.

Final Word

*Spender looked at the payments ledger and sighed disconsolately. "This is harder than I thought," he said. "First Wren and Malone open up and take half our business away with their phony dragon. It's just a giant lizard, same as ours, but with illusionary fire! Then someone poisons our giant beetles while they are still on the transport ship. It's too cutthroat around here. I know . . . how about we write a book called **How to Survive in the Tourism Business**. Writing about it has got to be easier than actually working in it . . ."*

Designer's Notes: *Transhuman Space: Deep Beyond*

Into the Deep Beyond

by David L. Pulver

"These bodies which now wear belong to the lower animals; our minds have already outgrown them; already we look upon them with contempt. A time will come when Science will transform them by means which we cannot conjecture, and which, even if explained to us, we could not now understand, just as the savage cannot understand electricity, magnetism, steam. Disease will be extirpated; the causes of decay will be removed; immortality will be invented. And then, the earth being small, mankind will migrate into space, and will cross the airless Saharas which separate planet from planet, and sun from sun. The earth will become a Holy Land which will be visited by pilgrims from all the quarters of the universe. Finally, men will master the forces of Nature; they will become themselves architects of systems, manufacturers of worlds."

-- Winwood Reade, *The Martyrdom of Man* (1872)

One of the last things I did for ***Deep Beyond*** was coming up with a suitable set of quotes for the book. I wanted to use the above passage, but it would not quite fit anywhere -- but I think Reade's words from over a century ago nicely sums up some transhumanist ideologies, and in a rather prescient fashion.

Deep Beyond is the ***Transhuman Space*** worldbook for the outer solar system -- that vast region that encompass the asteroid belt, the giant planets and their moons, and the icy bodies of the Kuiper Belt and Oort Cloud. This is the final frontier, the actual and symbolic promised land for adventurous pilgrims willing to push the envelope of science, society, and humanity. It's a place for transhumanists, criminals, corporate visionaries, and folks who just want to be left alone. And since America gets most of its vital energy from Saturn, there's also plenty of soldiers.

I also wanted to see if I could convey a sense of the wonder of the outer solar system -- not just cratered rocks, but worlds with erupting volcanoes and subsurface oceans, with continent-sized storms and geysers of ice. It seemed a shame not to make some use out of all that scenery, so I spent some time coming up with reasons why it might be economically feasible to put people there. Fortunately, a lot of much cleverer people had already thought up many of them, and I drew ideas from dozens of different books and articles on asteroid mining, Helium-3 extraction, and space colonization. Even though you won't find the standard trope of an asteroid belt full of hardy miners, there's plenty of things for people to see, do, and get in trouble with.

One of the biggest resources the belt and outer system offers is freedom -- places where people can get away, to escape the rules, memes, and regulations of Earth and Mars. That makes the belt and beyond home to everyone from experimental research labs of transnational corporations to bizarre posthuman societies. The inhabitants of the Deep Beyond are small in number and their profitable activities represent only a tiny fraction of the 2100 economy (aside from the huge He-3 mining operation). However, as a harbinger of a posthuman future, they can be seen as either the canary in the memetic mineshaft whose excesses serve as a warning to Earth, or as brave pioneers of mankind's expansion into the cosmos. Or both.

Deep Beyond was the second *Transhuman Space* book that I wrote, but it was the first one I began. In fact, it was originally intended to be the opening book in the line, until Steve Jackson and Sean Punch rightly pointed out that an introductory core book was needed to set the scene. So ***Deep Beyond*** ended up coming out later in the series. (Fortunately, it still beat the Cassini space probe, which will hopefully change our understanding of some of the places visited.) A lot of material that was intended for it had already appeared in the core book -- such as the outlines of the Exogenesis struggle -- but of course, this gave me more room to add new things . . . not all of which ended up being used.

Welcome to the Deep Beyond

"Imagine what it's like to risk death every time you go to work. You walk unshielded through an environment filled with bacteria and cancer-causing radiation. You navigate to work down a narrow channel, dodging a stream of multi-ton projectiles moving at ever-varying speeds. A single slip on a patch of ice or slippery vegetation, and gravity will suck you down with a force that can wrench ligaments or break bones.

"That was life on Earth. For many in the Third Wave, that's what it's like today.

"Luckily, you're growing up in space, where the laws of physics behave the way your physics text says they should. You can see someone coming a million miles away. You live in a clean, sterile environment, and if anything's wrong, you've always got your suit. If your craft's engine fails, it's not like you'll fall from the sky and die, like you would on Earth or Mars! If you don't panic, you can even live a minute in hard vacuum!

"Sure, microgravity, vacc and radiation kill a few careless groundhogs -- if you grew up on Earth, stay focused and learn quick. But not you kids -- space is in your blood.

"So stay away from planets -- they're not safe! And remember: it's not the environment you have to worry about. It's the competition. We got here first, but we're no longer alone."

-- Karen Pfil, Green Duncanite

The Duncanites are the libertarian pantropist group that initiated the illegal terraforming of Mars and chose exile to the asteroid belt over punishment. Much of **Deep Beyond** is concerned with their viewpoint, and working out some of the details of how they might live and work on Ceres and their other colonies. I wrote that section from a Duncanite viewpoint in reaction to all those books and RPGs that portrayed life in space as a never-ending struggle where one wrong move meant death, and so ended up as neurotic obsessive-compulsives. I figured the people who actually live there might have other ideas, at least after a generation or two.

Of course, that's if fairly stable, smart, well adjusted people get into deep space. One of the other assumptions of **Deep Beyond** is that after the orbital, Lagrange and Mars colonies have been around for a couple of decades, these societies will produce various misfits, dreamers, misanthropes, and the like, and being already in space, they'll find it easier to head out into the frontier than go back to Earth. This led to the creation of a number of religious and other isolate colonies. But a few were too odd to include.

Space Nazis Must Die

"The End Times are coming, and the Kingdom of Yahweh is at hand! We must purify ourselves before the final battle. Just as the 10 Lost Tribes separated themselves from the spawn of Cain to walk in the untainted north, we shall leave the muck of Earth behind us, embarking on a new Folk Wandering. We seek a new eyrie in which we may purge the taint of the serpent from our genes, and restore the line of Adam: fair of skin, long-limbed and long-lived, with straw-colored hair and clear blue eyes. Our Nordic ancestors grew strong in ice and snow; to dwell among the Cosmic Ice is the natural heritage of Nordic Man."

-- Richard Armstrong, 2074

I was originally thinking of including a fairly sizable bunch of space nazis in the Kuiper Belt, mostly to give the Duncanites something to worry about besides the Chinese and each other. My thought was that some suitably obsessed neo-Nazi racists would latch onto the semi-mystical ideas of Hanns Hoerbiger's "cosmic ice theory" and Nordic "folk wandering," and somehow fit that into a mythology that led them to head out to the icy Kuiper Belt or Oort Cloud and settle a comet or whatever . . . except their own ineptitude and racism would get into all sorts of unfortunate situations, which their leader would try to spin into some sort of epic tale, with pseudo-scientific ramblings of this sort:

"I knew we were in trouble when I saw the shape of the pilot's skull. Unlike a true Nordic, he was brachycephalic. Aderic, my trusty VI, performed a quick laser scan and confirmed my instinctive judgement. The greatest breadth of the pilot's heads divided by the greatest length and multiplied by 100 gave a cephalic index of 85. From that moment on, I

was certain he could not be trusted, and would try to cheat us during our passage."
-- *Our Folkwandering, Book VI: Columbia Station to Lagrange 5* by Richard Armstrong

I read a bunch of racist tracts as research to try and get the style right, but in the end, I decided they didn't really fit (if I kept getting the urge to make fun of them, they couldn't be taken that seriously as bad guys) so I reduced the Space Nazi Menace from the Kupier Belt to a single asteroid colony inhabited by a more media-savvy if no less toxic group, one that exported "eidelon" mind-clones of famous icons of the politically incorrect.

Dragons in Space

A more whimsical fringe group I had thought of including was inspired by reading a news account of the "Otherkin," a real-life movement of individuals who believe themselves to be spiritually or physically other than human -- incarnations of centaurs, dragons, sylphs, and so on. I figured that sort of meme could continue in more literal form:

Fafnir and Tien Lung

Fafnir is a group of immortal xenokin transhumanists attempting to transform themselves into celestial dragons. Most were heavily influenced by the dracofantasy infodreams of Shiina Aki, such as the award-winning "King with Wings" (2073) and the needlebrain past lives movement of the 2080s. The needlebrains attempted to use early psychosurgery and mind emulation technology to recover (critics said "manufacture") supposed past lives as dragons during the age of dinosaurs, which they envisioned (following Shiina Aki) as a Jurassic-age civilization ruled by Leviathan, king of the Tien Lung, which survived until destroyed by cosmic catastrophe. The group split in the 2080s, one segment being content to live in virtual reality on Earth, the other, a small faction led by millionaire guru Shinji "Tien Lung" Yamamoto, preferring a physical realization of their destiny. The means the group have finally achieved is their own deliberate transformation into the modern incarnation of draconism: enormous draconic cybershell spacecraft.

Alas, I got hung up on how they would actually pay for this sort of thing (the big spaceships, I mean), and in the end, decided it was all a bit much -- it never even hit the first draft. Perhaps turning themselves into cybershell dragons and flitting about Titan would have been more practical, and better for the tourist trade as well!

An element I did hope to explore was xoxing, and I wrote this short section:

Xox Populi

A xox is a replicated sapient infomorph. On Earth, sapient xoxes are feared by the authorities, as they represent the potential for a non-human population explosion. In the Deep Beyond, humans are in short supply, and there's plenty of room. Xoxing appears to offer a way to increase productivity without worrying about population. The situation in regard to xoxes is quite similar to many old attitudes toward illegal migrant labor -- it's not suppose to exist, but the economy often depends on it.

I then had a weird idea that perhaps there was a group in Earth orbit that ran some "amateur radio astronomy" dishes that were actually used to beam ghosts out from Earth to receivers secretly installed in the Belt or whatever -- they'd offer passage for dissidents, criminals, xoxes, etc. These folks would be reconstructed by the Trojan Mafia or another criminal group. But it sounded a bit far-fetched, and there probably weren't enough people who would need such a service -- actually it would work better as a way to illegal emigrate to, say, Mars.

I plan to explore xoxing in more detail, but decided to leave that to a hoped-for ***TS: America*** or ***TS: Pacific Rim Alliance*** sourcebook that could it look at the rising influence of ghosts in Japan and the United States.

Deep Beyond is available now. I'd like to thank everyone who made it possible, especially those Pyramidians who selflessly contributed ideas, material, and reality checking during the playtest. Bon voyage!

Give Your Heroes A Home with Cardstock Cutouts

by Mike Colcord

Not too long ago, roleplayers used just their imaginations to see where their characters were in a dungeon or in a town. Then some companies made flat "generic" maps for showing what was where, (like the "Dungeon Design Kit" in *Dragon Magazine* #45) and on occasion someone even made a 3-D cutout for this purpose. Of course, you still had to buy the set and were limited to what the company chose to make available, but being able to see where the characters were usually made it worthwhile. Then came the Internet, and downloadable files that allow you to print out as many of whatever you need. In addition to being generally cheaper than actually buying the sets, as graphic files they are usually modifiable to what you need. (For example, by setting your printer to print at a smaller scale, you can print 25mm sets for 15mm games.) Then came 3-D cutouts of buildings, dungeons, and just about anything else the intrepid DM needs to show the players what is going on. There are many places you can get these sets, with prices ranging from free to \$20.00 or so each.

This article will compare and contrast the downloads made specifically for roleplaying games, with attention to cost and ease of assembly.

The first is **Billy's Shed** at <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/johnny.kid/index.htm>, which has 15 or so buildings for the **Warhammer** game. These are medieval village buildings and are very well done. The set includes an armory, a bridge and watchtower, several basic buildings, ruins, and a magic shop. The detail is very good, the construction is easy, and these are all available free.

Next we have miniature buildings created for Wizards of the Coast's **Chainmail** miniatures game, at <http://www.wizards.com/dnd/article.asp?x=minis/ch20030123pmx>. This includes 15 downloads, including several with both whole and ruined versions. (The ruined version is designed to be put under the whole one so when a wizard's fireball hits it, you just pull off the whole piece.) The set includes a stone bridge, towers, city walls, a church, an inn, a blacksmith shop, and even a crypt and a graveyard. Most of these are very easy to assemble, and all are available for free.

Worldworks -- at <http://www.worldworksgames.com/> -- is the third location for medieval buildings. He has three sets available for download. Its first, **Castleworks**, is a castle. It includes two lengths of walls, a stone tower, a gatehouse, and a two-story building. The detail is excellent, and for the most part, construction is easy. The second set, **Dungeonworks**, is somewhat more complex, but for the standard dungeon crawl is definitely worth checking out. The third, **Villageworks**, includes various modular buildings that allow you to pick and choose the look of your village. All three sets are available at <http://www.rpgnow.com/> for a price of \$7.00 to \$15.00 and are well worth the investment. (Future releases include an interior set of buildings, and several sets of standup characters.) There is also a free samples section with several free selections.

S. John Ross' Cumberland Games -- at <http://www222.pair.com/sjohn/cumberland.htm> -- has two cardstock creations available: **Dungeon Interiors** and **Space Station Interiors**. Each set includes walls, floor pieces, and "wall hangings" suitable for the setting. At \$5.00 each they are a fine, cheap investment. (You might also want to check out his fine line of **Sparks Miniatures**. These are scalable miniatures designed as True

Color vs. Black & White

While color sets are nice and look better in a lot of ways, there is an advantage to getting the files uncolored. By printing several versions of the building in question and coloring them differently, you avoid having all the buildings look identical.

Coloring can be done prior to printing with several programs. As one option, Photoshop Elements allows the user to select a single page from an Adobe Acrobat document. (All the offerings are in Adobe format.) alternately, they can be printed and then colored with felt tip pens.

Assembly

When it comes to putting the models together, some equipment can make a difference. Most of the modules

Type Fonts, enabling easy scaling and mass-printing.) Assembly is very easy but are not colored. They are available at his site or through

<http://www.hyperbooks.com/catalog/index.html>

Microtactics -- at <http://microtactix.com/> -- is probably the most prolific of the electronic miniature sites around. In addition to three different modular undergrounds -- **Dirt Cheap Dungeons, Caverns, and Sewers** -- they have a medieval village set (**Vyllage-On-The-Cheep**), an interior village set, ruins, and Dirt Cheap Keeps. They are also almost the only place where you can get settings other than medieval. Locations include a modern town, a rural modern town, a futuristic setting, a western town, skyscrapers, vehicles, and tons of other things. Assembly is generally easy, and some of the sets are available in color or black & white. Prices generally run \$5.00 to \$20.00 per set, depending on complexity. There are several sample sets available for free as well.

can be cut out with scissors, but the small expense of a self-healing cutting board, a steel ruler, and an Exacto knife can make a big difference. White glue works very well, although Elmer's School Glue Gel sets quicker than the White glue.

For those interested in western towns, another option is **Whitewash City** by Eric Hotz, available at <http://www.erichotz.com/whitewash.html>. Each building comes in color and monochrome sets, and includes both a floor plan of the building and a blank floor plan (which is something that would be nice to see in some of the other sets). Buildings are available for \$3.00 each, and there are various package deals. For those playing **GURPS Old West, Deadlands**, or **Boot Hill**, the set is well worth the investment, and includes most of the places your characters are likely to go (such as a bank, a bakery, a hardware store, a bar, a hotel, and -- of course -- the sheriff's office and jail). All are very easy to assemble. Other items available include a flat set for a stone keep, a wooden palisade, and three sets for flat furniture (bedding, tables, and chairs). There are also various "add ons" (such as wanted posters, additional doors and windows, and tons of other stuff). Done in 30 mm, all sets are easily adjusted to whatever size you use. Both Eric's love of the old west and incredible artistic abilities show in these buildings.

Fantasy Cutouts <http://www.fantasycutouts.com/>) has one item available. The Guard tower is definitely the most complex model constructed here. A three-story watchtower on a small hill, this set is also the most amazing of them all. Each floor has a removable section to allow looking inside, and each floor is removable. Under the tower, inside the hill is a basement as well. At \$6.00 for a 14-page download, this is almost a "Must Have" item. *[Editor's Note: At press time this URL does not seem to be working.]*

Germ's World at <http://www.germy.co.uk/> has a modular space station, and a dungeon set, both of which are free and highly adaptive. In addition, he has a collection of buildings for a contemporary or near-future setting that not only includes interior walls, but removable roofs for interior access. It would be nice if there was some furniture as well, but it's a minor deficiency. The sets are very easy to assemble, resembling small shoe boxes.

One final option for those who play an unusual game is at http://members.tripod.com/~into_the_shadows/models/index.html. Available for free download is a Tardis (both exterior and interior, with standup figures) and a set of "Scooby Doo" figures with a Mystery Machine, and some simple-to-assemble cutouts.

A Nyamban Herbal

for *d20 System*

by Chris Dolunt

Atlas Games' upcoming **Ancestral Vault** sourcebook explores the heart of African adventure with 96 pages of mundane **d20 System** equipment, special and superior items, and magical objects of all degrees of power. Though designed for use with the **Nyambe: African Adventures** setting, these items can find their way into any campaign as exotic treasures from faraway lands. The following outtakes are just a sample of the wealth of **d20 System** material found in **Ancestral Vault**.

Introduction to Herbalism

Natural medicine makes extensive use of plants, animals, and stones to generate a variety of effects. Some of these effects are mundane in nature, while others are magical. The following herbs are used extensively in Nyamban natural medicine. This bonus material gives descriptions of new herbs not included in **Ancestral Vault**, along with the mundane and magical concoctions that a character trained in the ways of plants can create with the Herbalism skill.

Description & Climate/Terrain

The opening section of each entry gives a description of the plant in question, a discussion of its general uses and natural habitat, a glimpse into its history of use by sentient races, and other relevant information. Below it is a header giving the plant's common habitat. Many plants are adaptable enough that they can grow in other climates, but not without difficulty or some detrimental consequences.

Availability

This entry gives the plant's rarity and market price per pound. The raw herb's market price is determined by its habitat and rarity, and the more difficult an herb is to acquire, the higher the probability is that the herb market vendors won't have it, as well. To determine whether an herb is in stock, roll 1d20 and compare the result to the DC for that plant's rarity: Common DC 5, Uncommon DC 10, Rare DC 15, Very Rare DC 18, and Unique DC 20.

Bindings

This heading lists the magic schools with which the plant shares an affinity. A rating indicating the maximum spell level that can be bound to a verdex made of the plant using the Plantbind feat follows each school name; bindings allow an herbalist to "store" spells. For example, Anise's bindings are: Conjuration 2, Transmutation 3. This means that anise has an affinity for the schools Conjuration and Transmutation, with spell level maximums of 2 and 3, respectively. As such, a spellcaster may only bind a 1st- or 2nd-level Conjuration spell or a 1st-, a 2nd-, or a 3rd-level Transmutation spell to an anise verdex.

Traits

This heading lists the plant's medicinal traits, which describe the natural properties that can be harnessed by using the Herbalism skill. The number following each trait name is its rating, which is added to an herbalist's base DC 15 when she makes a skill check to create either a mundane or a magical concoction. It also determines the amount of time she must spend working on the material, with the amount of time being measured in hours for mundane concoctions, or days for magical ones, and equal to her Herbalism skill modifier subtracted from the trait rating. For example, Umeiko

the Sorceress has the Herbalism skill at +16, and wants to turn berries from the henna plant into a type of enchanted ink for creating magic-storing tattoos. The plant's pigment trait rating is 20, giving her a DC of 35 to effect the change over the course of 4 days.

Mundane Concoctions

Below the list of the plant's traits is a more in-depth discussion of a few of the natural effects inherent in the plant, and mundane concoctions that can be produced from each trait by using the Herbalism skill. Again, making a dose of one of these medicines requires an Herbalism check, DC 15 plus the trait's rating. At the end of each trait's information section is a brief note on which magical concoctions can also be made by awakening that trait; these are described more fully in the Magical Concoctions section immediately following.

Magical Concoctions

Also included in each plant entry are numerous magical concoctions created from the plant by awakening its natural attributes. Each is the result of laborious experimentation and research performed over centuries, codified, and subsequently handed down as a standard recipe. The magical concoction's information block contains its type, the trait from which it is made, as well as the base Herbalism DC to make one dose, and its market price. Also, unless otherwise noted, a concoction's bonuses do not stack with consecutive uses. In most cases, one must wait for the effects from previous uses to wear off for it work again.

Borage

Borage is not unique to Nyambe; it is also found in the lands to the North and parts of the Near East. Borage plants stand about two feet in height, and are covered with stiff white "hairs." The leaves, which are of primary interest to the herbalist, are pointed ovals approximately three inches long, and also covered with hairs. Its flowers, also useful in herbalism, are bright blue with black anthers. Finally, its seeds are black and grow in clusters of four.

Climate/Terrain: Temperate and warm plain and hill. In Nyambe, borage is grown mostly in the empire of *Mabwe* (MAH-bweh).

Availability: Common (22 cp per lb.)

Bindings: Abjuration 1, Evocation 3, Transmutation 4

Traits: Brokelung 3, Blightpurge 4, Coldsweat 12, Feverthaw 10, Readheal 2, Spinewrack 14

Mundane Concoctions

Brokelung: Sometimes nursing mothers eat borage nuts to induce milk production, but they can also cause difficulty breathing. An herbalist can grind borage nuts into a paste that help expel contaminants from the lungs.

Ingesting borage nut paste causes violent coughing that expels dust, sand, or other contaminants from the lungs. Where applicable, it adds a +2 bonus to Fortitude saves against such effects for 10 minutes.

Blightpurge: Dried borage leaves boiled in water can have a diuretic effect, helping rid the body of foreign substances.

Drinking such a concoction reduces the duration of any ingested potions or other substances currently in the body by 25%.

Coldsweat: Eating borage leaves can induce cold sweats to aid in purging toxins from the body.

A healer using this concoction to treat a poisoned patient gains a +8 circumstance bonus to Heal checks made to counteract the poison, but the borage also inflicts 1d4 points of temporary Strength score damage on the patient. This bonus lasts one hour.

Feverthaw: When boiled in honey and water, the extract of borage leaves can be drunk to reduce fever.

Drinking this infusion provides a +4 bonus to Fortitude saves made to avoid heat exhaustion for 8 hours.

When magically awakened, this trait can be used to produce a body-cooling substance known as *sunbane*.

Readheal: The juice from borage leaves can be used to reduce inflammation.

A healer who uses compresses soaked in this juice on her patient gains a +1 circumstance bonus to any Heal checks made to treat that patient against diseases that cause inflammation. This bonus lasts for 24 hours.

Spinewrack: Eating candied borage flowers stimulates a "flight or flight" response.

Eating these flowers provides a +4 circumstance bonus to Initiative checks for 1 hour.

When magically awakened, this trait can be used to produce *flowers of haste*.

New Magical Concoction: Sunbane

Type: Potable

Trait: Feverthaw DC 25

Market Price: 150 gp

When ingested, this honey-colored liquid provides the imbiber with complete resistance to the debilitating effects of heat, making the user totally immune to heat exhaustion for 24 hours. It has no effect on burns or other heat-related damage.

New Magical Concoction: Flowers of Haste

Type: Comestible

Trait: Spinewrack DC 29

Market Price: 400 gp

This concoction is in the form of borage flowers candied in crystallized honey. When eaten, they provide the user with a burst of energy. This has the effect of a *haste* spell, lasting 10 rounds. In addition, the flowers provide a +4 circumstance bonus to Initiative checks for 8 hours.

Cayenne

Cayenne is not unique to Nyambe; it is found in the Far East as well, but the Nyamban strains have a unique color and taste. Cayenne is a shrub that grows up to 6 feet in height. It has slightly purple branches, and produces a red, oval fruit, commonly known as a "hot pepper." The fruit is harvested and dried, and oftentimes the seeds are extracted and powdered into a flavoring simply called "pepper." Nyamban pepper is usually a pale brownish-yellow, as compared to the black or red pepper of other lands. To keep the cost of pepper down amongst the lower classes, it is sometimes "cut" with colored sawdust.

Climate/Terrain: Any warm. In Nyambe it is cultivated mostly in the kingdom of *Bashar'ka* (BAH-shar KAH).

Availability: Common (14 cp per lb.)

Bindings: Evocation 7

Traits: Allheal 2, Birr 10, Brokelung 8, Exapir 3, Readfah 6

Mundane Concoctions

Allheal: Cayenne has a mild ability to boost the immune system.

If a healer has a patient eat this cayenne concoction, he gains a +1 circumstance bonus to Heal checks made to treat the patient for any sort of disease. The effect wears off after 1 hour.

Birr: Simply eating cayenne peppers produces a sensation of heat, but in the hands of an herbalist, a concoction of cayenne can provide a great deal of energy.

Those eating a specially prepared concoction of cayenne peppers gain a +1 circumstance bonus to Initiative checks for 10 minutes.

When this trait is awakened, it can create a magical paste known as *dragon's breath*, which allows the person eating it to breathe fire.

Brokelung: An herbal concoction of ground cayenne pepper seeds can cause a heavy build-up of saliva, sometimes helping wash foreign substances out of the mouth.

Inhaling a concoction of pepper the round after eating an ingested poison allows a second saving throw against its effects. If the second save succeeds, then any damage caused by the poison is immediately negated, and the user spits out the poisonous substance. No secondary save against the poison is required, since the substance was not fully consumed.

Exapir: Eating cayenne can cause violent diarrhea or stomach upset.

After eating this concoction, the victim must make a DC 10 Fortitude save or suffer 1 point of temporary Strength score damage. There is no secondary effect.

When awakened, this trait can be used to create an irritating poison called *cayenne dust*.

Readfah: When ground and mixed with oil, cayenne can be used topically to treat arthritis pains, as well as other sorts of aches.

Cayenne oil provides a +2 circumstance bonus to Concentration checks to ignore pain. It does not help ignore distractions. The effect lasts for 4 hours.

New Magical Concoction: Dragon's Breath

Type: Comestible

Trait: Birr DC 25

Market Price: 375 gp

Dragon's breath is a magical paste made from cayenne pepper. After eating it, the user gains the ability to breathe out a single 30-foot cone of fire. Anyone caught in the cone suffers 6d6 points of fire damage, with a DC 15 Reflex save reducing the damage by half.

New Poison: Cayenne Dust

Type: Powder DC 15

Trait: Exapir DC 18
Primary Damage: Irritation
Secondary Damage: None
Market Price: 25 gp

Cayenne dust is a yellow-brown powder that is thrown into the air, and must be inhaled to take effect. A single packet is enough to affect a 5-foot-radius area. Those who miss their saving throw suffer irritation. This applies a -2 penalty to attack rolls and a -4 penalty to effective Dexterity. The character can move at half speed, but cannot run or charge. If an irritated character attempts to cast a spell, she must make a DC 15 Concentration check or lose the spell. The irritation effect ends after 1 minute.

Myrrh

Myrrh is not unique to Nyambe; it is also found in the Near East. Myrrh bushes have branches that grow at right angles to each other and end in sharp thorns. The leaves are trefoil ovals, and cover the bush sparsely. When the bark is damaged, cavities within the bark release a yellow resin. The resin eventually hardens to a dark red color, and is prized for use in incenses and perfumes, making it as or more valuable than gold. Herbalists also prize it for the various effects it has on the respiratory and digestive systems.

Climate/Terrain: Warm desert. In Nyambe it is found most often in the *D'okan* (d-OH-khan) Desert.

Availability: Very Rare (4,800 gp per lb.)

Bindings: Abjuration 5, Conjunction 3, Necromancy 9, Transmutation 7

Traits: Allheal 12, Apir 8, Ebbwith 4, Exapir 8, Hellac 4, Lungwort 12

Mundane Concoctions

Allheal: When dissolved in alcohol, myrrh makes an excellent mouthwash for sore or infected gums.

This solution provides a +4 bonus to initial Fortitude saving throws against poisons or diseases transmitted through ingestion for 4 hours. It provides no bonus against secondary saving throws.

Apir: When powdered and boiled in water, myrrh can be used for the treatment of stomach ulcers and similar problems.

This concoction can be used to lessen the effects of ingested poisons. It grants a +4 bonus to secondary Fortitude saves to avoid the effects of poison for 4 hours. It provides no bonus to the initial Fortitude save.

Ebbwith: When dissolved in alcohol and soaked into bandages, myrrh makes an astringent for use in treating cuts and abrasions.

Myrrh compresses provide a +2 circumstance bonus when making Heal checks to stop someone from bleeding to death.

Exapir: When powdered, mixed with hot peppers, and eaten, myrrh can stimulate the stomach and digestive system. This is especially useful in the treatment of those who have developed stomach problems due to excessive alcohol consumption.

This concoction can be used to expel all poisons from the body, not just alcohol. Eating myrrh and hot peppers inflicts 1d6 points of subdual damage, but allows the subject to regain an additional point of temporary ability score damage per day, provided the damage was caused by an ingested poison.

Hellac: Powdered myrrh can be worked into a wound to prevent infection.

It provides a +2 bonus to initial Fortitude saving throws against diseases transmitted by injury, if applied before the end of the disease's incubation period. It provides no bonus to secondary Fortitude saves.

Lungwort: Inhaling myrrh powder causes build-up of mucus in the respiratory system.

This provides a +6 bonus to initial Fortitude saves to avoid the effects of inhaled poisons or diseases. It provides no bonus to secondary Fortitude saves.

When this trait is awakened, it can create magical perfumes such as *scent of the dead*, or enchanted incense such as *king's smoke*.

New Magical Concoction: Scent of the Dead

Type: Ointment

Trait: Lungwort DC 27

Market Price: 75 gp

This oil contains powdered myrrh as well as less-savory substances such as fat rendered from human corpses. It is applied to the skin, and gives off a faint, rotting odor. Anyone anointed with this oil is effectively protected by *invisibility to undead*. One dose of *scent of the dead* is enough to treat up to three humanoids, and provides protection for up to 30 minutes.

New Magical Concoction: King's Smoke

Type: Inhalant

Trait: Lungwort DC 27

Market Price: 600 gp

When burned, this incense releases a reddish-orange smoke that fills a 30-foot radius around its point of origin. Anyone who breathes the smoke for at least one round gains a 1d4+1 enhancement bonus to Charisma for 10 minutes.

* * *

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Pyramid Review

Chaos Rising (for d20 System)

Published by [Necromancer Games](#)

Written by James Collura

Cover by Llyn Hunter

Interior art by Brian LeBlanc

Cartography by Christopher Boll

64-page b&w softcover; \$13.95

You'd think the most confusing parts of an RPG adventure that deals with time travel would be trying to keep all the weird causality loops straight in your head and making sure the rubber physics don't bounce too far. In ***Chaos Rising*** from Necromancer Games, the time travel may be the *easiest* thing for the group to work with.

The party is called upon to find an amulet, an artifact that is the soul of a demon lord. Such an item doesn't come along often, and other interests have discovered its existence. Rather than let it fall into their (the wrong) hands, the adventurers are asked to soldier to the Devil's Finger, an impossibly tall promontory. Atop this sits a dwarven citadel, the final resting place of . . . well, all the elements of the adventure.

It's not as simple as going to the old dwarven fortress and collecting the amulet, of course. A small army of men led by the scurrilous Lord Raob Blackenheart work at the site, seeking to clear tons of rubble from a bygone disaster that cover the old outpost. So with all this going on, how are the heroes to get in and get the amulet? They need to travel back to a time before the halls collapsed, find a key to the vault wherein the demon lord is imprisoned, navigate the extradimensional paths that protect the vault from casual (or even determined) intrusion, and do it all by the blood moon two weeks hence (another good reason for time travel). The trials don't end there. Once the key allows entrance, Jubilex the Faceless Lord (from the Necromancer volume ***Tome of Horrors***) must still be confronted in a deadly and rather gooey finale.

If this sounds simple, it isn't. The players don't really have to understand the order of things to complete the module, but their characters shift back and forth a few times through the citadel's history. Throughout the timeline there are great battles and invasions, and demons stalk certain eras. But the full effect of the temporal fun is dulled by the confusion, and unless the GM takes pains to convey the history to his players in a meaningful way, it's hard to get excited about the party's impromptu visit and the changes they may make to something with which they're almost completely unfamiliar.

Keeping all the elements straight is a task; keys that open vaults that sit in demiplanes that occupy citadels that house creatures . . . time isn't the only thing the story twists. Too much of it boils down to killing things while taking the right thing to the right place and time, like an old Infocom adventure gone mad. There are some pleasant problems for the party to puzzle out, but the need for creativity is outweighed by the need to go through the motions in what is essentially a linear adventure.

For those who just want the crunchy bits, there's a prestige class called Brother of the Ooze. These lowly weirdoes are devoted to chaos and heed the call of Jubilex (whether he's even interested in followers is another question), and have

at their disposal spells and feats of a glutinous nature. They're hard to get a grip on -- with spells, fists, psionics, anything really -- and they can alter things in their environment to be just as gummy as they are. There are also the Corrupted (dwarves taken by chaos) and demon oozes (enough said).

The artwork is one of the better features of the book. The pencil drawings are done in a loving hand, each face etched with emotion, each figure conveying action. Even the cover lives up to the company's promise of 3rd edition rules with a 1st edition feel, with heroes surrounding a freakish and overbearing foe. The graphics and layout are equally impressive, with good maps (even inside the covers) and little wasted space. The text is a bit small -- usually good, since it means a whole mess of adventure stuck in the package, but some sections suffer from typesetting that lets words mash together into single, unbroken lines of gibberish. Worse, many pieces of information are repeated throughout the adventure. Normally this would be a good thing, covering all the bases, but when you get to where you're repeating information to be found later on the same page . . .

The module should be easy to drop into most ongoing games (and since it's built for four to six characters 12th level and up, the participants had better have some experience under their belts). Most of the important bits can be tailored to your existing story -- where the citadel is located, who hires the characters, and what happens to the world after the adventure concludes.

Although ***Chaos Rising*** contains a number of neat features (a couple of cute ways to alter the future to show the effects of heroic intervention, for example, and some NPCs that break out of their traditional molds), the material is terribly hard to absorb or get riled up about. In trying to prevent the sorts of horrors that spring from the wackiness of time travel, Necromancer Games has shackled their own adventure and its buyers with a story that, if not by the numbers, still leads the players too much by the nose.

Most of the module is designated open gaming content. The company's logo and graphic creations are product identity, of course, as are the plotlines and the motivations of the characters (though most of the people and critter write-ups can be freely reused).

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Victoriana -- A Roleplaying Game of Vile Villainy & Glorious Adventure

Published by [Heresy Gaming](#)

Written by John Tuckey with Richard Nunn and Scott Rhymer

Illustrated by Tara K Labus, Kelly Hamilton, Svetlana Chmakova, Ursula Vernon, Matteo Lolli, Samuel Araya, Ed Davis, Shawn Brack, Fufu Frauenwahl, & The Illustrated London News Archive

304-page perfect bound softback; \$29.99

As the surviving British RPGs of the 1990s -- primarily *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* and *SLA Industries* with an honorable mention to *Dark Continent* -- are all relegated to the status of an uncertain future, the actual state of the British roleplaying industry looks surprising rosy and could be said to be undergoing something of a resurgence. At the head of the charge is surely Mongoose Publishing, the UK's most prolific of publishers with *d20 System* adaptations of 2000AD's [Judge Dredd](#) and [Sláine](#) (as well as forthcoming adaptations of *Babylon 5*, *Lone Wolf*, and *Conan*) and the self-developed and recently released *Armageddon 2089 RPG* all to its name, but alongside Mongoose have appeared several new independent publishers. These include Bottled Imp Games, with its *d20 System* vampire sourcebook [The Lords of the Night: Vampires](#) and self-published *Crimson Empire*, but perhaps the game that will have the broadest of appeal is *Victoriana -- A Roleplaying Game of Vile Villainy & Glorious Adventure*.

Originally self-published in 1997 with a limited print run of 20 copies, *Victoriana* joins a growing number set in an alternate Victorian era, best typified by *Space 1889*, [Castle Falkenstein](#), [Forgotten Futures](#), *For Faerie, Queen & Country*, and more recently [Victorian Age: Vampire](#). *Victoriana* shares much in common with *Castle Falkenstein* in that it brings the fantasy genre to the reign of Queen Victoria: magic, Dwarves, Halflings, Gnomes, Ogres, Beastmen, and Eldren (or Elves). Although the book uses a cog motif on both its cover and throughout its pages, which might suggest that it is also a steampunk RPG, *Victoriana* is very far from this. True, there are steampunk elements mentioned in the book -- such as aerial steamships and Babbage's successful completion of his computing machine -- they are barely touched upon, and those wanting more of them in their game are directed to other games and supplements (*Castle Falkenstein* and *GURPS Steampunk* in particular).

One result of suggesting that *Victoriana* is a steampunk game comes as a result of its default set-up. This casts the characters as rebels against the corseted confines of Victorian society and its hypocrisies, which in combination with the game's magic and supposed steampunk elements might lead one to describe *Victoriana* as a 19th century *Shadowrun*. Even the authors do draw this comparison themselves, substituting the term "Gutter Runner" for "Edgerunner" to describe the player characters. Also, it should be pointed out, that since *Victoriana* is "Fuzion Powered," it is currently the leading Fuzion RPG.

The nominal year for the game is 1867 with the British Empire approaching its height. Her current and primary concern is leading the Anglo-French-Turkish alliance against Imperial Russia in the Crimea, where despite poor leadership and logistics, the discipline of the Redcoat continues to hold off the mass attacks of ill-trained peasantry thrown at their thin red lines. It is hoped that the arrival of British artillery will be enough to stem the successes gained by the Eldren Czarina Pyetra or Imperial Death Guard (lead by Stephanie, daughter of Kathryn Romanov, the Steel Czarina).

Elsewhere, Russia continues to play the Great Game in the hope of wresting India from under British rule and influence, while the French Republic is in decline at home and abroad. She is ruled by Louis Napoleon, nephew of the great Napoleon the Despoiler, who dreams of Imperial gains abroad, while at home he is remodeling Paris to further splendor and Communists provoke revolutionary fervor through her broad boulevards. On her borders, the wily Prussian Chancellor Otto von Bismarck schemes to unite the German nations into greatness. Italy also still consists of several nations, and while its politicians and statesmen work slowly towards reunification, it may not be fast enough for the fervor of the revolutionaries under Garibaldi, against whom the French have stationed troops in Rome to protect both the Vatican and its recently established liberal government.

Although not historically accurate, the major factors that make **Victoriana** an alternate setting are magic and religion. Magic is itself rare but not unknown, and is "strictly" governed by the Guild, the Geneva-based body that regulates the study of the arcane, such that it is possible to obtain a degree in Thaumaturgy. This is **Victoriana's** major college of magic, but it is also possible to learn magic outside of the aegis of the Guild. Primarily, this type of magic being Petty Magic, which involves enchantments that require hours of time and concentration, and resulting in the creation of foci which keep their enchantment and magic. Petty Magic is mostly the province of the shaman and the native magic wielder. Other colleges -- such as Demonology and Necromancy -- are outlawed, with reports of their use usually bringing Guild thaumaturges to investigate.

The status of magic in 1867 is very much down to the influence of the Aluminat Church, which lead an inquisition or persecution of magic practitioners that culminated in the Thirty Years War. In doing so it lifted Europe out of a "Dark Age" or "Age of Magic," during which time great deeds were wrought through magic. The Aluminat Church sees magic as the essence of Entropy and would prefer to stamp its order upon what it sees as a untrustworthy and chaotic. As more recent Aluminat sects, the Anglican and Evangelical Puritans are more trusting, and less tolerant of magic respectively. Other religions also exist at the extremes of Europe: the Celtic faith in the West, and the Asgardian in the North. Though the Aluminat church sees these old Gods as dark and dangerous, the Followers of Entropy are more dangerous to all faiths; their best face is that of Paline, Lady of Subversion, and patron goddess magic, who is worshipped by a pleasure cult throughout the artistic circles of European society.

Characters in **Victoriana** can come from all walks and levels of Victorian society. Humans can be Lower, Middle, or Upper class; Eldren Middle or Upper class; Dwarves and Gnomes Lower or Middle class; and Beastmen, Halflings, and Ogres of Lower class origins only. What they have in common is that they are all desirous of change -- change because they feel that the nature and structure of Victorian society is wrong, if not corrupt. They be a simple social reformer, or hold to something radical such as Bolshevism, Communism, Chartist ideals, nationalism, Nihilism, Anarchism, or even Free Trade. Though some of these are extreme movements, they can at least account for the 21st century attitudes of the players in coming to the ideals of Victorian society -- arranged marriages, sweatshop exploitation, sexism, racism and slavery, and so on . . .

Victoriana uses a slightly cut down version of the Fuzion rules, with characters possessing a set of six characteristics (Dexterity, Body, Intellect, Presence, Resolution and Luck) rather than Fuzion's more standard 10 (INT, PRE, WILL, TECH, MOVE, REF, DEX, STR, CON and BODY). Social class determines how many points are available to spend on these six characteristics -- 28 for Upper class, 32 for Middle and 36 for Lower, as well as a Gutter Runner's starting money and the skills they have access to. All characters receive 30 points to spend on skills gained during their prior experience, which are divided between two packages, one for their "Childhood Experience" and another for their "Past Career." A fair range is available, but players are also free to design their own. A further 25 Option Points can buy increased skills and derived characteristics, Talents (advantages), and Perks (both social and asset based), while Complications (disadvantages) can be taken to provide more Option Points. Among the Talents available are Medium, Petty Conjuror, and Thaumaturge for players who want their Gutter Runner to wield magic. The process is relatively easy, but not helped by a lack of character generation examples, though there are several completed characters at the end of the section. All six are actually write-ups of characters that appeared in the color fiction at the beginning of the book.

Most of the races in **Victoriana** are self-explanatory, but Beastmen are not. The rules lump them into a single race, but they can actually be of any species -- Goat and Dog Beastmen being common in England. Illustrations under the descriptions of India and China suggest, for example, that they may be home to Tiger and Panda Beastmen

respectively. Unfortunately, a player is expected to define their Beastman Gutter Runner that they want themselves, favoring for example Dexterity over Body and adding the Talent "Acute Sense of Taste and Smell" if they wanted a Rat Beastman. It would have been nice had the authors included a number of Beastmen packages for players to choose from, further easing character generation.

The mechanics employed by **Victoriana** differ little from those of Fuzion, but where they do, it is with the aim of emulating both period and genre. The opposed dodge roll found in ranged combat has been replaced by having a target number against which players must roll. Combat is deadlier because there is little armor available and characters have less health. They also feel the effects of their wounds, suffering modifiers to their action rolls to simulate their pain and discomfort. Like character generation, both mechanics and combat are well-explained, and although the various different aspects of combat are each given their own examples, one large one that combined brawling, the clash of swords, the discharge of firearms and sorcery being used in one big fight, would have also helped.

For the GM, there is plenty of advice and support -- a plethora of NPCs, monsters and threats; a guide to running fights in particular London or British locations -- the Rooftop Chase, the kitchen of a great house, a Pea-Souper or London fog, in a water mill, a bar room, aboard and on top of a train -- moving of course, and through the maze-like streets of the Rookery-Warrens; plus the scenario, "A White Wedding." Described as "An Introductory Penny Dreadful," this revolves around an Upper class character becoming involved in an arranged marriage from which the bride is less than happy to remain within its confines.

Also discussed in the chapter on GM support is how to run **Victoriana**. The suggestions look at both atmosphere and campaign ideas. The former includes Ghost Stories, the Golden Age of Empire, Farce, Grim Reality, Dickensian, Moorcockian, and Turning the Tables, while the latter suggests the Consulting Detective, A Fellowship of Interest, Guild Investigators, Long Live the Revolution, and Suffrage as potential campaigns. It is in these last two, and also in Turning the Tables, that the authors explore the Gutter Runner set-up presented in **Victoriana's** opening pages. It is however, not enough for either GM or player, especially when the game makes so much of it throughout the book. And even though the game might be set in an *alternate* 19th century, to even to attempt to alter -- let alone overthrow -- society feels so much like the act of micturition into a gust, considering the strength of society's inertia that they would have to overcome . . .

Of the several game atmospheres given, it is very clear from the various elements of **Victoriana** that the default playing style is definitely that of Moorcockian, seen of course in the previous RPGs, **Stormbringer** (or **Elric!**) and **Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay**. If you consider that both the Moorcockian and Grim Reality atmospheres are the authors' favored style of play, then it is all too easy to draw a comparison and ask a question. It is tempting to compare **Victoriana** and **Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay**, with perhaps **Victoriana** being seen as an update to the 19th century in terms of the background and feel of the world of ". . . Grim and Perilous Adventure." If these are the authors' favored style of play, this begs the question of why they are not made more of throughout the rest of the book?

Certainly, the cosmology of the setting, with its Planes of Order and Entropy, and their manifestations upon the Earth - the Aluminat Church representing order, and sorcery representing the various degrees of chaos -- all lend themselves to the Moorcockian feel. Likewise, the blurb on the back cover hints again at this set-up, and of great change, that the planes will soon align and revolution is coming . . . Yet as to the nature of all this, the author leaves it little explored . . .

In terms of production, **Victoriana -- A Roleplaying Game of Vile Villainy & Glorious Adventure** is very much a hit and miss affair. Though overall well done, the look of the game is sometimes too cartoon-like to match the grit of its subject. As to the writing, it is basically sound, but what the game very much needs a thorough re-edit and proofreading, particularly towards its end, where it grows increasingly slipshod and feels very, very rushed. The contents could also be re-arranged to make them far more accessible, which an index -- so unfortunately absent in a book this length -- would also have helped with.

The real problem with **Victoriana** is that it is a medley of elements needing to be worked into a cohesive work. The background as a whole is never explained, leaving the reader to wonder at the setting's deeply untold history -- which

had it been explained, would have provided a foundation for said medley, as would a timeline. Also, some of the elements are unwisely handled and perhaps may give cause to offend. These include having the Zulus of South Africa actually being a tribe of Orcs, and the renaming of what is so exceedingly obviously the Catholic church something else.

Although **Victoriana** is not intended to be a wholly historically accurate game, the history that is given, jars jaggedly with the game's default date of 1867. It can perhaps get away with having the Crimean War take place a decade and a half later than it did in our history, but talking about how a great calamity may beset India next year on the centenary of the Battle of Plessey, fought in 1758, is one such example. Other little things, such as having a language called Swiss, making the Portuguese speak Spanish, and denying the Ottoman Turks the Turkish tongue, are just as irksome.

Ultimately, **Victoriana -- A Roleplaying Game of Vile Villainy & Glorious Adventure** is a game in search of a direction, which is such a shame considering that its pages contain one all ready to use. And if said direction does make it feel like an update of **Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay**, it is at least a stronger hook for both players and GM than the one provided. Of course, this is only one direction in which an experienced GM could take the game, whereas the novice will very much be lost in one of London's pea soupers. As a potential toolkit to run a fantasy game set within the Victorian milieu **Victoriana -- A Roleplaying Game of Vile Villainy & Glorious Adventure** has its uses, but as a coherent whole, it just does not pass muster.

--Matthew Pook

Crisis On Alternate Apes!

"When in doubt, add monkeys!"

-- the First Rule of Drama, attributed to Lee Unkrich

Carmine Infantino knew this wisdom well, as did the producers of *Friends*. Anything that encompasses both Iris Allen and Jennifer Aniston has to be sound advice, right? So we'll take it, and present four highly miscellaneous **GURPS** campaign frames (although the latter three might also make good **Terra Primate** campaigns) unified only by the simian element. Four classic tropes of apes among us; four worlds where history -- went ape.

"And we -- my partners and I -- have brought back the living proof of our adventure, an adventure in which twelve of our party met horrible death. And now, ladies and gentlemen, before I tell you any more, I'm going to show you the greatest thing your eyes have ever beheld. He was a king and a god in the world he knew, but now he comes to civilization merely a captive -- a show to gratify your curiosity. Ladies and gentlemen, look at Kong, the Eighth Wonder of the World!"

-- Carl Denham (Robert Armstrong), in *King Kong* (dir. Merian C. Cooper, 1933)

With the raising of the final mirrors to the top of the Lighthouse of Alexandria in 280 B.C., the world had its Seven Wonders -- Kardenam of Carthage wanted to find the Eighth. Following the path blazed by his countryman Hanno two hundred years earlier, he traveled between the Pillars of Melkart around the great island of Libya and up the Black River to the deep jungles where the "forest men" lived. Here, he found lizards and insects grown to enormous size, as if left untouched from the Golden Age when the gods and monsters had left their spawn on Earth. But the mightiest of these giants was the one the natives called Kong, a "forest man" of tremendous size. Only the alchemistic vapors brewed by the sages of the Library allowed him to defeat the beast, sending it into an enchanted slumber. But when Kardenam returned his captive to Alexandria, Kong awoke and rampaged through the city, climbing the Pharos and howling defiance to the gods!

Perhaps the magics the Librarians used to subdue Kong had some effect, or perhaps Kong himself carried the curse of Kronos after being removed from his Golden Age kingdom. Suddenly, the seas were alive with giant monsters -- Ketos the dragon-whale (called "Gog 'sileos" -- "king of Gog" -- by the illiterate rabble) who breathed fire, the three-headed Chimera from Gadarea, the Hydra from 50,000 fathoms down, and giant turtles, moths, and so forth all attacking the cities of the East from Alexandria to Athens. Each enchantment used to defeat one monster calls up others in its wake, until the Librarians fear that Kong himself will return in glory to claim his new kingdom of the monsters from Ketos. Players in this **GURPS Greece-Atomic Horror** game can be Librarian magician-sages, bold Roman monster-killing heroes (whose lips oddly match their speech, unlike the Easterners), or plucky youths who befriend a giant turtle for some unfathomable reason.

"Flash, for countless years our special race of gorillas has thrived behind these mountains! But we're so few -- we know we'd be wiped out in any contest with humans!"

-- Solovar, in "Menace of the Super-Gorilla" by John Broome, in *Flash* #106 (April-May, 1959)

On October 17, 1902, Captain Friedrich Robert von Beringe led Dr. Oscar Engeland, a sergeant, and 20 askaris into the Virunga Highlands of German East Africa. What he found was a city built by intelligent mountain gorillas, hidden behind a vibratory screen that bespoke a deep understanding of electro-magnetism and a deep desire for peace. Von Beringe responded to both in the finest traditions of his First Hussar Regiment -- the *Totenkopffhusaren* -- and opened up with his machine gun on the silverback who approached him cautiously. This bold stroke of troop dominance cowed the gorillas; they surrendered their city and promised to teach Dr. Engeland (and many later German scientists) the secrets of their technology. But one or two young gorillas escaped, making their way across country to the British outposts in Buganda. Now the Kaiser deploys his electro-fliers and magno-dreadnoughts to humble Europe just as von Beringe overawed Gorilla-stadt -- the only hope lies with "Lord Greystoke's Men" -- a few British adventurers equally at home in the African jungles and the jungle of European diplomacy. Players in this **GURPS Steampunk** game might be hunters, spies, engineers, or explorers sent out by his Lordship to liberate Gorilla-stadt -- or by his rival Sir Allan of the Foreign Office to destroy it!

"In here, you can see these chimps are capable of many of the same tasks as men. And they are much more cooperative. They are being put through every phase of the astronaut training."

-- Wernher von Braun (Scott Beach), in *The Right Stuff* (dir. Philip Kaufman, 1983)

In 1959, scientists working at Holloman AFB assembled a colony of 65 wild African chimpanzees to train for space travel as part of Project Mercury. In January of 1961, after a lengthy dispute with von Braun and his design team (who favored a single-chimp capsule), the first four-chimp mission rocketed into space. But what neither the trainers at Holloman nor von Braun's technical team had counted on were the freakish effects of cosmic rays. Ham, Enos, Minnie, and Ben were changed by the radiation -- given not only intelligence but also astonishing powers. Surviving gun-camera photos from the splashdown show Ham stretching his arms for hundreds of yards to batter sailors while Ben smashed the hull of the *U.S.S. Donner*. Pilots saw Enos flying in a cloud of fire -- and no witness or camera ever saw Minnie. Ham was not content with his four fantastic chimps; he freed the Holloman colony, and began a series of ape-nappings from zoos and laboratories across the country. J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI fear the worst -- could Ham be assembling an army of super-apes for an undeclared war on the Air Force? RFK saw a different option -- could Ham and his friends be conciliated -- and recruited for the secret war against Communism around the globe?

This particular campaign frame might be **GURPS Atomic Horror** -- jut-jawed heroes against Inhuman Menaces From Beyond -- or the ultimate in "hunted mutant" **GURPS Supers** action, with the players taking the roles of the super-chimps, trying to help people while avoiding the Air Force and FBI. Perhaps you might split the difference; a mixed team of super-chimps, science-heroes, and grizzled Marine veterans could infiltrate Communist Latveria, thwart an invasion by Mole Men, and desperately try to defeat the Air Force-FBI conspiracy that wants the Kennedys -- "soft on monkeys and on Mao" -- dead! Impossible Monkey Force X -- ask not what your country can do for you, but ask rather what you can do for a banana.

"You are right, I have always known about man. From the evidence, I believe his wisdom must walk hand and hand with his idiocy. His emotions must rule his brain. He must be a warlike creature who gives battle to everything around him, even himself."

-- Dr. Zaius (Maurice Evans), in *Planet of the Apes* (dir. Franklin J. Schaffner, 1968)

Was it a secret KGB or CIA biowarfare station, in the heartland of Ebola? Or was it a corporate gene-research lab, looting the jungle ahead of mercenaries out for conflict diamonds? Nobody knows, but something escaped from somewhere in 2001, during the chaos of the Congo War. To the millions of dead in chaotic fighting, refugee massacres, ethnic cleansing, and famine were added those killed by the virus later known as "Zaius-B." But some victims survived, often gifted with uncanny apelike senses and reactions. And when Zaius-B hit the apes -- well, they got smarter. Smarter than anyone who had run the Congo in the last century, because they managed to team up and put down the rebellions, drive out the predatory foreign armies (and their mining-company partners), and get the planes flying on time. Of course, if you're human, life in the Ape Republic isn't great -- ducking your head to every chimp, baboon, and gorilla and never, ever showing your teeth hurts your pride. But it is life, of a sort, and more importantly, it gives order where there was once only chaos and death. The Belgians were more cruel, and they were far less efficient. Humans work in the fields and uranium mines -- "wild" humans are hunted down by helicopter gunships and by Zaius-B survivors more ape than man. The Ape Republic has expanded its order -- and the etiology of Zaius-B -- throughout the civil war-torn belly of the continent, from Brazzaville to Luanda and from Harare to the Nile. Seven African countries have fallen -- and the apes press hard against Uganda, Tanzania, and Gabon.

This setting can host anything from the gritty commandos of **GURPS Special Ops** to **GURPS Black Ops** modern pulp heroism as Strike Force Charlton liberates key men, mines, and UFO crash sites from the aggressive empire of the apes. Campaigns can explore high politics (Does the UN recognize nonhuman governments?) and dark horror (What if the apes are brewing a new, improved plague?) alike -- or the PCs can be the brave new apes trying to balance the evolutionary scales and endanger some other species for a change. Whichever side you take, both know that a battle for a planet of the apes has begun.

Consequential Drift

I've received a few emails and a comment or two on the message board about my somewhat uncharacteristically emphatic advice in [last week's column](#), wherein I recommended that GM's strongly consider a "dead folks remain dead" policy. For some folks it seemed an odd position to take a strong stand on.

(I also promised a sequel to that column. This ain't it. Our apologies for those of you who waited all night in line for tickets for that installment; Elvis has left the column.)

Anyway, I mulled it over a bit and tried to figure out *why* that was a hot button for me. And I came to a conclusion that, even if it isn't right, is good for at least 1,000 words of contractually obligated columny goodness.

I realized that the decision to bring a character back to life - no matter the circumstances or intentions - can have unforeseen consequences on the rest of the campaign, which can be *very* difficult to undo. Like all unforeseen consequences, they're insidious; they aren't something that can come to light or be overcome by simple contemplation (since, by definition, they're unforeseen).

For example, in my first **GURPS Supers** game I ran (and, really, it was the first roleplaying game I ran for more than a one-shot) one of the players wanted to play a character called "Alter-Ego." It was a character with three personalities: a "normal" one, who was a scientist; one called "Ego," who had various mentalist powers; and one called "Alter," who could absorb matter and turn it into other things that he had memorized.

Now, long-time GMs may realize that this character might pose some problems. **GURPS** aficionados may believe the difficulty came from the half of the character who used **GURPS Psionics**, whose point structure always seemed fairly distant from **GURPS Supers** (as witnessed by the PC who could only toss around one mountain at a time, mostly because I refused to put more than one in any background description). But no; the difficulty came from the "Alter" side.

Yes, I knew the character would be powerful. Matter manipulation is like that. But it was a reasonably powerful campaign, and there were a number of limitations I thought would keep him in control: multiple personalities, limitation of a couple pounds of matter, limitation of a minute or so of keeping the matter absorbed . . . no big deal, right?

Yeah.

It was my first real exposure to the adventurer maxim of, "If it's not nailed down, take it. If it *is* nailed down, use a crowbar. If you can pry it up, it wasn't nailed down well enough; take it."

There were no nouns in my campaign that were not assimilated into this character. Keys? Absorb. Guns? Absorb. Rope? Absorb. Gadgets? Radios? Chemical concoctions? Absorb absorb absorb.

And each adventure Alter-Ego would find new ways for me to remove my hair before maternal genetics had a chance. And each adventure I would sheepishly make requests of additional limitations to be placed on the character's powers: It costs more energy, you only have a limited number of slots, it takes longer than it did previously. And nothing helped. It's not that he was *trying* to be a munchkin . . . not in the slightest. But the way the power worked and the logic behind it made *not* using that power seem like a dumb decision in most circumstances.

Finally we resolved the situation (more or less) by having a chat; he used his powers in a somewhat more restrained fashion, making sure to take an appropriate amount of "screen time" but not upstaging anyone. And things were okay from then on. (Of course, whether or not this was an *appropriate* solution is open to debate . . . and may be the subject for another column. In the short term I'll note that it's difficult to envision Superman saying, "Well, I *could* save the world with my heat vision . . . but I'll give Aquaman a chance and see if he stop Darkseid with his <snicker> fish . . .")

In short, the game was a victim of unforeseen consequences. Oh, sure, in hindsight I could have predicted some of what happened with the inclusion of that character and his powers . . . but when a character can transform matter without much effort, that means:

- He need not be imprisoned, so long as he can make explosives, lockpicks, chisels, sledgehammers, and the like.
- He need never be poor, so long as he can make diamonds.
- Practically *any* adventure revolving around limited resources of any type no longer applies.
- If you give any NPCs specialized or interesting equipment and the heroes capture it, you've given them not only their neat loot, but an *infinite supply* of their neat loot.
- And so on.

Anyway, the point of this anecdote is that I suspect much of the reason gamers are often so social outside of a gaming environment is because they're trying to keep others from making the same mistakes they did. Some of these mistakes are easily taken care of, like when I made the *perfect* scholarly priest character for one campaign, only to realize halfway through the first adventure I'd neglected to make him literate. Others can have far-reaching and unexpected effects that can be difficult to untangle, like introducing time travel, clones, alternate universes, or Ultimate Evil to a campaign. Or bringing back characters from the dead.

Parents often say, "I don't want my kids to make the same mistakes I did." (Of course, this always begs the question, "So it's better to take my chances with mistakes you *didn't* make, so that none of us have any idea how to fix them?") So if I was emphatic in last week's installment, it's only because I know all too well the dangers of unforeseen consequences, and how difficult it can be to unravel them otherwise. For me personally, the best way to fix a mistake is to keep it from happening in the first place.

Playing to the Crowd

Influencing Groups and Societies in *GURPS*

by Matt Riggsby

Competent social characters influence people. Truly ambitious social characters influence societies. Attempting to influence public opinion and make changes within a society, though, is both difficult and complex. No group of people is a unified whole. There is always a range of opinion and ideas, and even a consummate master of public opinion can be surprised by sudden shifts in public perceptions and the appearance of new opposition. Nevertheless, true power can come from influence over hearts and minds.

This system presents rules for influencing groups of people, from church congregations and departmental committees to entire societies, and conducting conflicts between groups within a society. This works on two levels. At a low level, a character can influence groups of people fairly directly with public speaking, distributing propaganda, and winning the support of key leaders. This may be sufficient for gaining the support of groups of moderate size, but any society of any appreciable size will be too large for any one person or small group of people to win over entirely. At a higher level, groups will struggle against one another. This article includes rules for determining the outcome of those conflicts, which may be led or influenced by PCs.

This article draws on concepts from a number of other sources, including [mass combat](#), [power and faction](#), and extended rules for [Memetics](#) skill and [social skills](#). Although not absolutely necessary, you may wish to review them before using these rules.

Procedure

The basic procedure for influencing a group consists of four steps:

1. GM identifies groups and any component factions, determines Social Strength values and range of opinions
2. Character decides which group to influence and what skill to use.
3. GM determines modifiers and appropriate skill roll is made.
4. Social Strength changes are applied and GM determines other consequences.

Social Strength

Social Strength is a measure of a group's ability to bring about or prevent changes. SS is a combination of wealth, social standing, legal and moral authority, popularity, and the size of the group. First, figure the average Wealth, Status, and total Reaction modifiers for group members and combine the modifiers for each as given in the table below.

Wealth	Status	Total Reaction	SS Modifier
Dead Broke	-4 or less	-4 or less	+.1
Poor	-3	-3	+.2
Struggling	-2	-2	+.25
	-1	-1	+.5
Average	0	+0	+1
Comfortable	1	+1	+2
	2	+2	+3
Wealthy	3	+3	+5
Very Wealthy	4	+4	+7
	5	+5	+10

Filthy Rich	6	+6	+14
Multimillionaire or more	7	+7	+18
	8 or more	+8 or more	+25

For example, a member of the modern middle class would have a SS of 3 (+1 for Average wealth, +1 for Status 0, and +1 for an average reaction modifier of +0). A moderately wealthy Medieval noblewoman of low rank might have an SS of 7.5 (+2 for Comfortable wealth, + 5 for Status 3, and +.5 for a small Social Stigma). The GM may derive other modifiers if an average level is between two entries on the table. For example, a group of craftsmen might have as many Wealthy members as Comfortable members, for a Wealth modifier of +3.5. Once you have determined the average SS, determine the group's SS by multiplying average SS by the number of people who are in it. For example, a group of a hundred wealthy Roman freedmen might have a SS of 525 (+5 for being Wealthy, +.25 for Status -2).

For matters purely internal to a group, the Rank advantage provides an additional +1 to SS per level. For example, if a government minister wanted to convince his colleagues to adopt a new method of bookkeeping, the Administrative Rank of bureaucrats would add to their Social Strength. If he wanted to convert them to a new religion, it would not.

The GM must determine the SS of any group a character attempts to influence. While it's possible to determine the SS of an entire society, from beggars and peasants up to presidents and emperors, the GM can often get away with only determining the SS of some segment of that society. Any group is likely to be divided into [factions](#). The GM must also determine the composition of those factions and how SS is distributed between them.

Example: An ambassador from the city of Gelano to the city of Venezepoli is trying to gain a reduction in import duties on raw silk, Gelano's major export. Although Venezepoli has nearly 90,000 residents, he only needs to win the support of the law-making bodies, the Senate and High Council. The Senate is made up of 240 people, including heads of important households, guild leaders, and other men of some wealth and importance. The GM decides that they are mostly Wealthy (+5 SS) and have Status 3 (+5 SS), but no particular reaction bonus or penalty (+1 SS). The Senate as a whole has $(11 \times 240) = 2,640$. The High Council is a body of 20 very rich and powerful men with special religious responsibilities and the wealthy Duke. The GM decides that the average wealth of the councilors is between Very Wealthy and Filthy Rich for +10 SS per member. They're Status 4 (+7 SS) and have a +1 reaction bonus for Clerical Investment (+2 SS). The council has a SS of $(19 \times 20) = 380$. The Duke himself is Status 5, Filthy Rich, and is personally charming (total reaction bonus +3) for a total SS of 29. The total SS of Venezepoli's ruling class is 3049.

Opinions held by members of a group are represented by portions of its Social Strength being committed to different propositions or ideas. On any given issue, a group's Social Strength may be neutral or committed to a specific position. On many issues, opinion may be divided between "for" and "against" (for or against a war, for or against a particular religious reform, etc.). However, other situations may call for multiple options. For example, an election might have neutral and committed to various candidates. The task for characters is to change that distribution in favor of their own positions.

Social Strength is divided between positions on the basis of points, not individuals. SS allocation is a measure of how much power the group as a whole will bring to bear on the issue. Some individuals will be enthusiastic; others will be half-hearted and provide only nominal support. Having, say, 200 out of 400 SS in favor of a proposition may mean that half of the people involved are fully committed to the position and the rest are entirely neutral, or it may mean that some are fully committed while a rather larger number are moderately in favor.

Example: The GM initially decides that the Senate has a faction of about 90 people in favor of a more aggressive stance against Venezepoli's traditional enemy, Miloma. As such, they aren't in favor of reducing any taxes. They represent 990 SS, with 450 SS against and 460 SS neutral. A small group of cloth merchants and related tradesmen, about 25 in all, are in favor of reduced costs: 275 SS, with 150 SS in favor and 125 SS neutral. The remainder of the Senate is largely unconcerned (100 SS for, 75 against, 1,200 neutral). The High Council is divided but more against than for (140 against, 100 for, 140 neutral). The duke himself has no position. Totals are 665 against, 350 for, and 1,954 neutral. Initial conditions are not good for the Gelanoese ambassador, but there's a lot of uncommitted opinion left.

In practical terms, distribution of SS can be used to gauge public opinion and popularly held belief. Anything with more than 20% of a society's SS behind it is a reasonably well-accepted idea, if not a particularly tightly held view. Controversial ideas will have at least 20% of the society's SS on either side. Most traditional beliefs and practices will have at least 75% of their society's SS in favor of them and very little SS actually against them. However, large, complex ideas and practices can be subdivided into more and less popular aspects. For example, the earliest Protestants were very much against the Catholic church, but remained very much in favor of Christianity, the Commandments, church-going, and so on. Likewise, most revolutions have been aimed at removing specific unpopular leaders (who have a great deal of SS against them), not at reworking an entire political system (which have more SS for than against). Some ideas and practices may have a surface acceptance but are rarely practiced (for example, some historical Muslim nations, which have a nominal prohibition against alcohol, saw regular wine-drinking, at least among the upper classes). "Lip-service" ideas will have perhaps 10% of the society's SS behind them, perhaps a similar amount of SS against them, but opinion will be largely neutral.

It's also worth keeping in mind that traditionally held views and officially-endorsed opinions are in many ways self-maintaining. Government propaganda, church sermons, and traditional observances can all be regarded as ongoing, almost automatic, attempts to maintain public opinion. Even if no one decides to take action to directly counteract the work of activist PCs, many aspects of the status quo will serve to lure people back to traditional ideas. Nevertheless, if PCs start to have a visible impact, there certainly will be some kind of backlash. In the example of the Gelanoese ambassador, if he became too successful in arguing in favor of dropping the tariff, the GM would eventually decide that a member of the opposition decided to campaign against the tariff proposal. At that point, both the ambassador and the opposed senator would hold their own meetings, write letters to key senators, wine and dine the high council, and otherwise make a series of persuasion attempts until the matter was voted on by the senate.

Persuasion Attempts

Once the GM has established the relevant factions and their opinions, characters may attempt to persuade them to their own positions. This persuasion is usually performed by either speaking to groups or distributing written propaganda. For public speaking, a character uses Bard skill; the same skill is used for radio and TV broadcasts, public telepathic transmission, and other forms of verbal communication. Bard can be used on any audience the speaker can gather (or broadcast to) so long as he speaks their language. Most orators would be hard-pressed to effectively reach a live audience of over 1,000, but can reach more with artificial amplification or by using broadcasting. Once such technology becomes available at TL 6, larger audiences can be reached by amplification or through paid broadcasts or advertisements at a cost of \$.015 per person. Characters may attempt to drum up audiences with public criers, advertising posters, offers of free food and drinks, or by inserting their own speaker into other public events likely to draw a crowd (religious ceremonies, sporting events, etc.), but ultimately the size and composition of the audience is up to the GM.

Writing skill can be used to persuade any literate audience using pamphlets, broadsheets, printed advertisements, newspaper editorials, and so on. Typically, it takes time and money to produce and distribute written propaganda. Written propaganda is particularly expensive at low TLs, where each copy must be hand-written, but the invention of the printing press speeds things considerably. Initial composition takes skill - 30 hours of work, minimum six hours. It takes \$.5 and 30 minutes of preparation time per person in the intended audience at TL 3 or lower, \$.20 and five minutes of preparation time (maximum eight hours) per person at TL 4, \$.01 and 30 seconds of preparation time (maximum eight hours) per person at TL 5 or higher. This only covers the time to prepare letters, print pamphlets, and so on; actual distribution may take a few additional days. Moreover, not all people who are exposed to written propaganda will pay attention to it. Only $10 + (3d6 \times 5) \%$ of the intended audience will read written propaganda and be subject to the persuasion roll.

Example: If the Gelanoese ambassador were to write letters to every member of the Senate (pre-printing press, TL 3), it would cost \$120 and take 120 hours to copy them out by hand. Since the letters are going to people living in the same city, he could probably have runners distribute them in an hour or two.

The GM may allow other social, artistic, and professional skills as well. For example, a minstrel could use his Singing skill to influence his listeners with a partisan ballad. In a preliterate or semi-literate society, Artist skill might be used

to produce satirical cartoons. With the advent of mass communications around TL 5, the GM should allow a Professional Skill (Advertising) to take the place of Bard and Writing.

Other skills may be used to persuade smaller, more focused groups of people. Carousing, Savoir-Faire, and Streetwise skill may be used exert personal charm in favor of the character's position at social events. A character may attempt to use those skills at events including no more than $(\text{skill} \times 2)$ people. Savoir-Faire may only be used among gatherings of high-status individuals. Streetwise may only be used among criminals and other rough company. Carousing can be used at just about any social event.

Diplomacy and Politics may likewise be used to influence groups, but through quiet negotiation, personal networking, and building consensus. They may be used to influence any number of people but, unlike the other skills, they can take a great deal of time. The time is spent in polite small talk and round-robin negotiation rather than direct persuasion. Attempts to use Diplomacy and Politics require 4 hours per person to be influenced. Individuals who are strongly opposed to the persuading character's position may also make themselves unavailable and not subject to the results of the skill roll. However, they can still take up time; a particularly ornery official may keep a petitioner waiting in his vestibule for hours without seeing him or play phone tag for days.

Example: Influencing the High Council and the duke with Diplomacy would take 84 hours. Assuming the high officials make themselves available in one way or another 10 hours a day, it would take the ambassador over a week to get to them all.

Persuasion Rolls

After each speech, pamphlet distribution, or other attempt to persuade an audience, roll against the appropriate skill, modified by total reaction modifiers (from Charisma, Reputation, etc.) and other modifiers detailed below. Persuasion attempts using Bard are modified by the speaker's Appearance (if the audience can see him) and Voice. Persuasion attempts using Writing do not gain bonuses from Charisma, Appearance, and similar personal advantages. If the roll succeeds, $(\text{margin of success} \times 2)\%$ of the SS of the audience (the people who heard the speech, read the pamphlet, etc.), rounded up, shifts one step in the persuading character's favor. That is, opposing SS becomes neutral and neutral SS becomes positive. Players may designate how the SS they influence is distributed. If the roll fails, there is no effect. On a critical failure, 2d6% of opinion shifts away from the character's opinion.

Example: The ambassador makes an address to a committee of the Senate with 40 members. The GM decides that it includes members of neither the pro-tariff or anti-tariff factions. However, many of them are members of the Montalet family, who have a long-standing if seldom expressed dislike of the Capugues, a prominent cloth trading clan. The committee has a SS of 440; the GM decides that it has 100 SS against the reduction, 120 for, and 220 neutral. The ambassador has a Bard skill of 14, and the GM rules that he suffers a -2 modifier (to approve the tariff reduction, the bulk of the committee would have to make a vote advantageous to a rival). It's a good speech, and the ambassador rolls a 7, making his skill by 5. He moves total of 10% of the committee's opinion, 44 SS. The ambassador's player decides to split it evenly, making 22 of the SS against his position neutral and 22 neutral opinion positive. After the speech, the committee's opinion is 78 SS against, 142 for, and 220 neutral. The total opinion of the ruling class is 643 SS against, 372 SS for, and 1954 SS neutral.

For small groups, the GM may treat the audience members as a single group with a single total modifier. However, for persuasion attempts against large groups, the results of the persuasion roll should be applied separately against each faction it contains.

Example: The Geloanese ambassador has an opportunity to address the entire Senate and High Council. He makes his Bard skill by 1. This counts as a success by 3 against the anti-tariff faction (who derive a small benefit from it for a +2 bonus), a failure against the Montalet and pro-war factions (who have modifiers of at least -2), and a success by 1 against the remainder of the Senate and High Council.

Sample Modifiers

Position provides a small benefit (small tax relief, physical convenience)	+2
Position provides large benefit (total tax relief, physical luxury)	+4
Benefit to be realized immediately	+1
Position involves small risk (e.g., legal inconvenience, small tax increase)	-3
Position involves large risk (e.g., risk of war or imprisonment)	-5
Risk or benefit is long term rather than immediate	×1/2
Temporary alliance required with opposed group	-2
Temporary alliance required with traditional enemy	-5
Long-term alliance required	×2
Increase/decrease CR in one area of law (weapons, civil rights)	-1
Increase/decrease regulation on minority group	-2
Increase/decrease overall CR generally	-3
Increase/reduce power of central authority	-3
De-emphasize existing religion/ideology (introducing limited market reforms in Communist economy, moderate humanist reforms in theocracy)	-4
Introduce new religion/ideology	-6

The GM may, of course, apply other modifier as necessary. Proposals which have no clear benefit or harm may nevertheless meet considerable resistance if they are seen as immoral or otherwise inappropriate. For example, legalizing alcohol in a strict Mormon or Muslim community would have at least a -3 penalty.

The modifiers above also assume that the ideas being proposed make sense to the intended audience. Some ideas require considerable cultural preparation before they'll be accepted. For example, the average Medieval peasant probably wouldn't understand idea of modern representative democracy (democratic time travelers might start slow with the idea of landowners electing a king). Likewise, Rastafarian theology would sound like incoherent gibberish to a Byzantine clergyman.

Charity and Entertainment

A character may gain temporary bonuses by buying the good will of a target group, giving alms to the poor, sponsoring religious festivities or sporting events, throwing lavish parties, and so on. This will provide a bonus to the character's next attempt to persuade the target group. For example, endowing a charity hostel would provide a bonus to an attempt to influence the urban poor, while sponsoring a grand ball would influence the aristocrats who attend. The cost of such an event is $(\text{monthly cost of living}/100) \times (\text{bonus}^2)$ per person to a maximum bonus of +3. The number of people to spend for is the intended size of the target group; individuals may choose not to show up at parties, go to the country instead of attending the games, etc. However, in most societies, only the very rich and powerful will pass up free food and entertainment, so that's rarely an issue. The cost to give a +2 bonus to a group of 100 middle-class peasants (Status 0) by sponsoring a feast on a holiday would be $(200/100) \times (2^2)$, or \$800. The bonus would apply only to those peasants who attended the feast. Sponsoring events also gives the sponsor an opportunity to distribute leaflets, make speeches, and otherwise interact with individuals who might not typically be available to him.

Example: The ambassador invites the High Council to a dinner, at which he'll try to subtly try to influence them with his Carousing skill (which he has at 11). Figuring he needs to really impress them, he goes all-out for the maximum bonus. Cost of living for status 4 is \$2500, and \$5000 for status 5. Therefore, he shells out $(2500/100) \times 3^2$ for each of the councilors and $(5000/100) \times 3^2$ for the duke, a total of \$4950. This money is spent whether or not they all show up.

Secondary Skills

Other skills may be used to support persuasion attempts.

Writing: A well-delivered speech is always enhanced by being well-written. A character with Writing skill (who does not have to be the one delivering the speech) can produce a speech to address a specific class of people. A speaker gains a bonus to Bard skill equal to the writer's margin of success for a small, homogenous group (a single union local, a military company) to a maximum of +5. Divide by two for a larger but fairly homogenous group (all farmers in a state or small nation) or by four for members of a large, diverse group (everybody in a large city or Medieval country).

Psychology: Psychology skill can provide useful insight into the thoughts and desires of a group. A psychological analysis can be used to tailor a message for a specific class of people, just as Writing skill can. However, it can be used to support any one skill roll (Bard, Writing, Diplomacy, etc.), and it only provides half the bonus (half of the margin of success for a small group, 1/4 for a large homogenous group, and 1/8 for a large, diverse group).

Memetics: A successful [Memetics](#) roll provides a bonus equal to the margin of success to all persuasion attempts intended to spread the meme in question. There is no adjustment for group size; group size is already accounted for in the Memetics skill roll.

Enthrallment: Enthrallment skills can be used in conjunction with persuasion attempts using Bard skill, providing additional benefits over and above those provided by the persuasion attempt itself. In attempts to accumulate Social Strength, the Persuade skill will move an additional (number of targets $\times$ average SS of audience) points of SS in the speaker's favor. Suggest and Captivate add the targeted number of people to demonstrations, riots, and strikes (see Other Uses of Public Opinion below). All Enthrallment skills can be used with fund-raising attempts, adding (number of targets $\times$ average SS of audience) to the effective favorable SS of the audience.

Other Uses of Public Opinion

Public opinion and persuasive skill can be put to other uses. Just as characters can talk people into helping them, they can also attempt to persuade groups of people to take direct action or to color their opinions of individuals. Here are some possibilities:

- *Endorse/Defame:* Rather than spreading a message, a character may work on the audience's opinion of other messengers. A persuading character may work in favor of or against an individual. If the persuasion roll succeeds, the audience will react to the target at (margin of success)/2 for the next 1d6+2 days to a maximum of +/-5 (the persuading character decides if it's a positive or negative modifier); this may be treated as a temporary Reputation.
- *Fund Raising:* A character may solicit donations for his cause. If successful, he receives \$(margin of success $\times$ SS of the audience in his favor $\times$ audience's average monthly cost of living $\times$.005).
- *Demonstrate:* Crowds can be convinced to make a public demonstration of their opinion by marching, gathering in one place and shouting slogans or singing, and so on, as appropriate to the society, for 1d6+1 hours. The number of people present at the demonstration is ((SS of the audience in his favor + (margin of success $\times$ 4%)) / average SS of the audience). The persuading character may delay the demonstration, but the number of people to appear will decrease by 1d6% per day.
- *Strike:* Strikes are a traditional weapon of the oppressed. Compute a number of people who will stop work as for a demonstration, but divide by two. 2d6% will return to work for each day the strike lasts.
- *Riot:* Rioters will break windows, set fire to things, and engage in fistfights. Compute the number of people as for a strike. 4d6% will stop rioting each hour the riot lasts.

Example: A union activist makes a firey speech before a thousand lower-class factory workers. Ranging from Poor to Average wealth with a range of Status going no higher than zero, the GM decides they have an average SS of 1.5 and monthly cost of living of \$300. They're not at all happy about their lot, so 60% of their SS, 900, is in favor of the proposition of increased pay for workers. The activist makes a Bard roll by 3. If he were speaking against a company boss, the boss would suffer a -2 reaction penalty for several days. If he wanted contributions, he'd get $$(3 \times 900 \times 300 \times .005) = \$4050$. If he wanted a demonstration, he'd lead a group of $(900 + (3 \times 4\%)/1.5 = 672$ people. 336 would be involved in a riot or a strike.

Personal Consequences

Attempts to change opinions often have some kind of fallout, and the more effective they are, the greater the chance something unexpected will happen. After any attempt to change opinions, the GM should roll 3d6. Add one to the roll if less than 50% of available SS remains neutral. Add two if less than 25% of available SS remains neutral. If the character succeeded at his skill roll, add the margin of success. On a 16+, roll on the personal consequence table and apply the results to the character.

Personal Consequences Table

Roll 2d6

- 2-3 Roll on Lasting Personal Consequences table
- 4 Character subject to a concerted physical attack. This may be anything from a random enraged citizen to a carefully planned assassination attempt.
- 5 Character suffers a -1 Reputation for 1d6 weeks
- 6 Character is subject to a civil lawsuit
- 7 No consequence
- 8 Character is subject to a criminal lawsuit with a threat of exile, or imprisonment
- 9 Character gains a +1 Reputation for 1d6 weeks
- 10 Character is given a donation "for the cause" of $1d6 \times$ campaign starting wealth
- 11- Roll on Lasting Personal Consequences table
- 12

Lasting Personal Consequences

Roll 3d6. Wealth cannot be increased beyond Filthy Rich or below Dead Broke.

- 3 Lose -10 points of Reputation permanently (either take a -10 Reputation or reduce the cost of an existing reputation by 10 points)
- 4 Lose one level of Wealth
- 5 Lose 10 points of Ally/Ally Group or gain an Enemy worth 10 points
- 6 Lose -5 points of Reputation (either take a -5 Reputation or reduce the cost of an existing reputation by 5 points)
- 7 Lose -5 points of Ally/Ally Group or gain an Enemy worth 5 points
- 8 Gain an Enemy worth -5 points
- 9 Lose one level of Status
- 10 Roll twice, ignoring further rolls of 10. Apply *both* results.
- 11 Gain one level of Status
- 12 Gain an Ally/Ally Group worth 5 points
- 13 Lose -5 points of Enemy disadvantages or gain an Ally/Ally Group worth 5 points
- 14 Gain 5 points of Reputation (either take a 5-point Reputation or increase the cost of an existing reputation by 5 points)
- 15 Gain an Ally/Ally Group worth 10 points
- 16 Lose -10 points of Enemy disadvantages or gain an Ally/Ally Group worth 10 points
- 17 Gain one level of Wealth
- 18 Gain 10 points of Reputation (either take a 10-point Reputation or increase the cost of an existing reputation by 10 points)

Individual Reaction and Subversion

It's also possible to work to persuade powerful individuals to use their SS for a cause using the usual rules for social skills. Any character can have a reaction to an idea as well as to a person. Someone with a Good reaction to an idea will lend 33% of his SS to a position. A Very Good reaction will get 66% of SS, and an Excellent reaction will get 100% of SS. If you're using [extended rules for changing individual reactions](#), the SS an individual will lend to a cause is equal to $(\text{Reaction Number} - 10) \times 10\%$. Working on a person-by-person basis is usually inefficient, but it can be

useful for extremely powerful rulers and leaders of opposed factions.

At the GM's option, individuals with enough influence over a body of followers to have them as an Ally Group will bring an equivalent amount of their SS with them. For example, a government minister has a batch of courtiers as an Ally Group. He is persuaded into a Very Good reaction to an idea. Not only does the position get 66% of his SS, it also gets 66% of the SS of his Ally Group. However, the GM will have to decide this on a case-by-case basis. A group of noble retainers will probably follow their master's political leanings out of loyalty and common interest; a street gang or pirate crew will more likely stick with their own opinions rather than follow their nominal chief.

Another use of social skills on individuals is to persuade them to work on your behalf. For example, a prominent official or popular hero might be talked into making a speech or writing letters supporting your cause. That persuasion attempt would use that character's skills and advantages, and might grant entry to groups the persuading character might not otherwise be able to reach.

Social "Mass Combat"

This is all well and good for gathering support for a proposition or spreading ideas (for example, popularizing a new religion). Some attempts at social change, though, will require some kind of confrontation. For example, passing a new law or electing a leader requires a distinct moment of decision. Such social confrontations are conducted using a process similar to the mass combat rules: when the conflict comes to a head, the strengths of each side are compared, other skill modifiers are selected, leaders roll a contest of skills, and consequences are applied. In social confrontations, though, battles may be a bit harder to start and Politics rather than Strategy is the applicable skill. The procedure for resolving social confrontations is as follows:

1. Force a confrontation
2. Resolve extraordinary strength use
3. Resolve catastrophes
4. Compute SS ratios
5. Roll contests of Politics skill
6. Resolve outcome and personal consequences

Forcing Confrontations

Confrontations don't necessarily happen on their own. For example, some governments may have regularly scheduled elections, which give a time frame for certain confrontations. However, other questions must be forced by their partisans. To pass new laws, for example, legislators must be convinced to consider the new legislation. If there is no preexisting timetable for a confrontation, at least 25% of relevant Social Strength must be committed (that is, not neutral) before one may even be attempted; otherwise, there's simply not enough interest. In order to make a confrontation take place, the leader of one of the interested parties must make a successful roll against his Politics skill. This roll may be resisted by the Politics skill of a leader of an opposed cause. If the character attempting to force the confrontation wins, the confrontation will take place in 1d6 weeks. All sides can spend the final weeks making last-minute speeches, trying to influence important figures, and so on.

Exceptional Strength

Magic, psi, and other exceptional powers have a place in social conflicts just as they do in mass combat, but they require powers with a somewhat different focus. ES points in social conflicts are computed as ES points in the [mass combat system](#), but instead of combat-related spells and abilities, they are earned for information-gathering and influencing abilities (telepathy powers, divination spells, etc.). Opposing leaders allocate points to the uses below:

- *Divination*: Using exceptional powers to look into the future to better plan actions. +1 to Politics skill per 3 ES points to a maximum of +3.

Catastrophes: +1 to another side's Catastrophe roll per ES point.

- *Confusion*: Sowing confusion at high levels of an enemy's organization. -1 to an enemy's Politics skill per 2 ES points to a maximum of -5.
- *Dischord*: Encouraging disagreement among the rank-and-file of an enemy. -50 to an enemy's SS per ES point.
- *Morale-building*: Enhancing coordination and positive attitudes on one's own side. +50 to own SS per ES point.
- *Defense*: Points may be allocated to defend against enemy attacks, each point negating a point of the enemy's ES.

Catastrophes

Things always go wrong at the last minute. For each group involved, roll 3d6 on the table below.

Roll Catastrophe

3-7	No catastrophe.
8-9	Poor communications hamper plans: -1 to Politics roll.
10-11	An enemy calls on unexpected resources (pick one randomly if there are multiple opposed groups). Increase that side's SS by 10%.
12-13	Last minute scandal. -2 to Politics roll.
14	Faction leader threatens to bolt. Make a roll against an appropriate social skill or suffer -1d6% SS.
15	Dissension among allies or top leaders weakens organization. -1 to Politics roll, -1d6% to SS.
16	In a last-minute schism, a faction leader bolts; 1d6% of SS defects to another side.
17	Major internal dissention. -2 to Politics roll, -2d6% to SS.
18+	Designated leader injured or detained. Base Politics roll cut in half or pick another leader at -5 to his Politics skill.

Social Strength Modifiers

As in the Mass Combat system, the strength of relevant groups is treated as a modifier to the leaders' skill roll. Compute the Social Strength ratings for each position. Find the ratio of SS of the stronger side to the weaker one on the Social Strength Ratio table below to get the modifier to Politics skill. If there are more than two positions, compute SS ratios relative to the weakest side.

Example: In a four-way election, candidate Bob has a total of 1490 SS in his favor, candidate Carol has 2909 SS, candidate Ted has 2998 SS, and candidate Alice has 5772 SS. Carol (about 1.95 to 1 over Bob) gets +5 to her Politics roll, Ted (a tiny fraction over 2 to 1 over Bob) gets +6, and Alice (at about 3.87 to 1) gets +7.

Social Strength Ratio

Odds	Politics skill bonus
1.1 or less	No bonus
1.1+ to 1.2	+1
1.2+ to 1.3	+2
1.3+ to 1.5	+3
1.5+ to 1.7	+4
1.7+ to 2	+5
2+ to 3	+6
3+ to 5	+7
5+ to 7	+8
7+ to 9	+9
greater than 9	+10

Other Modifiers

Social conflicts have their own kind of "superiority" modifiers. Either side of a conflict can have an advantage if they are seen as having moral or legal weight on their side, or at least the heavy guns. Any faction in a social confrontation gets a +2 to Politics skill for having clear support of each of these: legislators, judiciary, military, or spiritual and religious authorities. For example, in a confrontation between a popular uprising backed by a secular military against a theocratic government, both sides would get a +2. The popular uprising has the overwhelming support of the military, while the government has the overwhelming support of religious authorities. Assuming the opinions of the nation's legislators and judges are divided, they provide no bonus to either side.

Finally, public perception of the people involved in a struggle is important. As with persuasion attempts, a leader's total reaction modifiers are applied to the Politics roll.

Resolution

When catastrophes have been resolved, exceptional powers used, and Social Strengths computed, all leaders roll against their modified Politics skill to see how the confrontation comes out. Margins of victory are computed relative to the highest roller, who must get a definite victory over *all* other positions in order to win the confrontation. For a contest between multiple positions, it's very easy to come up with an inconclusive result and fight it out all over again in a few weeks.

Margin Result

0-2	Inconclusive. No laws are passed or candidates elected, but the side which caused the confrontation is at +3 to force another. Other sides lose 1d3% of their support.
3-5	Marginal victory. As with an inconclusive victory, no laws are passed or candidates elected, but 1d6% of support for losing positions becomes neutral and there is automatically another confrontation in 1d6 weeks.
6-9	Definite victory. The winning side's candidate or law is successfully established. 2d6% of losing positions' support becomes neutral.
10-12	Great victory. As above, but 3d6% of losers' support becomes neutral.
13+	Overwhelming victory: As above, but 4d6% of losers support becomes neutral and 1d6% switches to winning position.

This is sufficient for most legislation and many elections, where an unclear vote leads to another round of negotiation and move voting, but specific circumstances may provide exceptions. In most modern democracies, for example, the smallest victory is nevertheless a victory, although an actual tie will lead to a run-off election.

Example: After all modifiers are applied in the contest between Bob, Carol, Ted, and Alice, Bob makes his Politics roll by 3, Carol makes hers by 0, Ted makes his by 6, and Alice makes hers by 8. Alice comes out 2 ahead of Ted, 5 ahead of Bob, and 8 ahead of Carol. Alice's victory over Ted is inconclusive, so this battle will have to be fought again. Ted loses 1d3% of the SS behind him, Bob loses 1d6% of his support, and Carol loses 2d6% of her support.

Personal Consequences

As with individual attempts to influence society, leaders in social confrontations are subject to personal fallout, only more so. After every confrontation, every leader involved must roll on the Personal Consequences table. Leaders of each side must roll an additional 3d6 plus the margin by which they won. On a 16+, they must roll on the Personal Consequences table a second time. PCs lending their SS to a social struggle should make the same roll, also adding their side's margin of success.

Roleplaying Opportunities

This system outlines how to influence groups, but all of those attempts come down to individual action, which means

opportunities for roleplaying. Characters with good social skills may do most of the work influencing a society, but other characters will have their hands full supporting them. Here are some possibilities:

Getting An Audience: One of the big limiting factors on characters attempting to influence society is finding an audience that cares to listen to them. Here, the GM has a great deal of discretion, and the PCs may have to do a lot of work just to get their message out. The rules for entertainment provide one way of gathering a live audience. To gather specific individuals, characters might have to trade favors and talk their way into the good graces of difficult NPCs. Characters engaged in regional or nationwide political contests also have to deal with the problems of travel: coach, train, and plane schedules, bad roads, car or animal problems, bandits, making sure their entourage comes along, and so on. Characters attempting to use print or broadcast advertising might have to deal with partisan editors and station owners.

Security: For any topic which raises strong feelings, as any social conflict will, violence is always a possibility. Combat-oriented PCs are useful to scout out locations and keep an eye on the crowd.

Scandals: Because public perception of the people involved in a social conflict is a factor, a leader's reputation is even more vulnerable to attack than his person. Characters must be wary of enemies digging up unpleasant facts about their leader's background, or at least putting a negative spin on things that might seem innocuous.

Undue Influence: It might be dishonorable and underhanded to interfere directly in an opponent's campaign, but it's fun. Sneaky characters can misdirect important invitations to politically-motivated gatherings or simply let the air out of the tires of the most important individuals. Toughs can be employed to break up the other side's mass meetings. If there's nothing scandalous about an opponent's past, a scandal can be created.

GURPS Starbases

by Sandy Antunes

Starbases are a unique mix of ship and home, technology and politics. They span from from zero-gravity asteroid belt mining outposts to multi-racial "Babylon-5" O'Neil-style stations. Adventures in and around such bases cover the entire range of the science fiction genre.

Starbases and space stations face unique resource and technology issues, not just in construction but for allowing day to day life. Much of what we take for granted -- air, gravity, water, weather, living space -- are sharply controlled on a starbase. When someone is literally selling you the air you need to live, politics and economics become just as important as nifty tech or cool guns. And if said cool guns are the only way to get the air you need, well, starbase, we have a crisis.

Build It

For the gamemaster, creating a space station depends on your choice of rules. Since a station is just "a vehicle that doesn't move", use ***GURPS Vehicles 2nd Edition***, with a dose of the Vehicles outtakes (from *Pyramid* #21) for rules like habitation modules and spin gravity. Or, call it "a spaceship that doesn't move" and use ***GURPS Space***, with minimal thrusters (for station keeping).

Tech Level can range from modern-day earth (TL 7) through typical science fiction television usage (TL 9/10+) up to the Ringworld or Dyson sphere levels (TL14). Often the bases will be at the cutting edge of technology, since it's handy to have a Base before you launch your spanking new starship fleet. And hey, bases don't move -- they only need walls, power, air, and perhaps some gravity.

- **TL 6: Atomic:** Skylab-level short-term stations
- **TL 7: Nuclear:** MIR- and Freedom-sized non-self-sufficient stations
- **TL 8: Spacefaring:** Stations become self-sufficient and serve as starship ports
- **TL 9: Starfaring:** City-sized stations are ubiquitous and often independent entities
- **TL 10: Antimatter:** Stations can exist even in the absence of habitable worlds
- **TL 13: Worldbuilding:** The distinction between ship, starbase, and homeworld blurs
- **TL 14: Dysonian:** Bases so advanced, the locals may not realize they are constructs

Fund It

Within the game, space stations are more than just vehicles -- they are perhaps the most expensive and politically crucial elements of technological societies. Issues such as ownership, defensive potential, and multi-species involvement make for complex military, political and economic situations. The reasons for building such bases involve 3 aspects, in differing amounts. Where the motives lie on this pyramid define the role for a station.

Each of our three motives will affect how the base is designed. Clearly an all-military base is going to load up on firepower, armor, and sensors. Political bases will likely maximize living space as well as keeping tabs on affairs with good sensors. Economic bases will want lots of living space and easy ship access. Bases with multiple purposes are more likely to be funded by nations or worlds, but will have to then juggle these various factors.

Quick readers might note that 'Science' is not a motive here. Just as science is only part of science fiction, real-world science is likewise not a stand-alone goal, but something that requires a partner for support and funding. Thus a "Science Starbase" really has to have a supporting group. It can be funded by the Military, it can be designed for corporate research (Economic), or it can be there for pure research on behalf of a nation or world (Political). In all cases, the 'science' is part and parcel of the motive behind it. Consider 'science' just a wing in the base, just as 'goods' and 'trade' and 'meetings' and 'people living there' have their own sections.

Stepping back to the big picture, military bases tend to have the highest available technology, to best fulfill their defensive role. A purely military base may be spartan, providing simple barracks and serving as an advanced weapons platform. Or, it may be more behind the lines, providing recreation and relaxation facilities along with a modicum of defensive capability. As with real estate, their level of armament is a function of location, location, location.

A station set up as a peacekeeping effort, however, starts to encroach on political terrain as well. Indeed, a successful peacekeeper will participate in the local political scene more often than in battles. As most diplomats and negotiators prefer more comfortable housing than a barracks, such stations might lose some of their efficiency and trim in favor of comfortable quarters and decent guest facilities.

Or, the military station may be a form of bragging, showcasing advanced technology in a subtly threatening manner to impress other worlds. This can lead to overconfidence and an increase in appearance at the cost of military readiness. As time passes and conflicts become more removed, a military outpost can soon become an empire's figurehead, rather than a beachhead.

Purely political bases may simply provide consulate and ambassadorial stations or maintain a diplomatic presence. In such a case, the station's condition would be a direct measure of their importance in their government hierarchy. This spans the extremes from "jewel of the empire" to backwater outposts where only the out-of-favor are sent.

As politics rarely brings in money itself, though, even a base defined as purely diplomatic will end up engaging in at least some trade. The economic advantages of using an already-established port are many, low start-up cost being foremost.

Indeed, some starbases are purely economic in function, serving as trade ports and meeting houses. Poised in orbit around a planet, a base provides a very cost-effective way to transfer goods from inter-system ship to ground-hopper, and provides an effective Customs declaration for the planet as well. Indeed, the business of the port could be entirely

its utility in refueling, resupplying, and rebuilding ships, with no other goods necessary to sustain a viable income. But, it is more likely that there is trade as well, since an orbiting or free-floating base can provide ample warehouse space (ample, at least, compared with the fuel-eating spaceships).

Regardless of its economic utility, a base devoted to commerce will be characterized by surprisingly low technology, relative to a military unit. It is rarely cost-effective to spend huge quantities of your profit on your storefront and warehouse. If the base is devoted to the luxury trade, it might seem quite opulent -- but only in the surface details. Underneath, brute economy will rule.

Taking economy to an extreme, a nearly unmanned base can have great economic potential with little cost -- as a broadcasting station. This provides excellent (and unblockable) global coverage for the planet below, and requires very little space or comfort, especially if the only inhabitants are all staff.

Rounding out the triangle, an economic port may often find itself relying on military support, to keep open trade lanes and protect their interests. In such cases, the military is usually a separate entity, and indeed can frequently be at odds with the merchants over differing courses of action. The military presence must be robust enough to survive combat, but not get in the way often enough to cut into the profit margin. By the same token, an economic port is likely to provide quarters and facilities (at inflated rates) to its government's representatives. This provides both profit and some semblance of government sanction, and works to both parties benefit.

Use It

In reality, most bases have all three components to some degree, and that is what gives them their character. Each faction involved will generally consider itself the most crucial element of the station's community, and the inter-station politics will be a factor not easily ignored by visiting characters. A base with strong rivalries can provide endless adventure hooks without involving a single outside agency.

Characters working off a base will find things different from the usual cities in that access is more controlled and resources are more valuable. It's a lot easier to track which ships are arriving and leaving, than to monitor an earth-bound border. At the same time, tight controls on import/export means smuggling may be that much more lucrative.

Need to wheel a deal? Bases are just as filled with intrigue as any planet-bound setting. And just like a small town, everyone knows everyone, so secrets may be hard to keep.

Just passing through? Be prepared to deal with possibly corrupt customs, endless shakedowns for your meager credits, and blatant inquiries into your true motives. Nothing to worry about if you have nothing to hide, right?

Have a covert mission? If it's for the forces of order, you can hope the administration at least turns a blind eye, and maybe even provides a little help. But the locals might shut down if things on the base aren't as under control as the tourist brochures say.

Doing some private detective work? You might find the locals helpful -- or they might be part of the problem. Much like a wild west town, each base reacts differently to different visitors.

Overthrowing the establishment? A balkanized base, with zones belonging to different factions, is tremendously unstable. Whomever controls those resources necessary to survival will be dominant. And a 'scorched earth' policy by the losers can kill everyone. Either good diplomatic skills or 100% perfection in special ops can resolve such situations.

Starbases can be destinations, home, or simply a stop in transit. They're just like any other place, except for the ease of establishing totalitarian control and chance of catastrophic death of all aboard.

Know It

Our own Atomic and Nuclear era (TL 6/7) is marked by Skylab (36 by 7 meters in size), MIR (13 meters) and Space Station Freedom (108 meters). These structures are simultaneously primitive (rivaling a mobile home in terms of comfort and accommodations) and amazingly sophisticated, given that they allow life in the most hostile region nature provides. They are by no means self-sufficient, and require frequent and expensive resupplies of all basic commodities other than energy (which they receive via solar panels).

They are at their heart Political entities, and concerns like profitability and results take second place to the overall goal of asserting national pride. Fortunately, the pure science research is, in itself, genuinely useful and trickles down into earthbound society over time. Although not ostensibly military platforms, military funding and military science is engaged in on these platforms. Still, due to their small size and limited availability, these space stations are really more 'space platforms' than 'starbases'.

Those same restrictions mean such stations are more suited towards games where the characters are either part of the elite crew or involved in espionage. With typical staffing at a dozen or less, any adventure will be a short mission -- go in, do it, get out. Military or paramilitary operations, black ops research, or technology-driven investigation are naturals. Or perhaps these early steps towards space are also the only way for the daring heroes to stop the extra-planetary threat that has just manifested...

At the border of the Nuclear and Spacefaring ages (TL 7/8) is Space Station Five (from *2001: A Space Odyssey*, at 223 meters diameter). It clearly had Economic uses (given that there were regular civilian flights up to it), and may have had off-screen Political and Military purposes. Of the classic 'rotating ring to provide artificial gravity', it is a nice extrapolation of what we could, in theory, produce now. It also provides the best standard for what an entry-level starbase might be like. With staff, crew, and tourists, it can serve as a jumping off point as well as containing possible dens of political rebellion, secret research, or global terrorism. While perhaps too small to stage a campaign, such are ideal exotic locales for a jaded globe-spanning band of adventurers.

The fully-fledged self-sufficient Babylon-5 starbase (at 8454 meters, TL9) is a perfect example of "a world unto itself". Babylon-5 uses the "rotation as artificial gravity" model and a decent amount of real-world science, making it ideally suited for hard science fiction. Staffed with military crew under a diplomatic mission with the goal of being a trade nexus, it's smack dab in the middle of the 'triangle of interests' and thus a great place for trouble.

Those tending towards space opera can switch to Deep Space 9 (from *Star Trek*, at 772 meters, TL11). Complete with artificial gravity, photon torpedoes, shields, and other pseudo-science, the focus with DS9 is part military and all political. They must deal with a native planet population, several space wars, and a fair amount of internal corruption. Again, a plot-rich environment.

Past this, we get into Death Stars (800 km), Ringworlds (3 million earths), and beyond. Building moons and paving orbits is good for ultra high tech, and marks the end of the distinct terms 'starbase', 'ship', and 'planet'.

Starbases are a fascinating microcosm for the TL8 through TL 11 universe, a golden age where a starbase is a rich yet unique setting, balancing limited resources while remaining a bit tougher than any ship, a bit smaller than any nation. They have challenge and intrigue inside. And if you make a mistake, you can just leave -- to the hard vacuum outside.

What, Me Heal?

by Aaron Rosenberg

You and your friends are gaming. The party gets into a fight with some monster, and you step forward to lend a hand. "No, don't!" your friends all say. "We need you to hang back and heal us!" So you sit there and watch while they have fun, and then afterward you get to play Mommy and take care of their boo-boos.

Does this sound familiar?

It's a sad truth that people get certain expectations into their heads, and this is as true in games as it is anywhere else. People assume that fighters aren't too bright. They assume that wizards can cast fireball, or at least magic missile. They assume that rogues are untrustworthy liars.

And they assume that the best thing about a cleric is that he can heal.

Healing is useful, of course. Without healing spells, most fantasy adventuring parties wouldn't last beyond their second or third encounter -- they'd still be so wounded from that first pack of kobolds that a single wild boar would finish them off easily. So it is great to have a cleric in the party, and it's nice to know that your character is so important to everyone's welfare.

But that doesn't change the fact that being a known healer can limit your options. People start to expect healing from you, and after a while it becomes all you're allowed to do. And that's not a lot of fun.

So how do you get out of that and still manage to play a priest? Well, you have to be smart about it. Find ways to downplay your healing abilities and emphasize your other talents. But keep in mind that this isn't easy, and there isn't one perfect solution. Part of the problem is that you've actually got two separate things to worry about -- the players and the characters.

Players

It's sad but true that one of the first things anyone says when the group is creating new fantasy characters is "who's going to play the healer?" Your best option is to cut this off right from the start. Tell your friends that you want to play a cleric, but that you don't want to get stuck always healing everybody. Explain to them that you're interested in using the class's other spells and abilities. If you're lucky, they might say "that's cool -- we'll probably still beg you to heal us when we're on death's door, but we'll try to keep it to a minimum."

Even if you're already playing the character, if you have a good group that likes developing strong characters you should try the direct approach. Tell them you're sick of just being a sideline healer, and that your character wants to do other things. They may be fine with that. Maybe some of them are tired of what their own characters have been doing, and can appreciate the desire to change things around a bit. If that occurs, you're golden -- you'll want to ease out of the healer role, and still use healing when someone's seriously wounded, but if the other players know you don't want to focus on that they'll try not to emphasize it either.

But sometimes you'll say "I'm sick of healing" and someone else will respond with either "dude, we need you!" or "well, you shouldn't have played a priest, then." If you think either of those will occur in your group, don't bother talking to them about this. Just find other ways.

The best thing, in these situations, is to enlist the help of the gamemaster. A good GM wants everyone to have fun, and if you tell him you're not enjoying your character he'll work with you to change that. He's got the authority to say "suddenly healing spells don't seem to work" but that's a bit extreme. What's more effective, if a bit underhanded, is just to enlist him as an accomplice.

For example, you can create a new priestly prestige class, or modify an existing one. And the one drawback to this new class is that -- you guessed it -- your character can no longer use healing spells. Or very rarely. If the GM is willing to approve this, you've got a clear reason to tell the other players that your character can't heal them.

You can also get the GM to set up other reasons for your character not to heal. Perhaps another god has cursed this land, and whenever healing spells are employed they do cure the wounds but then inflict disease in their place. Or healing gives off a particular type of magical aura that can be honed in on by some particularly unpleasant monster. Or healing requires the trappings of your religion, and those are in scarce supply -- a water god's priest can't really be expected to function at full capacity in a desert.

Another option is to work with the GM to revamp how clerics work in his campaign. If healing is easy to do, and can be done on such a frequent basis, that cheapens the power. Here are a few ways to make healing more valuable, and at the same time less frequent:

Emphasize ritual. This is, after all, a direct entreaty to your god, and one you can reasonably expect to produce results. That's worth a bit of ceremony. Drop little comments about how healing is immensely powerful and so requires a long and elaborate process. Healing checks are quick things, basically combat medicine or first-aid. Healing spells should involve candles and censers and all sorts of other religious equipment, plus lengthy prayers. This is not something you rush over and demand because you fell out of a tree -- it's something that takes a day to prepare. After the first few times you make the entire party sit around for two days because you have to get ready to heal someone's cut, you'll find that they don't ask as often.

Emphasize fatigue. Healing is not something you can toss off whenever you like. Not only does it take time to prepare, it also requires substantial effort. Even though the god supplies the ultimate power, it has to go through your cleric, and that's exhausting. Emphasize that. "Yes, I can heal you. We'd better set up camp, though. It will take me a day to prepare, and after the process is complete I will be of no use for at least a day after that." Which means that you can't take a turn on guard, you can't help hunt, and you cannot cast any other spells. That should make them question how badly they need healing -- is it worth it to put one of their spellcasters out of commission for at least two days? Or should they just bandage that slash and deal with it?

Don't count on success. The god of healing is going to grant healing requests every time, obviously. But the god of war? Why would he? He'd probably rather see the character show some backbone by soldiering on while hurt. Think about your character's deity. Is healing one of his areas, or just something you can do because you're a priest? If it's the latter, emphasize the god's actual domains more. A god of fire is not really all that keen on healing, and so he may choose not to grant you that power whenever you ask. Lighting a fire he's happy to do, but healing is a different thing, and not his focus. The next time your character is asked to heal someone who isn't dying, agree to help. Go through the entire ritual, chant all the prayers -- and then look sad. Tell the others that your god has chosen not to grant your request at this time. Gods are unpredictable, and beyond reproach -- if he didn't give you the power, he must have a reason. And once you've established that you cannot heal on demand, the others will tap that more sparingly. They'll want you to save the healing spells for when they really need them.

You should also remember that the cleric-deity relationship is very personal, and can evolve over time. If in-game your god feels that you have been abusing the power to heal, he may revoke that ability to teach you a lesson. Stop using healing spells as often, as openly, and as easily. If any of the other characters ask, admit that you have been reprimanded, and are no longer able to tap that power as easily. It doesn't hurt to add a little guilt here. After all, if they didn't keep demanding that you heal them, you wouldn't have had your healing privileges revoked. You can also get together with the GM and actually roleplay this situation. Make it a real issue for the character, where he and his god are trying to come to terms with this new kink in their relationship.

Another option is for your character to choose a new path, one that takes him away from healing. This does not mean he has to give up being a priest -- if anything, it's a more focused approach to his clerical duties. For example, a priest of a fire god will concentrate on fire spells, while a priest of a war god will focus on war-related spells. If your god is not one of healing, you can easily shift your attention to your actual domains, and let the healing fall by the wayside. If anyone asks, just tell them that such powers are not truly an aspect of your god, and that as you have grown in

wisdom you have learned to more closely adhere to his interests and wishes. That's pretty tough to argue against.

Characters

If you've got a good group of players, they may be able to keep player-knowledge and character-knowledge separate. And if that happens, breaking out of the healer mold is a lot easier, because now you don't have to fool the players -- your character just has to fool the other characters. Here are a few suggestions:

Don't tell them you can heal. When characters ask if you can heal them, say something like, "Unfortunately, such gifts are beyond me." That not only tells them you can't do it, but reminds them just how valuable healing is. It's not something to be taken for granted, or bought on the cheap. You might also talk to the GM about establishing that, in his game world, not every cleric can heal. That way people won't automatically expect your character to have that gift.

Only reveal low-level healing. If the other characters have figured out that yours can heal, you can't really claim you can't heal at all. But you can minimize it. Only use the weakest healing spells, like Cure Minor Wounds. Never let on that you could access the more powerful ones.

Heal unobtrusively. This is a great way to not only downplay the healing, but also to develop your character. Find ways to heal people without their knowing what happened or who did it. For example, you could wait until everyone's asleep and then heal the wounded. When they wake up the next morning, they'll be amazed by how much better they feel after a good night's sleep. Comment on the strong divine energies in a particular glade, and the next morning they'll attribute their rapid recovery to the area rather than to you.

Demonstrate other abilities. If all you ever do is heal people, that's what everyone will expect from you. But priests are a lot more versatile than that. You just need to distract everyone else from healing by showing them what else you can do. Is the area crawling with undead? You're set -- once you've demonstrated that you can turn those liches and destroy those skeletons, the other characters will think of you as a take-charge, destroys-evil type of guy, rather than as the humble, religious healer. You do want to keep things varied, of course, to avoid being pigeonholed somewhere else, but definitely use some of your other abilities. If you want your character to be more physically involved in combats, use combat-oriented spells and jump into the fray. Whatever you do, though, don't focus on casting spells like Bless and Aid. Those are great boons to your party members, but they'll just put you back on the sidelines.

The important thing is to convince both the players and their characters that your cleric can do more than simply heal others. Either downplay his healing abilities altogether or play them up and make them more involved and more exhausting and more unlikely to succeed. Either way, as your character demonstrates other useful abilities and as the other party members get used to the idea that they may have to heal naturally, they'll learn to adjust. Your priest will stop being a Heal-o-Matic, and will become an active participant again. And that's worth a quick prayer of thanks.

Magical Scripts and Living In The City

Two Articles
by Larry D. Hols

* * *

Magical Scripts

The acquisition of new spells by magic-using characters in games is most often a matter of routine: the character finds a scroll containing a spell and copies it into a personal spellbook for study or is taught the spell by a more learned mage. Some games require the use of another spell -- some rendition of Read Magic -- to be able to read the spell for learning it, but the process is still essentially the same.

This method, while being quick and easy, lacks character. Tomes found in musty stacks are only of use if they provide an entire spell text in the generic language of magic. Scraps of spells are useless, as are scribbled notes about a spell. Research into variations is also flavorless, as a variation has to be found whole to be used.

It is possible to add flavor to the learning of new spells, and, at the same time, tie the use of magic strongly to the setting and provide use for otherwise rarely-used skills. Magic-using characters need not take deciphering magical writings for granted and Game Masters can add mystery and difficulty to the acquisition of new spells. The search for magical tomes and journals can prove of interest without whole spells being involved.

Magical Script

The first thing to do is to add the concept that magical writing exists separate from, and overlaid on, mundane writing when used to scribe spells. That is, the words that appear on the scroll or spell book page are not the whole of the spell. Those are the words that must be chanted or intoned, or explain what gestures must be made when, or how to manipulate any material components, or otherwise explain exterior behavior necessary for the spell to be worked.

The magical script, which is written over the mundane words, provides the instructions for the magical techniques, the internal behavior, the mage must use while casting the spell. These operations can include cadence, vocal pitch, mental operations (connecting with an elemental plane, for instance), or any other process necessary for casting the spell. The magical script is automatically obscured from normal vision as part of writing it down (whether via a Write Magic spell or using a basic magical technique).

For those games and campaigns where a version of Read Magic is used, the spell simply allows the caster to read the magical script. This script would be unreadable without use of the spell, as the writing of the spell involves setting a "twist" in the fabric of reality for the script. The spell allows the mage to learn that particular twist and thus read that script at will thereafter.

Breaking the writing of spells into two sections makes it possible to mix up how spells get discovered and learned in the campaign. A mage must find each section of a spell to be able to learn and use it, so chasing after journals and tomes can be fruitful.

The mundane text of a spell can be found, in whole or part, and by itself doesn't provide the mage with the entire spell. A PC can find the mundane portion of a spell and spend months searching for the corresponding magical script that accompanies it. The mage can even assemble the mundane script from notes found in a variety of places, if necessary, and put it all together when the magical script is located and learned.

The GM can use this to complicate things a bit, if desired. The magical script that is found may have been developed for a slightly different version of the spell than the mundane script, so either magical skill checks are necessary for joining the two or casting the spell is experimental -- leading to variation in effect -- and requiring the mage to adjust the spell to work out the glitches. The mage must tweak either the mundane or the magical script.

The split between mundane and magical script also means that other characters can read a spell because they can read the mundane script. They can't, however, read the magical script -- they may not even be able to see it. The magical script can only be seen using the Read Magic variant, if required, or by knowing the trick taught to all apprentices to see magical script where Read Magic is not required. That makes having non-mages help with searches for spell scraps of limited use when the magical script portion of a spell is required.

Example:

Archaeus, a mage, has sought out writings by the legendary mages Fallium and Pornaas because they reputedly used a spell that would throw large rocks with great accuracy and force. Archaeus has located notes later mages made about Fallium and Pornaas's versions, with approximately half of the mundane text each used scribbled in the margins. The GM can require that Archaeus's player makes checks to figure out if the two parts make for a whole, and possibly whether they work together for the same effect.

Archaeus is still in need of the magical script for the spell. His companions are of little help in finding it, though, because they aren't capable of even seeing if magical script accompanies the mundane script of a spell. He'll have to pore over the books all by himself.

End of Part One

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Living In The City

Game Masters face the challenge of making each new part of a setting interesting to players. Presenting each new place so that it's memorable can prove difficult, particularly when dealing with places that are largely similar to one another. Players often seem determined to treat each new area as nothing more than an old area with new names . . . and can we please get on with the interesting stuff?

Each genre of game has types of places that often appear and are thus taken for granted by players. This article will discuss cities in fantasy campaigns, although the general principle can be used in other campaigns.

One method of helping to differentiate between cities in a campaign involves noting the day-to-day activities and habits of the people living in it. The GM can use knowledge of how the inhabitants live to provide nuance and depth to each city the characters visit for any length of time and perhaps etch specific memories of each city into the minds of players. It requires only a bit to show one city lives differently than another.

The key to providing the players with the feel or flavor of a specific city is to know the city well enough to have it affect the characters as they go about their business. If the PCs can act as if every city is the same, then all the stage dressing in the world is likely to be forgotten quickly by the players. Make the PCs adjust to the city and the players are more likely to remember it.

The cycle of daily living for a city's population can affect the characters in many fashions, and the characters will have

to adapt to those cycles as they pursue their interests in the city. Many areas actually touch on this, but a few can be used to great effect in making the city memorable. The manner in which the people conduct business is important. The meals they eat, how and when they are prepared, and how the food is procured can affect the PCs. The times when the varied residents appear and disappear as they go about their business can also have great effect.

Daily Business

As noted above, many GMs have already decided what areas use a given coinage system and the relative values of coins of different sizes and composition. Exchanging coins, however, becomes an exercise in bookkeeping only and an opportunity for defining a city more clearly is missed. Players can be kept on their toes when dealing with coinage issues, instead of simply having the characters ride into town, find a moneychanger, and change a few hundred florins for doubloons. Such a generic approach to handling foreign money can be changed with little trouble.

First, the GM can assume that in most instances, moneychangers do not buy coins from other realms to melt down and recast (and ignore the little matter of authorities taking a dim view of counterfeiting). Moneychangers change coins because they are able to use the coins in some fashion. They could change them with merchants doing business in the realm of origin. They could have a regular trade with moneychangers in the foreign country or occasionally trade coins with the local Royal Treasury (which could melt down the coins to mint new ones). The exact disposition can affect the value of the coins.

If the moneychangers typically trade coins with moneychangers across the border (or with moneychangers closer to the border), then anything that affects relations or travel between the two countries will affect the value of the coins. A border dust-up can shut off trade and make those foreign coins useless. Extensive flooding of the river that marks the border can make travel and trade sporadic, driving down the value of foreign coins. Long-standing hostilities can also decrease the value of coins.

How do the other inhabitants deal with foreign coins? Some, most, or all tradesfolk may accept foreign coins, setting their own rates, and force PCs to consider the worth of dealing with varied rates from vendor to vendor. Some may not accept foreign coins and force characters to trade at poor rates with a moneychanger. Some foreign coins may be welcome in most shops, pubs, and inns, while others aren't even acceptable to moneychangers as anything other than bullion. The city authorities may prohibit changing of coins anywhere other than with official moneychangers. A pouch full of coins can prove interesting for a character.

An example:

Coracon is a river port on the frontier. Because it is just upriver from a seaport and situated on the border marches with a neighboring land, lots of foreign coins flow through it. Most of the moneychanging is done by trading merchants who regularly do business downriver in the seaport or across the border. PCs can exchange coins with these merchants or try to find innkeepers and others who will change coins at worse rates.

A series of border conflicts, however, has slowed trade on land routes across the border, so coins from there have been devalued in exchange. A spice merchant, Dudric, offers a slightly better rate, however, expecting to be able to trade those coins for other foreign coins without much trouble downriver with the sea traders. He has a limited capacity for changing coins based on his store of local coins at hand. He will offer to trade for other foreign coins when pressed, although he'll keep a good portion of all his coins back until he can unload the coin from across the border.

Doing Business

Other aspects of how business is done in the city can also be important. Are prices by vendors firm or is bartering expected? Are all prices entirely negotiable? What are the protocols of negotiation? Is bartering done directly or indirectly? Is it a loud affair or a subdued scene? Do some markets require the use of an intermediary? Playing with these traits can allow for interesting variation in the experience of characters purchasing goods.

Example:

The bazaar in Coracon is noisy, with minor haggling on part of everybody involved. Dealing with luxury items such as spices, fine textiles, jewelry, and the like, requires each party to hire an intermediary and negotiations are done across a table while a bottle of wine is shared. The intermediaries belong to a guild and have some power in the city.

A character attempting to do business in a fashion other than that expected will engender feelings of hostility on part of the natives. This could result in the character being charged high prices or not being dealt with at all. The goods they get offered could all be second-rate. Few parties would want a lot of negative attention.

Where is business done? Do all of the merchants do business out of their storefronts, complete with a customer courtesy counter? Do all of the tradesmen send a journeyman and apprentice to a bazaar with the day's allotment of goods for sale? Do some trades do business from their shops and others show their wares in a bazaar? Are some trades required to restrict their business to a certain portion of the city? Is there a single bazaar, or many? What goods are shown where?

The heroes could be in need of gear that can only be purchased in the seedy section of town. Doing much business there will advertise their wealth relative to the inhabitants of the poor section, and likely set them up as targets for thieves. Conversely, they may need to trade in the ritzy section of town, and immediately come under suspicion because they aren't part of the normal crowd there. (The city watch is most likely very diligent about keeping the riff raff out of this section of town.)

Confessions of an Improvisational Game-master

by Gareth-Michael Skarka

I'll admit it. I am a lazy Game-master.

I can't stand to do tons of advance work, because I know full well that, more often than not, the player's actions will take the adventure in a direction that I did not anticipate, and a large chunk of that work will be wasted effort.

This pisses me off.

I know it shouldn't. The work that you put in to designing an adventure or a campaign setting is part of the role of the Game-master-and as we've all read in the GM section of every game we've ever played, Game-masters should be prepared for the players to pull the adventure off the tracks. It still gets on my nerves, though-I hate wasted effort.

Oddly enough, though, despite my lack of interest in massive amounts of preparatory work, I have the good fortune to have been considered, by the several dozen people who have played in my personal campaigns over the past 20 years, to be a pretty good GM.

This is largely because I have figured out one very important skill, and have worked hard to master it. That skill is improvisation.

You've heard it before, I'm sure-the adage that a role-playing group is similar to a band of musicians, each playing their own part, and creating a collective work. I've noticed that the similarity gets even more specific. A gaming group operates in almost identical fashion to a group of jazz musicians. Lacking any pre-defined structure or script, the individual players rely on impromptu combinations of their individual riffs, which combine to create a complex new composition on the fly.

So, I started to apply the lessons of improvisational jazz to my role-playing.

The first lesson: By careful combination of well-prepared riffs, one can improvise, and if it's pulled off well, the audience will never quite be able to tell what was rehearsed and what was thought up on the spot.

Apply this to the gaming table. Nothing is established until you commit to it. Until you divulge the information to the players, it is mutable . . . ever-changing. If this is done correctly, your players won't know the difference. It will all seem as if it had been planned by you from the beginning, part of a grand tapestry that you wove for their entertainment . . . when in reality, they did most of the work, and you merely reacted to them.

As such, I tend to keep a number of "riffs" in my game-mastering repertoire:

"Let's start at the very beginning . . . a very good place to start."

--The Sound of Music

If you'll forgive the show-tunes reference, the beginning actually is a good place to start . . . the beginning of a campaign, I mean.

Here is the first of my improvisational methods: I don't come up with ideas for campaigns. I come up with ideas for the beginning of a campaign. That's it. After that, I let the direction of the campaign be created by the characters. Let's face it-the average playing group has something like 4 players and a GM. It is simple numerical fact that the players have, in the average case, 4 times the imaginative power of the game master. There are simply more of them than there are of you . . . why should you do all the work?

They come up with character concepts . . . why not sit back and have them create the direction of the campaign as

well?

What I have done in past campaigns is to create the opening, and then sit back and observe what the players do with it. I then react to what they've done, and we're off and running.

Some examples:

"The King is dead"

I tend to use this opening in games where the player characters are fairly high-powered, both in ability and influence. I've used it in *GURPS Supers*, as well as *Vampire*.

The set up is this: The players are subordinate to a leader of some kind. You give them an overview of the situation to start play. Then, on the first night, you kill off the leader. You then sit back and watch the fallout.

The players will react to the event. Their reactions will give you a direction in which to take the campaign. One player might try to assert him or herself as the new leader . . . other players might try as well, leading to inter-party conflict. More astute players might start worrying about what the power vacuum will mean to the group's enemies . . . giving you an opening to throw those very enemies right at them.

The first VAMPIRE campaign that I ever ran, back in 1991, using this opening, and managed to run for over a year and half just on the seeds of stories planted by the actions of the players on that first night of play.

"Why are they after US?"

This is a fun one. I've tended to use it in games where the starting player-characters aren't supposed to know much about what's going on . . . it lends a bit of tension and action to the discovery that they undertake. I've used it in *Immortal*, *Justice, Inc.*, and *7th Sea*.

Here's the deal. You just come up with a group of bad guys, and have them attack the players. Have them make comments like "at last!" or "Turn it over, scum!" . . . something that indicates that they have a clear reason for the assault.

Do you need to have a reason?

Well, no, actually . . . just be vague. You'll come up with a reason later, and it will seem like you had it all planned from the beginning. I once had a supernaturally-skilled spearman confront the characters in a wuxia campaign set in a fantasy world based on medieval China. The spearman challenged a single character by name. The player decided "what the hell", and attacked-doing enough damage to kill a normal man in the first blow. It was then that I decided this was a supernatural NPC-because I found the situation too interesting to resolve so quickly. I gave him the ability to ignore damage from non-magical weapons. During the fight, I adlibbed a line from the NPC, where he referred to the character that he challenged as "Godslayer." I don't know where it came from-I pulled it out of the top of my head. It just sounded cool at the time.

When the other characters leapt to the defense of their comrade, I had the supernatural spearman retreat-mostly because I wanted to figure out what his deal was. He had intrigued me-and I had nominally created him!

It turned out, after a few more weeks of play, that the spearman was sent to assassinate the character, because the character IS a Godslayer-but in the future. The assassin was sent back to kill the character BEFORE he slays the god. Yes, I lifted this from The Terminator, adapted it to a Chinese fantasy setting, and let 'er rip. Not only did it give me a cool sub-plot involving that spearman, but it also gave me the impetus for a full-blown adventure at a later date, where the character actually got to fulfill his destiny, and slay a god.

Remember: Raymond Chandler once said that if a story was getting boring, you should just have two guys with guns

kick down the door and come in shooting. It becomes ten times more interesting if it seems like there is a reason for them to be there.

"The Blake's 7 Gambit"

For those of you who aren't familiar, Blake's 7 was a really kick-ass British sci-fi series of the early 80s. I blatantly lifted the set-up of the show for not one, not two, but three different SF campaigns: *Star Wars*, *Periphery* (a small press game that I wrote in 1993), and *GURPS Traveller*.

The campaign starts as follows: The players are prisoners, aboard a vessel of whatever wicked-and-nasty government has locked them up. The ship comes upon a derelict vessel, which the nasty government jailers want to salvage (salvage has historically been a great way for naval personnel to get rich/buy their way out of the service). The vessels link up, but the crews sent over by the prison vessel are never heard from again. The captain of the prison vessel, unwilling to let the salvage go, decides to send over a group of expendable prisoners to secure the vessel and find out what happened to the other crews . . . with no weapons, and wearing "dead-man collars" which will kill them if they attempt escape.

The players have to overcome whatever has been killing off the other salvage crews, figure out a way to take control of the vessel, and evade their captors. Of course, when they discover that the vessel is massively more advanced than anything they've ever seen . . . then the fun begins. What will they do with such a resource? Fight for the rights of their fellow oppressed citizens? Become the biggest, bad-ass space pirates the galaxy has ever seen? Don't worry . . . they'll show you.

This set-up doesn't necessarily need to be limited to a sci-fi setting, either-I'm planning on using it for the opening night of my forthcoming 18th century Caribbean pirates campaign (I'll be using *Skull & Bones*, the pirates-n-voodoo *d20 System* supplement that I helped design-which is coming out soon, I will note with a none-too-subtle plug). Take the archetypal Sabatini-esque set-up of the characters are prisoners being transported as slaves to the Caribbean (as was the case in the classic Captain Blood), make the derelict vessel a Spanish galleon (long thought lost in a storm), put some kind of supernatural threat aboard, and Bob's yer uncle, as the lads on the account say.

"The Inheritance"

This old chestnut started out as a standard *Call Of Cthulhu* cliché, and since then, I've used it in a number of other games and settings, including *GURPS Castle Falkenstein*, *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*, and *Deadlands*.

One or more of the characters are approached by a strange pair of solicitors, who claim to be the legal representatives of a recently deceased distant relative. The relative (the cliché dictates that this is almost always an uncle, for reasons which are lost in antiquity) has left the character as the sole inheritor of their estate.

At this point, the contents of the estate can vary-I've used everything from a single artifact (a wooden case with a pair of pearl-handled revolvers (*Deadlands*), to a strange country manor filled with the detritus of a lifetime of travel and occult experimentation (*GURPS Castle Falkenstein*).

The catalyst for adventure in this case is in how the characters deal with the inheritance. Have strange things happen surrounding it -- I usually dispose of the solicitors in some suitably grisly fashion. Have one or more groups of "interested parties" make their presence known, stating their belief that they, not the characters, should be the rightful owners of whatever-the-hell-the-thing-is. If you've got some inventive players, you might be lucky enough to spin this into a focus for the entire campaign: a throw-away comment by one of my players in the BUFFY game led to the entire campaign being focused on the fact that the inheritance, a small brownstone in New York City, was actually a "dimensional lynchpin"-a location that exists in the same space throughout all dimensions, holding the universe in place. Of course, occasionally there is some overlap, and the right door opens onto the wrong location . . . dimensionally speaking.

That's part of the secret, right there. Improvise from the actions of your players. As long as you don't let on that they're

shaping the world, and that you are merely arranging the details, you can make it appear as if you had detailed plans and a clear idea of where the campaign was going from the beginning. The things they do, the things they say-even out-of-character-can give you a foundation on which to build.

The key here is to make sure that you take copious notes during play, rather than before. Make sure you keep a record of everything that has been solidly established (so you don't violate those in-house "rules" later on), and quickly jot down any possibilities that occur to you as play progresses. Remember that the possibilities only become fact after you've presented them as such. You'll find that as play progresses, some possibilities will naturally grow more likely, as other options are eliminated through player actions. At that point, you can change a possibility to a fact by presenting it during play-or you can completely come up with something else, completely out of left field, that puts an entirely new interpretation on even the previously established facts.

How do you handle things like NPC write-ups? Have some published adventures or supplements standing by, and simply lift the stats from there. Since you won't know in advance who will turn out to be important, just use this method as a stop-gap measure initially-if the NPC turns out to be more important later on, go ahead and write them up as a unique character, using the initial "lifted" stats as a starting point. Again -- unless you let on, your players will never know that the recurring villain who has plagued their every step started out in your notes as "the guy they meet on the docks", whose stats were lifted from Bartholomew Roberts in *GURPS Who's Who 1*.

I keep a bunch of NPC write-ups ready to go, to be plugged in where needed. It's one of the riffs that I use -- like a 4-bar break-down from a jazz pianist, that he slips into the end of an improvised phrase to lend it some weight.

The point here is that your players are more than capable of dragging any carefully prepared story that you have off to hell and gone. Almost every "how to GM" article or section in a rulebook that I've read has contained the "be prepared to have your adventure completely screwed up" admonition.

So, if they're going to do it anyway, why not roll with it? It only takes a couple of things on your part: the ability to think on your feet, and the ability to keep a straight face when they assume that you'd planned it that way all along.

Nedeju, God of Wishes

by Andy Vetromile

You've been in that position before: You've found a ring that contains a wish spell, and you're all set to use it. You hold it up, open your mouth, and as you start "I wish . . ." you catch the gamemaster's eye. He's got that glint, that feral, mouthwatering hunger that tells you he's just waiting to pick apart the wording of your wish in oh-so-subtle fashion so that, instead of a +4 sword of giant-slaying, you end up with a baboon's head.

Why do such spells always go wrong? Why are even the simplest desires twisted into something that not only isn't what you wanted, but often ends up being more of a curse than a heart's desire?

Blame Nedeju.

Thinking Outside the Box

Gods are a jealous lot, carefully hoarding their power and guarding it covetously from those who would steal it given half the chance (which includes just about everyone). The only thing a god dislikes more than having his power usurped by another god is for an impudent mortal to do the same -- then deities present a united front. Witness the theft of fire by the Titan Prometheus. The gods sent Pandora, the first woman, to Prometheus and his brother, and followed this beautiful but curious woman with the gift of a box.

The box was part of an elaborate scheme of the gods to revenge themselves upon man for his quick acceptance of Prometheus' ill-gotten endowment. Into the casket, each god put a "gift" -- a plague, a vice, an ill -- and they sent it to Pandora and her mate. Her curiosity got the better of her, and she opened the container, releasing hardships upon mankind. When she slammed the lid shut, all that was left was hope.

Hope? Again, blame Nedeju.

Can't Keep a Good God Down

Or a demigod. Nedeju was one of those unremarkable and disenfranchised half-deities, a Johnny-Come-Lately in the firmament who had no sphere of influence, no dominion for interaction with mortals. He wanted badly to be part of the heavenly host, but gods do not share position so easily. No god truly disliked Nedeju, but none of them saw enough promise to ally themselves with him. They had trafficked with him before and, in spite of his cajoling and politicking, found the weight of him charm wanting. And so Nedeju could often be found sulking along the roadsides of the higher realms or puttering in the corners of the great halls, mumbling to himself about the inequitable division of power among those he wished were his peers.

Then came the box. Everyone was called upon to place something in the box, but few took notice of Nedeju, certain he had nothing to offer. When no one was looking, he slipped the only thing he had, hope, into the chest and quietly drifted away. The box was sealed and carried by Mercury to Epimetheus and his mate Pandora. She had released sorrow into the world, but now there was also hope, the gift of Nedeju.

Not that the fledgling god had any great love for mankind, but he knew the value of keeping the fish on the hook. To wipe out mankind would be the work of a moment for the pantheon, but it was unsporting and self-destructive (with no one to worship them, what would become of the gods?).

The gods' revenge was sweet, but it was also a miscalculation for two reasons. First, rampant ills were no longer attributed to the gods. Man lost a little of his fear of those beings; it was much harder for them to inspire awe in the jaded populace. The gods could still offer blessings, of course, but they could seldom protect followers outright, and

the devout in turn lost some of their faith. Second, and more importantly, in spite of the plagues he suffered man now had a small bit of essence from each of the gods and goddesses, and that was far better than fire.

The Rise of Magic

Man had been a quick study where fire was concerned. The only reason the gods were not completely supplanted by magic was it was a far more temperamental force with which to deal. Men spent lifetimes trying to master the power flooding the natural world, some without success. Others excelled at mysticism, and they became mighty indeed. The gods could only hope mankind would bite off more than it could chew. This was borne out with the creation of the wish spell.

It was, to coin a phrase, a mixed blessing for everyone. The wish spell was potent, and could work wonders even the gods could not reliably produce. Every time one was used, the pantheon felt a tug at its collective soul. Man, too, suffered. Without constraints or wisdom, the sheer power of a wish spell could wreak havoc on the world of man.

Again the gods stood to lose their fragile grip on their followers. Something had to be done. Someone had to regulate these wanton displays of power before existence self-destructed. The gods fell to arguing among themselves what should be done, who should be given sway over wishes. None dared trust his fellows with such authority. Then something happened that had never happened before: Someone noticed Nedeju watching the proceedings quietly from the corner.

The Ascension of Nedeju

Nedeju, they realized, had given man hope. Nedeju was not like the other gods. Nedeju wanted to be an active member of the pantheon, but had no real interest in the squabbles that characterized every assembly. He wanted to keep power where it belonged -- with the gods -- but he knew the value of careful dispensation of same. And so the congregation agreed to raise Nedeju. Into his vessel they each poured a small bit of their essence, and when it was done he was a god in full.

Nedeju was delighted. He had long sought this position, and now it was his. All his years of watching the other deities, studying their capricious whims and flights of fancy, were about to pay off. Anyone making a wish would answer to him.

Nedeju Almighty

Nedeju's symbol is the moth, flitting silently among men and drawn to the flame. As a god, he is somewhat green. He has spent his entire existence above mortals, and he has kept company with gods and goddesses, but he is neither ancient nor practiced. While these factors usually work to his advantage, maintaining the random nature of his work and defining his personality, he isn't the canniest member in the heavens. It's possible to "get one over on him," and Nedeju doesn't -- can't -- care about every use of every wish everywhere in the world.

He is somewhat self-absorbed and does not seek elevation by man or approbation by his fellows. The other gods, although they have given much power to Nedeju, are not always happy with the arrangement. He is often the target of schemes and sweet promises, and can be found at the center of many argument in which he holds no opinion. Manipulation seldom works, but that doesn't stop the gods from trying. Given Nedeju's close association with man, these plots often spill over and affect poor mortals.

Nedeju can do little outside the purview of wishes. If mortals aren't wishing for things, rarely can he intercede in their affairs. This is partly his nature and partly because this is how he nurtures his power and fosters pleasing behavior among mortals. On the other hand, a wish spell is a rare enough occurrence that there exists a very real chance Nedeju will take a personal interest in a being's execution of the power -- which is not to say he'll manifest, but he could be standing unseen nearby, and could show himself if the user proves interesting or clever enough.

If a mortal does get a decent wish past him, Nedeju is not a vengeful god. These oversights, if they offer him a valuable warning, are much more likely to be looked on with gratitude. Not such thankfulness as to provide added reward, mind, but then the person already got their wish . . .

Followers

There are those who know of and worship Nedeju, but they are few and far between. Nedeju prefers to work behind the scenes, and the more distance he keeps between himself and those who use his power, the easier it is to keep up that mien of arbitrariness. He knows he needs followers to maintain his power, but he doesn't need many -- a lot of his power comes from being linked to magics man already uses in ignorance. Rumor has it these followers have easy access to wishes, and this couldn't be farther from the truth. The trick is to make wishes a sort of grail, not to hand them out to anyone who asks.

More often, Nedeju calls upon his followers to work to keep his power active on the mortal planes. They are sent to ascertain the existence of rings and other items with wishes stored in them, and occasionally they are asked to place such items where they may, after great hardship, be found. There is another rumor that Nedeju may, without warning, destroy a cult that has discovered his existence, or that promotes knowledge of his existence too easily. This rumor is absolutely true. He feels he cannot afford widespread familiarity with his name and sphere.

The other major component of the Wish God's entourage is genies. He created these loyal beings and sent them to hide among artifacts and treasure, to ensure there would always be examples of his works among men if the undependable cults should prove too troublesome to retain. Genies are charged with offering men wishes, but most will attempt to warp the desires of their finders, hopefully teaching them an object lesson about the wanton use of power.

Using Nedeju in the Campaign

Nedeju prefers to remain behind the scenes, but like the wishes he oversees, there's no point having him in the game if the GM isn't going to make use of him. Some possible ways to put the Wish God to work:

- Fed up with the duplicity, a genie rebels against the wish god and begins dispensing wishes freely and accurately. The genie offers the party each a wish if they will first protect him from the followers of Nedeju sent to track him down. Alternately, Nedeju himself may approach the party and offer an unadulterated wish if they will discreetly find the offending being for him.
- Nedeju has been incapacitated and wishes suddenly have no limitations placed on them. Kings begin wishing for the destruction of their enemies, and entire armies are disappearing in impressive displays of raw power. The adventurers must track down Nedeju, find what has left him insensate, and put him back into power before the two most powerful warring states of the mortal planes eliminate all of realty with their desires.
- Someone has killed Nedeju and left a vacuum of power. Has Nedeju fallen prey to a clever paladin who took advantage of the deity's inexperience to do him in? Or have one of the other gods, still furious at having to give up so much to Nedeju to protect his own godhood, killed the Wish God in hopes of reclaiming his essence? If this is the case, it's unlikely the god stopped at taking back his own power, and now he holds something over all the other gods as well. The investigators must find who has perpetrated the crime, or may be called on by the pantheon as impartial observers to do the job. A dangerous task, given that anyone who can kill a god of wishes is a force to be reckoned with.
- Following the death of Nedeju, a successor must be found. One of the heroes may be chosen, and the other members of the group asked to serve as his avatars. The gods may instead send them into the world for a year and a day to find and present a successor to the position; the party could hold a contest to determine the fittest being. A heretofore unknown heir may be lost on the mortal plane and have to be tracked down. Most likely, the gods will decide one of their own is to ascend to the position, and the party will adjudicate. This is a perilous political game to play, of course, and it may be easier for some of the heroes to stall. The rest will seek a ring of wishes with which to resurrect the fallen Nedeju as reality storms continue wracking Heaven and Earth.
- The Apocalypse looms, and mankind attempts to delay it through the use of a wish. Nedeju has twisted these

desires, making some matters better and some worse, as is his wont. The kingdom's high mage takes the party aside and tells them to find a magical artifact, created before Nedeju ascended, that holds a wish with no limitations placed on it. Others claim this is a waste of time, that no such item exists, but the party knows there is always hope.

Pyramid Review

The Magic Box (for Buffy the Vampire Slayer)

Published by [Eden Studios, Inc.](#)

Written by John Snead with Timothy S. Brannan, Fiona Faria, Toos Holmes, Thom Marrion, Andy O'Hara, Andrew Peregrine, Justin VanKirk, and Jeremy Hunt

Illustrated by C. Brent Ferguson and Jon Hodgon

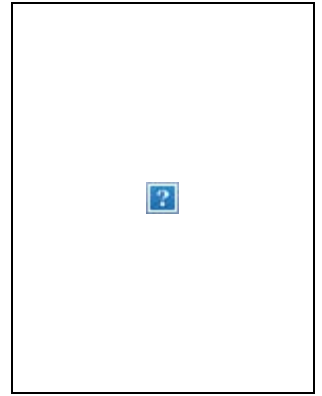
128-page color softcover; \$27.00

The Magic Box is not, as the title might suggest, a guide to the magical arts and occult emporium run by Giles and Anya as seen in the series, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Rather it is a sourcebook for all things magical in the Buffyverse and more specifically for the [Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game](#). It is the fifth release for the game and the first fully-fledged supplement after the game's core triumvirate -- the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game* corebook, [Slayer's Handbook](#), and [Monster Smackdown](#). This means that its format changes from hard to softback, though without almost any loss in terms of production values. (What lose there is only extends as far as a not-so-fine a quality paper stock and the reproduction of one two stills from the series not being quite as crisply as they should be.)

Since this is the magic supplement for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game*, Eden Studios picked the right man to author *The Magic Box*. John Snead has a number of magic systems and supplements for various RPGs to his credit, including [The Dying Earth Roleplaying Game](#) by Pelgrane Press, as well as contributing to [Postmodern Magick](#) for Atlas Games' [Unknown Armies](#) and *The Book of Three Circles* for White Wolf Studio's [Exalted](#) RPG. In *The Magic Box*, he gives us an overview, history, and the nature of magic in the Buffyverse, new Qualities and Drawbacks, new archetypes and updated sheets for characters from the series, a look at magical organizations, psychics and Superscience, a grimoire of spells old and new, and -- of course -- a ready-to-run adventure.

The overview of magic provides a conjectured history of magic in the Buffyverse, drawn as tightly as possible from the series canon while also developing beyond it. This has it tied in with the fall from power of demons, once capable of great magics, but out-evolved by mere humans. Magic declined with their rise, but still tied to demons, some of who will teach the unwary a spell or more in return for favors and services rendered. One of the most interesting aspects of the book is its discussion of the differences between black and white magic, and the dangers of both of the former and that of magic addition. As seen from Willow's path in the series, this can come from casting too many spells as well as from casting spells too powerful for the witch or warlock to cast. Of course, it is quite possible to keep a balance between the black and the white, but not only is this difficult with all of the temptations available, it may also not be the most interesting option from a storytelling point of view. Besides providing rules for all of this, details are given for power boosting, whether from magic pushers like Rack, but from draining enchanted items and books as well as other magicians. There is expanded coverage of the virtual magic of the Technopagans like Jenny Calendar, and more detailed rules for Telekinesis, so that practitioners can toss bodies around and pull the triggers on guns from afar.

For characters, *The Magic Box* offers a wealth of new Qualities and Drawbacks. Of the latter, Demonic Tutor explains a dark way of learning magic while the Magical Family Quality gives a character an arcane heritage, access to an occult library, and might even please the Potter fan. It can also work as a drawback if the character's family have a less savory purpose in mind. Magic Group can also work as a Quality or a Drawback depending its status and demands upon a character -- and there are guidelines for both player and Director to design their own. This is in addition to the



several examples included: the demonic cult hiding behind the façade of the Delta Zeta Kappa fraternity; the key protecting and transforming into slayer's sister Order of Dagon and their mortal enemies, the Knights of Byzantium; the Technopagan Alliance and the High Council of Witches; and the all new Black Death, a magic practicing band.

For the player wanting a psychic rather magic-using character, there are the new Qualities of Empathy, Psychometry, Telekinesis, and Telepathy. The Enchanter and Superscientist Qualities work in similar ways, but where the first allows the design and construction of magical items and artifacts, the second does the same for technical gizmos and gadgets that simulate a spell-like effect. The rules for both are nicely -- but not overly -- detailed, with the process far from quick, though items known as "Assemblages" can be built in a pinch. They do not last long, though. The Sight Quality allows a character to see both traces and aspects of magic, while Spirit Medium enables easy communication with ghosts.

To reflect the various new Qualities and Drawbacks, several character sheets have been updated for the series cast. These include the magic-addicted Willow, the empathic Tara, the coven-boosted Giles and the post-rat witch, Amy Madison. All of these come from the show's sixth season, as does the sheet for the leader of the Geek Trio, Warren Mears (who possesses the Superscientist Quality), and also for the whacked-out, blacked-out, über-magic addicted and power-boosted (Darth) Willow. The four new archetypes include the Young Mystic, able to see the magic world, but not really affect it; the Young Inventor, who build amazing devices through Superscience; the demon-hunted and Demon-Trained Witch; and the AWOL Invisible Spy, who possesses the Invisible Quality and has fled government training and employment as a secret agent on a leash.

The selection of new spells is mostly drawn from the series, organized season by season. Each clearly indicates the episode that the spell appeared in, its Power Level and requirements, whether it can be cast quickly, its actual effect, and its Aspect Analysis. This last is an explanation of how each spell's Power Level is reached and ties into the rules for designing new spells. Some spells, such as Jonathon's Superstar formula, are not detailed here, as their purposes are really as plot devices. Of those spells drawn from the series, only a few were given proper names on-screen. These are clearly marked in this book, but for ease of use the author has named all of the other spells, both those new to the game and the previously unnamed one from the series. For all of the new spell types -- Quick Cast, Altruistic, Harmful and Summoning as well as for item creation -- there is an appropriate side-effect table to check against whenever a witch's, warlock's, or inventor's attempts go awry . . .

The adventure, "Orphan Child," is designed to focus upon the magic-using character and his family in a Director's series. It requires the use of magic to solve the problem at its heart, rather than the usual dose of slayage. Although it can be run as part of the ongoing series begun in the corebook -- and the author suggests adding in several NPCs seen in earlier episodes to tie it in closer if desired -- "Orphan Child" is not part of the series' ongoing story line. This episode is the most easily adapted to a Director's own created campaign.

Rounding out ***The Magic Box*** is an appendix that takes the reader beyond the Buffyverse. It begins with a four-page set of lists useful for rituals and the like. This includes the names and spheres of various gods -- Celtic, Egyptian, Roman and Greek (though no Sumerian or Babylonian, which would have been nice additions) -- plus the names and aspects of the Muses, the Graces, Voodoo Loa, candles, crystals, and herbs. Again, this very useful information, accessible with a little research time, but very welcome here all the same.

Beyond ***Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game***, there is ***CJ Carella's WitchCraft RPG***, and although the corebook gave a quick and dirty guide to converting the magic over to that of ***WitchCraft***, it is here that the game gets down to the nitty-gritty. In effect, this section goes both ways, with rules for adapting the ritualism of this game over to ***WitchCraft*** and the invocations of ***WitchCraft*** back over to the ***Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game***. A Director will need proper and fuller access to the various supplements for ***WitchCraft*** to get the most out of this appendix, but it is at least a good start and points the Director in the right direction.

Just as the show has its fans of Buffy herself, it also has more than its fair share of fans of Willow, resident Wiccan, computer hacker, fully-fledged witch, and more dangerously, vengeance-sworn threat to the world as we know it. This is what the book covers and is one reason why Willow appears on the cover. It does all this comprehensively and intelligently, particularly so where the content develops what is cannon or goes beyond it, such as the rules for

enchantment and item construction. There is a great deal in ***The Magic Box*** to add to any ***Buffy the Vampire Slayer*** campaign, especially if the gang includes a Wiccan, warlock, witch, or technopagan.

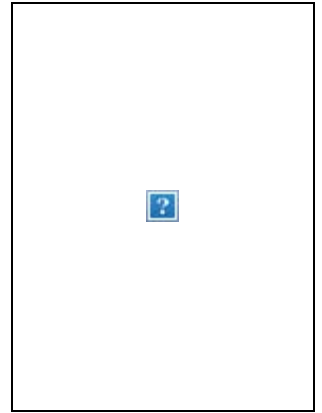
--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

Dark Inheritance (for d20 Modern)

Published by [Mythic Dreams Studios](#)

Written by Sam Witt, Wil Upchurch, Chad Justice, Aaron Rosenberg, Jason Olansan, & Gareth Hanrahan



220-page b&w hardcover; \$34.99

Modern fantasy is a tough duck. You've got one of two ways to look at it. Type A is the *World of Darkness/Buffy the Vampire Slayer* philosophy: magic is all around, and most people just don't notice it. Type B is the *Shadowrun* philosophy: You wake up one day and there are dragons (creating a setting where Magic has always been all around is just right in the Alternate History field).

Dark Inheritance chooses to take both of them, weaving together an ancient hidden mystical history, with a sudden explosion of magic and mayhem.

The game is set now (it starts February, 2003), in the aftermath of an inter-dimensional tear that brought a demonic city to Earth in the space inhabited by Jerusalem. Now, the holiest city on Earth gets to share real estate with the least so.

Dark Inheritance is a setting for the **d20 Modern** system. The merge, called The Rip, acts as a good jumpstart point to transition from Type A to Type B. The difficulty of Modern Fantasy basically consists of pedantic players who desire nothing more than a good long game of "if that's the case, then why didn't . . .?", even if you're in the middle of a good game of something else. The rationale (hidden mysticism that explodes so as to be not-so-hidden) allows for both a "secret history"-type of game and a "brave new world" type of setting.

Players have the option of creating standard humans and Titans; Titans possess the "godgene," which allows them to channel energy in superpowers called birthrights. The system is a bit different from the standard magical abilities, and a bit more flexible than you see in the standard **d20 System**. Their abilities are outlined in the fourth chapter.

Titan's Birthright powers vary according to their bloodline. There are five bloodlines, each of which has a certain type of duty; for example, Crimson Lords lead, Hidden Suns are scholars, and Storm Crows are warriors. The birthrights are an interesting lot. Organized like feats, they have prerequisites in terms of abilities and other birthrights. The Fortitude of Tezcatlipoca birthright, for example, which allows you to ignore the massive damage save, requires you to have the Rest of Blessed birthright.

Birthrights are determined by bloodline; the Wild Bloods, shape shifters and skin-walkers, get birthrights from such categories such as Bestial Urge, Chimera, and Wild Flesh. The addition and use of birthrights is a pricey process; birthrights must be purchased by using Action points, which are a fairly rare commodity, and using them can cause a character to become physically transformed in a negative fashion. Characters must make a Strain check each time they use a birthright; failing by a certain margin (or rolling 1) will require the PC to make a transform check. Failing the strain check alters the character in accordance with the birthright they were trying to use. A character using Second Sight, for example, may be struck blind . . . permanently. PCs can buy off the effects of a transform by spending XP.

Standard magic is covered in a set of advanced classes (Initiates, Mystics, and Eldritch Monks). The remainder of the advanced classes include super soldiers, researchers and . . . well . . . Lara Croft for lack of a better term. There's an advanced class called the Stim Freak that's similar to the **Rifts** Juicer; it's fairly odd, but it does have the benefit of

having a class ability called "F'ing crazy".

There is also a pair of **d20 Modern** Prestige Classes, the Spec Ops and the Two Fisted God of Guns. In spite of everything else cool in this setting, the Two Fisted God of Guns is probably the neatest thing in the book. Sure, the Spec Ops is a neat class, but Two Fisted God of Guns is torn right from the screen of your favorite John Woo film. Some readers will, of course, balk at a character class that seems to be such a shallow cliché. "Where," they will ask, "is the 'guy with a katana and a raincoat' prestige class?" (One can only weep for their dry, empty souls.) Also included are 28 new feats, a selection of new occupations, and a few new uses for skills.

The setting is outlined in the first two chapters. Chapter one, and the book's introduction, develops the world through straight text and found information, outlining what happened in Jerusalem on February 9th, 2003 and what has happened around the world since.

The second chapter is an introduction to the seven factions that players will likely be members of. There's The Brotherhood of the Iron Rose, a secret organization of Catholic hit men; Project Titan, a secret government organization dedicated to exploring the genetic heritage that makes some people gods; and the Illuminati-esque Promethean Order; as well as an Eastern crime organization, a mercenary organization, and a secret group dedicated to breeding titans. The final chapter includes information on the various antagonists the setting will possess, from the demonically possessed to strange beasts.

There are a couple of quibbles with the book. The monsters section ends rather abruptly, in mid-monster. There's no index, which is a significant flaw in a book with as much information as this, and the table of contents is not terribly informative. In fact, there's no quick finds of any kind to help track down information in the book.

This is aggravated by the fact birthrights are organized by bloodline, so tracking down a birthright in mid-game is slightly annoying. Physically, there were some problems with the reviewed copy of the book. The binding fell apart, and the back cover now flaps loosely in the wind.

The book is filled with new information for use in **d20 Modern** games; even if you don't want to play in the **Dark Inheritance** setting, you'll find useful information for other games in here. The Prestige Classes, Advanced classes and Titans would all be useful for many games.

The Two Fisted God of Guns, of course, is perfect for any game.

--Justin Mohareb

Death Holds No Fear For MeeeeIIIEEEEEEE!!!!

Two weeks ago I encouraged folks to avoid bringing characters back from the dead, no matter how strong the temptation. But for many campaigns this advice comes too late; and so, to you, I promised some advice.

Okay; the cat's out of the bag, and death holds no fear for your players . . . but you're hoping to cram that genie back in the bottle. What to do?

Well, there are a myriad of techniques to use. (As an aside, notice how people who don't know what they're talking about use the word myriad: "Mrs. Finigan, your myriad of symptoms could be caused by a myriad of ailments. For example, you could be suffering from . . . uhhh . . . Myriadopia. I'm afraid we'll need to perform a cashectomy.")

Where was I?

(Babbling.) Oh, yes. Harnessing death.

What is required to reaffirm death is really dependant on the genre and campaign. In general, you need to present a situation where the players and characters understand the import of death in the campaign, ideally by letting them experience this newfound focus first-hand.

"There's a Mr. Reaper here to see you . . ." Let's face it; campaigns where death can be thwarted aren't exactly the most realistic in the first place. So perhaps the best course of action is to have a Big Epic Event where Death puts his foot down and shows that he means business. This can be any epic journey to the Underworld, a recovery of some grandiose artifact, or some mission for the gawds. In many campaigns -- especially supers -- there are actual personifications of Death running around for the characters to interact with or take to a Tori Amos concert. Anyway, the upshot should be that, at the end of that adventure, any means characters had of cheating death will be blocked to them. Resurrection spells stop working, and folks who can speak with the dead can offer reports from the afterlife: "Whoa! The rules are different now . . ."

For an interesting twist to get the player's involved, why not give them a "choice" or make them the holders of this newfound lock on the afterlife? (Choice is in quotes because it's not a *real* choice; consider the implications if Death says to the heroes, "Okay; you now hold the Key of the Afterlife. It needs to be kept on the mortal world because of its link between this world and the next. With it anyone can be brought back from the dead . . . but if it is used in this way, all life will end on this world. Oh, and all manner of unsavory characters will seek to take it from you. Have a nice day!")

(And what do you do if the players use the Key of the Afterlife? End all life on this world. Rule #2 of successful GMing: Never, ever bluff.)

"Hmm . . . are you *sure* your fiancée wasn't a zombie before?" As an alternate entrance to the Epic Plot above, you could just have the rules behave differently, for no apparent reason. Maybe those resurrection spells bring back the departed as mindless zombies. Maybe those who have come back from the beyond start suffering from some horrible wasting disease . . . and then they die. Regardless, the heroes can investigate the reasons behind this, culminating with some kind of revelation regarding the new nature of the universe, as above.

"He told you he came back from the *dead*? And you *believed him*?!" For more realistic campaigns, or those campaigns which haven't had many characters come back from the dead (maybe one or two), perhaps one of the most cruel things you can do is to reveal those characters who were believed to come back from the dead did not, in fact, do so. Rather, someone or something has impersonated that person and led others to believe he came back. Then work that fact into the plot.

How this comes to pass is up to you, depending on the campaign. As a general piece of advice, try using as little effort and energy as necessary to make it work with the pieces revealed to the players. For example, if a supers campaign

seemingly has the sinister masked Dr. Destructo-a-go-go return from the afterlife, you *could* concoct a storyline about it's really a cloned body with the transplanted memories from the previous incarnation . . . but it's *much* easier to simply say that someone else has adopted Dr. Destructo-a-go-go's identity and is now wearing his mask. The simpler the explanation, the more likely the players are to believe it -- and perhaps even consider that it was part of the storyline from the beginning -- instead of rolling their eyes and going, "What?!?"

Yes, this maneuver requires the players to swallow the existence of doppelgangers, convenient studyable journals of memories and mannerisms, and/or flawless duplicating plastic surgery . . . but at least, once the storyline is concluded, they *don't* need to believe that death is anything less than permanent.

("What do I do if it's a PC that was brought back?" I hear you ask. Simple; just come up with the same kind of solution, and have things start to unravel for the player. Energy beings able to scan brainwaves of the dying are useful here, as are magical constructs able to do the same thing. Once you have a solution, have a catalyst to start to reveal the truth to the player: "Why do I radiate as magical to detection spells?")

"Things like this only happen in comics! Bad comics!" Finally, perhaps the simplest thing you can do is to let the players know the rules have changed in-game by having a hip, edgy, self-referential character point out that, indeed, the rules have changed.

This kind of character has a number of counterparts; Rick Jones in the Marvel Universe often makes those kind of asides (especially as written by Peter David), various characters in recent hip horror movies *know* they're in a hip horror movie, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer's* dialogue seems built around the premise.

Anyway, have this character have a situation to respond to -- ideally another death of some sort:

"Why did Plotpoint need to die? It's not like the old days; heroes came back all the time then. Villains too. They played by different rules, back then . . . they didn't kill. Do you think anyone will ever come back again?"

If the heroes still need the point driven home, you may want to have a red herring plot that the deceased character *might* be able to come back; run them through the gamut of the "back from the dead" storyline, only to have events conspire to thwart them . . . or have it be revealed as an unobtainable errand in the first place. (See the legend of Orpheus for more ideas.) Then have your hip character comment, again, that it just may not be possible to bring anyone back from the edge of death anymore.

And if the players *still* need to know that the rules have changed, then go ahead and kill your edgy, hip character . . . ideally dying with another lamentation that the rules were different now. (It takes the right kind of campaign, GM, and players to make this technique work . . . but it can also be one of the more effective and most realistic.)

If you use any of these methods, by far the most important thing to do is . . . *mean it*. Once you've put your foot down and said (in essence), "Death is meaningful again. From this point on, dead means dead," if you do *anything* to backpedal -- say bringing back some master villain from the dead because it's absolutely convenient -- then I almost guarantee you'll be stuck with a deathless campaign from then on. (Even worse, by crying wolf you've made it quite likely that anything else you present as "putting your foot down" may be seen as having wiggle room.) So if you believe you might be the kind of GM who will be tempted again to have characters shuffle back onto that mortal coil, it might be best not to employ any of these techniques.

* * *

Owing to the excitement of GenCon (and the raging jealousy I feel for not being able to attend), this week's Pyramid does not include a **d20 System** article. Sorry; we'll catch up next week.

--Steven Marsh

Big Brother is an Idling Bachlorette Survivor

Week 1

by Steven Marsh

Reality television is all the rage currently. Networks are scrambling to produce new programs that combine uncontrolled uncertainty with a level of interactivity and audience involvement previously unseen.

And we at *Pyramid*, never one to leave a bandwagon unjumped, have decided to put our own spin on the reality show.

We've locked five freelance gaming writers into the Big Pyramid, dividing the entire editorial content for the issue evenly among them to use as they will, submitting articles for your approval. Outside of minor style and formatting decisions, no other editing has been done with these articles.

Each week **YOU**, the readers, will vote out one of the writers.

The week after, the remaining contributors will again divide the entire editorial content among them.

And so on, for four weeks, until the last week when the two finalists each create something that fills half the magazine, and someone is crowned the BBiaIBS champion.

Voting for your favorite (or least favorite) articles is accomplished in the same way as normal voting -- by using the Rating system on the bottom of each page. The person who receives the lowest rating will be voted out of the Big Pyramid. Naturally, we need to give our contributors enough time to craft their masterpieces, so we will close off competition voting earlier than normal ratings. As such, only ratings received by Monday, 11:59PM Eastern Time, will count toward determining who is voted out. (Of course, even if you *don't* get a chance to vote in time for the competition, you can still rate articles within the normal two-week window to let the *Pyramid* Hidden Masters know your thoughts.)

And now, without further adieu, let us introduce the Big Pyramid challengers:

* * *

Sandy Antunes is a freelance writer, LARP designer, and astronomer. In addition to authoring several RPG books, numerous articles and adventures, and two years of RPG.net opinion columns, Sandy also has run live action games on both sides of the Pacific and published a professional live action magazine (*Metagame*) for two years. The oft-run tabletop-or-LARP "Priceless" is Sandy's favorite; "Miskatonic University" is perhaps the longest work; "ePublisher Guide" is a good sample of Sandy's love of this industry. Sandy currently runs a game with 10- and 14-year old players, and also has two children at pre-gamer age (two and four).

* * *

But What About . . .

"Where's my Suppressed Transmission?" we hear you ask. Well, one of the reasons we came up with this idea is the realization that, between GenCon and a European trip, Kenneth Hite wouldn't be available for a month. Given this fact we decided to do something different for that month.

We mention this just to try to curtail the pitchfork-wielding villagers who might accuse BBiaIBS of bumping Suppressed Transmission.

For the duration of this event there will still be reviews every week; in addition, you all are still stuck with Random Thought Table.

Chad Underkoffler's Campaign in a Box will next appear the

Larry D. Hols began gaming by becoming a DM on two days' notice. Since that trial by fire, he's played with and pattered with an unending stream of games and genres. He can be described as a ruthless GM, but prefers to be viewed as Just Plain Mean. He has shared his wisdom in a column on RPG.net and with a contribution to *Gamemastering Secrets Second Edition*.

* * *

Aaron Rosenberg recently won an Origins Award as the primary author on *Gamemastering Secrets Second Edition*, and was the creator of three Clockworks games: *Asylum*, *Spookshow*, and *Chosen*. He is one of the authors of Mythic Dreams' *Dark Inheritance* (reviewed this issue) and has written for such lines as *Lord of the Rings*, *EverQuest*, *Star Trek*, and *Vampire*.

* * *

Gareth-Michael Skarka has worked in the industry as a retailer, distributor, publisher, freelance writer/editor, and marketing consultant since 1988. He was the designer of *Hong Kong Action Theatre!* and *Underworld*, and has freelanced for dozens of publishers. His latest project, the *d20 System* Pirates-n-Voodoo book *Skull & Bones*, will be released by Green Ronin in August, with following support and adventures to be released by his own company, [Adamant Entertainment](http://AdamantEntertainment.com).

* * *

Andy Vetromile is a freelance writer, editor, and developer. He has worked for Steve Jackson Games, Nightshift Games, and interned for White Wolf Publishing, among others. He is the author of *The Complete Caveman's Club Book*, his first short story appears in *The Book of Final Flesh* from Eden Studios, and he has had articles in several magazines such as *Pyramid*, *Shadis*, and *Knights of the Dinner Table*.

* * *

If you have comments about the month-long "Big Brother is an Idling Bachlorette Survivor" event, or want to hype up your favorite BBiaIBS challenger, feel free to post over on the [Pyramid message boards](#), or send an email to [the editor](#).

week after this event, in August 22nd's issue.

Article Length

For those of you wondering how much room the competitors have each week, this is a breakdown of each week's maximum word length:

- *Week 1*: Five people -- 2,200 words each
- *Week 2*: Four people -- 2,750 words each
- *Week 3*: Three people -- 3,666 words each
- *Week 4*: Two people -- 5,500 words each

If an article is too long, the remainder of the article past the limit will be truncated.

Pyramid Review

Druids and Druidism (for d20 System)

Published by Bastion Press

Written by Thomas Knauss

Full color PDF; \$7.99

Druids and Druidism is a 70-page PDF druid class book. The book presents druids as caretakers of nature, a position that divorces them from civilization and its society. While the book contains many prestige classes, feats, spells, and items that druids can make, it is heavily slanted toward use for NPC druids, or druid characters in solo PC or all-druid campaigns.

This is because the picture of druids that the book promotes is one of an independent society that is dedicated to overseeing its own territory of natural wilderness. Their primary concern is protecting their area from the ravages of unnatural forces such as undead, exploitative sentient creatures, and the encroaching forces of civilization and "progress." This dual aspect of a tied-down protectorate and disconnect with normal society portrays druids as loners who only associate with those of their own society similarly dedicated to their wilderness charges. This makes them not quite a suitable position for a member of a diverse adventuring party that travels or deals with any issues of civilized societies.

In addition, many of the eight classes and 23 feats are tied to their wilderness niche, giving power only in their specialized terrain. This is fine for NPCs who guard an area but less attractive to generalist adventurers who encounter many different types of challenges and usually find themselves in different environments.

The prestige classes share many aspects in common, all being 10 levels, have two strong saves, d8 hit dice, moderate BAB, four skill points, and 1/1 spell advancement but no advancement in druid abilities such as wildshape. Most have some movement, combat, and extra spell or limited use supernatural abilities tied to their niche that fill out about 6/10 class levels.

The classes are:

Glacier Walker: Arctic lands protectors.

Guardian of the Oasis: Desert protectors.

Highlander: Mountain caretakers.

Lord of the Flies: Lawful insect aspected druids.

Packmaster: Druids who join a wolf pack as a beta.

Pridemaster: Large cat protectors.

Scourge of the Dead: Hunters of undead.

Waveriders: Protector of Waterways.

From the descriptions as written, only the Scourges are not tied down to one area with specific guardianship requirements. These classes can easily be made more PC friendly by changing the descriptions to be different paths of specialization in bonding with nature or animal spirits.

The section on nature's handiwork is a nice little discourse on items druids can make using natural materials. There are some great descriptions but the rules don't always come through in this section. For instance, a number of different wood qualities are described for real world lumber such as mahogany and alder trees. While the descriptions give a good flavor for the qualities of the wood, anything made out of them is automatically considered master work quality,

so double weapon quarterstaves of the various types all cost over 600 gp. In addition, although it mentions that druids use bone to craft many items, not one bone item is listed.

On the other hand, the leather armor with special qualities that can be created from the hides of monsters such as xorn and frost giants is both evocative and usefully stat'd. The idea of evil druids skinning sentient magical beings to craft items is a great little tidbit, complete with rules on how much can be harvested, prices, benefits of that type of leather or hide armor, etc. Similarly the new snake venoms, plant toxins, and herbal healing remedies give great details for nature lore and creating a natural apothecary feel. The remedies are even broken down into their application methods of whether they are decoctions or to be applied as ointments, etc. The benefits are modest, however, and as written they require a new feat in addition to skill rolls to find and prepare the right remedies. The feat seems an unnecessary cost for an adventuring PC and just using the appropriate skill sets should prove fine.

There are 26 new druid spells covering levels 1 to 9 with 11 crossover ranger ones. Particularly nice is the spell *bifurcate*, which gives the caster an extra identical body that he splits his spells and hit points with. Following this are 37 individual magic items with a natural flavor to them, notably including pseudo-Judeo-Christian Slings of Giant Slaying and a Crown of Thorns.

Druidic society is then examined a bit more in depth with the concept of druidic circles. According to this supplement, druids congregate in modest numbers to oversee a particular territory. At the center of the territory is a physical circle crafted and hallowed by the druids as a ceremonial center for their social and ritual life. There are plenty of different ways this physical circle can be set up with carved wooden totems, massive stones, ice sculptures, living tree arrangements, etc. Construction and price costs are examined in depth with various options for different terrain types. Oddly, a specific item creation feat is required to create a circle, although there seems to be no game mechanic tied to the physical circle besides a hallow spell. The circle is the site for ritual observances of natural events such as the yearly equinoxes and solstices as well as druidic funeral pyres, marriage ceremonies, and other significant rites.

The social druid circle is generally a loose organization that does not recognize the legitimacy of temporal powers. There are a number of different types of leadership styles that may be adopted from democratic to oligarchic to dictatorial. Different methods may also be used to allow membership into a circle or to gain leadership positions ranging from grueling physical tests of endurance in the wilderness to dealing with dangerous animals without the use of magic, or even trial by combat for leadership positions. When a circle gets too big, a charismatic druid will gather like-minded druids and set off to establish a new circle in another territory.

In addition to the circle, druids rely upon animal companions for society, and their choice of a companion is often seen as a reflection of the individual druid; some common animal personality stereotypes are defined, such as rodents and weasels being favorites of druids who are wily and antisocial while druids who choose bears are gluttonous and known for their strength.

Another nice little touch is the view of some druids that nature gods are actually druids who have advanced a step up the ladder of enlightenment and communion with nature.

Finally there is a little discussion of those who lose their connection to nature, through alignment straying or the call of civilization, and even a rumored society of ex-druids called the Black Thumb.

Overall, ***Druids and Druidism*** presents a lot of useable details and ideas for druids. This is more so for druids as NPC wilderness protectors apart from society than adventuring PCs as written, but the information can be easily modified to make it more PC friendly.

--John Henry Stam

Pyramid Review

Aliens (for the Star Trek Roleplaying Game)

Published by [Decipher, Inc.](#)

Written by Bill Bridges, Andrew Greenberg, Kenneth Hite, Ross A. Isaacs, & Doug Sun

178-page full-color hardcover; \$35.00

Much like the [Starships](#) before it, the latest supplement for Decipher's *Star Trek Roleplaying Game* focuses in on a particular aspect of the *Star Trek* setting. And just like *Starships*, this focus is entirely new to roleplaying in the *Star Trek* universe, as in previous incarnations of the game the treatment of aliens was to have them dotted here and there through all of a line's books. With *Aliens*, the fifth supplement for the *Star Trek Roleplaying Game*, there is nothing else but non-terrestrial sentient species to be found within the content of its pages (except for humans, making this a handy source of species put firmly into one single place).

Aliens is another hardback like the rest of the CODA line and the its layout is evidence that any of the niggles hampered the two core books -- [Player's Guide](#) and [Narrator's Guide](#) -- are gone. It is clean, tidy, and easy to read, though sparsely illustrated with photographs taken from all five series and the movies.

The volume opens with an overview of aliens and how they are used in *Star Trek*, which serves as a decent introduction. This includes a table that not only the races included, but also their attribute modifiers. Best of all, those that the authors consider the easiest to use as player characters with little or no adjustment are clearly marked with an asterisk. (And no, those so asterisked do not include the Borg, the Breen, the Founders, the Jem'Hadar, and members of the Q Continuum or Species 8472 -- thankfully.) Also included is a new to the CODA rules Personal Development Package -- "Alien Upbringing." This allows the creation of characters like Worf, born of one species but raised by another. *Aliens* is rounded out with several forms for creating an Alien Species Form.

The entry for each of the supplement's 58 races is organized in the same fashion. There are sections for Personality, Physiology And Appearance, Homeworld, History And Culture, Language And Names, Favoured Professions, Species Adjustments, Species Abilities, possible Encounters with members of the race along with a sample NPC and other suggested characters, before rounding out the entry with a look at the race's status during each of *Star Trek's* eras. These ties into the five television series -- *Enterprise*, *The Original Series*, *The Next Generation*, *Deep Space 9*, and *Voyager*. In fact, *Aliens* devotes more of its contents to the currently-in-production *Enterprise* than any of the supplements published so far by Decipher. Sections of boxed text describe new weapons, such as the Andorian Chaka (a punching blade used in dueling) or Capellan Kligat (a three-sided blade that can be thrown or used in melee); particular artifacts, such as the Bajoran Orbs and their locations or the various Betazoid relics; and cultural notes, detailing (for example) the Klingon Code of Honor and their Great Houses, or the Orion Syndicate; and also new traits particular to a race.

Such new traits are for the most part optional, but their use will add much to the game. For the Betazoid character there is "Bonus Skill: Empathy (Edge)" -- for players who want half-Human/half-Betazoid characters like Deanna Troi, while Deltans can take the Oath of Celibacy flaw. Vulcans will be able to undertake the Discipline of Kolinahr with the appropriate new edge (it has unsurprisingly high requirements) or even suffer the species Flaw: Psychodegenerative Disorder, such as Sarek's Bendii Syndrome. For those playing Trill the advanced rules for their symbiont detail it as a character in its own right and provide more detail for the skills it can pass onto its host.

The write-ups feel nicely complete, though in due course it is likely that such species as the Klingons and the

Cardassians will receive their own supplements, while the Andorians and the Vulcans already have. Those, however, were for the Last Unicorn Games' incarnation of the *Star Trek* RPG, which in comparison with this supplement often left its species write-ups frustratingly and irritatingly incomplete.

So what of the actual races in ***Aliens***? For minor species such as the Anticans, Lurians, Napeans, Pakled, and Vorgon there are only two pages of coverage for each, while others such as the Borg, the Trill, and the Klingons get five pages. Most of what would be regarded as either player character or major protagonist species receive four or so pages devoted to them. From the *Enterprise* series come treatment of the Suliban and their genetic enhancements and the Axanar, though no picture of them is given; while notable entries for *The Original Series* include the Gorn, the Horta, the Kelvans, the Medusans, and the Tholians. *The Next Generation* provides details for species such as the El-Aurians, Nausicaans, the Q Continuum, and the unique living ship Gomtuu. Those from *Deep Space 9* are a little more obvious -- the Bajorans and the Cardassians, plus the Jem'Hadar, the Founders, and the Breen (they *are* the major protagonists of the Dominion War after all), but also include the Flaxians and the Lurians, though there is no extended entry for the Ferengi as there are for other species found in the ***Player's Guide***. *Voyager* is represented by entries for the Hirogen, the Kazon, the Ocampa, Species 8472, the Talaxians, and the Vidiians, while from the 10 movies come just the two entries -- the Deltans and the Atrenoids. Of course, these are just the most notable of the races covered in ***Aliens***.

With so many different races within its covers, how useful the *Star Trek* GM will find this supplement to be will vary greatly. Much of this will depend upon their campaign and the species that they want to use within own series; for example, running an *Enterprise*-era game will severely limit what can and cannot be used. The same can be said for a *Voyager*-style game, but in either case, this is partly offset by the information given under the various Eras for every race. There are also entries that some may deem odd, most notably that for Humans, though since they serve as a benchmark by which all other species are measured and do play a prime role within the history of *Star Trek*, their inclusion here could be said to be warranted.

From a more objective point of view, many of the races in ***Aliens*** should prove themselves very welcome additions to the ***Star Trek Roleplaying Game***. These include older races such as the Tholians (here getting their first *full* write-up), and the Orions, who have been generally neglected since FASA's ***The Orions*** double supplement, much as they have in the various television series. Particularly welcome are the given notes on the Orion Syndicate. From the more recent series, most gamers and *Star Trek* fans will be happy to see the very first treatment -- within a supplement, that is -- of the Borg, though there are no rules for playing drones disconnected from the Collective. That said, such rules are outside the scope of this book and will probably be found in a future supplement. The treatment of the Hirogen and Species 8472 are also pleasing additions for narrators wanting stronger and more capable antagonists, while the expanded rules for Trills will be appreciated by some players. The Q Continuum entry is also well done, concentrating in the main on how to use them within a game.

Doubtless fans will also find that a favoured species is not given here -- I would have liked to have seen the inclusion of the Kaylari (from *The Original Series* episode "The Menagerie" and detailed in Last Unicorn Games' [Star Trek: The Original Series RPG](#)), while others might have wanted to have seen entries for the Son'ya and Remuns from the recent movies. Despite such opinions, ***Aliens*** is a very useful and handy resource for any *Star Trek* campaign and is probably the most useful of books so far released by Decipher.

--Matthew Pook

Yours For Four Hours

by Sandy Antunes

A good four-hour scenario depends on velocity. In contrast to the slow build of a campaign, the single night one-shot adventure or Convention game must be focused and quick. Within four hours, players are introduced, hooks are set, and a conclusion is rapidly reached.

A well-designed one-shot includes not just a sizzling good adventure, but interesting and capable characters able to solve anything this particular adventure will throw at them. The stakes (and mortality) level can be as high as you want, since no one will be coming back to their character. Above all, you must keep it interesting.

Character Is What They Are In The Dark

Everything starts with the characters. Technically, the players exist only as lonely voices calling out character actions, and thus characters serve as inner representations of the player's ego and id, or some such pseudo-psychological babble.

Let's get real -- one-shots are about *players* having fun, and characters are the thin candy shell that makes it all possible. So you need characters that work and that have a catchy hook for roleplaying.

Pre-generated characters are by far the best approach, as they will fit the scenario. There are horror stories about referees who neglect this little point, and create scenarios that require skills no one possesses. Fortunately, it is not the role of this article to address idiocy.

Good Redundancy Is Good

Characters should be created with redundancy in mind -- truly essential skills that you expect will be required must exist within several characters (though at varying levels of ability). If they simply must pilot the alien ship off the volcano island, for example, at least two characters must have some degree of piloting ability or something equivalent. Though skills should overlap, each character should be unique to encourage interaction and ensure each player gets to enjoy being needed at some point in the adventure.

Giving each character a unique identity means giving them a name and a role as well as statistics and skills. A character without a name is simply a tactical token, and much of the fun of roleplaying will be neglected. With a name and a role (even as simple as "Sergeant Lee the over-enthusiastic commando"), the player can instantly grasp the character's essential point of view.

Skills and abilities for characters should be concentrated, so that the character excels at a few certain things. This helps with identity, and lets the player distinguish their character from the others. They are, in part, what they do-- whether it be the Healer, the Scholar, the Leader, the Fighter, the Scientist, or any other archetype within the genre you are playing with. A mix of different character types is often best, since this will allow each player to have the spotlight on them for at least part of the game.

Flavor And Sex

To improve the richness of the characters, jotting down two or more sentences of background and detail that sets them apart will help players get into the role quicker, and does not take much of your time. Heck, this paragraph is only two sentences, and it says all it needs to say.

Character gender is an issue with several resolutions. With pre-gens, one easy solution is to give each character a gender-neutral name (like "Sandy" or "A.J.") and let the players choose for themselves. Or, you can be dictatorial and force them to play the gender you wrote; bear in mind that, in Convention games, some people are very uncomfortable playing cross-gender characters, and the purpose is to have fun. On the other hand, if it is your local gaming group and you want to toss them something new, gender-swapping is a fun way to explore role-playing, so go for it!

The Quick Choice

The actual act of players choosing characters for a one-shot can be handled in several different ways. Most common are either free choice (letting them read all the characters and choose whom they want), or random assignment.

Other methods include just listing the character names, or perhaps names plus occupations, and having them choose. Artistic types can lay out character sketches and let players choose, then surprise them with the actual details of who they are. Soft-hearted Referees can let players swap if they want. About the only poor method is having you choose what you think each player will like; people tend to resent being stereotyped or pigeonholed.

"Nametag" approaches are fine. If the character sheets have a little portrait, that can suffice for "prior info" when letting people pick. Just a catchy job handle (such as "Veteran Guncat") likewise can help guide the players. In such a case, don't let them choose from the entire character sheet. Just let them choose the Nametag and the rest follows.

Or, if you like a little randomness in your initial mix, you can use a Matrix Method to allow player-created characters. This is a quick system that balances your need for "can they do this" (plus your need for speed) with the natural player desire to actually, like, have a say in their very existence.

Matrix Methods Of Chargen

This method allows players to create their own characters, yet maintains balance and necessity within the scenario. It's the chinese menu system of creation, using 5 or so 'columns' to choose from.

First, you make little cards or slips with the skills or abilities that will be required within the scenario. Call these 'Column A', and make sure there are as many items as there are players.

Then, make a set of cards or slips with skills or abilities that would be handy to have, provide a back-up to an 'essential' skill, or allow for strong roleplaying. Scatter these randomly as Columns 'B' and 'C'. Each column should have more items than there are players, and duplicates are encouraged.

Make a set of interesting advantages or perks, that may or may not be directly relevant to the scenario, and call that 'Column D'. You can have more of these than there are players, but sometimes it is nice to have exactly as many 'goodies' as players-- let them fight over who gets what.

Finally, make a set of interesting disadvantages, and call that 'Column E'. Have more of these than there are players.

Players then create a character by taking 1 item from each column. Voila, a customized character, built with three skills, one advantage or perk, and one disadvantage. Players can easily remember their character's abilities, and they can craft the persona ("the roleplaying part of their character") around these iconic elements -- a process they usually will do while choosing their column items.

Rules Light Lite

You know those 1-page quickstart rules a lot of companies print? They're too long for a one-shot. Either your players love the system (and hence know it better than you) or they're newcomers (who don't care). Here's all you need.

- **GURPS:** Roll 3d6. Try to roll low. Let me know if you roll a 3 or 18. Compare against your skill for the attempt,

and tell me if you beat your skill or missed it (or missed it by more than 10). Or just tell me the roll and I'll figure it out. If you don't have a skill or advantage for it, roll anyway.

- **d20 System:** Roll a d20. Try to roll high. Let me know if you roll a 1 or a 20. Add your combat or skill bonus from your sheet if you have one, or just tell me the roll and I'll figure it out. If you don't have a skill or feat for it, roll anyway.
- **Call of Cthulhu:** Roll percentile dice. Try to roll low. Let me know if you roll under 05 or over 96. Compare against your skill for the attempt and tell me how much you made it (or missed) by in case it was harder or easier than usual. Or just tell me the roll and I'll figure it out. If you don't have the needed skill, roll anyway.
- **Other systems:** I'm sure you can figure this out from the above.

Kill A Friend

One keen trick you can pull to set a high tension level right from the beginning is to recruit a shill to start the game. This is not a person who is actually playing the game, but a friend recruited for fifteen minutes of work. Their job is simple -- to die. Privately go over the setup of your adventure with them, and tell them exactly what you want them to do at the first major crisis point. Have them be with the other players at the start, choose a character like the others, and appear totally innocent.

Start the adventure with the initial backdrop and setting, spring the first crisis, let the shill leap foolishly to deal with it, and kill them. This usually does not require much mechanics manipulation -- if need be, you can hide your die rolls/card draws/favorite resolution method from the characters. Look sad, but announce to the player that their character died. Walk with them away from the table to console them, and once out of earshot, thank them and return to your game.

You will return to a table full of very earnest players now. What have they learned from this? That you are not just playing around, that they should take things seriously indeed, that their characters' lives are really in peril, and that you are not going to give them any easy breaks. If this at all fits your genre, you have just set a wonderful tone for the adventure without any effort, and ultimately made the scenario more enjoyable for them.

Start It Off With A Bang

Even in the absence of a shill, a good one-shot should leap into action and tension. This means conflict -- in most RPGs, combat. Use an initial attack, ambush, or heck, hostile waiter with a minigun to let the players shake off the malaise of real life and get into their personae. By starting the game with action, you buy yourself valuable time to later tackle things like 'setting' and 'plot' without being too boring.

Then Set Off A Bomb

The plot you have constructed requires certain elements for a good four-hour game. Games include problem solving, combat, social interaction, player-to-player role-playing, and tactical decisions. If you are playing in a Convention setting, rather than with friends, you should allow for more flexibility in this mix based on what the players enjoy most during the run. In any case, your adventure will contain some or all of the above, to different degrees. This is what moves the plot along.

Pacing is important. It is useful to have a "ticking bomb" of some sort, a deadline the players face. It can be strong or subtle, but never weak. Strong is "the city will be destroyed at midnight", while subtle is "while you were debating, the villain got there first."

If there is not a time pressure, the players will have too much room to come up with truly wacky, inventive, and perhaps even cunning plans that unfortunately take the game off the map and bog it down. Far better that they be saying instead, "Gee, if only we could go to the Castle and recruit the King's troops, but this town will be destroyed by then."

After all, they are the hard-luck heroes, in the situation because either no one else knows, no one else cares, or no one else was around. This does not mean railroading players, but it does mean having events work for your benefit.

If the players favor social interaction and you had expected intense problem-solving to get past a certain point, invent an alternative that lets them try continue by the way they choose. Either their interaction will bypass the problem, if they do well, or quickly indicate to them that, fun as it is, they will not solve things that way and have to find a new approach.

It's Not A Railroad, It's Just A Good Idea

Deviations should be allowed to linger for only so long as they are viable for the plot. If the players are truly going along a wrong path, and can not get what they need no matter how good their actions, let them know.

One way is to just give them whatever they are pursuing (aide, items, NPC knowledge, troops) so they can realize it will not really help. Or, if it is something they clearly can not get no matter how clever they are, make it very clear to them (through an NPC or an appeal to common sense).

Finally, toss in a reminder of the main issue at hand -- a surprise appearance by the villain, a news report of happenings elsewhere, or whatever fits the setting they are in. Even if it seems mildly implausible, a timely coincidence can set the characters back in the right direction without giving them a ridiculous advantage.

This does not mean railroading the players is good. Just differentiate "clever ideas you had not expected" from "useless ideas you'd feared", and deal with them accordingly. If you always have that clock ticking down in the background and you keep throwing things at the players, the plot and the action should progress in at least a rough approximation of a path towards the finale.

The finale should always occur. This provides a resolution to the adventure, gives a sense of completion and closure to the players, and (hopefully) allows the players a sense of accomplishment. Depending on how successful the characters have been up to this point, they will enter the finale with a certain degree of preparation and understanding, which may range from Nearly Unstoppable to Doomed.

Similarly, their degree of personal risk and odds of survival are a result of how well-prepared they are. Like a chess End Game, their chances are a product of all they have done so far, but the final outcome is not yet determined.

Freedom To Die

Things could be bleak, and you should be prepared for the slight chance that the characters will fail completely. If the players have been generally clueless and ineffectual, the finale may be a crushing moment of despair as they watch, helpless, at what their failure has brought. This is okay-- this is part of roleplaying, the consequences of their actions. Hopefully they enjoyed the journey.

To keep it from being totally downbeat, you can add a second chance, a way for the characters to redeem themselves, a sort of 'sequel effect' where, though the game is over for this bunch, they know that somewhere, sometime, they or others might be able to reverse what has happened. Though this will not actually be played (unless you write it up later, thus creating a campaign), it does add a hopeful note to a dark, poignant end.

If all went well, though, the characters succeeded brilliantly in stopping the terrible things and in aiding the good things, and the finale is a brilliant triumph (though perhaps at great cost). Rewards are justly due, either as intangibles or in material objects (whatever is appropriate). Though it is a one-shot, slight moderation is recommended just to maintain realism; too many goodies and the players will feel cheapened, not heroic.

And now that the players have enjoyed role-playing your pre-generated characters cleverly through your brilliant plot twists to the final grand finale and stopped the ticking bomb, you can relax, until the urge to run another game

beckons.

The Central Psionic Directorate

by Andy Vetromile

I'm at the door. Is the target inside?

The voice came back, more irritated this time. Yes . . . as before, he's still in there. Still four in all.

Just wanted to be sure, I offered. The door's locked. I hear movement; any chance you can save me the trouble of picking the lock?

Elsbeth here. Focus on the deadbolt.

There was an audible click . . . too audible for my taste. I held my breath, but if anyone knew we were here, they didn't give themselves away. Do we know what's on the other side of the door? Booby traps?

A pause.

No contact with Galloway. Sorry, no.

I looked back at my team. Decked out in Kevlar and armed with M4s, they hovered just behind me waiting for a signal. I couldn't make anything out inside the darkened glass of Beery's helmet, but he gave a nod.

I turned the knob quietly and pushed the door. My team stepped from the porch into the entry hall, a formal but unfurnished room with a thick layer of dust. For a moment there was nothing but the sound of voices from another room. Then Beery stiffened as a young man in an old robe, munching a bowl of cereal, stepped around the corner. He wasn't the primary target, but he had to be neutralized.

"Compromise!" Beery yelled, the first words any of us had spoken aloud in 10 minutes. The man's cereal bowl wasn't halfway to the floor before Beery was on him, pushing him against the wall with his rifle stock. The unit piled into the foyer like a fraternity fresh from a homecoming victory.

I followed in time to see Keyes toss a flash-bang, blinding the occupants with smoke and light. Within seconds everyone was on the floor, and Billet, the pyrokinetic who had set fire to four government buildings, had a white noise generator clapped over his head.

"Clear," the other members said, one after another. I was about to say the same when a side door opened and a woman entered brandishing an Uzi. I had enough time to realize she must have been shielding her presence psionically as she leveled the barrel at my chest. There was an explosion of gunfire, but only because her finger was hooked on the weapon's trigger as it flew upward and out of her hands.

I was just about to think my thanks to Elspeth for this last-minute save when the woman reached out with her mind and thrust me backward through the wall.

* * *

Welcome to the Central Psionic Directorate, a government agency that uses psionic abilities to thwart criminals and terrorists. Don't worry if you don't have psychic abilities of your own. Nine times out of 10, the psis have got your back.

Fog of War

The Vietnam Conflict ended in 1968, thanks to the prolific use of chemical warfare. Sadly, the aftereffects of that

methodology are still being felt today.

The U.S. Government enjoyed several breakthroughs in biochemistry and saw no reason not to use them. Excusing themselves from a number of treaties by saying these drugs were in no way comparable to the mustard gases of yesteryear, the military made gratuitous use of the concoctions all over the country, even on their own troops. Great clouds of foul-smelling mist would pass over a battlefield, or concentrate on a single section and linger for days even in a stiff wind. Enemy troops would pass out or find themselves paralyzed by powerful hallucinations. Marines would then step in and collect weapons and prisoners, rendering huge contingents helpless without a shot fired. The United Nations continued to balk, but there was no arguing with the success of the American operations. In 1968, rather than spend the remainder of the 20th century unconscious, North Vietnam surrendered.

Home Front

The men and women of the Vietnam Conflict returned home as heroes. Even those who had protested the war were reluctant to vilify the participants, seeing an opportunity to use the struggle to further their own pro-drug agenda at home. Although it chafed them to do so, politicians bowed to pressure and legalized many mind-altering substances. That all changed by 1980.

During the 1970s, several servicemen and women showed side effects not obvious during the war. Everything from memory loss to epileptic seizures wracked combatants and front echelon support crews. Many died, and studies done in Vietnam showed the effects weren't limited to the States. By 1980, those children of the war not suffering symptoms similar to their parents' were displaying low-level psionic abilities - telekinesis, clairvoyance, and cryokinesis, among others.

Amends

Lawsuits threatened the country's economic stability, so politicians cut an ambitious deal to stave off disaster. Those with psionic abilities could work for the government, receiving several benefits - lower taxes, cheaper insurance, and job security among them - and the psionics would forego further legal action against the United States while helping lower the crime rate. Some refused the deal or had no powers to offer and so pursued their suits, but most took the offer, becoming part of the Central Psionic Directorate.

The CPD would be a federally managed agency charged with using psionics to foil crimes on local, state, and federal levels, and to protect the interests of the United States at home. Some cried this was an attempt to circumvent civil rights, but steps were taken to maintain the respectability of the organization. The government would be in charge, but subject to generous oversight by civilian agents. The chorus of protest was muffled, but did not cease.

How It Works

Psionics would continue to live life in their own communities, but when the need for their abilities arose, agents for the CPD could draw on the "pool." Since psis span the nation, there are usually a few no matter where police action occurs. Most agents use a device called a "tap" to access this pool (cruder wits call the pool the Brain Farm); it connects them with a selection of local psi users. Given various power levels and the synergistic nature of psionics, it's possible one will be in a location receiving aid from a psi in another county, or even another state.

The tap is the size of a pack of cigarettes (some disguise it as such, though few criminals would actually fall for such a ploy) that sits flat against the base of the skull. A smaller version exists, but it must be implanted within the skin using a simple surgery. Few CPD agents opt for this because a) the tap is no more likely to be taken from them than any other gear and b) it's kind of creepy.

A select few agents are psionic and have no need of a tap. Their ability is usually limited to "channeling": an improved ability to receive, use, and sometimes boost the psionic powers of others. (Few people in possession of full powers feel

the need to place themselves on the front lines.)

Structure

Although a federal agency, the CPD's employees work at all levels of government (another of the checks and balances worked into the system to assuage civilian concerns). Only the smallest police forces do not have a CPD officer on their payroll. Some larger cities like New York have entire units comprising only CPD agents, but for most teams it suffices to have one person with access to the pool.

Agents and psis answer to a local overseer whose job is to maintain lines of communication. If locals have a concern, he passes it up. If the higher-ups have a memo, he makes sure it gets passed down. He can take a more active role if he chooses, but most overseers are responsible for 100-500 psis over the space of a metropolitan area.

The overseer in turn reports to a state auditor, who is responsible for everyone in the state. Most states (and Washington) have only one auditor, though a heavy workload may demand more be assigned. If a problem arises or disciplinary action must be taken and it's not the sort of thing the overseer can take care of with a signature, the auditor will step in and handle it personally.

State auditors are a step beneath the directorate itself. The offices are located in Virginia, and are staffed by about 50 people, plus the Tribunal. The Tribunal is a group of three managers that creates the budget, manages problems, and passes out discipline in grave or contested situations (i.e., if a psi goes rogue or uses his abilities illegally).

To further prevent misuse of the system, all members of the CPD that do not work in the field are non-psis.

What the CPD Does

The CPD primarily concerns itself with high-profile criminal cases (murder, rape, arson), national security (antiterrorism), and psi crime (the misuse of psionic abilities). Sometimes there is overlap, but psi crime is the biggest concern since it is difficult for non-psionics to take on psionics on a level playing field.

There is plenty of mindpower to go around, so it is seldom thought amiss to ask for psionic assistance in even a local criminal case. It's fast and its use does not unduly tie up resources for any length of time. If a potential terrorist plot is uncovered, it is considered a priority for the CPD until it is resolved.

What the CPD Does Not Do

The Central Psionic Directorate, in spite of its imposing name, does not routinely pry into people's lives. There must be an indication of misdeeds beforehand, and the evidence must be presented to a judge in order for a psi-warrant to be issued. Once issued, these warrants typically come with several caveats attached, and failure to adhere to them is a serious oversight. In addition to the limitations placed on normal warrants (time, place, the person or item sought), agents may be limited in what powers they may access in order to carry the warrant out.

Psis are not required to work for the government, or even forego use of their powers (though a murder committed with telekinesis is still murder, and telepaths are not allowed to enter the minds of others without permission). The Directorate keeps tabs on unassociated psis (especially the powerful ones), and may investigate the suspected use of powers to determine if there's a new psi in town, but no actual action will be taken. This is for intelligence gathering only.

A psi accused of illegal use of his powers may be probed by telepaths in order that the CPD may learn the truth, though this is a rare occurrence overall. The ACLU and other organizations come down hard on abuses of psi power, and probing is far more likely to be okayed down the line (in a police interrogation it's almost unheard of; at trial, less so). In cases involving foreigners and threats to national security, these limitations are relaxed further still. In the field,

use of an ability may be overlooked - for example, a telepath who looks into a suspect's mind to find the code to defuse a bomb - but it's expected that it will go no further. To probe deeper and claim it was "for the case" will have to be proved to one's superiors.

The CPD in Action

How does all this come together?

Officer Perdue of the Los Angeles Police Department is attempting to uncover a chop-shop. Using the tap, he found Lisa Unger, a housewife and psychometrist from San Bernardino, ready and available for work. S/he touched the keys of a carjacking victim and tuned in to a warehouse on Bellway Avenue. Perdue followed up, calling for backup and a warrant with his radio. While waiting, Perdue sent more feelers out. By the time the warrant and his backup arrived, he was aching to move in. Dell, a psi with an affinity for electronics, offered to fill the system with static, but a local telekinetic named Perez stepped in and twisted the camera's view upward. Perdue wasn't too happy with this initiative, but what was done was done. He asked Dell to hang around.

When the team entered the building, most of the choppers gave up easily. One was shot by police, and Perdue channeled a healer out of Compton. Then he had Dell probe into the computer system and start poking through the files to see how much further the operation went . . .

Power Available

GMs should determine what powers are available and how rare certain abilities are to keep it from being all-psi-action. Some guidelines:

- Some abilities are almost universal, like telepathy and telekinesis. While their inclusion can short-circuit an adventure, limitations on range, depth of probing, or weight lifted can all make these abilities fun but less likely to overwhelm events.
- Pyrokinesis and mental blasts are mostly offensive powers, and illusions are defensive or diverting. Offensive powers (pyrokinesis, mental attacks) can do serious damage if not limited somehow, and even defensive illusions can cripple a character. This works both ways; you don't want your party wasting the bad guys with abandon any more than you want your villains to die before they can get their guns out of their holsters. Use lines of sight, durations, and technology to limit effectiveness.
- Exotic abilities like teleportation remove much of the danger, so such powers ought to account for only a small portion of the pool. Quirky occasional use, especially if it only works once, whisks someone out of the way only a few inches, or does more harm than good, is a good way to keep players from depending on such miracles.
- Time spent planning can make the difference. To keep things entertaining, players should be able to keep up a stream of conversation with members of the pool (it is happening at the speed of thought, after all). But if the game bogs down, put your foot down and push the idea that this is happening at a frantic pace, and they should keep up. And if their opponents are psis, the margins for action will shrink considerably.
- Power accessed before may no longer be available. If you call on a psi, it may be a moment before they can send to you - if they're deep in some mental activity like math or doing their bills, that will slow down the response time.
- The powers can be accessed even at night, when most psis are asleep - at this point, reaction time is slowed and the agent may not have the needed personal advice of the psychic in the use of the power.

Technology

As the human mind has expanded, so has man's understanding of it. Not only has man developed the tap, he has devised mechanical means of dampening psionic powers. White noise generators can create a loud mental "distraction" that inhibits concentration. These come in different sizes. The wearable version is the size and shape of a kneepad and is wrapped over the back of the head. Vehicle mounted models (the size of a car battery) can be used to debilitate

psionics within 50', and the largest is as big and heavy as a footlocker and is effective to 500'. Care must be taken that these devices don't interfere with psis on your own team, of course, and apparatuses have begun appearing that counteract the effects of white noise generators.

Alternate Settings

The CPD can be transplanted to other genres that use weird powers with a few alterations. For example, a fantasy campaign may have the Royal Chamber of Mentalism. With different dynamics in population, the group may be relegated to only the royal estate, as a member of the king's guard specially trained to use the system. Perhaps riders from the chamber go forth into the kingdom and use it against magical powers stemming from dark compacts made with demons (if your fantasy game has no psionics, substitute magic itself).

For futuristic games, it's even harder to keep track of the population (and thereby build up a decent pool). Psychics may be offered money to join the Galactic Psionics Directorate and settle in certain areas or on certain planets. The technological race becomes more important, and governments establish boosting stations on (and between) planets - this could in turn lead to truly magnificent displays of psionic power among the stars.

"Can I Be Allergic to Glass?"

by Aaron Rosenberg

No kidding, I once heard a player ask that question. We were creating characters for *Asylum*, and you can take various flaws to get extra points. One of those flaws is Allergy, and you specify the allergy, subject to GM approval. So he wanted to be allergic to glass. The GM asked, "What you mean like touching it?" and the player replied "no, swallowing it." "Uh," the GM said, "that's not really an allergy -- everyone has a bad reaction to swallowing glass."

So what are we talking about here? Limitations. These are fun ways to give your character more depth, more personality, and a more unique flavor.

Let's face it, if you've got two people in your game, each with fifth-level fighters, those two characters may be tough to tell apart. They have the same base attack bonus, the same number of hit dice, the same starting proficiencies and class skills. But if one of them refuses to carry a shield, and the other only uses axes and spears, now they're distinct. Because you, the player, gave your character a limitation.

Some limitations give you penalties to various rolls, like the classic Blind or Deaf. And maybe you don't want to take that severe a handicap. But you don't really have to. First off, lots of limitations are not so severe. Being unable to hear low-pitched tones, for example, doesn't mean your character is deaf, but he may have trouble listening to the instructions of that gravel-voiced army commander. So now your character has to ask someone else later what the commander said, or risk looking stupid by asking the commander to repeat himself. No real die penalties, but it makes the character more interesting. Second, even limitations that do cause penalties can wind up being more useful and entertaining than damaging. Here's an example: another *Asylum* game, and one of the players created a character named Lady Ellegance, who thought she was a butterfly -- she'd woven herself a pair of silk wings and everything. The only problem was, butterflies don't talk -- so she made her character incapable of speech. Not of sound, mind you, just of proper words. We all thought she was nuts -- the player, not the character (we knew the character was crazy). But the player forged on ahead with it, making little chirps and trills and other strange sounds. By the third session we could all understand her completely. She'd developed her own vocabulary, and given the character a tremendous amount of realism -- and all with something that would normally be seen as a weakness.

Does that mean all your characters should be deaf or mute? Of course not. But when you're creating your character, think about him. What is the character's history? Where did he come from? What were his parents like? Did he have an education? How and where did he get his training? Look at all of these elements, and see if any of them suggest some limitation that fits the character. If he had no formal education, perhaps he is illiterate -- or, even if he knows how to read and write, maybe he mispronounces everything because no one ever corrected him. If he grew up on a pig farm, maybe he is easily distracted by pigs and by farming activities in general. Or perhaps he despises pigs, and is actually afraid of them. The limitation should always fit the character, even if it stems from some aspect of his past or personality that most people don't know about.

If you know that you want to give your character a limitation, but you don't know which one, consider the character's history. Then think about what type of limitation you want your character to have. Most limitations can be broken down into the following categories:

Code: Your character has a personal code of honor or of behavior. Perhaps he cannot stab a man in the back, because his father was killed that way long ago. Or maybe he feels the need to answer any request for help, because his parents were saved by a passing stranger before he was even born, and so he feels he must honor that unknown benefactor by continuing such generous behavior. Codes can be extremely restrictive or very broad, and they can apply to everything or to a specific set of activities or individuals. For example, a knight has the code of chivalry, which dictates how he behaves toward worthy opponents (no backstabbing, no striking when the other is unarmed, automatic acceptance of any plea for mercy, etc.) and toward women (though only those of noble birth). It says nothing, however, about how a knight must act toward a cowardly robber or even toward a peasant. Make sure the code you pick fits the character,

and does not make his life completely impossible. Being an archer who has sworn never to fire a bow defeats the purpose of the character right from the start, whereas an archer who has sworn never to kill may have a difficult time but not an impossible one.

Feature: The character has a distinctive physical feature. Perhaps his hair is naturally striped like a skunk's or a tiger's, or his eyes are a unique shade of purple or a solid gray, or his tongue is literally silver. These may not seem limiting, but they mark the character, making it difficult for him to hide or be mistaken for another. Other physical features are more inherently limiting. Height is a big one. A character who is eight feet tall has just as many problems as one who is only four feet tall -- and in fantasy worlds with dwarves and other races, the tall human has a much harder time. Not only is it difficult for him to hide, but he has to get all of his clothes custom-made, while the short human can buy clothing meant for dwarves and hobbits and be fine. Other physical feature limitations include having too many fingers or too few, too many joints per finger or too few, missing a feature (like a nose) or having one that is so large it gets in the way. Physical features often provide more comical limitations, though they can certainly be serious -- the man with only one arm will have a tough time using a shield and a sword in combat. Be careful not to make the limitation too restrictive, however -- if you really want your character to be one-armed, talk to the GM about it. Perhaps you can trade that arm for something else, like extra experience or a bit of character-knowledge or even a few extra skill points.

Trait: While features are physical, traits are psychological. Your character always walks on the right side of the street. He never drinks from a dirty cup, and never uses another man's knife. He whistles whenever he enters combat, even if he is trying to surprise his opponent. Traits can be minor or major, and are usually not chosen by the character -- most traits are a matter of unconscious habit, and the character may not even be aware he does it. Why does he whistle when he gets ready to fight? Is it a way to calm his nerves? Did his old fight instructor use that particular melody to teach him rhythm? Some traits make sense once you know the character's history -- his grandfather died from a disease caught by sharing a pipe with several strangers, so the character simply cannot consider sharing utensils or cups with another person. Others are just quirks, and make no real sense -- the character wears only blue and has dyed every possession blue because he likes the color, and for no other reason. Most traits don't affect die rolls, just character.

Vow: Vows are similar to codes in that they affect the way your character behaves, but vows are more personal, and often more specific. The code of chivalry dictates that the knight must show proper respect for a noblewoman, and protect her from harm, but the knight has also vowed to defend a particular lady to the death and to see her restored to her kingdom. The code is often something the character was taught by another, but vows usually come from the character himself, and can actually take precedence over codes -- a character who swears to kill the man who murdered his family may be willing to stab that man in the back, even if normally such behavior would be unthinkable. Most vows are that specific, geared toward one person or event, but they can be more general -- for example, a warrior could vow to rid the world of orcs, or to slaughter every orc he sees, or even just to lend aid to anyone he sees battling the foul creatures.

Bias: Your character may have very set notions about particular people or things. For example, he may believe that all dwarves are drunkards, because the only dwarves he ever saw growing up were a part of drunken miners. Or he may insist that real men only eat meat and potatoes because that is all his father and brothers ever ate. Most biases are the result of a character's upbringing and education, and only come up when interacting with other characters. But a strong bias can be a major limitation, particularly when it prevents the character from relating well to another (like a character who thinks all dwarves are drunks, and his dwarven companion).

You can, of course, mix and match limitations. Perhaps your character has only four fingers on his left hand, because a bandit chopped off the fifth years ago. Now the character has sworn to find that bandit and get his revenge. Be careful about taking too many limitations, however. The character who has vowed to help any women in need, and who cannot tell a lie and cannot refuse a friend and insists upon walking everywhere (as opposed to riding a horse or taking a boat) will be a difficult companion because he'll slow the rest of the group to a crawl. Make sure that your character can still be effective -- stick to either one large limitation or several small ones. As an example, I'm currently playing a druid who not only cannot wear metal armor but who has vowed never to use manufactured or processed materials of any sort. His hide armor was made by hand and has no metal, his club is hardwood and his dagger bone, and his money is all in gems and gold coins (unrefined metal). It's a major limitation in that it influences everything the

character does, but it doesn't give him any penalties in terms of mechanics -- his weapons are made of wood and bone anyway, so they're fine, and his armor is just as effective as the normal version of hide. The limitation is simply a quirk of his personality. It does make him very distinctive, however, and creates a lot of fun roleplaying opportunities.

Before you add limitations, you should definitely talk them over with your GM. Tell him how you want to limit the character, and how that ties into his background or personality. This way, the GM can warn you if you're considering a limitation that's too restrictive or that goes against something he has planned -- for example, if he's about to run a campaign set on the high seas, a character who falls asleep every time he's on a boat won't fit in very well. He can help you find ways to make the limitation more integral to the character, so that it's not just a tacked-on trait but a real facet of his personality. And, by letting the GM know what your character's peculiarities are, you give him the chance to use them himself. If your character has a particular problem with black horses, one of those might be the only mount left when you need to chase someone down. Or perhaps your character is invited to a ceremony and offered the peace chalice as a mark of respect -- a great goblet that everyone drinks from in turn, and of course your character has that problem with sharing cups and silverware. Most GMs love the chance to play upon a character's unique details, because it makes the game more real for them just as much as for you.

Nor are you prevented from adding limitations if you're already playing a character. People change as they go, largely because of the things they experience. Was the character recently involved in a large battle with someone? Then perhaps he has developed a limitation as a result -- if his adversary had a forked tongue (literally), perhaps your character now insists on being able to see the mouth and tongue of any person he speaks with, just be sure they are not in league with his old foe. Or, if the character almost drowned because some sailor had not tied a knot properly, perhaps he must now compulsively check every knot he sees, and must always carry a coil of rope no matter where he is. Again, talk with the GM. Find some limitations that would make sense, given what the character has gone through recently. Then find ways to work in those new features -- in some cases the character may wake up one morning and suddenly have this new trait or code, but it might develop slowly instead. One of the advantages to adding limitations to existing characters is that others (both players and characters) already have their notions of what that character is like and how he acts. By adding something new, you'll make them stop and reassess the situation -- they'll have to look at everything anew, and that can be refreshing for everyone.

The biggest thing about limitations is to find something that's fun to play. Don't get bogged down in how many points a limitation is worth, or how much it penalizes you -- your GM will stop you if you select something too major, or too damning. Find a limitation that fits the character, that makes sense for where he's been and what he's been through, and that you think would be fun to play. Have you always wanted to play a straight-laced, honor-bound character? Then perhaps your extremely practical fighter starts realizing that life is more than mere survival, and that honor is the true measure of a man's worth. Or maybe you think it would be fun to have a character who stutters -- your halfling thief has just barely survived his encounter with a lich, and that fright is more than enough to make him have trouble speaking from then on. Keep in mind, too, that limitations are not absolute obstacles so much as challenging barriers. Having only one hand does not mean your character can't climb a ladder -- it just means he's got to be more creative about it than most. That gives both you and your character a chance to shine, by showing how you can overcome those restrictions. And it makes the character more interesting, more unique, and more three-dimensional because he has problems he has to work around. He's not perfect, just like we aren't, but he's got different limitations from yours, because you want someone that makes you stretch a bit as a player, and that means roleplaying traits and features and vows and codes that fit the character even if they wouldn't apply to you yourself. After all, everybody has a bad reaction to swallowing glass -- what's interesting is playing the man who feels compelled to swallow it anyway.

The Crux War

A d20 Modern Campaign Setting

by Sean Robson

"I am not speaking of randomness, but of the central principle of all history -- contingency. A historical explanation does not rest on direct deductions from laws of nature, but on an unpredictable sequence of antecedent states, where any major change in any step of the sequence would have altered the final result. This final result is therefore dependent, or contingent, upon everything that came before -- the un-erasable and determining signature of history."
-- Stephen Jay Gould, *Wonderful Life*.

If you could rewind the tape of life to any point in the past and let it run again, would it ever play out the same way twice? The late Professor Gould was referring to an innocuous little creature called *Pikaia* that swam in the seas of the Middle Cambrian, 500 million years ago. *Pikaia*, through sheer chance, survived a mass extinction that decimated many of Earth's early species; lucky for us, because *Pikaia* is the earliest known chordate -- the progenitor of the phylum to which we, ourselves, belong. What would the world be like today if *Pikaia* had gone extinct? What would the world be like if Archduke Ferdinand had never been assassinated, or if Nelson had lost the battle of Trafalgar? Imagine that for every significant historical event there is a divergent timeline for each alternate outcome. This would result in a nearly infinite number of alternate timelines, some only subtly different from our own, and others dramatically different. As a general rule, the farther in the past the divergence occurred, the greater the difference between that timeline and our own. Because each timeline can spawn its own divergences, the number of existing timelines is beyond count. Not every alternate outcome spawns a timeline, however; the event in question must be significant enough to overcome temporal inertia. If you had steak for supper last night, theoretically there should be an alternate timeline in which you ate chicken instead. But unless your choice of supper was a historically significant event such a timeline would only last a few milliseconds before remerging with the baseline. Think of a timeline as a fast flowing river with steep banks. In order to break free of this river, and create an alternate timeline, an event must have sufficient momentum; if it does, it forms a temporal "tributary," and the point at which this tributary diverges is called a crux. What if these cruxes were the battlegrounds of a temporal struggle to decide the ultimate fate of all time, and you were a soldier in what is known as the Crux War?

Campaign in Brief

The Crux War campaign allows you to take your players to any point in history and explore the myriad possibilities that might have resulted had events transpired differently. The heroes take the role of temporal agents from "our" timeline who make covert infiltrations into alternate timelines at critical crux points to prevent them from being conquered or subverted by the Akkadians, agents of an enemy timeline. Temporal agents are also tasked to influence the historical turning points of alternate timelines to ensure that they develop along paths that make them sympathetic to cause and to recruit them as allies.

Background

Our timeline first became aware of the Akkadians when a shadowy, enigmatic cover organization, known as the Disciples of Namtur, was linked to a variety of unrelated terrorist groups. The sudden geopolitical destabilization following the collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in flare up of long-simmering ethnic rivalries, increased terrorism, and widespread global conflict, and behind every incident were the Disciples. Intelligence agencies were at a loss to explain this new omnipresent organization until the leader of a Disciple cell was finally captured. Under interrogation, the leader revealed that he was an agent from another timeline and was sent to our timeline to soften up our defenses for an eventual invasion. The confession would have been regarded as the ravings of a madman were it not for the parachronic transmitter that he had been carrying when captured. Once our scientists had proof that time travel was

possible, creating a mathematical model for the "chronoverse" was relatively simple and the mechanics of cross-time travel were quickly discovered. In response to an unprecedented threat to our very existence, a secret agency known as the Chronoverse Operations Authority (COA) was established, an elite corps of Chron-Ops was created, and our exploration of the infinite worlds of the chronoverse was begun.

The Akkadians

Around 2360 BC, Sargon, ruler of the city-state of Akkad began a war to conquer neighboring city-states of Mesopotamia. By 2340 BC he had united Sumer-Akkad, and went on to subjugate the lands from the Persian Gulf to Cappadocia, creating the first great empire of the ancient world. Trade from across the empire made Akkad fabulously wealthy and transformed it into the center of world culture.

Facing external threats from the Hittites and other barbarian tribes pressing against every border, Akkadia was engaged in almost constant warfare. After the death of Sargon, the security of the empire was threatened by numerous rebellions. Sargon's grandson, Naram-Sin, quelled the rebellions in a series of military successes, and extended the realm created by Sargon. He declared himself "King of the Four Corners of the World" and had himself deified.

Under Naram-Sin's reign, the empire was invaded by the Gutians, a fierce mountain people and it is at this juncture that the Akkadian timeline diverged from our own. In our timeline, the Gutians overran Akkadia and northern Sumer, razed Akkad, and deposed Naram-Sin, ending his dynasty. With the Akkadians under Gutian rule, the Sumerians were able to regain control over many of their city-states, and in 2115 BC, the Sumerian city of Ur rose up in revolt against Akkadia and established an independent Sumerian empire that was extremely prosperous for over a century before becoming absorbed by the Babylonian empire. Events in the Akkadian timeline transpired differently, dramatically altering the future of the Mesopotamian region and of the entire world.

In the Akkadian timeline, as the Gutians were besieging Akkad, Naram-Sin appealed to the demon-god Namtur, the demon responsible for death, who dwelt in Kur, the underworld. When the Gutians were thrown back, Naram-Sin attributed their deliverance to the will of Namtur, and sacrificed Gutian captives to the death demon. He subsequently built a towering ziggurat in the center of Akkad to serve as the temple of Namtur, the city's new patron god. The narrow victory over the Gutians had a profound and lasting effect on the people of Akkadia, as the Gutian invasion was only the most recent attack in a long history of warfare. Naram-Sin concluded that the only way to ensure the security of Akkadia was to utterly defeat and subjugate all potential threats, and thus embarked upon a war of conquest that would last for centuries.

After Naram-Sin's death, he was venerated as the spirit of the Akkadian empire, and his successors continued the wars of conquest in his honor. As region after region fell under Akkadian domination, Akkad grew larger, richer and more powerful. Despite this, the Akkadians never felt secure, and xenophobic paranoia became a deeply ingrained feature of their culture. So too, did the worship of Namtur, and in each conquered city, a ziggurat built in his honor was baptized with the blood of its vanquished populace. All the while, Akkad's unprecedented prosperity allowed it to grow and develop rapidly, and its scholars unlocked the secrets of nature far quicker than such discoveries were made in our own timeline. By 1000 BC the Akkadian empire encompassed the known world, Akkadian astronomers had charted the heavens and celestial navigation made long ocean voyages a reality. The conquest of the New World began shortly thereafter.

Akkadian scientists discovered cross-time travel more than two hundred years ago, and began to explore alternate timelines. True to form, the Akkadians feared eventual invasion by alternate timelines, and set out to conquer all those they discovered. Since the Akkadians were far more technologically advanced than any other known timeline, it was not long before the ziggurats of Namtur were erected in a multitude of cities across many timelines. The Akkadians have explored far more timelines than they have resources to conquer at any one time, so they dispatch agents to crux points in timelines that are not on their immediate agenda for military conquest. The agents attempt to influence events and destabilize the world to make the timeline more susceptible to eventual domination when the time comes.

The Fundamentals of Cross-Time Travel

Agents travel between timelines by stepping through an Infinity Gate, which creates a bridge between the infinite worlds that might be. An immense amount of energy is required to power an Infinity Gate, so the process is extremely expensive. In general, the earlier an alternate timeline diverged from our own, the more power is required to establish a bridge. This means that travel to worlds greatly diverged from our own, such as the Akkadian timeline, is prohibitively expensive. Of course this means that the Akkadians don't often launch incursions into our timeline either, although with the resources of many vanquished worlds at their disposal, it is less of an issue for them than it is for us. Linear time travel within our own timeline is the most difficult and expensive type of all. To return to the analogy of the temporal "river," traveling into our past is like trying to swim up a waterfall and is not often attempted. Such a jaunt would deplete the Temporal Corps' entire budget for a year, so we have settled for seeding the crux points in our past with temporal flux sensors. Any attempt to open a gate in our past, say to alter the outcome of a key event in our history, will trigger an alarm allowing a rapid response team to be dispatched to protect the crux point. Forget what you've seen in the movies, though; it is not possible to change the course of our history, and thereby our present, by altering the outcome of historical events. Our past has already been written, and is immutable. Such tampering would only create a new timeline, although it is still worth defending our crux points because any timeline the Akkadians might wish to create is almost certainly one we would like to prevent.

Agents operating in alternate timelines have no way of communicating with headquarters in our own world, so they are issued with parachronic transmitters, which they can activate to send a temporal echo through the chronoverse that can be heard by special sensors that function like the temporal flux sensors that guard our own past. When a parachronic signal is received, the Infinity Gate is activated, and a bridge is reestablished allowing the agents to come home. Unfortunately the bridge is established only at the same geographical location that it was originally established, not at the agent's location so it is up to them to get to the rendezvous point for retrieval. If a signal is received and agents do not return, it is assumed that the transmitter was activated as an emergency signal and a rescue team is sent to find them.

The Role of Department-7 in the Crux War Campaign

- **Department-1: Administration**
- **Department-2: Training and Standards.** Responsible for recruiting personnel and training field-operatives.
- **Department-3: Archives.** Compiles and stores information about all known timelines, including the specific history of each and the location of its crux points. Also responsible for providing cover identities and appropriate costume for agents on assignment.
- **Department-4: R&D.** We face a technologically superior enemy and have a lot of catching up to do. Department-4 includes world-class physicists and engineers who not only built and maintain the Infinity Gate, but study captured Akkadian equipment in an attempt to reverse-engineer it and bridge the technological gap between us. Department-4 also maintains the armory, and supplies field agents with experimental equipment of beta-testing.
- **Department-5: Exploration.** Department-5 provides timeline scouts that make the first entry into newly discovered timelines. Reports from Department-5 agents are essential for building a reliable database of information on the known timelines.
- **Department-6: Intelligence.** As soon as Department-5 has explored and reported on a new timeline, Department-6 stations an agent on long-term assignment to monitor it. Such assignments can last for years, and many Department-6 agents spend their entire careers living in one timeline. They accumulate detailed information about their assigned timeline, and watch for signs of Akkadian activity on the world. They signal for pick-up once per year to file their updates with Department-3, and immediately upon the confirmation of Akkadian agents operating in the timeline. In the event that an annual parachronic signal is not received on its expected date, a team of Department-7 agents are dispatched to investigate. Intelligence agents also recruit indigenous agents and set up and handle intelligence networks on their assigned timeline. The Akkadians have a similar system; the Disciples of Namtur operate on many different timelines and always consist of natives of that world who do not know the true nature of their organization. Each Disciple of Namtur cell is recruited and directed by an Akkadian intelligence agent.

- **Department-7: Field Agents.** These are the "special forces" agents that fulfill a wide variety of roles, and include the elite Chron-Op agents. Field Agents are dispatched to counter any Akkadian operations reported by a Department-6 agent, to defend any incursions into one of our timeline's crux points, and serve as rescue teams that respond to any emergency parachronic transmitter signal made by a Time Scout, Intelligence Agent, or Field Agent team. They are also responsible for undertaking an investigation when an Intelligence Agent fails to signal for annual retrieval. Chron-Ops are the most highly trained of all COA agents, and are required to have a broad range of skills and combat abilities so as to complete their mission in any possible environment.
- **Department-8: Combat.** The combat department provides a rapid response military force that is prepared to repel an Akkadian military invasion, whether of our own timeline, or any allied timeline. They are the first line of defense and must hold the line until the world's military forces can be organized to respond.

Characters

Most Field Agents are recruited from our own time, and the COA looks for people who are able to handle themselves in a wide variety of circumstances. The agency will never pass up an exceptional candidate, however, and many agents have been recruited from other timelines. Thus it is possible to play an agent who originated from any period of time, such as a Roman legionnaire, a Victorian scientist, or a Renaissance era explorer. Sometimes, when a local discovers the truth about a temporal operation on their world, it is easier to tell them the whole story and recruit them than to cover it up.

New Advanced Class -- Chron-Op

Chron-Ops are the product of intense training, and are the elite of the Department-7 field agents. They are jacks-of-all-trades, and need to know a little bit about everything as they can be sent with no warning into nearly any possible alternate world. Since their training involves extensive education, most agents will have several levels of the Smart Hero basic class, but since they need to be able to fight ruthless and highly trained enemy agents, and survive in any conceivable environment, levels in the Strong, Fast, or Tough Hero classes are also recommended.

Requirements

Base Attack Bonus: +3

Skills: Diplomacy 2 ranks, Knowledge (History) 6 ranks, Speak Language (Modern), Speak Language (Ancient), Survival 2 ranks. **Feat:** Archaic Weapon Proficiency

Class Information

The following information pertains to the Chron-Op advanced class.

Hit Die: 1d8

Action Points: The Chron-Op gains 6 + one-half character level, rounded down, every time he attains a level in this class. **Class Skills:** Bluff, Craft (all), Decipher Script, Diplomacy, Disguise, Gather Information, Hide, Knowledge (all), Move Silently, Navigate, Read/Write Language, Repair, Research, Ride, Search, Sense Motive, Speak Language, Survival.

Skill Points at each Level: 7 + Int modifier.

Class Features

Best Effort

Chron-Ops are the best of the best, and are expected to succeed in even the most adverse conditions. Once per day they can focus all of their ability on the completion of a task and gain a competence bonus to any Skill Check. This

bonus is +2 at third level and increases by +1 every second level thereafter.

Bonus Feats

In order to gain the flexibility to meet the extraordinary demands placed upon them, Chron-Ops receive bonus feats every second level.

Operational Priority

Due to the high priority of their missions, Chron-Ops receive preferential logistical support. When requisitioning equipment from Department-4 or support from any other COA Department, Chron-Ops may add their class level to the roll (1d20 + character level + Chron-Op class level + Cha bonus).

Save the Day

The fate of entire worlds regularly rests on the shoulders of the Chron-Op and they are often required to do the impossible when the chips are down, and overcome overwhelming odds. Once per day, when spending an action point to improve a d20 roll, the Chron-Op can add his class level to the d6 improvement roll.

Level	BAB	Fort	Ref	Will	Special	Defense Bonus	Reputation			
1	+1		+1			+1	+0	Save the Day	+1	+1 Operational Priority
2	+2		+2			+2	+0	Bonus Feat	+2	+1
3	+3		+2			+2	+1	Best Effort	+2	+2
4	+4		+2			+2	+1	Bonus Feat	+3	+2
5	+5		+3			+3	+1	Best Effort	+3	+4
6	+6		+3			+3	+2	Bonus Feat	+4	+2
7	+7		+4			+4	+2	Best Effort	+4	+5
8	+8		+4			+4	+2	Bonus Feat	+6	+3
9	+9		+5			+5	+2	Best Effort	+5	+6
10	+10		+5			+5	+3	Bonus Feat	+7	+4

Adventure Ideas

The Dawn of Enlightenment

Situation: COA has received an unscheduled parachronic transmission from Marcus Quinn, a Department-6 Int-Op on station at a crux point in the year 1485 of the "Lancastrian" timeline, so named for the dominance and long-lived dynasty of the House of Lancaster in this world. The Lancastrian timeline diverged from our own in 1420 A.D., five years after Henry V defeated the French at Agincourt. The Treaty of Troyes was signed in 1420, which made Henry V the heir of the French king, Charles VI, instead of Charles' own son. In our own timeline Henry V died of dysentery in 1422, before ascending the French throne; most of France refused to recognize Henry V's son as the legitimate heir to the French throne, and by 1453 England had lost most of its territory in France. In the Lancastrian timeline the Treaty of Troyes was not refuted and Henry V did not contract dysentery, but was able to ascend the throne and cement English rule in France. The Lancaster kings went on to establish a powerful dynasty that has dominated Europe to this day. Henry V was succeeded by his son Henry VI, who continued to expand the empire his father had established in Europe and, in 1471 allied himself with Pope Sixtus IV to gain the support of the church, and subsequently gave royal consent to all papal decrees. Sixtus IV called for a crusade against the Turks, which Henry VI and his successor,

Edward IV, wholeheartedly supported. This was to be a long, bitter campaign that saw the eventual conquest of Turkey. The Spanish Inquisition was instituted in 1478 and was lead by Tomas de Torquemada, who became inquisitor-general of Spain in 1483. This inquisition has persisted to present day and its vigorous persecution of heretics, including all natural philosophers and free thinkers, has ensured that the Lancastrian timeline has never emerged from the "Middle Ages," and is firmly under the covert control of the Akkadians. Agent Quinn has been working with local revolutionaries to overthrow the iron grip of the church and usher in the Renaissance, in hopes of creating a new timeline that will eventually become our ally in the Crux War. Unfortunately, the leader of Quinn's Enlightenment Movement, a visionary artist and inventor named Leonardo da Vinci, has been accused of heresy and arrested, and is due to be put to the question by Torquemada, himself. Moreover, agent Quinn has discovered that Tomas de Torquemada is a member of new order of the church, the Order of Saint Namtur. This order is, of course the front for a cell led by an Akkadian agent.

Mission: Agents will insert into the Lancastrian timeline in 1485 A.D. There, they will contact agent Quinn, who is locally known as Antonio Bartolli, the abbot of a small monastery outside of Florence. During the first stage of the operation, Department-7 agents are to rescue da Vinci from prison, recover the confiscated Codex Atlanticus, his notebook of inventions, and assist him in constructing working prototypes of his military machines. The second stage of the operation will involve agents helping to train a cadre of revolutionaries recruited by Quinn, and lead them in battle against the Order of Saint Namtur. Agent Quinn is certain that once this militant sect is broken, Pope Sixtus will be able to regain control of the Inquisition, relaxing its strictures, which should, in turn, allow the Enlightenment Movement to gain momentum and herald a new age of science and philosophy.

Execution: Stage one of the operation will need to be conducted quickly, as Torquemada, and the Akkadian cell leader likely suspect that da Vinci is the leader of a COA resistance cell, and will be executed as soon as a confession, and Quinn's identity can be tortured out of him. The second stage must not delay too long, as the Order of Saint Namtur will use all of their resources to hunt down and destroy the revolutionary cell before it can act. Agents are responsible to evade the Order of Namtur long enough to prepare their forces to defeat them in battle.

Support: The Department-7 team will be issued with one parachronic transmitter. No other modern equipment will be allowed, as temporal contamination is to be avoided on this mission at all costs. The Lancastrian Renaissance must be allowed to make its own discoveries to generate the momentum to revolutionize the world. Agent Quinn can provide any other local logistical support required by the field team.

Command and Signals: The Department-7 field team is in tactical command of the operation. Agent Quinn is the officer in charge of the Lancastrian 1485 crux point, and is responsible for the strategic development of the Enlightenment Movement. Upon completion of the mission, or in the event of disaster, the parachronic transmitter can be activated to signal for retrieval.

Leonardo da Vinci and the Codex Atlanticus

Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) was an artist, inventor, and philosopher whose inventions were far ahead of their time. The Codex Atlanticus is the name that has been given to the notebook containing many of his inventions. The following are the inventions that will be of most use to the agents in the successful completion of their mission.

Armored Car

This is a tortoise-shaped cart reinforced with metal plates. The car is operated by 8 men who operated cranks to turn the wheels. The car has an inner turret armed with guns, with narrow slits to allow the gunners to aim through. Da Vinci described his armored car as a "covered chariot, which cannot be assaulted; behind it infantrymen shall follow without fearing injury or impediment." Construction: Purchase DC -- N/A, Quinn has gathered enough funds to purchase necessary materials; Craft (mechanical) DC 25; Time to build -- 24 hrs.

Automatic Igniting Device

This is the first rotating wheel lock for igniting firearms. Though da Vinci probably did not design this device until 1497, the GM may wish to allow it in Lancastrian 1485, because in this timeline, da Vinci devoted much less time to art than he did in our own, so his inventions could reasonably have been made earlier. All firearms of this age use matchlock ignition, whereby pulling the trigger lowers a slow burning fuse to a touchhole to ignite the powder. This fuse was very vulnerable to wind and rain, making matchlock weapons unreliable. The wheel lock ignited powder by striking a flint to create a spark, which results in a much more practical weapon that, unlike matchlocks, can be holstered or carried concealed. Construction: Purchase DC -- N/A; Craft (mechanical) DC 15; Time to build -- 1 hr.

Eight-barreled Organ

This is a machine-gun consisting of a set of eight small-caliber muzzles mounted in a fan-wise arrangement on a single wheeled carriage. Elevation of the muzzles can be adjusted by a turning a screw and the fan-shaped arrangement of the muzzles enables a wide field of fire. **d20 Modern** rules: The eight-barreled organ is a one-shot autofire attack. Due to the fan-shaped distribution of the barrels, the area affected is 20 ft. wide by 10 ft. deep rather than the usual 10 ft. by 10 ft. area covered by normal autofire weapons. Construction: Purchase DC -- N/A; Craft (mechanical) DC 20; Time to Build -- 12 hrs.

Thirty-Three-Barreled Organ

This is a scaled up version of the eight-barreled organ, which consists of thirty-three small guns lined up in rows of eleven, mounted on a rotating framework. After the first row of guns is fired, the gunner can successively rotate the second and third rows into place. The guns swing upward for muzzle-loading. **d20 Modern** rules: The thirty-three-barreled organ may make three autofire attacks before reloading. After firing, the gunner must take a full-round action to set up the next bank of eleven guns. The area of the autofire attack is 10 ft. by 10 ft. Construction: Purchase DC -- N/A; Craft (mechanical) DC 25; Time to build -- 24 hrs.

New Feats

Artillery Proficiency

You are proficient in loading, aiming, and firing all gun powder artillery weapons, such as cannons. The 8- and 33-barreled organs fall into this category.

Benefit: You take no penalty on attack rolls when using any kind of gun powder artillery

Normal: A character without this feat takes the -4 nonproficiency penalty when making artillery attacks.

Black Powder Weapon Proficiency

You are proficient in loading and firing black powder pistols and long-arms.

Benefit: You take no penalty on attack rolls when using black powder weapons.

Normal: A character without this feat or the Personal Firearms Proficiency feat takes the -4 nonproficiency penalty when making attacks. Characters with the Personal Firearms Proficiency feat but without the Black Powder Weapon Proficiency feat may make attacks without penalty, but reload times are doubled, and the weapon malfunctions on "to hit" rolls of 8 or less.

Designer's Notes: GURPS Vehicle Builder

by Thomas L Bont and Thomas Jones-Low

GURPS Vehicle Builder is a labor of love, one I have been working on for over four-and-a-half years (the oldest file I can find in any backup is dated January 1999). This article was originally 900 words of "How do I possibly tell you what the deal is for a project of this length?" Thomas Jones-Low said, "Reduce it to one paragraph." I have found that his opinion is usually right so you just read that paragraph. Besides, it would be impossible with my meager writing skills to tell you about the trials and tribulations of the development process. Suffice it to say nobody is happier than I am that it is finally shipping.

At one time I exclaimed in a public forum, "**GURPS Vehicles** defies logical expression!" To a certain extent I still feel that way. There are too many options, too many expansions, too many ways to tweak the rules to fit a particular application without devoting a substantial amount of time to learning the rules and all the ins and outs of the system. **GURPS Vehicle Builder**, when I first considered writing this ultimate gaming utility, was to fix this. I wanted something that was flexible enough to fit just about any genre the player wanted to design a toy in, while at the same time adhering to the rules in **Vehicles**. This was not an easy undertaking; there are only two other people I know of that could possibly understand it at the level of the developer: Thomas Jones-Low, my compatriot; and Mike Joseph, the writer of **GURPS Vehicles Designer** . . . and only because they have actually seen the fruits of their labor reach the market. In effect, I wanted a program that was generic enough to be worthy of the name **GURPS**.

So, why did I choose to do things the way I did in **GURPS Vehicle Builder**? Some things are completely user-defined (though they are defined by default by us) while some things are hard-coded. The simple answer is, "because it was easy." The not-so-simple answer is, "I still haven't figured out a way to make the entire program formula driven yet." This goes back to my previous exclamation about defying logical expression. Note I am steadily experimenting with ways to completely turn all performance statistics into user-defined formulas.

By its very nature, **GURPS Vehicles** scares off most would-be gearheads. It is math-intensive. The math isn't that hard, though. It is mostly just the four basic operations: addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division, with the occasional square root thrown in to keep you honest. However, even a simple vehicle has over 50 formulas that must be solved, with many of them depending on an answer from a previous one. Make a mistake earlier on and your entire design is toast. Post it to a public forum and you will get some feedback on the idea but it may be days before some hardy soul will actually try to reverse-engineer it and tell you if your calculations are wrong or not. This has actually happened to me a couple of times in the early days of **GURPS Vehicle Builder's** development (I was trying to get some free help to test my program <grin>). It was weeks before someone said, "Hey, your air speed is wrong!" Personally, I have probably only checked half a dozen myself. This isn't because we are lazy. It is time consuming!

GURPS Vehicle Builder reduces the amount of time it takes to design a vehicle by doing the math for you (and quite quickly, I might add, in real-time as you make changes to your vehicle). There are still a few different ways to toast your design, but **GURPS Vehicle Builder** does try to enforce the rules for you. If you want to step outside that sandbox known as **Vehicles**, you can. For instance, all motive subassemblies are not truly part of the Body. They are separate entities that only contribute to total vehicle statistics. By placing them in, say, the Body, **GURPS Vehicle Builder** will ignore their contribution to the vehicle as a whole but affect the Body. And they do not contribute to the final performance statistics.

You may think, "This is wrong; you should be able to place them anywhere." To a certain extent you may be right. However, by allowing **GURPS Vehicle Builder** to ignore situations such as this it opens the door to many other options. You can create armored sections of a ship much more easily -- put a superstructure in the Body and it is treated as a separate entity for structural and armoring purposes but not used for total vehicle surface area nor is that little rule about Body volume enforced. It has its advantages at times.

GURPS Vehicle Builder also takes care of the little nit-picky parts of the Vehicles design system. What is the

difference between a TL6 7.76mm Machine Gun and a TL7 model? I have no clue and neither do you unless you are a savant or happen to have **GURPS Vehicles** opened to the correct set of pages right now. **GURPS Vehicle Builder** knows.

In some ways, this program makes the vehicle design process worse by presenting you with too many options. Steve Jackson Games manages to put a new book out ever month or so with new rules, new additions, and new options that just contribute to the morass. However, before **GURPS Vehicle Builder** it was impossible to keep track of them all, which in a very strange way, made it easier on the designer. You only worry about the snake you know about (i.e., you only design with the options at hand). There are solutions to this problem, though.

The Steve Jackson Games solution is the Modular Design System (MDS). MDSs reduce the complexity of the vehicle design process by taking the most useful vehicle design options and wrapping them up into modules. For instance, a bridge module might consist of crew stations, computers, sensors, and communicators. This cuts down on the design complexity substantially. You find them in **GURPS Traveller**, **World War II**, **GURPS Space**, and **Transhuman Space**. **GURPS Vehicle Builder** fully supports the first three. **Transhuman Space** is coming in a later version though there is no definite time frame.

Thomas Jones-Low and I are steadily putting new items in as fast as we can get our hands on the books and type them in. As we do so, we continually find new ways to streamline the vehicle design process and implement them into the program, making the experience more pleasant for you, the user. And we do take every suggestion seriously, even if we don't use it. If you have an idea, send it to us. We'll look at it.

Fate's Worse; Then Death

This is the third week of our chipper, upbeat, happy-go-lucky series on death. If you didn't enjoy the first two, you almost certainly won't like this one.

Let's suppose for a moment that death has gotten out of control in your game. As a GM you stand on the table and proclaim, "Thus the king slumps over dead, dead I tell you, *dead!!!!*!" This prompts the players to breathe a sigh of relief and say, "Oh, whew; I thought it was something *serious*." And you realize that, no matter what you do, death will never be a force to be reckoned with in your campaign. Too many people have come back from the dead, too many tricks have been played, too often has death proven an inconvenience. The cat has gotten out of the bag, returned with kerosene, lit the bag on fire, and pushed powerful anti-bag legislation through Congress.

Okay; you now need something else to frighten players with.

Well, fortunately you're not out of luck. You have options. The trick is to understand *how* you have options.

But first, in the interest of completeness (and certainly not an attempt to pad the word count or provide tension), let me offer some advice of what *not* to do.

Avoid death escalation. A more spectacular "death" does not make it more powerful or emotionally tying to the players. Some GMs (and other creative types) mistakenly believe it does; thus if having a villain seemingly die in an exploding building is exciting but unbelievable, then maybe having him die on an exploding *planet* will be more believable . . . or an alternate universe that ***winks out of existence!*** "Surely no one could survive *that!*" the GM might think. In fact, usually the opposite is true; the more spectacular the demise, the more likely the players might be *not* to believe it. After all, if you can envision a force that can turn an entire alternate dimension into tapioca pudding, then imagining that there's an Tapioca-Activated Alternate Dimension Transportation Buoy really isn't a much bigger step.

At this point the players might well believe that you'll do *anything* to make the story work, no matter how unrealistic. (This may be true, but once they realize it, you've got a tougher road to travel.) No, perhaps the best thing to do is to have an *unspectacular* death. The heroes might not believe (or care) about a villain who dies in an exploding building, but there's a good chance they'll care if he's gunned down Jack Ruby-style on the courtroom steps right before his trial. The players still might not believe it -- this *is* a campaign where death has lost its teeth, after all -- but the emotional ties will still probably be stronger.

Avoid disappearances. This is fairly tied to death escalation; if a planet explodes, there usually isn't an identifiable body for the heroes to identify. But other times GMs try to convey a "wink-wink" sense of death by having someone disappear: "We just got a report that his ship sank in the Amazon; surely he must have drowned." Once this method is used, the players are pretty much waiting for the departed to return.

Okay; you have a couple pointers of what not to do; so what *should* you do, then?

Well, forget about killing anyone. It's not going to work. No, the trick is to find fates that are worse than death. And then there's one final piece to make this fate real:

The victim must remain in sight.

Not literally in sight, but certainly as part of the campaign. For example, let's say that you're trying to make the players emotionally invested in a villain's defeat; you might kill him, but the heroes will just wait for him to come back. But what if, after the climactic blow, he falls from a height . . . onto his head? He is obviously in bad shape, but the heroes don't know how bad. If the villain is carted off by MediCartel, the sinister villain convalescence unit, then once he's out of sight the heroes will probably assume he got better and will be back to plague them soon. But if the heroes are kept appraised of his condition through periodic updates, then they'll understand the gravity of the situation and the likelihood that he isn't coming back soon . . . and even if he *does* come back, he probably won't be the same antagonist

they faced before. ("Dr. Annihilatio is making considerable progress. He was able to drink broth through a straw unassisted for the first time today!")

Of course, the same applies to the good guys as well. If a sympathetic protagonist is killed, the players will just be waiting for him to come back. If he gets lost on an expedition to K2, the players will again just wait for him to come back. But if he's captured by a secretive paramilitary organization that periodically gives updates as to his status (in an effort to taunt the heroes), then they know he's not just going to "get better."

Perhaps the textbook example of this in the Silver Age of comics was Superman's Bottled City of Kandor. This piece of prime Kryptonian real estate became a bottled city -- along with its inhabitants -- when the villain Brainiac shrank it and stole it with his spaceship. (Did we sufficiently emphasize "Silver Age" here?) Superman was generally plagued with guilt at not being able to do anything for the Lilliputian Kryptonians . . . and since the bottled city was in Superman's Fortress of Solitude, he was forced to confront his frustration each time he went home. If the residents had merely died or otherwise been removed from the picture, neither Superman nor his comic readers would probably give them much thought (since this kind of thing happened all the time in the Silver Age anyway: "Golly; the residents of Shaggidog-4 sacrificed their lives so I could return to Earth. <choke> Hmm . . . I wonder if there's a softball game in Smallville today?").

Now, it should be pointed out that this method of reminding players should be used sparingly; after all, you don't want every aspect of the heroes' lives filled with drooling villains, mangled acquaintances, and oddly resized allies. Then again, these techniques are necessary in the campaign because death isn't feared anymore; as such, they shouldn't be used any more often than a meaningful story involving death would be employed in other campaigns.

Next time we continue this series (which may or may not be next week) we'll look at some specific things you can do to keep the living in the spotlight and out of the clutches of the grim reaper. But until then, consider that, using this technique sparingly, the players may view death as a kinder alternative in some instances . . . which leads to some very interesting story possibilities.

--*Steven Marsh*

Big Brother is an Idling Bachelorette Survivor

Week 2

by Steven Marsh

Last Monday at 11:59PM Eastern Time saw the closing of the first part of arguably the most controversial series that *Pyramid* has ever done. The readers spoke, and these are the numbers:

1. **Gareth-Michael Skarka** -- 3.9448 (634 votes)
2. **Sandy Antunes** -- 3.1675 (591 votes)
3. **Andy Vetromile** -- 3.0019 (530 votes)
4. **Aaron Rosenberg** -- 2.7686 (566 votes)
5. **Larry D. Hols** -- 2.5934 (519 votes)

Upon learning the results, we bid Larry farewell from our BBiaIBS experiment. It seems Larry's gambit of ending two articles midway did not pay off with the readers.

And so the groundwork was laid for an interesting and epic second week. Unfortunately, fortune did not smile upon this endeavor; late on Wednesday *Pyramid* learned that the frontrunner, Gareth-Michael Skarka, had personal issues that forced him to drop out of the contest.

Immediately the creative forces behind *Pyramid* debated how best to proceed. The editor's suggestion -- which involved flinging himself into oncoming traffic -- was discarded. Instead it was decided that the show must go on. And, with the former frontrunner now no longer in the competition, it is now possible for *any* of our contestants to win! (This is a textbook example of transmuting sow's ears into silk purses.)

The BBiaIBS experiment shall be shortened by one week,, with one person eliminated in this batch. Next week will be the climactic conclusion to this epic challenge!

(Or so we hope.)

Remember: You have until Monday, August 4th, 11:59 pm Eastern Time, to have your vote counted for this week's stage of the competition.

It's A Mad Mad Illuminated World

Three Articles by Sandy Antunes

* * *

Illumination

A conventional challenge features an opponent and a goal. Solving the challenge means either understanding the opponent or figuring out a way to stymie the goal. But that's tremendously linear. The best (game or movie or book) endings are ones that are obvious in retrospect yet not foreseen at the time.

This means there must be a twist. There must be elements that just don't initially make sense, secret purposes or motives that are a complete mystery. A simple lack of facts, hidden agendas, or even wildly incorrect world views can make a situation seem truly baffling.

The moment of illumination is when the light goes on in the player's minds and they suddenly see what really has been there all along. An illuminated plot involves a larger world than the one we assume we live in.

Shannon information theory lends different values to patterns or order, versus random information. The two can be distinguished. But what is random to one person is perhaps perfectly sensible to another. Any decent villainous goal should make perfect sense to its proponent.

So an illuminated game has a purpose beyond 'solve this problem'. It asks the characters (and players) to 'solve this universe', to figure out a new way to look at all the facts so that the situation makes sense, from the right point of view.

Everyone has ulterior motives. In an illuminated plot, though, those motives cannot be deduced until "the secret" is revealed. It's simply too non-linear. This means great care must be exercised by the GM in revealing clues. The GM controls the information flow that the players (and thus characters) receive.

The classic illuminated twist is the Lovecraftian universe. Only when you can accept self-destructive behavior as normal and non-Euclidian theory as accurate will your path to the final goal be clear. Of course, learning this will drive you insane.

If the Illuminati existed, they'd be a good source. After all, no matter how wacky or surreal things seem, once you hear "it's the Illuminati", you think "Oh . . . okay, that makes sense." Even if you don't understand it, you know why you don't understand it.

In their absence, we can invoke other sources of 'greater reality': alien gods, choral vortexes, pornomantic ascensions, and other "what the ?" influences can give any setting or plot a 90-degree shift.

We now apply the idea of greater secrets (illuminated reality, a new way to view apparently odd circumstances) as well as a healthy dose of old-fashion "there must be a secret, if we can just find it" to some classic cases. Specifically, let's use illumination theory to look at the 7 ancient wonders of the world.

* * *

The Seven Wonders of Any World

Grand illusions and monuments to magical might are often impressive, but ultimately an heroic campaign is rooted in the achievements of men and women, mortals who strive for greatness. A science fiction campaign is rooted in the iconic structures representing the future world. An alternative history is defined by the new power structures.

All of this is reflected in the setting, and drawing from history is an excellent way for GMs to develop magnificent creations of architectural and cultural impact for adventures and campaigns. The Seven Wonders of the Ancient World are excellent templates for such realms.

Scattered across geography and time, the Wonders' one common thread was the architectural beauty to which they arose. Which is utterly useless to gaming, at least until "**GURPS Architecture**" or "**Vampire: Gothic Arches**" is released. So let's examine and perhaps illuminate these. Where meaning doesn't exist, we'll invent it.

No mortal soul has lived long enough to see all seven of the wonders of the ancient world, but any traveler from 2700 BC to the present can explore one. Ergo, GMs creating campaigns can easily use a single Wonder as the focus for a campaign. Just one Wonder is rare enough; seven at once would be overkill.

It would be natural for a party of disparate adventurers to meet in the city near a Wonder, drawn by the tales and splendors told by travelers world over. Whether based in the fantasy D20 worlds or in a future or historical setting, Wonders of that world's past and present are centers for great adventure.

Ancient era games can explore the splendor of the Wonders at their peak; fantasy worlds can have thinly-disguised fantasy variants. In the earlier days, the Wonders are thriving constructs, humming with use. Later, more "civilized" era games may try and pierce the fog of history to find the true origins of the Wonders and their meanings. By these later epochs, characters must face the formidable task of discovering remnants of these long-lost marvels, or, far worse, face the insurmountable task of dealing with possible arcane threats that the Wonders had been built to guard against.

Least we get carried away, first, a list. As recorded by Antipater of Sidon, the Wonders were: (1) the Pyramids of Egypt, circa 2700 BC, (2) the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, circa 600 BC, (3) the Statue of Zeus, 430 BC, (4) the Temple of Artemis, 356 BC, (5) the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, 353 BC, (6) the Colossus of Rhodes, 280 BC, and (7) the Pharos of Alexandria, also 280 BC. The wonders were dedicated to mortals or gods, designed for utility or worship; indeed, it is difficult to find a central theme connecting their existence. Built by different races in different centuries, the Wonders as a set are unique examples of ancient achievement.

Pyramids, Pyramids, Oh Clichéd Pyramids

Ironically, it is only the eldest of the works that still remains standing today. The Pyramids of Egypt, including the Great Pyramid of Giza, were built from about 2700 BC through to around 1000 BC. A pinnacle of Egyptian architectural skill, they lay scattered (some hidden) throughout Egypt and along the Sudan, centered at Giza, near Cairo.

Their design was an advancement on the 'step pyramid' design, with four triangular sides meeting at a point on top. The Great Pyramid, great Wonder of the World, was built as a tomb for the Pharaoh Khufu (or, in Greek, Cheops) to honor his reign of 2575 BC to 2465 BC.

For millennia it was the largest single structure ever erected, towering at 147 meters high, with the base square 230 meters on each side. There are many skeptics who do not believe such a construct could be made by a "primitive" ancient society. Those with a supernatural bent can spend a lifetime seeking the puzzle of their construction; indeed, riddled with hidden passageways, many times the architects themselves were killed to keep their secrets.

One of the best possibilities for the Pyramids is not Illuminated, but darkly mundane. Imagine you have nuclear power, with left over Plutonium (half life of 24,000 years). How would you keep people away? Perhaps a sign:

"Stay away! If you enter you will die! Your insides will rot! Invisible forces will eat away at you! Your descendents

will be deformed monsters! Go back now!"

Now translate that into pictures, and imagine an archeologist 10,000 years later. "Ha ha, look at the primitive warnings to keep away superstitious farmers. Let's enter and find riches! Hmm . . . nothing here but stacks of a strange metal." How many archeologists carry geiger counters?

So if you run SF, any 'ancient wonder' might be nothing but a toxic storage dump whose purpose has been lost in legend. Cruel, but useful to GMs seeking a more anticlimatic plot driver.

Now, for the actual pyramids, they were a thriving economic market akin to today's security business. As repositories for the royal dead, pyramids were a popular target for grave-robbing. An entire industry existed of two factions; those seeking to find and loot pyramids, and those who earned money protecting them. Guards would protect a tomb for as long as the family provided money; thus over time even the greatest became unprotected. Grave robbers during any Pyramid era would be a hunted class, but the lucrative market is encouraging enough for any thief to keep searching for that great find.

Fantasy games can easily expand these concept for any pyramid-building great race. Because of the high cost and the great skill in stonecraft and architecture required, only the greatest of civilizations can afford to create a Great Pyramid. Magic could help but little with the construction, unless someone could hire huge teams of mages to handle the lifting and placement of every block. Brute labor is and has always been cheaper than skilled workers, be they mage or engineer, and thus pyramid making could only be undertaken by large city/states.

Some have speculated that the pyramids found in South America are a legacy of Egyptian influence. This conveniently ignores the fact that these later pyramids (1200 BC to 1520 AD) had flat tops and were used as temples or palaces, not for burial. Alas, there is no universality to pyramidism.

If the supernatural were truly real, any matter involving the pyramids would be the focus of earth-bound Ka spirits and otherworldly forces vying in these borders between the living and the dead. Even lowly undead such as ghouls and mummies are a challenge for the low level visitor. To some, the pyramids are an innocent custom of an ancient race. To others, they are foci for forces that mortals are often wisest to avoid. In either case, profit-seeking humans provide a constant threat. As the most lasting of the Wonders, any setting involving pyramids can evoke these many possibilities.

Egyptian pyramids are overused as a plot device. Pop books on "pyramid power" were a bane in the 70s, and poor Thoth (ibis-headed moon deity) gets invoked by modern day pagans. As a deep, dark cosmic underlying secret, pyramids are a bit outdated. Fortunately, their influence survives in other wonders: that the Statue of Zeus may have had a Sphinx at its feet, and the Mausoleum was topped with a pyramid. But first, someone built a garden.

Garden Of Life

The Hanging Gardens, born during the New Babylonian period of 626 to 539 BC, was most likely a step-terraced garden near the city walls of the water-locked city of Babylon (south of Baghdad, in modern Iraq), surrounded by the Euphrates river. The Gardens were built by and for the king, Nebuchadrezzar II, who was busy consolidating the empire his father had recently restored to independence.

Following Nebuchadrezzar's death, internal struggles resulted in a usurper gaining the throne, and the usurper's son witnessed the fall of the Babylonian empire to Persia in 539 BC. Poor Nebuchadrezzar would later be best remembered as "that guy they named Morpheus' ship in 'The Matrix' after".

The terraced gardens appeared as if they were hanging, yet they contained paths within, and paths also led to the parks and gardens of the Akitu temple outside of the city walls. However, much of this picture is speculation; previous theories had suspected the Gardens as properly hanging from tall vaulted buildings in the center of the city.

Gardens of that time (judging by Assyrian examples) typically grew many trees, such as cedar, willow, fir and oak, and many fruit trees, including date-palm, olive, fig, and plum. And still more: almonds and pears, myrtle and accacia,

ebony and cypress box, quince and pomegranate. Not only does this make me hungry, but it is a useful list for anyone doing a period piece.

The same city contained the supposed Tower of Babel, a ziggurat dedicated to the city's patron deity of Marduk. The biblical tale of the fall of Babel and the significance of Babylon make them both far more interesting than the actual Garden. As a great city in both history and myth, Babylon's legacy in culture and custom has provided much of our Western culture (and, according to "Snow Crash", the breakdown of the bicameral mind and evolution of consciousness).

The possible lost lore of Babylon, information not recorded in history, would be a wonderful subject of study to sift out legends from truth; travelers in any era could partake of such wisdom, and the possible power it might bring.

Babylon as a city is a natural place for studies or employment of any sort. In non-Earth worlds, a city such as Babylon provides a natural center for mages and bards, scholars and travelers to congregate and mix. If a science fiction television series like *Babylon-5* can make a new Babylon, certainly an enterprising GM can too (hmm . . . you'd need something like '**GURPS** Starbases' for that . . .)

As time passed and the Gardens and Tower fell into ruins, adventurers would find opportunities for seeking lost knowledge or treasures. The gardens would be a particularly unusual above-ground "dungeon crawl", while the Tower might still be a focus of power for a local lord or mage who enjoyed the status such a unique relic brings. Indeed, it was several centuries after the fall of Babylon before another Wonder was created, this time in distant Greece.

The Short Wonder

The Statue of Zeus, a towering 13 meter sculpture in the Temple of Zeus at Olympia, Greece, was created by the sculptor Phidias around 430 BC. Well, okay, by modern standards 13 meters barely qualifies as "towering", given that every Bob's Big Boy fast food joint has a "Bob" about that height. But as a period piece, it's impressive.

[Interlude, fearsome thought: What if Zeus was that era's equivalent of Ronald MacDonald?]

This statue is richly made (something Bob can't claim), of of chryselephantine-- gold and ivory. Although Phidias also created the statue of Athena for the Parthenon (the temple on the Acropolis at Athens) it was the statue of Zeus which was truly called a Wonder. Perhaps this angered Athena-- in any event, time has erased all his works.

The statue of Zeus, sitting in a throne, was highly engraved with images of people and mythological beasts, drawing from the vast cultural heritages that existed before Greece. There is rumored to have been a Sphinx at the throne's arms, lions at the feet, an eagle on the staff in Zeus's left hand, an unknown winged figure on his right hand. What matter of creature it was, none say.

Mysterious creatures are an immediate hook for a GM, especially one who favors Lovecraftian tales. An exploration into such a mystery figure would well suit an adventurous party of explorers; depending on the magic level of the world, even an innocent question as to its identity could rouse Lovecraftian horrors, set an angry cult against them, or summon a magical beast most difficult to deal with. Although history does not record what occupied such an important place on such an important statue, it must have had good reason to be so honored. And perhaps, good reason to be so erased from the records of mankind.

The Universal Goddess

The next immortal to be honored with a Wonder was the goddess of the hunt, with the Temple of Artemis in the Greek city of Ephesus. Artemis, called Diana by the Romans and perhaps Cybele (the Great Mother of the Gods) by the Anatolians, was very popular with her people. Goddess of wild animals, the hunt, vegetation, chastity and childbirth, Artemis was often accompanied by nymphs (dryads).

Ephesus was believed to be Artemis' birthplace, and around 356 BC the colossal temple to honor her was built. Constructed of marble in a design similar to the Acropolis, this statue was merely one piece of the entire city devoted to the Goddess.

Considering the cross-race nature of this Goddess, holding different names and different aspects across the lands, strangers to this area might recognize her under still another name. Thus Ephesus may have served as a nexus for all who worshiped Artemis in her many forms.

Their yearly celebration of her birthday was notable in those times for not requiring a sacrifice. Celebrations included a variety of festivities, the center of which was the great procession across the city. Statues were carried, including one of Golden Artemis with her stags, and at least five others of Artemis in various poses-- Artemis at the hunt, Artemis at war, perhaps even Artemis defeating a team of adventurers.

Imagine coming across a statue of Artemis defeating your group . . . years before it actually happens. Ah, how wonderful.

Gold was reserved for immortals alone, and could only be used for statues of Gods, Goddesses, and Emperors. Stealing gold, then, was risky not just for thievery, but as a blasphemy as well. However, other nearby islands and countries did not have such a strong prohibition against gold for mortals, making temple robbery uniquely profitable.

Even a temple is not safe from destruction; the temple was destroyed first in 262 AD by the Ostrogoths. After being poorly restored by the Greek Tetrarchy, it was destroyed yet again by Patriarch Chrysostom in 401 AD, covered with silt over the ensuing years, and finally built over with houses and graves.

Amidst this constant battering, Saint John was rumored to have stopped by with a holy man to bath there (or so say 5th century tales). As the tales state, the remains were suspected to be haunted by a demon, a strangler by nature. Saint John devoutly drove out the demon, and was promptly attacked by the devotees of Artemis. The stones they threw were miraculously deflected, and John prayed against the building itself. When they later returned to the city, the idols and temples had fallen.

All that remains in modern times is a single standing pillar, but perhaps the power of Artemis remains so long as one stone stands. Whether there was a demon to face Saint John, and whether he truly defeated it, such choices are always possibilities that travelers after 400 AD might face. Or, the undercity might be a thriving culture of demons and creatures, the purging of Saint John still awaiting a successor.

The Mausoleum

The stone foundation of another wonder, the Mausoleum, is also among the few with remnants still standing in the modern era. An enormous yet derivative work, this huge white marble tomb stood 40 meters high, a broad plinth topped with an Ionic-style temple, itself topped with a pyramid (or perhaps a ziggurat), finally capped with a statue of a chariot and horses.

Bonus points for anyone who can differentiate Ionic from Doric. According to Google.com, Ionic is "cycles feature full suspension and hardtail mountain bikes handcrafted from titanium", while Doric is "manufacturers of top-sealed, lined-concrete burial vaults and distributor of cremation memorialization products." Doric columns, on the other hand, were basic, undecorated square 20-sided columns (the D20 of columns?) Ionic were slender, fluted, and convex. And Corinthian were more flowery Ionics. I actually have a point with this.

How words evolve is crucial to determining underlying mysteries. For a GM, the strongest way to put doubt and concern into a player's mind is to give an enemy organization a name rooted in ancient history. Whether it is Doric bikes or the Pyramid Society or the Golden Artemis Hunting Club, an ancient name is a quick and effective way to raise fear and interest within the setting.

Any decent Illuminated plot **has** to include clues for the players. And a name-based clue is ideal in helping clinch the

character's suspicions. Imagine searching a dictionary. "We're looking for which of the looted organizations is involved in this necromantic plot to bring about the Catastrophe. It's either Ned's Hardware Shop, or the Golden Artemis Hunting Society."

Names are powerful. Remember that.

As for the Mausoleum, it was built for, and named after, the Carian king Mausolus, who united six towns in what is now Turkey and named this region his capital, Halicarnassus, a generation before Alexander the Great would conquer much of the western world. Such synoecism (merging several smaller settlements into one city) was a common result of military affairs, and the city did prosper, adding fortifications, walls, and an elaborate harbor.

In honor of Mausolus, his widow/sister Artemisia II built the Tomb for his burial, a structure she would later join him in. Indeed, now "Mausoleum" is part of the English language, a synonym for "tomb". Statues of both of them likely stood at the corners of the roof-pyramid, and now rest in the British Museum (after excavation in 1857).

Much of the design was influenced by other cultures and the other Wonders. The upper structure was very Egyptian in design, while the statues included the Rhodian god Helios as the Sun God. As with the statue of Zeus, history is unclear over what other God-like representations were part of the structure.

Further, whether the carvings were merely symbolic, or were in fact required for mystical reasons, is a matter only known to the religions of the time, the architect, and anyone who was curious enough to pry. Rumors of this legendary place could draw many adventurous souls to pay a visit. An ironic GM could have an entire "tourist culture" spring up about the place, with greedy locals eagerly taking advantage of gullible adventurers who follow such rumors.

Giant Robots Aren't New

Although Helios was incorporated into the Mausoleum, he eventually gained center stage as the Colossus of Rhodes. This 30 meter bronze statue of Helios was erected in 280 BC to guard the entrance to the harbor at Rhodes, a Greek island off the coast of Turkey. Designed and built by Chares of Lindus, some reports suggest the towering statue straddled the entrance to the harbor, while others comment that it stood more casually to one side or the other. My belief-- were magic to exist, the status must have moved periodically. Yes, it's the advent of Fantasy Mecha.

It is known that Archimedes worked with mechanical designs, and certainly the Greeks were no slouches at architecture and engineering. While a bonafide mecha is perhaps a bit beyond their abilities, the idea of a moving statue is so sublimely beautiful that, were I able to force historical facts to allow it, it would be so.

The statue's appearance neatly coincided with the rise of Rhodian power, either through inspiration, coincidence, or divine province. Their original rise to power occurred in 304 BC, when Rhodes survived a siege by the island-state of Antigonos (aided no doubt by fantasy mecha).

Their survival was a combination of power (good defenses, strong will) and situation (Antigonos's son, Demetrius, lay the siege but failed to close off the harbor and cut their supplies), as well as minimal aid from Egypt. Rhodes' success led to their establishment as a peacemaker and a defender of autonomy, and thus bolstered they decided to build the Colossus (using money from the sale of Demetrius's now-useless siege engines and supplies).

Rhodes rose to be the strongest of the Hellenistic powers of their era. Thus times prior to and during the construction were bold, warlike times, where adventurous sorts could choose sides for fighting, for carrying messages, or merely for trading. Someone had to deliver Ptolemy's aid, for example; further possibilities at intrigue and politics abound for those interested in pursuing the rival politics of the different states.

The Colossus was finally toppled, not by man, but by the forces of nature, along with the island's walls, when a massive earthquake hit the island in 228 BC. As Rhodes was intimately intertwined with the economy of the other Greek states, contributions to rebuild flowed into their harbor, and they were able to maintain their imports and exports, and remain in power. Although their fortifications were rebuilt and improved, the Colossus was never

restored, and no trace of it remains now. Were it constructed to provide defense against a greater than mortal threat, its fall would provide a good start to a campaign to hold back the forces of darkness.

I've said my piece about what I wish the Colossus had been; I leave it to GMs to recreate this Wonder in their own eras.

The Lighthouse Of The Savior Gods

Roughly concurrent with the Colossus was another Wonder of a harbor, the Pharos lighthouse of Alexandria. An Egyptian city founded by Alexander the Great in 332 BC, the city was one of the finest ports of the ancient world, easily a peer of the strongest of the Hellenic powers. Indeed, the war that established Rhodian power was due to a debate between the Greek states over the wisdom of war with Egypt, with peace winning out.

The Lighthouse, on the island of Pharos in the harbor of Alexandria, was constructed in 279 BC by Sostratus of Cnidos. The island of Pharos was connected to the glorious mainland city by the Heptastadion, a 1.6 kilometer artificial breakwater for the harbor which also served as a causeway. The lighthouse itself was merely a sign that one was entering a wondrous city, Alexandria, famous for its Library, its cultural mix, and its robust mix of trade and learning.

The lighthouse construction spanned two rulers, starting during the reign of Ptolemy I and finishing early in the reign of Ptolemy II. Standing over 134 meters in height, it consisted of four stories of limestone blocks and granite (and marble) columns, with marble and bronze ornamental work along the lighthouse and pillared courtyard. The lantern itself consisted of a cupola on eight columns, above which a seven-meter statue of Poseidon (or perhaps another god) stood.

Resinous wood was burned to create the flame, and convex metal mirrors were used to extend the range of the light. Watchmen sitting in the tower had an amazing range of vision, and were able to see ships unperceived to the harbor below (due either to the height of the tower, the curvature of the Earth, or perhaps a telescope or lens of some sort). The lowest story sat over a freshwater cistern and provided living quarters, storage of wood for the flame, and primitive lifts to convey the wood to the top story.

The inscription, in letters of lead sunk into the stone, was a dedication to the Gods from the architect, appearing (translated) as "Sostratus son of Dexiphanes of Cnidos to the Savior Gods on behalf of sea-fares". Rumor has that the original dedication was a far more conservative statement given in the name of Ptolemy, the King; this surface dedication was written in a layer of plaster covering the architect's true inscription. Sostratus thus counted on the plaster remaining until after his (and Ptolemy's) death, eventually eroding to reveal his true words carved in lead.

Whether true or not, the inscription does remain ambiguous in mentioning "the Savior Gods", a title equally ascribed to Ptolemy and his Queen, and to the special gods of sailors, Castor and Pollux. Travelers of other mythologies might have a better knowledge of whom the "Savior Gods" truly were, and who they were saving; perhaps there was a specific threat warding by the Lighthouse.

The lighthouse survived even through Arab conquests of the region, finally falling in 700 AD. The Arabs repaired the lighthouse around 800 AD, and yet again in 980 AD, but earthquakes after 1000 AD and again in 1300 AD finally destroyed the structure completely. There now exists a fort (built in 1480) where the Lighthouse once stood. The Heptastadion still exists in the modern era, having gathered enough silt and material to hold a substantial section of town. Nevertheless, the Lighthouse, as with the other Wonders, has largely fallen from grace.

As for the inscription, in an Elrician sense, "Savior Gods" could be "chaos, coming to save us from law" or the inverse. Religion is flexible that way. The fact that the architect's beliefs differed from those of his patron suggests, at the very least, a conspiracy of one. It also neatly suggests a mechanism whereby any public or private work can be subverted by the architect.

Which raises the issue: what is written on the cornerstone of any particular building? Architects seem to hold a great

power in any society. It is not by accident that the Freemasons are feared as a great occult power; their work is the very bones of our civilization.

Earlier I stated that architecture was useless as a game plot. After presentation of these wonders, I offer an alternative: architecture is the one true secret influence for civilization.

Sleep well.

The effects of war, natural disaster, and time have obliterated most of the Wonders, leaving only the massive architectural tomb of the Pyramids to speak for ages long since dead. By their traces and histories we know of these elder glories, inspirations of architecture and expense. As a playground for characters, the possibilities surrounding each of these wonders is equal part trade, warfare, mysticism and magic. As an instant seed for a complex setting, the Wonders (or their parallels in non-Earth worlds) are natural drawing points for those who seek adventure, who seek knowledge, or who seek power. It is possible, for the ambitious referee, that there is a common link to the Wonders, a link that could take a long campaign to unravel. The power of history lies focused in the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, which even now beckon to the adventurous.

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Make Your Own Gaming Fiction!

Having trouble coming up with plot ideas? Use gaming fiction to inspire you! If your favorite RPG doesn't include any fiction vignettes designed to lure you into the setting and sell you on the cool character concepts, you can friend can just create your own.

Simply ask your friend to supply each blank item and fill in the hidden story (without actually telling them what the story is, yet). For example, the SF one asks first for a "noun", so just have them supply any noun, and so on. (Don't make me explain this further.) Once you get all blanks answered, reveal the fascinating and insightful fiction and feel particularly inspired. Apologies to MadLibs™.

Science Fiction

The huge _____ was _____ towards _____,
noun adverb verb a planet
where the _____ settlers lay helplessly in suspended animation.
adjective
Only the _____ captain, _____, and his _____

noble adj dog's name perky adj
 engineer, _____, could save the day! The engineer quickly
 female name
 leapt to the _____ to realign the _____ and
 piece of sf hardware technobabble noun
 reverse the polarity of the _____ flow, while the captain
 atomic particle
 _____ the _____. Just in time, they saved the
 adv verb noun
 _____!
 something valuable

Alternate History

In _____, everyone knows that _____ didn't _____.
 year famous person verb
 But what if _____ altered time to ensure that _____
 evil organization good org
 did not prevail in the _____? Imagine, _____
 contest or election adjective
 robots and _____ monkeys roaming the land, all due to _____
 adjective a number
 change(s) to the past. This, then, is our world.

Fantasy

As the _____ creatures _____ advanced
 overwrought adj obscure adverb
 on the _____ townfolks, all knew a _____ shadow lay upon
 a word for 'simple' color
 the land. Who would dare these them before _____?
 a time
 Only _____, aided by the mysterious
 name with lots of apostrophes
 _____, could _____ them. But the _____
 D&D character class verb old adj
 prophecy said only the _____ king could prevail. Was there any
 _____ that this could be the _____ foretold in the
 an emotion a number
 _____? It was up to our _____
 adj something read adj
 band of adventurers to save the _____ or doom the _____.
 noun place

Generic

As the giant _____ stalked the land, the brave band of
 creature or object
 _____ were sitting around _____. Suddenly,
 a group of people an activity
 a _____ rang out! "_____" quipped the leader.

sound

Heinlein quote

Quickly grabbing their _____s they leapt to action! With a
a weapon

quick use of _____ the threat was defeated!
game-specific cool power

Why Don't We Do It in the Road?

by Andy Vetromile

It is said life is not a destination, but a journey. Taking this into account, the highways and byways of the average campaign setting probably ought to be better populated, and not just by more wandering monsters. Even the deserted ones aren't without charms, character, or perils. By who, then, or by what, are roads occupied? Why are they there, and are they really just the way to get to the dungeon/starport/infirmary? A few ideas to bring the roads to life and make getting there half the fun.

As I Was Going to St. Ives

When you travel a road, you're not the only one. You'll run across fewer of the folks going the same way as you, simply because you're all going one way at more or less the same pace. Most of the folks you see, therefore, will be those headed in the opposite direction. What are the people you meet like? This is a good chance for a GM to drop hints about the adventure to come.

If the GM includes travelers on his roads, PCs will often ask the oncoming traffic for news of the city. It usually boils down to something having to do with the king's family -- a tournament, a marriage, a need for champions to right some wrong. Then again, if the GM seeds something a little more insidious, it gives the players a sense of involvement rather than the feeling they're showing up to be lead by the nose.

Suppose the prevailing gossip is about a rash of thefts. The thieves' guild seems to be working overtime, but in spite of the attempts by the constabulary to root out those responsible, the usual suspects are protesting their innocence in no uncertain terms. On the other hand, maybe some folks are coming out of the city in search of new lands better fitted to their newfound status and wealth. How they came across this wealth they will not say. Each has a scroll they guard jealously. A contract, perhaps, made with demonic forces? Could the two adventure seeds be connected? What evil lies at the heart of the city, stealing from Peter to pay Paul? Finding it will require more than just showing up at the king's coronation and waiting for the evil cardinal to make his move.

Any similar character quirk can be played up; highlight one aspect of the travelers (refugees?) or one class of people - albinos, or Rosicrucians, or communists, the lame, or people lacking their own shadows -- and see where the commonality takes the party. A slow, zombielike stride is more easily noticed than a belief in angels, so make sure the team will have occasion to take note of or discover even internal similarities in passersby. The more subtle the clues, the harder the heroes have to work to find the hidden meanings. And if the road really is empty, well, that's a whole other problem.

Even today, hobos are known to leave signs as they travel. These alert other tramps (and anyone who knows how to read their signs) to conditions along the road, and to the viability of certain stops along the way. They will tell their fellows who lives where, who has dangerous animals or livestock, which towns will show charity vs. those that will toss vagrants out on their ear, and where one might find a quiet place to sleep for the night. These signs are everywhere, but they may seem innocuous to the untrained eye. Charcoal scratchings along roadside fence posts are typical, as are carvings in the bark of a tree and small arrangements of stones and pebbles ground into the dirt on the shoulder of the route.

The Shortest Distance Between Two Points is Under Construction

"It's a bypass. You've got to build bypasses."

-- Prosser, *The Hitchhikers' Guide to the Galaxy*

Back up a moment. How did the road get here? Who built it, and why? The obvious answer is "to get from point A to

point B." Not much fun there.

Roads and cities are both well established in many locations. The cities are built on the site of older towns and villages, and roads aren't much different. Modern blacktop may cover the site of a roadway established long ago. In anything but a mundane campaign, the road may take on many shades depending on its history. How many lonely spirits still wander the Trail of Tears from Georgia and Tennessee to Oklahoma? Do Roman soldiers still haunt what's left of the Appian Way? Every small town seems to have a lonely road and a ghost story associated with it.

Some roads are built with little or no concern for those people in the middle. The railroads began crossing the frontier, and almost immediately settlers and, again, Indians found themselves displaced, shifted, or an unwilling party to "progress." Even today, homeowners find themselves at the mercy of planning crews erecting passages near or through their neighborhood for the greater civic good. Players may not get far on these roads, but if they have a role as builders, they will become targets for the disaffected property owners. As victims, they'll have reasons to fight.

Even if you're not plowing right through someone's flower bed, building a road near them can be just as destructive. Economies change, traffic is redirected, and demographics shift throughout the area. And historically, if your friends across the border see roads being built or improved, they might think you were getting ready to move a lot of men and equipment . . . somewhere.

"We changed to the elevated at the South Station, and at about twelve o'clock had climbed down the steps at Battery Street and struck along the old waterfront past Constitution Wharf. I didn't keep track of the cross streets, and can't tell you yet which it was we turned up, but I know it wasn't Greenough Lane."
-- H.P. Lovecraft, *Pickman's Model*

A road may be constructed not to get people somewhere but to allow one person to get where they want. Fiction is littered with haunted houses, and they're invariably at the end of a long and hard-to-navigate road. Miles of thoroughfare may be built for the benefit of one mad scientist's lab, and not all of them rely solely on the isolation to keep unwanted visitors at bay. These roads may be dangerous, even deliberately booby trapped. It may be a built-in convenience or it may all be part of one man or group's efforts to ward off the inquisitive.

"And as you value your life do not go across the moor in any direction save along the straight path which leads from Merripit House to the Grimpen Road, and is your natural way home."
-- Sherlock Holmes, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*

Roads are man's attempts to bring a small amount of civility to the woods primeval (even if those woods only exist in the mind of the journeyer). The road is also the safest method of travel -- usually. It's faster than traveling overland, and one is far less likely to run into hungry wildlife on pavement. Dangers lurk behind every rock in the country. On the road, trekkers have the advantage of speed. The roadways are there to hasten one's journey and keep them safe from harm. If there's no road providing such passage, the king might be in the market for someone to protect his crews, or someone with a keen eye for potential ambush sites when deciding how the road will be laid out.

Of course, brigands lie in wait along the road because they know this is where the money is. The road then becomes a game of one-upmanship between the unsavory elements and the potential quarry. Lords and ladies will be accompanied by an entourage, and merchants will band together in great packs (travelers can tell a great deal about the road simply by seeing who travels it and who goes with them). Kings may decree that certain roads should be patrolled, or he may declare that anyone traveling after a certain time of night takes his life into his own hands.

For more examples of the curious abutting of safety and peril on the roads, see the *Mad Max* films; West End Games' *The World of Bloodshadows*; John Landis' *An American Werewolf in London*; and Steve Jackson Games' *Car Wars* and *GURPS Autoduel*.

"Once the flame appeared so near the road, that even in the darkness around us I could watch the driver's motions. He went rapidly to where the blue flame arose, it must have been very faint, for it did not seem to illumine the place around it at all, and gathering a few stones, formed them into some device."
-- Bram Stoker, *Dracula*

Once built, a road may conceal many secrets. Conquering nations write the rules once the dust clouds have settled, and they waste no time placing statuary and monuments to themselves. Here is an instance in which a new road may spring up, this one between the victor and the defeated (the winner will want a way to get to his subjugated lands from his capital, after all). Beneath that road lie the bodies of the fallen, the soldiers and their mourners both, and all that once belonged to them. A "scorched earth" policy in which the besieged nation hides its great treasures lest the invaders find them means the byways may cover a trove of valuable treasures, now hidden until such time as some enterprising soul hunts them down, or the next war happens along.

Man's secrets may not be the only ones lost to a covering of asphalt or cobblestone -- if, as they say, cities are laid out on an ancient grid of ley lines, these powerful magical elements may also be disguised, inaccessible, or (depending on the nature of events above) perhaps even poisoned. The color of the world's magic can change, given enough time and pounding by mankind's endless cycle of construction, war, and reconstruction. It may, in time, fracture altogether, or decide to snap back like an angry elastic band.

Life on the Road

"Red Hook is a maze of hybrid squalor near the ancient waterfront opposite Governor's Island, with dirty highways climbing the hill from the wharves to that higher ground where the decayed lengths of Clinton and Court Streets lead off toward the Borough Hall."

-- H.P. Lovecraft, *The Horror at Red Hook*

Evil never sits still for a moment. You may be sure that if Hill House is as haunted as they say, the roads leading there will also have tainted tendrils stretching further back down their length with every passing year. The embodiment of the road may not be the spirits of the dead but rather a life force imbued in the pavement itself. A road possessed of a supernatural intelligence may not be your everyday enemy, and it probably won't buckle just to throw off offending do-gooders, but it might produce simple misdirections, illusions, and other mystical effects to foil the efforts of ghost hunters whose prying can cost a road its precious hidden power just by making it ordinary.

"I have never seen another street as narrow and steep as the Rue d'Auseil."

--*The Music of Eric Zann*

Such fanciful notions won't hold up in a modern-day campaign, but superstition is a powerful thing, and a good GM will use the environment to its best effect. Jack the Ripper may be dead, but conjuring his name while the investigators search Berner and Hanbury Streets and Mitre Square can summon bad memories. You don't have to spot Resurrection Mary to feel a chill as you travel Archer Avenue in Chicago. Elm Street in Dealy Plaza, U.S. Route 80 in Alabama, and Broadway all have their famous links, good or bad, and can flavor a trip, mystery, or stopover effectively -- the ghosts they call up can be altogether real in their own right.

Come the future, the planning commission will attempt to do away with complaints about the condition of the roads by creating AI streets. These will constantly monitor themselves and alert the DOT when they need repair. Another generation come and gone and they may self-repair using nanotechnology. Car chases take on a whole new dimension when the road may fold itself up or demagnetize in hopes of foiling fleeing criminals (or PCs, unless they're one and the same). Excepting the possibility of AIs becoming sentient or going crazy, the AI may still have the capacity to develop a personality of its own, formulated by its relationships with the humans that reside there. The phrase "hitting the streets for information" undergoes a bizarre sea change when talking to a street with a Brooklyn accent.

Crossroads

"It was about nine o'clock on a moonlight August night when he neared the place. He was sitting forward, and looking out of the window at the fields and thickets -- there was little else to be seen -- racing past him. Suddenly he came to a cross-road. At the corner two figures were standing motionless; both were in dark cloaks; the taller one wore a hat, the shorter a hood. He had no time to see their faces, nor did they make any motion that he could discern. Yet the

horse shied violently and broke into a gallop, and Mr. Wraxall sank back into his seat in something like desperation. He had seen them before."

-- Count Magnus (M.R. James)

If one road is a font of great and secret power, where two or more roads converge must be a banquet for those who wish to suck the mystic marrow out of them. Crossroads have long stood for strange power. It has also been said if you sit in one spot long enough, the world will pass by you. The observation has been made about everything from Piccadilly Circus to Parisian cafes, but the best spot for such sightseeing has to be the well-traveled crossroads.

Mystic Meaning

"Before we go, we must ask the great spirit, Wematanya, to watch over us. So pee now because once we're on the road, we ain't stoppin'."

-- Hank Hill, *King of the Hill*

Since ancient times, crossroads were held to be important, magical places. Indians would place symbols, often phallic, of Siva in the Bhairava form (a much older incarnation) at these locations, a tradition also practiced by the Greeks, though they used Hermes as their template (and later still, the Romans would do so with Mercury). Hermes was the messenger god, and a guide for souls that have passed on -- perhaps that was the reasoning behind the phallic symbols. Travelers wished to cling to the idea that the life force was stronger at the intersection, and that the positive disposition of their gods would be well represented as they traveled across the land.

At their most basic meaning, crossroads have been seen as a physical manifestation of the otherworldly intersection between life and death. Legba, the voodoo spirit governing intersections, mirrors, and crossroads holds sway at any threshold. Few ceremonies are performed without a prayer to Legba for protection and favor when engaging in a voodoo ritual, especially at a crossroad. If you want to speak with your ancestors, revive the dead, or see that a friend doesn't end up in Hell by mistake, a crossroad is the place to start.

Papa Legba has mirrors of his own throughout the world. African tribes all have a version of this powerful spirit that opens the doorways. These passages aren't just the ones between life and death, though; they may be doorways into other worlds and dimensions. Which one, you can never be certain, for Legba is also a trickster god. The gate may lead to the Dreamtime, perhaps, or an alternate plane -- if our one world has many versions of Legba, the world on the other side of the gate will have them as well. Since Legba also teaches wisdom and serves as the go-between not just for life and death but as a liaison betwixt mankind and its gods, if he does not open the gate at your bequest, the dutiful student will realize there must be a lesson to be learned there.

Death Takes a Holiday

Superstitious villagers, fearful that someone recently dead might rise again as a vampire, would often bury the deceased at a crossroads. The theory was the vampire would crawl from its grave and, unsure in which direction the town lay, become lost trying to find it again. If an intersection has even one undead lurking beneath its soil, that's reason enough for cautious travelers to avoid prolonged stays.

Another method of destroying the vampire is to cut off the head, burn the body and head in separate funerary pyres, and scatter the ashes to the four winds at a crossroad. It is said that Bhairava, Siva's older and more fearsome countenance, is a black man with skin made darker still by ashes spread over his body. These ashes come from his administration of cremation grounds and his presence when one burns the dead in a pyre. Coincidence, or the dark and terrible god maintaining his status and jurisdiction under yet another new guise, reinvented for a new century and new lands?

Not all ethereal beings at a crossroads are necessarily the result of the nearby town's burial practices. Ghostly festivals are also said to occur at these spots, though whether this is a bacchanalian orgy or simply a gathering of the spirit folk is not clear. It most likely depends on the sorts of activities that transpired at the intersection in years past. Without

notable events to tint the character of these meetings, the crossroads may simply act as a sort of cultural congress, an assembly of the dead from all walks of life and all times past and present, who are taking advantage of the thinning walls between the worlds. If townsfolk and travelers alike have abused the junction, the specters may be destructive entities who, in the throes of their debauchery, plan or even execute plots against the living.

Depending on the disposition of ghosts in his world, the GM may decide player characters caught at the crossroads are invited to join the discussions, enticed to take part in the festivities, or implicated in their scheming. Then again, the group may be the first targets of the vengeful undead.

The Devil

*"I went to the crossroad
Fell down on my knees
I went to the crossroad
Fell down on my knees
Asked the Lord above 'Have mercy now,
Save poor Bob, if you please'"*
-- Robert Johnson, *Crossroad Blues*

Perhaps the best-known story about the crossroads is that of Robert Johnson, Tommy Johnson by some accounts. Johnson was a blues musician of no note and little talent. A poor black man, he was said to have wanted to play the blues but, possessing no skill at it, went down to the crossroads.

*"Early this mornin'
When you knocked upon my door
Early this mornin', ooh
When you knocked upon my door
And I said, 'Hello Satan,
I believe it's time to go.'"*
-- Robert Johnson, *Me and the Devil Blues*

Legend has it that if you want something, you go down to the crossroads three nights (or nine, in some versions), and on the last night you ask for what you want. Do this, and a tall, dapper black man will step forward and give you what you want. Black is used here to mean not the man's race or skin but his actual color, black as pitch, the same color as the black-faced Bhairava of Indian legend (see above). Robert Johnson did this, and the black man came forth and took Johnson's guitar. He strummed a few notes and handed the instrument back to the musician, who suddenly found himself able to play as never before.

The legend says Johnson went on to record several songs using his newfound talent, but that ultimately he had to pay the price. Rumors of everything from a heart attack to being poisoned by a rival have circulated, but most swear it was just time for the piper to pay his tutor.

Hoo-doo, an American version of hedge magic, claims anyone can do this. If you want to get better at something, you go down to the crossroads and practice. For most aspiring students, it sounds like good advice; if your players want to make use of this tactic, however, just trying to find enough privacy at the most public spot on the road can be a juggling act. Learning black arts or lovemaking can get you thrown in jail or run out of town on a rail, depending on the prevailing prurience.

Patron Saints

Religions are often characterized by acts of faith, and the pilgrimage is one of the most popular. The idea is that you travel (under what conditions varies) from one place to another, usually one that holds a great deal of significance to the faith. The most famous of these is the Moslem treks to Mecca, birthplace of Mohammed. St. Nicholas (yes, that St.

Nicholas) was said to have traveled to Egypt and the Holy Land as well, and so he has been made one of two patron saints of roads. The other, St. John Nepomucen, was supposedly dropped into the river to keep him quiet after he and others argued with King Wenceslas (yes, that King Wenceslas) over the funds of the Benedictine Abbey.

Today, the idea of a pilgrimage sounds to many people like a quaint notion. The underlying sentiments are still there, however. Even those who would not seriously consider undertaking such a journey still think nothing of placing wreaths and memorials by the roadside where a friend or loved one has died or been killed. Such locations often grow up beyond what one might expect, overflowing with gifts and flowers (all of them placed there by other people, one would assume). Somehow the idea that someone has passed away, usually too early, on a spot that parallels metaphysically the journey cut short in life, holds a special kind of energy.

The spot where John is said to have been plunged into the water, dropped off the bridge by his assassins, is also marked, by a metal plaque bearing seven stars. These are the stars that were said to have hung over the water the night he died. As Muslims still make pilgrimages today, and deaths on the road are still memorialized as were those of the saints before them, it could spell a new age (so to speak) of religious belief. The young souls that have passed may denote the beginning of a whole new crop of saints. Even if they are not canonized by the Catholic Church, the roadways of America may be littered with saints in disguise. The disappearing hitchhikers of modern urban legend could be, if not the Savior or Mormon Nephites, the restless spirits of the world's collective brood, forever secure in their innocence and seeking to bring that to other travelers who walk their paths. They now hitchhike in hopes of bringing blessings to other travelers, possibly under the watchful eyes of John, Nicholas, and Mohammed, and perhaps a host of others.

Magic

Countless magics have been associated with crossroads. A few superstitions that can be codified into spells or other rites:

- Crossroads are thought to be a good place to dispose of things unwanted. Lovers throw away the detritus of a failed relationship there. The sick and the weak imbue both skull and bone with their illnesses and infirmities, grind them together, and spew the results into the intersection. The unspoken danger of this, of course, is that these maladies may not go anywhere. The more negative energy mages and mystics dump into the crossroads, the more inhospitable that lay becomes. Sooner or later it will begin to spill out -- crops may die, travelers may take ill, and surrounding villages may fall under a curse.
- The roads aren't the only things that come together at a crossroad. It is said a lover may draw the object of their affection nearer to them if they seed each crossroad that lies between their houses with the right combination of mystic dusts or wondrous potions. Anyone sowing such magics into the soil should take care; this is an awfully public way to attract a lover, and failing to perform the rituals properly may draw the wrong man or even the wrong species.
- The powder of the road that sits beneath your footfalls is believed to hold power over you. A shaman need only collect the dust from where you've trodden and he can use it to inflict several spell effects on your feet and eventually the rest of your body. Given that one never knows what else has passed over that ground, it's not something to be undertaken lightly. A summoning spell that draws an animal can be a great boon. One that magnetizes pixies, undead, or sorcerers greater than oneself may be more troublesome.

The traveler should beware this power as well . . . an entire army, marching to make war on a small hamlet, may have given the hedge wizard just the ammunition he needs by all using the same intersection. Several scoops of dust and the right incantation later, and he could turn the army upon its master.

Run of the Mill, Middle of the Road

Not everything that happens at a crossroad is de facto evil or the beginning of some grand magical ritual. Crossroads were used for perfectly mundane activities throughout history. Great festivals are often held at the intersection, offering convenience, access, and an open feel to the occasion. Marketers would set up their stands and folks from all four

corners of the county would come to the gala. Feasts were celebrated this way, and business both public and private discussed.

Acting troupes would often erect their stages at the intersection, allowing them to draw in the greatest number of people and giving them the best "word of mouth" advertising as travelers to towns would carry news of the event.

Those on a journey would bivouac along the roadside, knowing that in plain sight on the shoulder they could count on some measure of safety from their exposure. Soldiers (the local ones forced to camp out on the way somewhere, anyway) would bunk down in this fashion because it gave them control of a valuable piece of territory while they slept. It was far harder for enemies to sneak up on them and take them unaware, or get their forces past the troops and into a key settlement.

Thus GMs can put most anyone out at a crossroads without it seeming too out of place or forced. Instead of inventing a reason for the party to seek a meeting with a particular guild or faction, the adventurers may stumble right into them at any intersection (and with proper clues dropped on the journey there, the atmosphere may already be set according to the referee's wishes).

A Left Turn at Albuquerque

"When a traveller in north central Massachusetts takes the wrong fork at the junction of Aylesbury pike just beyond Dean's Corners he comes upon a lonely and curious country."

--*The Dunwich Horror*

Fiction makes a lot of taking the wrong turn. You end up anywhere from the bullfighting ring to a deserted summer camp populated by rural whackos. A wrong turn is a good way to lead the party astray. It's terra incognita, and it's ripe with exploits. Role-players are well known for their habit of finding out in which direction the adventure lies and then turning to go the other way, so GMs will have plenty of opportunity to explore these unseen back roads (unless you just want to say the castle lies to the east, not the west).

And why does no one know what lies down this road or that? Do all travelers down that way all die? Do they become unwilling members of some dark power's army? The GM should give some consideration to this before making a blanket statement about how terrible it's thought to be.

For the improvisational GM, an empty road is a storehouse of possibilities. When was the last time your players got to name something? If they can journey into the unknown and clear the way for those who come after them, they will be hailed as heroes by anyone who passes this way, especially if they make sure their names are on every bend in the road and every stand of trees. If it's a haunted keep at the end of the road that has everyone cowering in fear, imagine the reputation that will build up around the men and women who emptied the structure of its foul inhabitants and now call it home.

I Meant to Do That

Not every wrong turn has to end in some evil hellhole. It may also lead to a glade of fairies, who have their own mischievous reasons for wanting to keep the big folk away from their glens. Perhaps it is only difficult terrain that makes the road so unfavorable -- if someone could cut through the last section of forest, or discover a hidden tunnel at the base of the mountains, it could become a whole new trade route. The heroes could make their camp a stop on the road, asking a toll for anyone wishing to use their bridge or be lead through the dark under.

The Path to Wisdom

"Enlightenment was not the jewel. Enlightenment was the choice."

-- The Fifth Doctor, *Enlightenment*

To bring this whole journey round-trip, sometimes an excursion isn't supposed to be about getting somewhere. Sometimes it's about going nowhere. Like the journey of life, sometimes the trip taken by a group of adventuring swordsmen and spell-slingers is about those stops they make along the way. Like Caine in Kung Fu, like Dorothy on her hallucinatory head-trip to see the Wizard, like pilgrimages to Mecca, the journey itself turns out to be the brass ring.

Some players show up to a game looking to kill stuff. Some want to amass enough treasure to bury a mountain troll. Still others want to achieve greatness. None of these things are to be gained by sitting at home and staring at the fire. They are the experiences gained over long months and years of hardship, and whether many of them realize it or not starting out, they'll get those during their time on the road.

GMs and their groups will spend a lot of time traveling; they may as well make sure there's something to look at along the way, and something worth talking about when they're done.

<http://www.worldpath.net/~minstrel/hobosign.htm>

<http://www.slackaction.com/signroll.htm>

<http://www.luckymojo.com/siva.html>

A Dictionary of Superstitions, Opie and Tatem

A Guide to the Saints, Kristin E. White

The List of Seven, Mark Frost

The Tale of Why John Hates Travel

by John W. Mangrum

Proposed Outline:

- Chapter One:** In Which the Protagonist Gets to the Indianapolis Airport a Little Early on Friday.
Chapter Two: In Which the Protagonist Takes the 5:35 PM Flight to Washington, D.C.
Chapter Three: In Which the Protagonist Takes the 9:20 PM Connecting Flight to Albany, NY.
Chapter Four: In Which the Protagonist Gets His Luggage, Takes a Cab, and is Home by Midnight.

The End

Actual Draft:

- Chapter One:** In Which the Protagonist Thinks Ahead and is Courteous to the Baggage Apes
Chapter Two: In Which a Dog is Sick
Chapter Three: In Which it Costs the Protagonist \$25 to be Considerate to the Check-In Lady
Chapter Four: In Which the Protagonist is at His Gate Two Hours Early
Chapter Five: In Which the Protagonist is Still at His Gate Three-and-a-Half Hours Later
Chapter Six: In Which the Protagonist Has a *Munchkin* Brainstorm En Route to Washington D.C.
Chapter Seven: In Which the Protagonist Arrives at Dulles Airport Five Minutes After His Connecting Flight Has Left and is Told to Come Back Tomorrow Afternoon
Chapter Eight: In Which United Airlines Hoses the Protagonist, Part I: No Hotel For You!
Chapter Nine: In Which United Airlines Hoses the Protagonist, Part II: A Tale of Two-and-a-Half Hours and the "You Want It, Come Get It" Baggage Pick-Up Philosophy
Chapter Ten: In Which the Protagonist Discovers That the Back of His Hands and Arms are Mysteriously Covered in Blood Blisters
Chapter Eleven: In Which United Airlines Hoses the Protagonist, Part III: The Mystery of the Ruined Suitcase
Chapter Twelve: In Which the Protagonist Finally Decides that United Airlines May Royally Screw Itself in the Ear
Chapter Thirteen: In Which the Protagonist's Flight from Indianapolis to Albany Includes a \$60 Midnight Cab Ride Through Washington D.C.
Chapter Fourteen: In Which the Protagonist is Hosed by Humanity but Saved by Technology, and Discovers that Eighty Pounds of Luggage Makes Sounds like a Locomotive
Chapter Fifteen: In Which the Protagonist Writes These Words at a Washington D.C. Train Station at 1:53 A.M.
Chapter Sixteen: In Which the Protagonist Gets to Plug His Computer In Again on the 3 A.M. Train to New York City, and Does Some Work, but Wisely Chooses to Sleep
Chapter Seventeen: In Which the Protagonist has Krispy Kreme Donuts in NYC at Dawn and Discovers that His Heart Makes Sounds Like a Locomotive
Chapter Eighteen: In Which the Protagonist Battles the Japanese Aboard the 7:15 AM Train to Albany -- and Loses
Chapter Nineteen: In Which the Protagonist Gets the Next-to-Last Seat on the Train -- and Loses It
Chapter Twenty: The Long March to Nowhere and Women with Purses
Chapter Twenty-One: In Which the Protagonist Damn Near Breaks His Finger While Stowing Himself with the Baggage
Chapter Twenty-Two: The Oblivious Frauline and the Suitcase
Chapter Twenty-Three: In Which the Protagonist Turns His Computer On Again and Types These Words at 8:30 AM While Stuffed in a Dark Space Behind a Seat
Chapter Twenty-Four: In Which the Protagonist Finally Arrives in Albany at 10:30 AM and Takes a Cab Home, Discovering in the Process that He Has Literally Ground the Wheels Off His 58 lb. Suitcase

Chapter Twenty-Five: In Which the Protagonist Greets his Cat

Chapter Twenty-Six: In Which the Protagonist Takes a Shower and Discovers that Almost Everything that Could Go Wrong with His Bathroom Plumbing, Has

Chapter Twenty-Seven: In Which the Protagonist Hops Online to Deliver This Tale

Chapter Twenty-Eight: In Which the Protagonist Tells Hackard that He's Behind on **[SECRET PROJECT 2.5]** and Will Talk to Him Later

Chapter Twenty-Nine: Epilogue: In Which the Protagonist Crawls into his Bed to Sleep and, Perhaps, to Drop Dead

The End

Pyramid Review

The Colonies RPG

Published by [Politically Incorrect Games](#)

Written by Brett M. Bernstein

Illustrated by Dennis J. McGarry

67-page PDF Document (3 megs); \$7.50

The Colonies is an RPG published by Politically Incorrect Games, and is a near future set game that can be seen to clearly wear its influences on its sleeve. In reading through its contents it was reminiscent of the BBC Television series *Blake's 7*; upon checking, there it was listed in the bibliography. The weapon illustrations looked vaguely like those from GDW's near future SF RPG, *2300AD*, and yes, there it is listed in the bibliography. Other relevant televisual references include *Earth: Final Conflict* and *V*, while movies like *Blade Runner* and *Total Recall* and the RPGs *Cyberpunk* and *Shadowrun* are also included in the source material appendix. This is not to suggest that the author has done anything untoward, but rather that in the case of the television series and films, *The Colonies* could be used to emulate them, at least in feel if not actuality.

[The Colonies](#) is available in two versions. The first requires the EABA rulebook (which supports several other games including a version of BTRC's *Timelords RPG*) and comes as a 15 MB PDF document for \$8. The second uses the PIG House Rules system, and it is this version being reviewed here.

The setting for *The Colonies* is roughly a hundred years in the future. By 2030 the fusion drive enabled tourism on Mars and it had replaced all fission plants. Every member of the United Nations had also signed and enacted a ban on nuclear weapons, which would be the cause of humanity's downfall. Without nuclear weapons, nothing could be done about the comet with a trajectory that would lead it directly into the Earth's path. Throughout 2037, hurried attempts were made to recreate the nuclear missiles dismantled years before, but it was all too late. Salvation came from space - a decoded alien signal from a species calling themselves the "Virimar," contained an offer to destroy the comet. The world leaders agreed and while the comet's destruction was assured, the explosion took out every orbital satellite, blanked many computer systems and prevented off-world communication. The Virimar were granted sanctuary in the central Australian outback, so that they could escape the orbital debris field. There they remained inside their ship, only meeting with the various government officials.

In 2081, as the debris field cleared, France initiated an aggressive annexation of cities across Europe, aided by Virimar technology. In response, the USA, China, the UK, Mexico and Canada formed a coalition army, but when this was sent to stop the French, sleeper agents in the home nations toppled governments and commanded the armies to oppress populations. Within a few years the Earth was been divided into provinces ruled by Virimar puppets; the Republic of France was the only surviving nation, with Eastern Europe given to it as a reward for its complicity. The collaborators live in comfort in tall skyscrapers, surrounded by desperate inner city neighborhoods and farmed suburbs beyond. Those charged with political crimes are sent to the labor camps . . .

With Earth suppressed, humanity's salvation lies off-world and beyond the solar system. Mars had survived and watched, learning from refugees what had happened at home and of a secret project put into practice in the few months before the comet's destruction; 20 vessels equipped with the revolutionary photon drive had been launched to colonize worlds in other systems. To date Mars has made contact with four worlds: Cassiopia, where perpetual darkness and savagely predatory wildlife forced some colonists to develop telepathy; Serpenti, a world with multiple rings that have caused mutations in the colonists; Reticuli, home to mysterious alien ruins which contained the secrets

to the science of biotech, but that have infected its colonists with nanotech -- and which has begun to infect those on Mars; and Orionis, split by a religious schism. Mars itself has become a democracy dominated by a variety of fairly benevolent corporations and the home to free humanity.

The Moon serves as a distribution and transit point for the Mars-run Off-World Militia, which is comprised of teams known as Liberation Cells, each of these have an established base near an Earth city, operating under orders via the Martian Defense Force liaison officers. In *The Colonies*, playing members of a Liberation Cell is the default set-up for the characters. Each cell requires one spacecraft pilot and one technician at least, but liaison officers, soldiers, mercenaries, hackers, scientists, refugees and even storytellers known as Pondsmiths.

Actually, Pondsmiths are a storytelling clan from the colony of Serpenti. Each world has a page devoted to it that contains a simple life path, much like that of R. Talsorian Inc.'s *Cyberpunk 2020 RPG*. These provide an origin, a little history, perhaps a reason for joining the Off-World Militia and possibly one or more special powers. The page also lists the costs of a character's traits (attributes) and skills. There is a page for each of the four known colonies, plus Earth and Mars.

Character generation begins by selecting a native world, rolling for background and then allocating some 150 points between traits and skills. There are six primary traits -- Strength, Dexterity, Perception, Willpower, Reasoning and Psionics, each rated from zero to six. Skills range from 0 to 12 and are divided into four categories: Fitness, Technical, Piloting, and Psionic. It is also possible to specialize within the various skills listed. The process is relatively simple, with character design being to some extent predetermined by the randomly rolled background (and its associated costs) and the desires of the player. An example of the creation process would have helped make it work.

While the game has a number of special abilities, including psionics, biotech, nanotech and cybernetic implants, each is balanced by a negative side effect. For example, the more a character uses his psionics, the more easy he is to detect, as measured by his Aura; likewise, Signature represents how easy the electromagnetic emissions from a character's implants are to detect; Contagion measures the degree to which a character's nanotech combine can be passed to another; and Aberration, how close a character's biotech chemical build-up is to causing negative side effects. These balances to the various special abilities do feel a little artificial, but at the same time, they nicely provide a means of curbing an over-reliance on them, and this should pressure a player to consider their use with care.

The Psionic powers are divided into Kinetics, (with the specialties of telekinetic Strike, Shield, Radiance -- speeding up the air to create plasma blasts and Sonics to manipulate sound), Passive (Empathy, Telepathy, and the meditative Quiet), Active (Trespass -- mind reading, Overload another's mind with a stream of confusing thought or block mind reading with Noise), and Intrusive (Implant false memories, implant and Trigger an action, and Extract whole memories or thoughts). Biotech or genetic enhancements tend to be metabolism, sensory, environment, or tissue growth-related, and are countered by aberrations such as radiation, spontaneous combustion, or reigning madness. Nanotech is divided between Biological Maintenance Units that improve the body's efficiency and Viral Units designed to infect others, such as the Disruptor Combine, which upsets the target's bioelectric system, whereas the Eater Combine attacks the body's organs, and the Poison Combine, the brain. Cybernetic implants include the usual range, but also devices known as limiters that can control a subject's ability to kill, commit violence, feel fear, emotion, and pain or even to speak. The Virimar use Limiters as punishment or as part of their super soldier experimentation program.

At its core, the dice mechanics in the PIG House Rules system are nicely simple. Roll 2d6, with low results bringing the desired outcome. Both penalty dice and bonus dice add to the number of dice rolled -- these are very clearly marked throughout the pages of *The Colonies* -- with one penalty die canceling out a bonus die, and so on. Where the number of bonus dice prevails, the two lowest dice rolled determine the outcome; where the penalty dice prevail, it is the two highest rolled that count. Roll under the skill total (the skill score plus its associated trait) to succeed.

It gets slightly more complex for advanced task rolls, where the result of the dice roll is compared with the character's skill total to get a difference called the margin. This is cross-referenced on a table with a difficulty determined by the GM to get a final outcome. Of course, the greater the margin, the greater the degree of success. As with the penalty and bonus dice added to action resolution, shifts in the difficulty of any attempt are clearly marked throughout the

game.

Again the complexity increases for combat, within the margin of success cross-referenced with the particular weapon being used to determine damage inflicted. Again the type is marked with symbols, lightning bolts for stress (non-lethal) damage, and Bugs Bunny-style lit bombs for lethal damage. The rules for combat cover most eventualities within its eight-page chapter, including all of the necessary charts. This includes underwater combat, fights within pressurized and zero-g environments, and using exotech (powered armor suits). Again, just as with character generation, there is no full example to aid the prospective player or even GM. Otherwise, combat is invariably short and brutal.

Exotechs and several other pieces of technology are covered over the seven different sections of the Technology Chapter. Besides the biotech, nanotech and implants, this includes weapons (explosive projectile or EP weapons, lasers, electro stun guns, and the mostly Virimar deployed particle streamers -- essentially gauss guns, and plasma firing pulse detonators), armor, exotech, miscellaneous items and drugs, the latter accompanied by side effect rules similar to those used for the psionics, biotech and nanotech. The rules for computers get a section to themselves and besides detailing the types and interfaces available, suggests several personalities that can be equipped. Two in particular, Oracle and Slave, are somewhere between a nod to and a swipe from *Blake's 7*.

All this technology is nicely, but simply done. Yet ***The Colonies*** gets even better when it covers Projects. This covers the design and invention of new items, similar to those already listed in the game so far, with the publisher encouraging the submission of such devices for use in further supplements. Of course, the appropriate skill and tools are required, but also actual experience points. The system seems simple and easy to use, but again let down by a lack of examples.

A sample cell and a description of the city of Philadelphia under the occupation of the Virimar collaborators support the default campaign set-up in ***The Colonies***. It includes a sample scenario within the one-page description, while the next two pages give another six mission ideas and several sample opponents. All of this could be adapted to the city of the referee's choice, as the real default setting has the game set in a gaming group's own town or city, with the player characters fighting for its liberation.

The Colonies comes as a 67-page PDF document, and bar the cover and the weapons, there are almost no illustrations. Likewise what color there is, is limited to the cover, and also to the pale gray-green wash given to the chapter and section headings. Where the lack of illustrations in a printed book would be seen as a downside, here it serves to keep the document size down. And while the artwork might serve to break up the text, this is not a real problem in ***The Colonies***, all due to its layout. Although it clearly shows its desktop publishing design, it is still done in a crisp, open style that is pleasing on the eye and easy to read.

What you get with ***The Colonies*** is really quite simple: a rebellion or resistance versus the authorities set-up, best typified by the [Star Wars RPG](#) from West End Games. While this game is very much in the vein of *V* meets *Total Recall* meets *Blake's 7*, it possesses a grittier tone than any of these influences. There is more breadth than depth to this game, as there are plenty of different elements, especially technical, around which to build scenarios and campaigns; helped of course that with this type of genre, ideas are two-a-penny. Beyond the basic game, the publishers have promised several supplements covering Mars, the other colonies, and the war against the Virimar. Politically Incorrect Games has already released two free supplements; one gives more details of the game's guns and the other provides background and life path pages for the newly discovered colonies of Oberon, dominated by technical castes, and Eridani, where the colonists have been reduced to primitive conditions after an exchange of low-yield dirty nuclear weapons.

The Colonies is a solid package that provides the GM with the necessary set-up to run a campaign within what is a familiar genre. It does this well, with a gritty feel to both the mechanics and to the various technological aspects of the game. Until the publishers provide more background, it still leaves plenty of space in which to run and develop a game. ***The Colonies*** is a well-presented, well-written game that comes in a credit-card-friendly package.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Pick

Promised Sands RPG

Published by [BBRACK Productions](#)

Written by Benjamin Rogers, Mike Rennaker, Robert Anderson, & Kelly Slaughter

394-page b&w softcover; \$36.95

Asking gamers who are already familiar with half a dozen RPG systems to learn another one is an uphill battle. That's exactly the battle chosen by BBRACK Productions with their new title ***Promised Sands***. To make things a little more palatable for gamers who don't really want to have to learn a new mechanic, they've made sure of a few important things. First, the game mechanic is simple to learn and use, but offers a surprising amount of depth. Second, the game world of ***Promised Sands*** is rich and complex, providing incredible potential for adventures.

Promised Sands uses what its creators call the "Trinary System" for determining everything in game, with the exception of character creation. It works like this: roll 3d10. Two dice are a percentile roll, which must be under or equal to the success value (SV) of the task at hand. The third d10, called the Effect Die (ED), is used to determine how successful the character is at the selected task. The percentile roll can be modified by reducing the value of the ED. For instance, if you need a 35 to succeed at a task and roll a 49, with a 6 on the ED, you can still succeed. Reducing the value of the ED by 1 drops the percentile roll by 5. So, in the example above, if you drop the ED to a 3, the percentile drops to 34. Success, but at a much lower level of effectiveness.

The mechanic is perhaps a bit trickier than that, but that's the basic gist. After a dozen rolls, it becomes simple. The world of ***Promised Sands***, on the other hand, has an extremely steep learning curve. The default game world of T'nah is one of the most detailed game environments ever developed. In addition to a host of character races, there are dozens of cultures, each with their own customs for marriage, dealing with death, and more. Each race and culture is presented in great detail, providing a very real and consistent world in which to play.

It does take some time to get used to the world, and the book itself isn't a lot of help in places. Virtually everything has an unfamiliar name, from occupations to articles of clothing, and it takes a lot of flipping between the page you're reading and another page gleaned from the index to figure out that a bukhanq is a woman's scarf. Similarly, you can't meet up with folks at the tavern near the market. Instead, you'll have to find each other in the vahna near the souq. With more and more exposure to the game world, this becomes easier, but it can be a bit off-putting at first.

The world of T'nah itself is a unique one. The game takes place some 3,000 years after a massive worldwide catastrophe of some sort. The game's creators are quick to point out that this cataclysm is not the result of a nuclear war, but more a natural upheaval on the lines of an ice age or massive climatic change. T'nah is a desert land where water is scarce, and clean, pure water is almost unheard of. BBRACK calls it "Arabic renaissance," and that's as accurate a two-word description as can be devised. Magic of two types -- Ido and Qai -- exist, as do some items from pre-cataclysm. These items, called "otec," are highly prized and considered magical by most who encounter them. As for the magic, Ido is more arcane while Qai tends to deal with living creatures, either healing or harming them.

Much of the book concerns the creation of characters, since ***Promised Sands*** is a character- and story-driven game. On first pass, character generation can be politely described as opaque at best. Expect your first foray into developing a character to take a good two hours. It becomes easier with practice, since much of the confusion is spent determining which of the scads of races and cultures best suit your character concept. An example of character creation would be a boon here, but except for some small examples in places, there's nothing.

Each character has nine basic statistics divided into three main categories. The Flesh characteristic is subdivided into Strength, Dexterity, and Stamina. Intellect, Perception, and Sanity make up the three parts of Mind. Finally, Will is subcategorized into Charisma, Insight, and Resolve. The way scores are generated for each is unique and fascinating. Three dice are used for each, but the dice used are determined in character generation. The character's race, culture, and chosen apprenticeship grant a die from d4 to d10 to each statistic. Each is rolled, and the total is where the character's given Attribute starts. The maximum from the three dice is the character's eventual maximum in the given stat. For instance, a Human from the Renizant culture who apprentices as a Kril (warrior) rolls a d6, a d4, and a d8 for Strength respectively. The total of the three dice is the character's stat, while the maximum (18 in this case) is the character's maximum Strength.

Once a character has a race and a culture (and two-thirds of the dice needed to determine stats), the next step is the interesting crapshoot called "Qualities." Each race and culture provides a pool of dice and bonus points used to add specific features to the character. These can be positive, negative, or neutral and are determined partially randomly. Each Quality has a variety of possibilities. To determine one, roll up to three dice granted from race and culture and add the total. If it comes up with a bad result, bonus points can be used to boost the result. It's not necessary (or generally possible) to roll on all of the Qualities tables: characters are considered average in those areas. For example, a player may wish to determine the Nimbleness of his PC. He selects up to three dice he has in his pool and rolls the appropriate die, generating a result from 1 (clumsy, with an appropriate minus to certain skills) to 10 (natural grace, with a bonus to some physical skills). If the result isn't what the player wants, any bonus points in the pool can be used to boost the result. Players who don't choose to roll on this table have a character of about average grace.

Assets and Detriments can further define the character and are usually provided by race, culture, or fiat from the Bard (GM). Once done here, the character moves on to selecting an apprenticeship and determining skills. This also provides the final die needed for creating the Attributes of the character. Finally, the character is equipped, much of which is a starting package dependant on the character's occupation. It's all a fairly laborious process, but results in an extremely well-defined character with a large selection of skills and abilities.

Combat in ***Promised Sands*** uses the same basic mechanic of $d\% + d10$, with the d10 determining the amount of damage caused with a hit. Rules for shock, blood loss, bone and nerve damage make combat a brutal affair not to be taken lightly. Real, permanent damage or death is always a distinct possibility, and on T'nah, there's no such thing as resurrection. Despite this, combat is surprisingly easy to resolve, and isn't generally the focus of the game in the first place.

Evidence that it's all about the playing instead of the rolling is apparent in the section on character rewards. Earned experience, called Wisdom, can be used to improve Attributes or boost skills, but can also be used to buy Legend points. These points, when used successfully, allow the character to append titles to his name. G'rlan the Wanderer, with the judicious use of Legend Points, can become G'rlan the Wanderer, Slayer of Drachen, Tamer of Wild Beasts, Kin to the Ebon Syl. Players are encouraged to include these titles on the character's sheets, and to have the character use all his titles whenever introduced to new NPCs.

Perhaps the best invention in a game full of new ideas and possibilities is that of dissonance, or DIS. Each player is given the opportunity to, once per game session or scene depending on the Bard's ruling, interrupt the Bard and take the story in a new way, change the results of a die roll, gain a reroll, or somehow change the course of action in a real way. A player whose character is thrown off a high building can use DIS to allow the character to grab a ledge on the way down, preventing a fatal fall. This ability to avert fate puts a lot of power into the hands of the players, giving them a little more control over the fate of their personas beyond the vagaries of random dice rolling, once again increasing the level of roleplaying and not letting a bad die roll get in the way of a good story.

Overall, ***Promised Sands*** is impressive in a number of ways. T'nah -- designed down to funerary customs for multiple cultures -- is complex and engaging in a way that worlds based more on numbers can't be. The bestiary, for instance, contains creatures evolved through thousands of years of harsh environment and mutation. With a few exceptions, there aren't any magical beasts, undead, or creatures that feed off the spirit of dying. It would be possible to play ***Promised Sands*** without the inclusion of magic of any sort without losing much in the way of creatures to encounter. The backstory of the game is left purposefully cloudy, not so much because of a lack of attention, but because this history

really isn't known, and is left to the Bard to develop in his own way.

There are flaws here, and they are mostly flaws of omission. The lack of an example for character generation is serious, as is the lack of a sample adventure for new Bards (although one is available on the BBRACK website). It's hard to complain of incompleteness in a book of this size, but dropping a couple of the stories used to enhance the setting in favor of some concrete examples of play and character design would have been a good idea. On the positive side, if character generation is too difficult or arduous for a given player or Bard, there are a number of archetypes provided. The book, well-written and entertaining to read, is not always logical in the way it is laid out, and finding the information needed for a particular part of gameplay or character design can be frustrating. A glossary of terms would have helped a great deal.

Ultimately, ***Promised Sands*** is a great game for an experienced Bard who wishes to present an exquisitely designed and lovingly crafted world to his group. The mechanic is simple enough for new gamers to understand in a few minutes. It does require a lot of work on the part of the Bard, since the world itself is unique and perhaps a touch obscure, but those willing to explore this dense tome and really understand the workings of ***Promised Sands*** will find that work repaid a hundredfold.

--Steve Honeywell

Pyramid Review

Diceland: Ogre

Published by [James Ernest Games](#)

Created by James Ernest & Falko Goettsch

Illustrated by John Zeleznik, James Ernest and Elizabeth Marshall

\$15.95

Just as the exhaust blasts from the spaceships in [Diceland: Space](#) reaches the shelves of your local games emporium, Cheapass Games follows up that expansion for the excellent [Diceland: Deep White Sea](#) with a whole new set. Where *Diceland: Space* was based upon a title of their own, the computer game [Strange Adventures in Infinite Space](#), with *Diceland: Ogre* the designers have obtained a license from another company, Steve Jackson Games and it based upon their boardgame, *Ogre/G.E.V.*

First published almost 30 years ago and then just costing just \$3.00, *Ogre/G.E.V.* still remains a solid and inexpensive wargame in spite of the five-fold rise in the price since 1977. In this game of near-future tactical armored warfare, the most feared weapon on the battlefield is the cybernetic attack vehicle known as an Ogre. The ultimate in tank design, an Ogre could be up to 50 meters long, armed to the hilt and with an inhuman intelligence layered under three meters of armor. On the battlefield, an Ogre is near unstoppable, trundling on lengthy tracks towards its target, steamrolling over anything that gets in its way, while its opponents throw everything they can muster at the behemoth in an attempt to take it apart one component at a time, hoping that they can disable it. Since the original boardgame, the *Ogre* line of games has received a number of expansions, been transferred to the computer screen, received both a line of miniatures (including a conversion to the eldritch with the *Spawn of Ogrehulhu* expansion) and macro-miniatures, decorated T-shirts, and a roleplaying supplement with *GURPS Ogre*.

Of course, there are some differences between *Ogre/G.E.V.* and *Diceland*. Both are wargames, but the latter is more akin to a miniatures game, though with all of its combat details and values printed upon each face of the dice. These change as the die takes damage or moves, both simulated by pushing down on the corner of the octahedral shaped die so that a different side is face upwards and pointing in a new direction.

Diceland: Ogre comes with . . .

- 17 standard-sized dice, representing the Infantry (four dice), G.E.V.s -- Ground Effect Vehicles or advanced hovercraft (three dice), and two dice each of each of the following: Light Tanks, Missile Tanks and Heavy Tanks, Howitzers and Mobile Howitzers.
- A double-sided 13½ by 12-inch rules sheet.
- Two sets of ¾-inch diameter counters numbered from zero to nine -- their use is optional and only really necessary in larger, more complex games (they also have to be cut out from the packaging).
- Two 5 by 4¾-inch color cards, one Track Card for the Ogre and the other for the Command Post.
- . . . And finally, the Ogre itself.

All of this comes in the standard *Diceland* flat pack, with the dice needing some simple glueless construction before play. This does not take long, but is easier if the instructions are followed.

In comparison with the standard sized dice -- each two-inches to a side -- the Ogre die is huge. At four inches to a side, it is roughly some four times larger than the others. Each of the dice is illustrated with an image of the unit it

depicts taken from the **Ogre** line, though if truth were told, in comparison with the illustrations from **Diceland: Deep White Sea**, these illustrations are rather drab.

The Ogre Tracking Sheet can be used for either the basic Ogre Mark III or the tougher Mark V. Various boxes show the damage it can take to its missiles, main and secondary batteries, its antipersonnel defense system, and its treads. As it fires off missiles or takes damage, the various boxes are crossed using a dry-erase marker (which the player must supply).

The Command Post represents a unit all of its own and sits at the very edge of the table throughout a game. It is the target of the Ogre unit and can be destroyed by reducing all of its 60 armor points to scrap, or when the Ogre actually trundles over it. While this is the basic aim of the Ogre in **Ogre/G.E.V.**, in **Diceland: Ogre** the first player to score 50 points is the victor. The only effect of destroying the Command Post is to deny its player access to the Command Post's all-important "Command All" Special Ability. This enables every die in an army on the table to take an action, and is both a primary and vital action if the Ogre is to be stopped. Against an Ogre Mark III, the defending player constructs an army of just over 30 points, or just over 50 if facing an Ogre Mark V. The Command Post is placed at the table's edge, while the Ogre is put down 20 inches away in the center of the table.

Once the pieces are in place, the game begins with the army player going first. On his turn, he can throw a die onto the table and have it maneuver, fire a weapon, or use a Special Effect. An army needs to get its dice onto the table as quickly as possible so that the Command Post can activate its Command All Special Effect. This is helped by the Call Infantry Special Effect of the Infantry dice, and the Call Tank Special Effect found on the Light Tank and G.E.V. dice, the latter also able to Call G.E.V. Neither the Howitzer dice nor the Missile and Heavy Tanks have any Special Effects on their dice. By using the Call Special Effect, an army can field its dice against the Ogre all ready for a combined assault.

The Ogre possesses just the one Special Effect -- "Shoot and Move" -- which enables it to undertake two actions per turn, as opposed to the one of the various army dice. It can fire just a single weapon each turn, but one that will hamper an army's build up of units (using their Call . . . Special Effect) is its Antipersonnel guns, which fire in all directions and are deadly to all Infantry dice and dangerous to G.E.V.s. Unlike the other dice, the Ogre die is not thrown during the game (though airdropping an Ogre would be an amusing option), and its maneuverability is susceptible to damage to its treads. The movement dots marked on the Ogre die are with numbers that correspond with the tread boxes marked on the Tracking Sheet. Treads can be taking fire and by rolling over units, destroying them in the process. Since an Ogre is so big, an army can specifically target its components, including the tracks.

Unlike in **Ogre/G.E.V.**, units destroyed in **Diceland: Ogre** are not completely wiped out, but as in **Diceland: Deep White Sea**, go into reserve status from where they can be thrown back into the game after a turn's wait. This gives **Diceland: Ogre** a far more fluid playing style, already present because in **Diceland**, range is relative rather than absolute.

The rules also make several suggestions for playing different games and scenarios with **Diceland: Ogre**. These include pitting Ogre versus Ogre, and army against army, as well as mixing the two (although another **Diceland: Ogre** set will be needed to play with more than one Ogre). It is also possible to play this game solo, though nowhere near as fun. Even more possible is the sending of dice from other **Diceland** expansion sets against an Ogre; the rules suggest that three Terran Destroyers from **Diceland: Space** would be a worthy foe for an Ogre Mark III. Dice from **Diceland: Deep White Sea** will be less effective because both the Ogre and the Command Post are immune to a wide range of Special Effects that those dice possess.

Diceland: Ogre showcases the versatility of the **Diceland** mechanics in adapting **Ogre/G.E.V.** into this format, while still retaining much of the original war game's flavor. In some ways, **Diceland: Ogre** can be seen as "**Ogre/G.E.V.** - lite," being easier to set up and play, far less fiddly, and more tactile than the boardgame. The translation does lose some flexibility, as there is just the single Ogre in the pack. Such minor gripes aside, **Diceland: Ogre** is a pleasingly fun reinterpretation of an old classic that will be enjoyed by both **Diceland** and **Ogre** devotees.

And on a final note, cats like this **Diceland** expansion set as much as the last . . . while the size of the Ogre die doesn't scare them at all.

--*Matthew Pook*

Hear Ye! Hear Ye!

One Million News Headlines and Rumors

by Jeff & Kristin Gaskill

The players in your game have defeated the dreaded Arch-Lich of Evil Incarnate, plundered his tower, carted away his mountain of riches, and are now relaxing in a nearby town after an orgy of spending, trading, leveling up, paying dues and tithes, and all of the other things adventurers do while loitering about in civilized areas. The characters are now hanging out in the local tavern, looking for something to do.

"So. What's happening in this burg?" the warrior inquires of the barkeep.

"Um . . . not much," replies the loquacious beer-flinger.

Sound dull? You bet. Wouldn't it be keen to have a handy way of coming up with news, rumors, and adventure hooks at the drop of a hat? Sure it would.

And here it is. Now you can instantly create any number of crazy things happening in your players' part of the multiverse with a few simple rolls of your favorite percentile dice.

How To Use the News Generator

Roll percentile dice from each of the first three lists -- Descriptions, People, and Events. For example, whipping out our handy bones and giving them a few shakes, we come up with 50, 22, and 42. Checking the tables we find that our first headline reads "Infected Diplomat Found."

With a little fast thinking, we can quickly come up with a possible scenario from this headline. He's infected with something (how about a nice magical malady, like Screaming Leaping Hives), he's a diplomat (he has to be from somewhere -- south is nice this time of year), and he's been found (from which one must assume that he was lost).

So now we've got a southern diplomat who's been missing and has just recently been found infected with the Screaming Leaping Hives. Why was he missing? How did he contract this horrible disease? If the characters are interested, you've got a new story subplot to follow and make your own. If they're not, just pop out a new headline -- Ravenous Old Coot Sucked Into Void, or Suicidal Prophet Kills Four in Tavern Brawl. If some of the results don't fit in with your world, go ahead and fudge those rolls' it wouldn't be the first time. Mix and match . . . that's the name of the game. Don't forget -- you can make any of the People selections plural. Why have just one Psychotic Halfling when you can have three or four for the same price?

Stop the presses!

Descriptions

1. Accused
2. Adventurous
3. Ancient
4. Angry
5. Bearded
6. Beautiful
7. Belching
8. Belligerent

People

1. Actor
2. Alchemist
3. Artist
4. Assassin
5. Baker
6. Bandit
7. Barbarian
8. Bard

Events

1. Ambushed by Bandits
2. Arrested
3. Begins Evacuation of Ancient Tomb
4. Begins Week-long Fast
5. Beheaded For Tax Evasion
6. Breaks Out of Prison
7. Burned at the Stake
8. Buys Haunted House

9. Bellowing	9. Bastard Child	9. Captured By Homemade Glue Trap
10. Bewildered	10. Beggar	10. Caught In Torrid Love Affair
11. Bewitched	11. Blacksmith	11. Commits Suicide In Novel Way
12. Blasphemous	12. Bowyer/Fletcher	12. Committed To Asylum
13. Bored	13. Brewer	13. Condemns _____**** Aggression
14. Brilliant	14. Butcher	14. Considers Defecting
15. Cheery	15. Captain	15. Courageously Battles _____*
16. Confused	16. Caravaneer	16. Covered in Dragon Excrement
17. Courageous	17. Carpenter	17. Crushed by Runaway Wagon
18. Cursed	18. Child/Children	18. Cursed by the Gods
19. Delusional	19. Conman	19. Defends Bridge Single-handedly
20. Deranged	20. Cultist	20. Defies All Odds
21. Dignified	21. Dark Elf	21. Defies Lord -- Refuses To Wear Pink
22. Diseased	22. Diplomat	22. Demands Justice
23. Doomed	23. Dock Worker	23. Destroys Local Orphanage
24. Drunken	24. Doomsayer	24. Disappears
25. Dying	25. Druid	25. Discovers Body in Chimney
26. Egotistical	26. Dwarf	26. Discovers Lost Dungeon
27. Emaciated	27. Elf	27. Discovers New Route
28. Enslaved	28. Executioner	28. Disintegrated in Magical Duel
29. Escaped	29. Farmer	29. Doing it "The Old-fashioned Way"
30. Fiendish	30. Fisherman	30. Eaten by _____*
31. Filthy	31. Gardener	31. Enters Academy
32. Fire-breathing	32. Gatekeeper	32. Enters Tournament
33. Flatulent	33. Gladiator	33. Escapes
34. Flying	34. Glassblower	34. Executed
35. Foreign	35. Gnome	35. Exiled from Homeland
36. Gibbering	36. Gravedigger	36. Expelled from Guild/Position
37. Gigantic	37. Guard	37. Explodes
38. Gleeful	38. Gypsy	38. Explores Local Ruin
39. Glowing	39. Half-elf	39. Fighting in Duel Tomorrow
40. Greedy	40. Halfling	40. Fingers Accomplices in Murder For Hire Scheme
41. Grimy	41. Half-orc	41. Forms New Guild
42. Grinning	42. Harlot	42. Found
43. Grotesque	43. Herbalist	43. Found Guilty/Innocent
44. Grumpy	44. Horse Trader	44. Found to be Shapeshifter
45. Hairy	45. Human	45. Frozen Solid
46. Hated	46. Humanoid	46. Funds Charitable Organization
47. Hideous	47. Hunchback	47. Gathering Converts
48. Holy	48. Hunter	48. Hired or Fired
49. Homicidal	49. Innkeeper	49. Hunts Family's Killer
50. Infected	50. Jackass	50. Identifies Killer
51. Irate	51. Jester	51. Infected with Lycanthropy
52. Irritating	52. Jeweler	52. Kills 4 in Tavern Brawl
53. Laughing	53. Knight	53. Knighted by King/Queen
54. Lecherous	54. Leper	54. Knocked Out of Tournament
55. Local	55. Madman	55. Leaves Fortune to 29 Cats
56. Lonely	56. Magistrate/Judge	56. Lost in Underground Horror
57. Lustful	57. Maid/Butler	57. Lynched by Angry Mob
58. Lying	58. Maiden	58. Mauled by _____*
59. Malevolent	59. Mayor	59. Missing
60. Merciful	60. Merchant	60. Perishes in Dungeon "Accident"
61. Misshapen	61. Miner	61. Plummets from Precipice
62. Monstrous	62. Minstrel	62. Polymorphed by Angry Wizard

63. Morose	63. Monster *	63. Practicing Foul Rites
64. Murderous	64. Noble **	64. Presumed Dead
65. Mysterious	65. Old Coot	65. Rampages Across Countryside
66. Oafish	66. Pirate	66. Really a Polymorphed _____*
67. Plane-hopping	67. Poet	67. Released from Custody
68. Portly	68. Porter	68. Remains Unconscious After Vicious Attack
69. Possessed	69. Potter	69. Rescued from Dungeon Mishap
70. Psychotic	70. Priest	70. Rescues Kidnap Victim
71. Ravenous	71. Prophet	71. Retires
72. Raving	72. Ranger	72. Returns
73. Reclusive	73. Rebel	73. Rises From the Grave
74. Reeking	74. Refugee	74. Robs Jeweler
75. Roving	75. Royal ***	75. Runs Rampant Through the Streets
76. Scandalous	76. Sage	76. Searches for Missing Daughter
77. Scarred	77. Sailor	77. Seeks Family Heirloom
78. Seedy	78. Scoundrel	78. Seeks to Hire Adventurers
79. Shadowy	79. Scribe	79. Slain
80. Shifty	80. Scurvy Dog	80. Still at Large
81. Shrieking	81. Seer	81. Struck Dead by Foul Magic
82. Sickly	82. Sewer Worker	82. Sucked into Void
83. Sneaky	83. Shepherd	83. Suddenly Goes Deaf/Blind
84. Spellcasting	84. Smuggler	84. Surrenders to Authorities
85. Stunted	85. Soldier	85. Survives Assassination Attempt
86. Stylish	86. Stable Boy	86. Suspected Spy
87. Suicidal	87. Stalker	87. Targeted by Cult
88. Surprised	88. Stonecutter	88. Terrorizes Village
89. Tattooed	89. Storyteller	89. Throws "End of the World" Party
90. Terrified	90. Street Urchin	90. Travels to Another Plane of Existence
91. Thrill-seeking	91. Street Vendor	91. Tried for Treason
92. Traveling	92. Tailor	92. Turned to Stone
93. Ugly	93. Teamster	93. Vanishes After Explosion
94. Undead	94. Terrorist	94. Visited by Divine Manifestation
95. Vampiric	95. Thief	95. Visits Local Orphanage
96. Virtuous	96. Vagabond	96. Wanted by Authorities
97. Wandering	97. Warrior	97. Wanted by Bounty Hunters
98. Weeping	98. Wench	98. Wins Tournament
99. Wretched	99. Witness	99. Wins Award in Chili-cooking Contest
100. Youthful	100. Wizard	100. Witnesses Alchemy Lab Accident

- * Insert your favorite monster here
- ** Duke, Duchess, Earl, Knight, Viscount, etc.
- *** King, Queen, Prince, Princess
- **** Insert your favorite war-mongering country here

No Means Yes and Yes Means No!

On many levels, RPGs provide a lot of wish fulfillment. You can be smarter than you normally are -- stronger, wittier, more attractive, richer, and more powerful. You can also encounter problems you generally couldn't in real life, but might enjoy exploring in a controlled environment. ("Oh, no! The Butterscotch Vixens have me chained in their dungeon!") And, of course, you get to explore worlds and encounter beings that simply don't exist elsewhere.

But there's one thrill that, at least for me personally, may top many other thrills provided by roleplaying. In a game, you're able to do things that are expressly forbidden in the real world; in fact, circumstances can warp in a game to allow you to do things that are not allowed within the game itself.

Generally these circumstances take the form of statements like, "Under any but the gravest circumstances we would not allow this. However . . ." Sometimes it's expressed more like, "Deeds such as yours would normally be punishable by death. However, given the service you have done for our people . . ."

In short, it's *fun* to do things you're not supposed to do. So how do you interject this bit of wish fulfillment into a game?

Well, first you must deny the players.

Minor digression: Isaac Asimov, in his robot series of stories, had three "immutable" laws that all robots had to follow. Then many of his plots came from a robot who seemingly violated one (or more) of those rules, and it fell to the protagonists to figure out what had happened. This technique, broadly applied, has innumerable applications to gaming; in this case I'll restate it as, "Tell the players that there are immutable rules, and then allow them to break those rules."

As such, in order to make this technique satisfying to the players, you first need to provide them with rules or restrictions.

These restrictions can be physical, and tied to the nature of the universe:

"No one can meet himself within the same timeline."

"A magician who learns of both Chaos and Order Magics will surely destroy his sanity."

"Don't cross the streams!"

They can also be social, mental, legal, or cultural:

"A woman cannot learn of the sciences; it's just not . . . *ladylike!*"

"Under penalty of death, none may directly address the Emperor nor lay a finger upon him."

"Only those sworn to the K'nall Triumvirate may access their Holy Library."

(There is also another type of rule, which will be explained below . . .)

Those tied to the physical nature of the game world are difficult to make convincing, since they rely on players suspending their disbelief to envision the one -- usually elaborate -- set of circumstances required to make the rule-breaking possible: "Well, *normally* you cannot cast more than one ritual a year. But . . . umm . . . today is the dawning of the Sign of Bullshidious, during which one may cast *two* rituals!" They are also often less satisfying because they almost all rely on the GM spoon-feeding the specific method of skirting the rules to allow his plot to progress. On the other hand, done correctly in the right story, violating the rules of the universe *can* be very powerful; after all, it's pretty neat to have a character that has explicitly done the impossible.

Rules tied to society are much easier to implement, and as such much easier to break. That's not to say it's *trivial* to break these rules; they are generally imposed by forces with enough clout to keep someone from violating the social

contract, and enough power to make the violator miserable for having done so. Again, this denied thing can be anything: a reclusive sage who hasn't spoken with anyone for decades, a warehouse full of mystic artifacts recovered in the 1930s, the crown jewels.

Regardless, both types of techniques work best if the GM lets the players know about the rules ahead of time. This lets them reflect about what is being denied, and possibly attempt to interact with the element *before* the GM intends within the story. For example, if the heroes learn that they have been given permission to kill a foozlebeast for its blood so they may save the Crown Prince, it's nowhere near as powerful to inform them that, by the way, the foozlebeast is sacred, and ordinarily it would be taboo to hunt one. Informing the players of the rules ahead of time gives them a chance to savor the "naughtiness" of breaking them.

There is an exception to this. There are rules that are intrinsic to the game world; these are generally obvious, and do not require explicit statement. For example, in a modern campaign the heroes might learn of an attempt by aliens to obliterate Washington D.C., and realize that, to keep the invaders from focusing their death ray, they must destroy the "antenna" -- the Washington Monument. In this circumstance it isn't required to state ahead of time, "Oh, by the way, it would be very, very bad to destroy the Washington Monument." Intrinsically, the players know this. (Of course, it can be interesting to have an NPC point out, "You know, it's a good thing you've got permission for this operation . . .")

Generally speaking these rules revolve around most of your obvious crimes: killing, destruction, theft, and the like. If the players learn that they must steal the Emperor's signet ring without his knowledge to fulfill a prophecy, then they don't need to be informed that what they are doing would be Very Bad under normal circumstances. (Even then, it might be good to inform the players ahead of time that the Emperor has such a signet ring . . . or even that the Emperor exists.)

So you've denied the players something. Now . . . you let them have it. Yes, the McGuffin introduced adventures earlier is now realized, and the heroes will be permitted an audience with the reclusive sage, given a chance to rummage around the government's ultrasecret warehouse, or allowed to use the experimental wall-phasing suit.

There isn't much to this part. If you've done your job in hyping up these forbidden possibilities, then getting to actually access the noun in question should be exciting for the players (assuming, of course, that what was denied is interesting; getting to access the government's secret warehouse and learning that it's full of nothing but wiener whistles and Alf puppets might result in irked gamers).

Afterwards, probably the best thing you can do is make sure the special encounter the players got to experience is still a big deal. After all, being told that the heroes could talk directly to the Boy-Emperor for this *one* instance makes it a perpetual big deal. Having the same Boy-Emperor decide that talking to the heroes has opened him up to society, and thus he'll talk to anyone from now on, makes the "rule-breaking" of the heroes less special. (This step isn't crucial, and in a lot of ways it's interesting to make the heroes merely the harbingers of some previously-impossible-but-now-possible deed. However, it's usually more special to punctuate the heroes' accomplishment by ensuring that others can't break the rule they did; in fact, it's often best to make sure the *heroes* can't break that rule again . . .)

The real world has a seemingly endless supply of forces telling us "no." Most game worlds have at least a comparable number of things denied the PCs. But letting the heroes break the rules every so often can be a great thrill that will make an adventure - and perhaps even a campaign - truly memorable.

--Steven Marsh

Big Brother is an Idling Bachelorette Survivor

Week 3

by Steven Marsh

Whereas [last week](#)'s "BBiaIBS" installment was punctuated by a startling development, this week was best defined when something dramatic and rivetting utterly failed to happen. Other networks might have sought to fix this and ensure high ratings by introducing, say, flesh-eating insects to the mix, but we at *Pyramid* know that there is no greater render of flesh than the author's own hands as a last-minute deadline looms.

The voting for the second week closed on Monday, 11:59PM Eastern Time. These were the results:

1. **Sandy Antunes** -- 3.5711 (443 votes)
2. **Andy Vetromile** -- 3.2457 (403 votes)
3. **Aaron Rosenberg** -- 2.8022 (450 votes)

By a considerable margin, Aaron Rosenberg escaped the claustrophobic challenge of composing a 5,500-word article in three days. This left Sandy and Andy faced with that task; both of them completed this with hours to spare.

And so the decision of who is the *ultimate* BBiaIBS champion rests in your hands. Voting for this installment will close at Thursday, 11:59PM Eastern Time. The winner will fail to have his life irrevocably changed, he shall not be presented with a multimillion-dollar contract, and plans to have a 20-foot-tall gold statue erected in his honor are unlikely to be realized given a preliminary round of communications with our bookkeeper. But we'll probably buy the winner a beverage of his choice at the next convention we encounter him at.

Who will rise to the challenge? **Who** will be the ultimate survivor of the Big Pyramid? **Who** will drink free?

Ye Olde Majik Shoppe

A Half-Dozen Odd, Strange and Just Plain Weird Magical Items

by K. David Ladage

In the dawning of the second age, the great mystic and sage, Kendalge, reigned as the land's premier magical talent. History paints a picture of a man that was a regal intellectual that brushed elbows with the movers and shakers of his day; some texts paint him as the *prime* mover and shaker, others see him as a tool of those that were truly in power.

He is said to have advised a dozen Kings over his lifetime, held a plethora of offices and titles, and was even dubbed Lord Protector of the Northern Regions at one point in his career. He was brilliant, powerful and wise. This much is not disputed.

However, owing to many of his memory-repressing spells, history does *not record* (save that which can still be found in mystic and guarded tomes) that he was eccentric to the point of insanity; some claim he had between three and six personalities running about in his head. Others claim he was actually possessed by a variety of otherworldly creatures over the course of his life. He would have conversations with people, and a few moments later act as though he had no recollection of having ever met them, let alone spoken to them. He was a wild-card in most of the conflicts that took place in his day.

No matter how you define the cause of his mental instability, one cannot deny the fact that over 60 of the most powerful and sought-after magical items in history are his creations (from Helicancile, the great shield that held off the armies of Lord Holstan for three days and nights; to Gemmomarmor, the mighty diamond golem that defeated the Hordes during the Northern Invasions).

Many a powerful and talented mage has spent their entire lifetime trying to emulate but one of his masterworks. Still . . . with that much going on in one's head, it should come as no surprise that Kendalge also created some of the oddest and just plain *weird* magical items history has ever known. Below we see but a half dozen examples of his unique perspective on the world.

Aaron's Sword

During the reign of King Frederick XIX, the King's eldest son, Aaron, commissioned Kendalge to construct him a mighty weapon. However, it was well-known that Kendalge was not fond of the King's son, since Kendalge had often openly complained that the boy was a danger to the throne; Kendalge claimed Aaron was a braggart that would kill his father for the power of the throne. Still, it was Kendalge's duty to comply with the Crown Prince. The result of six months of work was Aaron's Sword.

The weapon is a fine quality double-edged thrusting broadsword. The blade has some intricate watermarking that extends to within 1/64th of one inch from the edges. These markings seem to be in a state of continuous, fluid motion. The blade has a dull green glow to it that gets brighter as the moon wanes and dims as it waxes; the cutting edges, however, glow in a sickly yellow that gets somewhat brighter the more people are within 60 feet of the blade. When any form of detect magic is cast upon the blade, it will show as having many, sometimes conflicting magical properties of such intense power as to overwhelm the one doing the detection. All of this is for show -- several intricate and powerful illusions cast upon the blade to impress the young man that would wield it. The sword does have two "real" enchantments cast upon it, however. These, however, are all but undetectable.

The first is a simple charm that draws the wielder to the sword. Once you have the weapon on your person for more than an hour, the desire to maintain possession of the blade becomes ingrained. The wielder will refuse to use any other weapon in combat, they will cherish the blade above all others. Any attempt to point out the irrationality of such

a belief is useless. The second is that the wielder will grow more and more paranoid the longer he holds the weapon. This effect will not be noticeable for several weeks, as the initial changes are very subtle. After a few months, however, the wielder will trust absolutely no one. The strange thing about these enchantments is that they will only work if the wielder is a reigning Monarch . . . otherwise, they are dormant and do nothing.

It was less than six weeks after Aaron was presented with the sword that he assassinated his father and took the throne. Within another week, nobody would see King Aaron III lest he carried his favorite sword with him. After less than eight months on the throne, Aaron had killed all of his advisors, claiming they were plotting against him. His reign ended in a bit more than a year, with Aaron's younger sister, Chelsea, taking over. Aaron was buried with his prized weapon, although the grave was robbed a decade later. The fate of the blade was unknown.

Bauble of Time

Of the many areas of magic that Kendalge was obsessed with, none fascinated him quite the way that time did. He wrote in his journals that "Time is like invisible man building a wall of stone. You cannot see it, but its efforts result in effects that are obvious."

Although his most noteworthy artifact of time was his jewel-encrusted brooch (which, according to legend, often allowed him to react to events several seconds before they happened), most texts ignore or relegate the Bauble of Time to a footnote.

The Bauble is a small, spider-like piece. Eight four-inch-long thin spines of silver extend from the central bulb much like a compass. The bulb houses a glass sphere approximately two inches in diameter. The sphere is visible from the top and bottom and is half-filled with mercury. To activate the Bauble one must shatter the glass; thus it is obvious that the Bauble is a one-use item.

When the glass shatters, the closest sentient being to the bauble is removed from the time stream for, what appears to the outside observer to be, something between 10 seconds and one minute -- the exact time seems to be completely random. The affected individual will disappear completely, including all possessions, reappearing (from their point of view, instantly) in the same location they were in before they left. If anyone or anything is moved (or moves) into the location the affected creature was in, he will reappear in the closest, safe location available.

The first time the Bauble was used was by Kendalge's apprentice, Halvord. Halvord had been cleaning the study when he knocked over a large bookcase. The bulb hit the stone floor and shattered. He disappeared, and the books landed all over the floor where he had been; the nearest place for him to reappear was within the adjacent lab where Kendalge was working. He startled Kendalge, who dropped the elixir he had been working on, losing several weeks worth of work. Needless to say, Halvord had his duties severely increased for quite some time following the incident.

Chalice of Humility

If there was anything that could be said for Kendalge, it was that he was a humble man. He never spoke much of himself and was always polite and courteous. The same could not be said for many that he served. One such Monarch was King Beaufort VII. Once the King had a few servings of wine, his mouth would often get the better of him as he would begin spinning half-true tales of his own accomplishments. This often angered Kendalge who found such behavior assinine.

Kendalge crafted and enchanted a large set of chalices that would imbue magical power to any drink that was placed within them. These ornate drinking vessels were made of silver and platinum, engraved with an ornate maze-like pattern and a single one-carat diamond in each of the 64 chalices he made.

In addition to the humbling effect (see below), the diamond in the chalice will also change color to warn of poisons (yellow), spoiled drinks (orange), and even the presence of blood (red).

But the primary function of the chalices was humility. As the drinker continued to imbibe, he would grow more and more humble. The effect would last for as long as two hours after he finished drinking. According to the diaries of Queen Chelsea V (Kendalge's fourth wife and Great-Great-Granddaughter to Chelsea IV, the sister to Aaron), the effect was so subtle as to be nearly undetectable -- the drinker is simply incapable of bragging. He can still lie all he wishes, but not to save face, or to inflate his own perceived position. Chelsea's diaries go on to muse "had these wondrous vessels been made in the days of my Great-Great-Grandmother, perhaps King Aaron's fate would have been much more subdued."

Dream Catcher

Kendalge, aside from his obvious magical talents, was well-known for his superstitious nature. He collected four-leaf clovers (and is even said to have bred five-, six-, and eight-leaf varieties in his time); he would knock on wood after he said anything of any importance; he often prayed after seeing falling stars; he refused to do any magic on the nights of the new moon; and so on and so forth. He is said to have prayed to no less than 60 Gods, ensuring (in his mind) that he did not incur the wrath of any of them, and as a sign of respect. The man was, as it was written by Queen Chelsea V, "my sweet is a thoughtful and caring man that, to my eternal delight, has more quirks than one is capable of counting."

One of the many things he feared was that his next great idea would come to him in a dream and he would forget it when he awoke. He also believed strongly in the prophetic power of dreams (although no writing suggests that he ever had such a dream). As a result, however, he created his dream Catcher. The dream Catcher comes in two parts: a simple, nondescript sleeping cap and a specially enchanted crystal ball.

Whenever a sentient being places the cap upon their head, it will begin to induce sleep almost immediately. Most people will fall asleep within the first five minutes of wearing it. Additionally, they will get more rest than normal as the cap helps to induce a deep, REM sleep. One hour of sleep with the cap is said to be the equivalent of two and a half hours of normal sleep. In addition, in the fact that the dreams of the sleeper are stored within the cap. This cap can then be placed upon the crystal ball, much as it is on the wearer's head, and from there the dreams of the evening can be replayed. Simple verbal commands allow the viewer to speed through material, slow it down, stop it altogether to view a given scene more carefully, zoom in or out, rewind, and so on. The dreams are stored for as long as the cap is not placed upon the head of another sentient being.

In the time that Kendalge had these wondrous items, he is said to have played back no less than two dozen of his dreams -- each one revealing additional insights that he applied to his magical research. Within a few years of using the cap, he found he no longer needed it, as his memory of his dreams was crystal clear each morning. He was never able to determine if this was a side-effect of the magic, or if it was simply due to the fact that he had become more in tune with his dream-state.

Eye of the Storm

Legend tells that Kendalge was a promising enchanter even as a child. Most of these legends have been proven false over the years. One, however, seems to have continued to live on despite the 300 years since his death. The item keeps showing up for brief periods, and then fading away into the realm of myth and legend again. The actual existence of the item cannot be verified, nor can the "fact" that Kendalge supposedly enchanted it when he was only 11 years of age. The Eye of the Storm is, of all things, a small cats-eye style marble.

According to the most accepted version of the legend, Kendalge (in his youth) enjoyed playing marbles more than any other pastime. The Eye of the Storm was his prized possession in those days. The marble was a perfect sphere -- flawless in its creation. The marble, when placed between the thumb and forefinger in a marble "shooter" position and struck against any other object, will move the struck object up six inches to six feet in addition to any distance that it would move normally by being so struck. Regardless of mass, it will move. There is also a complication with this very powerful item; if it is ever dropped from a height of more than two feet, it will disappear upon striking the ground only to reappear sometime later (the legends waffle between weeks, months, and years) in some other, seemingly random

location. This disappearing act is not so limited in other writings of the tale. Some claim that it will disappear if it remains out of sight for more than a day, is placed in a bag containing any other marbles, is not used for more than a week, and so on.

The use of the marble in a game of marbles, where a circle is drawn in the soil and marbles are placed in the center for the players to strike out of the circle using their shooters, is obvious. However, through history, other uses have been found. Doors have been knocked open and walls moved; one castle siege is said to have begun with a wall shifted five feet, allowing the seizing army a new entrance. The many writings of Kendalge do little to verify (or place to rest) the legends surrounding this strange item.

Fly Paper

According to his second wife, Kendalge had a tendency to lose various scrolls and papers. He would work in his tower for hours scribing various formulae and a light breeze would blow his work into a state of disarray; he would place papers on his desk only to have his servants (or apprentices) move them without his knowledge; he would run out of room for filing on his desk and lose track of where some where in the piles upon piles of papers he was going through; and of course, people often attempted to steal his work. In order to correct all of this, he invented Fly Paper.

Fly Paper is exactly like any other parchment; it serves the same functions and is not different in any outward appearance. The only thing that makes it different is that, once placed somewhere, a command word of "stay" is uttered while hands are still in contact with the paper and the paper will form a mystic anchor and thus not move from that location; this location can even be in mid-air (hence the name) where it will remain airborne. By touching the paper and uttering the command word "come" the paper will release itself from its mystic anchor and behave as normal paper again. This second command word must be uttered by the same person that anchored it in the first place. This effect can be used repeatedly, although some tales indicate that it is limited (the legends disagree as to the exact number of "charges" but they range from six up to two-score).

It is possible, with significant effort, to move the paper (and break the anchor). Doing so would require care (so as to not rip the paper) and strength; it would take two to four average men to apply enough pressure. It is obviously harder to get the proper leverage on Fly Paper that rests on a surface than it is to do so with paper that is currently floating. However, if the paper is resting on a physical object, it is possible to move the surface the paper is on (thus "cheating" the enchantment). One of the more interesting characteristics is the fact that the paper can be bound to other sheets, thus increasing the strength needed to move the lot of them (see the book, below).

How Kendalge made this wondrous paper has never been discovered. Of the 24 reams of paper he enchanted this way, he is said to have used over 20 in his work -- indicating that there are still some four reams available for use. One ream is accounted for in the collection of books that make up his library. The 480 sheets were all bound to a book and collectively placed in a shelf in his tower. Since they are all locked into place together, and in contact with one another, none have ever been able to read the volume, since it would take the combined strength of approximately 1,500 men to move it.

Cornelius

by Joe Taylor

Cornelius is an ancient-looking African elephant, with a bulging forehead and dark eyes full of malignant intelligence.

Total Points: 616 points

Attributes: ST 240 [-]; DX 12 [-]; IQ 13 [100]; HT 17/50 [-]

Racial Package: Elephant [263], buy off Bestial [10], Chummy [10], Dull [1], Innumerate [5], Presentient [20], and Staid [1].

Advantages: Absolute Direction [5]; Acute Hearing +3* [-]; Alertness +3* [-]; Damage Resistance +4* [-]; Eidetic Memory [30]; Enhanced Move x1/5* [-]; Extra Flexibility (1 limb)* [-]; Extra Reach (1 limb)* [-]; Less Sleep x4* [-]; Passive defense +3* [-]; Penetrating Call* [-]; Peripheral Vision* [-]; Strong Will +4 [16]; Subsonic Speech* [-]; Striker (Long Tusk, thrust/imp, reach 1) x2 [100]; Telepathy Power 10 [50]; Unaging [15].

Disadvantages: Bad Grip* [-]; Bad Temper [-10]; Bully [-10]; Cannot Jump* [-]; Frightens Animals [-5]; Hidebound [-5]; Horizontal* [-]; Inconvenient Size* [-]; Increased Life Support x2* [-]; Loner [-5]; Mute* [-]; No Depth Perception* [-]; One Fine Manipulator* [-]; Poverty (Dead Broke)* [-]; reduced Dodge 7* [-]; Sadism [-15]; Secret (**) [-30]; Self-Centered [-10]; Semi-Literate [-5]; Slow Eater* [-]; Social Stigma (Valuable Property)* [-].

Quirks: Careful and patient; Considers killing animals to be murder (but not as much fun as killing people); Dislikes other elephants; Likes bananas; Refuses to be ridden by anyone [-5].

Skills: Area Knowledge (Congo)-18 [5]; Area Knowledge (Zooland)-15 [2]; Survival (Jungle)-16 [4]; Survival (Plains)-14* [-].

Psionic Skills: Mental Blow-15 [8]; Mindwipe-15 [8]; Sleep-12 [2]; Suggest-16 [10]; Telecontrol-16 [10]; Telerecieve-18 [14]; Telesend-18 [14].

Languages: Dutch-13 [1]; English-13 [1]; French-13 [1]; Munukutuba-13 [1].

* Paid for with Racial Package (BE109).

** Cornelius' Secret includes not only his sentience and mental abilities, but his history of sadism and murder as well. He knows that if anyone begins to suspect his true nature he is done for, and will stop at nothing to keep his secret safe. Because of this, he has managed to avoid gaining any sort of unusual Reputation.

*"Death is an Elephant,
Torch-eyed and horrible,
Foam-flanked and terrible."
-- Vachel Lindsay, Congo*

For thousands of years, there have been tales in Africa of places that are haunted, where men lose their minds and become possessed by murderous spirits. Some age-old stories speak of areas where even the animals act strangely, tearing at each other or themselves. There are legends of once-great cities located deep in the jungle that mysteriously vanished, with no trace of the inhabitants -- and whispered tales of lost villages which were later found with everyone murdered and horribly mutilated. And in the most remote corners of Africa, there are a small number of myths about a lone elephant who brings evil and madness with him.

Though he has lurked at the edge of human society for ages, none of the myths that grew up around Cornelius told the real truth -- that he was somehow born possessing intelligence, sentience, and psionic powers. Surrounded by witless

animals, Cornelius went mad with isolation long before he first encountered mankind. After years of taking out his frustrations on the beasts around him, he had developed a taste for sadism. When he finally did meet other creatures with real minds and real intelligence, he found it entertaining to manipulate them into doing each other in as well. Always careful to keep his true nature a secret, Cornelius preferred to prey upon isolated peoples or random travelers, and withdrew further into the jungle as humanity expanded.

In the 19th century, when ivory traders began to open up the heart of the Congo, they did not realize that they were invading the territory of an ancient, powerful force. Cornelius found puppets who were more than willing to slaughter other animals under his direction. With a little more manipulation, he had them carrying out acts of cruelty on their own kind as well. For the first time, Cornelius was in an environment where he could exercise his sadistic will on a grand scale. History only records a small part of the carnage he masterminded. When the ivory trade finally died down, he wandered randomly, hungry for more. Africa was boring him; he needed a place with more potential.

Two years ago, Cornelius allowed himself to be captured by wildlife preservationists. Giving subtle prods here and there, he has managed to get himself donated to Zooland, an animal theme park. Now Cornelius lives behind bars and gets gawked at by schoolchildren who call him "Mr. Peanuts." However, he also has access to new and interesting playthings, and has already begun to exert his influence on the keepers and animals of Zooland, slowly turning it to his own ends.

Methods and Motivation

Cornelius lives to cause death and suffering -- whether to animals or humans makes little difference to him. He rarely does so directly, preferring to use his psychic abilities to make others carry out his will. Therefore, most deaths he causes seem accidental or self-inflicted; if a keeper locks himself in with the lions, no one thinks that the elephant in the next cage over made him do it. He also uses his mental abilities to manipulate animals far more often than a human telepath would think to do so; anyone attacking Cornelius in the open is likely to be hit by a kamikaze pigeon. Currently, he is trying to gain control of Zooland and create an environment where he can satisfy his sadism free from interference or suspicion. Though quite intelligent, Cornelius is not human and doesn't think like one.

Cornelius in a Campaign

Cornelius is ideally suited for a *Supers* or *Horror* game, though he is not much of a monster in a campaign where psionic powers are frequently encountered. Any PC endowed with Telepathy could probably stand up against him, or at least expose him. In a campaign where psionic abilities are rare and unexpected, Cornelius is much more potent and surprising. The PCs might be able to guess that someone is using telepathic manipulation, but they're not likely to assume the villain is an animal! And since he likes to play puppetmaster and rely on his Telepathy, players may be in for a shock when they get reminded of just how physically powerful a fully-grown elephant can be.

Cornelius can also be inserted into almost any historical campaign. He could show up in ancient Rome, having crossed the Alps with Hannibal or been brought into the Circus Maximus as a spectacle. Cornelius would also give an interesting twist to a Victorian-era "Heart of Darkness" scenario. Where's Doctor Dolittle when you need him!

Zooland

Any scenario involving Zooland could instead be set in a specific zoo or an appropriate theme park. A GM can easily obtain a map of any zoo in his or her area. If the game is set in a different city, many zoos have maps available on their websites. The atmosphere of the place could range from apparent normality to an outright chamber of horrors, depending upon the mood the GM wants.

It's All Happening At The Zoo

- There have been a growing number of mysterious occurrences at Zooland recently. Over 10 animals have died in

the past two weeks and a child was killed when he squeezed through the bars of a normally docile gorilla's cage. When the PCs investigate, they find strange behavior among the staff: security personnel with holes in their memories, keepers who act like zombies, and owners who want to keep the whole thing covered up.

- The PCs apprehend a serial killer, but after he's locked up, the same pattern of murders continue. No matter how many suspects are caught, and no matter how sure the PCs are that they have the right man, the killings go on. And the only thing the various suspects have in common is that they all had been spending a lot of time at Zooland?
- The PCs have managed to find out the truth about Cornelius. Just before he can be destroyed, however, he manages to perform a mindswitch with a bystander. It may take a while for him to get used to operating his new body and function as a human, but Cornelius is still out there, contemplating revenge. And an elephant never forgets?

Analects Arcane: The Arcana of War

Warding Spells for the d20 System

by Owen K.C. Stephens

Workbook Entry The Forty-Seventh

*As I write this, an army surrounds my master's Citadel of Winds in siege. I am too far below ground to hear the **fireballs** hammer uselessly at gates warded with **iron air**, but I can feel the tension hanging in the air. I am told the red-helmed warlocks who make up such a frightening portion of our foe's army are warrior-wizards from the far west known as the Harrowers. They are mercenaries trained to overcome the mystic defenses of wizard's towers, and their presence fills me with dread.*

*This is the second time I have seen a major arcane-armed force attempt to take the Citadel of the Winds. My master is lord of a crucial port city and the mountain pass that connects it to the lands of the south, and his refusal to bow to any king or guild is bound to bring conflict. This time it is the Winter King who claims the port is rightfully his. Last time it was the Vernic League, attacking just three months into my training and still an initiate. Not that I cared who the enemy wizards were as I stood, shivering, a **wand of magic missiles** in my hand. The wand was far more powerful than I, but what little talent I had was enough to activate it. I was to target sergeants, lords, spotters and officers -- anyone who looked important and took cover. That was the first time I killed a man.*

*That first battle was terrifying for me, and I cannot say how thankful I am to now be too important to risk on the outer embankment. I suppose that may make me a coward, but if I was particularly brave I'd have become a warrior. As one of the Master of Rings' best archivists I rarely spend any time above ground during any fighting. My task is supposed to be suggesting wards and abjurations to counter the spells of our enemies, and to instruct younger mages in the use of spells we might not normally teach them yet. Five young initiates, not even officially apprentices, are even now pouring over the copies of **The Arcana of War** I have brought here. If the Harrowers do break our defenses, I shudder to think what they'll do to these young almost-wizards.*

*Thankfully, the Citadel is well-designed to repel such an assault. Unlike the castles and keeps built in lands where magic is rarely applied to sieges, it depends on not a square or circular outer wall. Instead, the Citadel is surrounded by a thick five-pointed embankment. The outer edge of the embankment is lined with good **tempered** stone, and the inner portion used for barracks, stables and work rooms. Solid towers sit at each of the inner five points, one a gatehouse. A killing ground is set between the embankment and the Star Keep, a smaller five-pointed keep tower.*

The star-shaped defenses allow our young initiates to cast spells from the outer points of the wall, while the more experienced apprentices of the Master of Rings protect them by casting defensive spells from the inner points. Thus our offensive strength has the greatest range and our defense is kept well back from the front

lines. When we have healing priests with us, as we thankfully do now, they too are kept on the inner points (healing those near the fighting with aid of the **rings of spell touch** my master is famous for inventing). A foe who seeks to move close to our defenders or healers must advance past the outer star points, finding himself in a crossfire.

The hollow walls are always manned during a conflict as well. Though Master Vuterung can blanket the entire stronghold with **mystic curtains**, there is no way to ensure no new method of teleportation is used against us. Every room has at least one guard, ready to ring an alarm bell if a burrowing monster or insubstantial foe should breach the embankment. The lower levels are similarly manned to defend against attacks from below. Though I am below the Star Keep, there are five levels of guards in rooms lower even than mine.

We have other defenses against arcane assaults of course. Thin sheets of lead were worked into all the outer walls long ago. The flat land around the embankment is criss-crossed with roads, placing a crossroads every 30 feet or so. Most of these roads have trenches beside them, allowing us to place running water nearly anywhere with just a few conjuring spells. A mithral net is hung over the center of our compound, supported by the six towers. It is fine enough to slow or entangle large foes such as chimeras without substantially interfering with offensive spells cast against airborne invaders.

Even with all this, the outcome of this siege is likely to be decided by the endurance of each sides' spell casters. The enemy cannot afford to use all his magic for attacks, as we might teleport behind his lines for a counter-attack. By the same token, we must husband our resources to guard against a particularly strong push. A foe well-equipped with wands and potions can expend quite a bit of force in a single assault. Wisely, Master Vuterung has always ensured our own supply of expendable magics was greater than any army could carry here. We rarely expend these magics, but if pressed could unload a decade's worth of arcane labor in an hour.

Ideally we will focus our defensive efforts on a few wards that each negate a wide range of offensive spells. A few **alchemical prohibitions** can neutralize a wide range of common attack spells, and setting up an **interdiction** or two (especially against elementals) is almost always worthwhile. A **wall of stone** is a good way to fill a breach, and when coupled with **antimagic field** can be difficult to remove quickly.

I'm having the initiates here with me learn **lesser alchemical prohibition** since I have the books and the time, but honestly I doubt I'll have them prepare more than one such spell each. Should our defenses fail the initiates will need personal protections, as I'll send them with one or two books each, to escape to one of our allies. I doubt more than one or two could make it past the Harrowers, but their presence as targets would improve my own chances. Should I not escape, it will be my duty to ensure none of the lore I carry, or know, falls into enemy hands.

Rowan Armage

Journeyman of the Blue Sash

Fifth Day, of the First Week, of the Eighth Month, of the Seven Hundred and Forty-Fifth year since the Fall of the Iron Citadel.

The Arcana of War

One of the oldest spellbooks that had wide distribution, *The Arcana of War* was written by the Ringlords of the Iron Citadel thousands of years ago. The Ringlords were an order of martial mages who fought in heavy armor, depending on magic devices, spells with long duration cast before battle, or Still Spell to overcome arcane spell failure.

The Ringlords built an empire with their combined sword and spell armies, and forced young wizards in conquered lands to join their forces. In time this was their downfall as the new members of their order often kept old loyalty, and eventually started a civil war that destroyed the Iron Citadel and the empire it ruled. Though many of their lorebooks were lost, enough copies of *The Arcana of War* had been carried by Ringlords to battles in far off lands that many survived.

Each copy of *The Arcana of War* is a thick tome with a heavy leather cover bound in iron. The books are 13 inches tall, 10 wide, and four thick, weighing six pounds. The title is etched in draconic on iron plates bolted to the front cover and spine. The pages are hardy vellum, inked in dull metallic letters. The solid construction of the books cause them to have a hardness of 5 and 30 hit points, and they are not considered easily flammable.

In addition to the new spells listed below, each volume of *The Arcana of War* includes several more common spells, including *detect scrying*, *dimensional anchor*, *fire shield*, *haste*, *heroism*, *mage armor*, *magic missile*, *message*, *mount*, *overland flight*, *protection from arrows*, *spectral hand*, *true strike*, and *wall of stone*. There are also several treatises on ancient wars, tactics and the building of strongholds designed to resist arcane armies (which was used to design the Citadel of Winds). Anyone able to look through a copy gains a +2 circumstance bonus on Knowledge (history) checks made regarding wars.

New Spells

1st Level Sorcerer And Wizard Spells

Scythes' Bane. Emanation prevents creatures from bleeding to death.

2nd Level Sorcerer And Wizard Spells

Alchemical Prohibition, Lesser. Grant 3 points of energy resistance in a 40-foot-burst.

3rd Level Sorcerer And Wizard Spells

Veil of Secrecy. Ward against mid-level scrying spells, and detect high level ones.

4th Level Sorcerer And Wizard Spells

Alchemical Prohibition. Grant 10 points of energy resistance in a 40-foot-burst.

5th Level Sorcerer And Wizard Spells

Mystic Curtain. Creates barriers in the astral and ethereal planes. **Temper Stone.** Harden one clay, earthen or stone object or structure.

6th Level Sorcerer And Wizard Spells

Alchemical Prohibition, Greater. Grant 20 points of energy resistance in a 60-foot-burst. **Interdiction.** Set up a barrier against one type of creature. **Scythes' Bane, Greater.** Emanation prevents creatures from dying due to injury.

7th Level Sorcerer And Wizard Spells

Iron Air. Create an invisible, floating wall of iron-hard air.

Alchemical Prohibition

Abjuration

Level: Sor/Wiz 4

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: 40 ft.

Area: All creatures and objects within a 40-foot-burst centered on the caster

Duration: 1 min./level

Saving Throw: Fortitude negates (harmless)

Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless)

This spell grants all creatures and objects within its area limited protection from damage of whichever one of five energy types the caster selects: acid, cold, electricity, fire, or sonic. The subjects gain energy resistance 10 against the energy type chosen, meaning that each time the creature or object is subjected to such damage (whether from a natural or magical source), that damage is reduced by 10 points before being applied to its target's hit points.

Alchemical prohibition absorbs only damage. Objects and creatures could still suffer unfortunate side effects.

Note: This spell overlaps (and does not stack with) *resist energy* and *protection from energy*. If a character is warded by *protection from energy* and *alchemical prohibition*, the protection spell absorbs damage until its power is exhausted.

Alchemical Prohibition, Greater

Abjuration

Level: Sor/Wiz 6

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: 60 ft.

Area: All creatures and objects within a 60-foot-burst centered on the caster

Duration: 10 min./level

Saving Throw: Fortitude negates (harmless)

Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless)

This spell works as *alchemical prohibition* except as noted above and in providing 20 points of energy resistance.

Alchemical Prohibition, Lesser

Abjuration

Level: Sor/Wiz 2

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: 20 ft.

Area: All creatures and objects within a 20-foot-burst centered on the caster

Duration: 1 round./level

Saving Throw: Fortitude negates (harmless)

Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless)

This spell works as *alchemical prohibition* except as noted above and in providing only 3 points of energy resistance.

Interdiction

Abjuration

Level: Wiz/Sor 6

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Touch

Area: 10-ft.-radius

Duration: 10 min./level (D)

Saving Throw: None or Will negates; see text

Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell creates an invisible barrier that holds back creatures of one type. An interdiction can be erected against aberrations, animals, constructs, dragons, elementals, fey, giants, humanoids (one type: aquatic, dwarf, elf, goblinoid, gnoll, gnome, halfling, human, orc, or reptilian), magical beasts, monstrous humanoids, oozes, outsiders (one type: air, chaotic, earth, evil, fire, good, lawful, native, or water), plants, undead, or vermin. The type is determined when the spell is cast and cannot be changed.

A creature of the selected type with Hit Dice of less than one-third the caster's level cannot penetrate the barrier. A creature of the appropriate type with Hit Dice of one-third the caster's level or more can penetrate the barrier if it succeeds on a Will save. Even so, crossing the barrier deals the creature 2d6 points of damage.

Iron Air

Abjuration

Level: Sor/Wiz 7

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)

Effect: Area of hardened air whose area is up to nine 5-foot squares/level (S)

Duration: 10 min./level (D)

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

This spell creates a wall of iron-hard air that holds its position without any additional support. This wall has a hardness of 10 and 120 hit points per 5-foot square per level. The wall cannot be conjured so that it occupies the same space as a creature or another object. It is possible, but difficult, to trap mobile opponents within or under *iron air*, provided the wall is shaped so it can hold the creatures. Creatures can avoid entrapment with successful Reflex saves.

You can create the wall produced by *iron air* in almost any shape you desire. The wall created need not be vertical, nor rest upon any foundation. It can be used to bridge a chasm, form a barrier in mid-air, or as a ramp. The wall can be crudely shaped to allow crenellations, battlements, and so forth by reducing the area by half.

Like any other solid wall, this one can be destroyed by a disintegrate spell or by normal means such as breaking and chipping. A 5-foot section of wall whose hit points drop to 0 is breached. If a creature tries to break through the wall with a single attack, the DC for the Strength check is 28.

Mystic Curtain

Abjuration [Force]

Level: Sor/Wiz 5

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)

Effect: Ethereal and astral barrier anywhere within range

Duration: 1 hour/level (D)

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

This spell creates an invisible, immobile, impenetrable barrier on the ethereal and astral planes. This barrier may be of any shape or size desired as long as it does not exceed the maximum range of the spell. Once cast, its size and shape

cannot be changed.

This barrier functions like a *wall of force* on the ethereal and astral planes. The barrier has no effect on the material plane, but ethereal and astral creatures cannot pass through it. If it forms a closed shape (such as a cube or sphere), it is an effective barrier against teleportation, though once a creature passes through the barrier on the material plane, he may freely teleport to another point within the barrier.

Scythes' Bane

Abjuration

Level: Sor/Wiz 1

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)

Area: Emanation, centered on caster, with a radius of 100 ft. plus 10 feet/level

Duration: Ten min./level (D)

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless)

This spell creates a pale nimbus, weaker than a single candle's light, that radiates softly from the caster. Creatures at -1 or fewer hit points within this emanation do not take damage when they fail to stabilize each round. The spell does not cause disabled creatures to be able to take actions or make them stable, it simply prevents them from taking bleeding damage or the duration of the spell.

Scythes' Bane, Greater

Abjuration

Level: Sor/Wiz 6

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Short (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

Area: Emanation, centered on caster, with a radius of 25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels

Duration: 1 round/level (D)

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless)

This spell acts as a *scythes' bane* except as noted above. Additionally, a creature in the emanation that takes enough damage to be killed isn't, though it still suffers all damage dealt. Instead any creature at -10 or fewer hit points acts as if at -9 hit points or the duration of the spell. These creatures can still be damaged further, they simply do not die of such wounds. All damage dealt to a creature past -9 hit points must be kept track of, for it must all be healed if the creature is to live. If healed to -9 or more hit points before the spell ends or they are moved out of the emanation, these creatures remain alive, suffering none of the penalties for dying.

This spell has no effect on deaths caused by anything other than dropping to -10 or fewer hit points. For example, creatures killed by failing a Fort save against massive damage or from a *power word, kill* still die within the emanation of a *greater scythes' bane*.

Temper Stone

Transmutation

Level: Sor/Wiz 5

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Touch

Effect: Stone object or structure up to a 10 foot/level cube.

Duration: 1 day/level

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

This magic hardens objects and structures made of clay, earth, stone, sand and rock. The hardness of objects and structures affected by this spell is increased by 1 per 2 levels of the caster (maximum +10 hardness).

Only a single object is affected with each casting of this spell, though a structure made of several different elements (such as a wall of cut stone blocks and clay mortar) is treated as a single object. If a structure is too big to fit within the spell's area, the part that does fit is effected.

You can use the *permanency* spell to render a *temper stone* spell cast on a structure permanent, with a minimum caster level of 12th and an exp cost of 2,000 XP.

Veil of Secrecy

Abjuration

Level: Sor/Wiz 3

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Personal

Area: 40-foot-burst

Duration: 10 min./level

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

This spell has three effects. First it makes the area it covers invisible and inaudible to creatures on the ethereal plane. Second, it prevents divination spells of 5th level or lower and magic items that detect as divination with a caster level of 9th level or less from functioning within or divulging information about its area. Such spells and items are not negated, they simply do not function within the spells area and cannot reveal anything about what goes on within it. Third, if a more powerful divination spell or item does act within the area or is used to gain information about it, the *veil of secrecy* spell ends with an audible "pop," alerting its caster that scrying is occurring.

New Item

Ring of Spell Touch: These grayish silver rings allows their wearers to create ghostly, translucent hands that can deliver touch-based spells of 4th level or less at a range of 130 feet. This works as the *spectral hand* spell, except the ring does not use hit points from the caster, has but one hit point, and no bonus is given to touch attacks made with the hand. These rings are not necromantic in nature.

Faint transmutation; CL 3rd; Forge Ring, *mage hand*, creator must have the Enlarge Spell feat; Price 12,000.

Pyramid Review

Evernight (for Shane Lacy Hensley's Savage Worlds)

Published by [Pinnacle Entertainment Group](#)

Written by Shane Lacy Hensley

Cover by Zeke Sparkes

Illustrated by Cheyenne Wright with Kieran Yanner

Cartography by Aaron Acevedo

144-page b&w hardcover; \$29.95

Evernight is the first release from Pinnacle Entertainment Group to use its [Shane Lacy Hensley's Savage Worlds](#) mechanics and system. These are, at their core, a cut down version of those used in their [The Great Rail Wars Miniatures Battle Game](#), from its *Deadlands* game line. The purpose of these mechanics -- revolutionary or not, as *Savage Worlds* claims -- is to provide a system and game that handles both miniatures wargaming and roleplaying characters without leaving a seam between the two. The types of genres covered by *Savage Worlds* are invariably action orientated, leaning toward the pulp and the heroic styles, primarily the fantasy and classic 1930s pulp genre. It is the first of these genres, fantasy, along with the heroic style that *Evernight* falls into, being a heroic fantasy campaign.

The setting for *Evernight* is the happy, peaceful world of Tarth, a fact that both the book lays on (and the GM is encouraged to lay on) with a trowel, or even a dump truck. Tarth, and in particular the Kingdom of Valusia, are described as such nice places because, although *Evernight* starts off as a heroic fantasy, it very quickly becomes a dark fantasy after Valusia and its nearest neighbors are invaded and the land is covered in a thick sooty smog that blots out the glories of Solace, the sun god revered across the continent.

Evernight is what is described as a "Complete Scripted Campaign" (also known as a campaign to the likes of you or I -- never mind the fancy description), in which the player characters of beginning or Novice Rank must survive the invasion, the occupation by the world's would-be new masters and the resistance overthrow the literally growing darkness. Indeed the author describes *Evernight* as, "The darkest setting of all."

The book is split into three sections: one for the players, which gives details on Tarth and Valusia, both prior to and after the invasion; another for the GM that gives them the "real" information about Tarth's history and the invasion, as well as a bestiary; and the third, the campaign itself, entitled, "The Dying of the Light." This campaign is broken down into five acts, each of several scenes. Its title is, of course, not to be confused with the campaign of the same name that was the first new product published by Hogshead Publishing for *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*.

Evernight is generally well-written, clearly laid out, and illustrated in the same style as *Savage Worlds*. Indeed, some of the artwork from the *Savage Worlds* corebook is reused in this book, much of it going to support the heroic nature of the campaign, while the depictions of the bad guys, reminiscent of H.R. Geiger in places, work to enforce their black, black hearts. Aaron Acevedo's cartography is decent, though leaning more toward serviceable and basic rather than attractive.

It is heroes that the players take the role of at the beginning of the campaign, for in Valusia heroes are idolized, and

what every young girl or boy aspires to be, whether they be Dwarves, Elves, Half-Elves, half-Folk (Halflings), Humans, or even Half-Orcs. The setting requires few changes to either rules or character generation, though the Connections, Noble, and Rich Edges are not available, as their effects will be negated by the events of the campaign. Most of the new Edges become available once the characters rise in experience to Seasoned Rank, while the majority of those that are available to Novices fall into the Professional Edge category. These include the Musketeer, formally trained in the use of black powder weapons; and the Red Knight and Sun Priest. These last two are the equivalent of the Holy Warrior and Cleric found in the **Savage Worlds** corebook, and in the world of **Evernight** are the only way in which characters can obtain the Arcane Background (Miracles) Edge. Both are devout worshippers of Solace, the Sun God who marks their skin with the sun's red tint, and are greatly respected throughout Valusia. They can also both take the Avatar of Solace Professional Edge that enables them to infuse a weapon with Solace's power and cause it to burst into flame.

Although the rules for character generation from the corebook are reprinted in the 40-page player's section of **Evernight** (also available as the **Evernight Player's Guide**, on sale at RPGnow.com at a cost of \$5.95), the whole process can be sidestepped and the campaign jump started by having the players selecting one of the ready-to-run archetypes. These are simply copied onto the **Evernight** character sheet at the back of the book (which is actually easier to photocopy than the one given in the **Savage Worlds** corebook).

The second of the player sections actually provides updated information that becomes available to the characters once they have made contact with, and spent time, with the Resistance. This includes new prices for equipment, new (and sometimes *icky*) foodstuffs, several new Edges -- Dark Fighting, Tunnel Fighter, and the Scrounger and Slayer professional Edges -- plus two new archetypes. The first of these is the Dark Fighter, capable of fighting within the dark of the tunnels and caves that the Resistance has taken up home in; the second being the Light Finder, who searches for natural light sources with the gloom of the caves.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The campaign, "The Dying of the Light," opens with our Novice, but potential, heroes tasked to take a message to an existing group of heroes currently investigating a cave of the ancients. Just as they locate the intended recipients, an almighty tremor reverberates through the walls of the cave system and buries everyone alive. By the time they get back to the surface and then to the Valusian capital of King's Port, the cause is clear. A gigantic spike has driven itself into the ground and is belching out the thickest, sootiest of fogs. King's Port is ruined and overrun with malicious Spider Beasts. The question is, who is behind these beasts?

The answer quickly becomes clear after the heroes are captured. They are revealed as being spider-like, but relying heavily on the use of psionics. The best description of them would be to combine the finer elements of **Dungeons & Dragons'** Mind Flayers, and the Xenomorphs from the *Aliens* series of films.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

While the characters begin at Novice Rank, if they are successful in vanquishing the villains of the piece, they will end "The Dying of the Light" as courageous heroes, perhaps even of great status. This does not mean that the campaign is itself over, only the current phase, as the author promises further volumes. Although played in heroic mode, the **Evernight** campaign offers a variety of other tasks for the characters to perform. This not only includes having to fight bad guys and monsters, but to also aid the survival of the Resistance, such as finding fresh fruit and sources of light. The campaign, on the whole, maintains a nice balance between the two types of tasks.

Yet **Evernight** is not entirely problem-free. One comes at the end of the campaign itself, after the defeat of the villains and liberation of the kingdom, when one hero is in line for a very, very large hike in their social status. The question is, what do the other characters get as their reward? Unfortunately, it is not covered in the pages of **Evernight**. The second problem lies at the beginning of this volume: There is no introduction. That there is no index is bad enough, but when the **Savage Worlds** GM wants to run **Evernight** and he is not aided by a description of how the book should be used, it is all very annoying. Actually, it is no problem to determine how to use the book -- but *only* after all of it has been read.

Finally there is a factor mentioned in the book called "Resistance," as well as a place to note it down as the heroes accumulate through their good deeds. Yet its use and purpose is only explained in the last two pages of the actual campaign. It is at the point where it is proactively used in "The Dying of the Light," but an explanation given for the GM earlier in the text would have been helpful. In fact, it is used to determine how many units the players will have their command in the final battle of the campaign using **Savage Worlds'** Mass Battle rules.

Despite these problems, **Evernight** is basically well-written and does a good job of showing off the roleplaying side of the **Savage World** mechanics. It is not, truth be told, in the same league with what are regarded as roleplaying's best campaigns -- **The Enemy Within** for **Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay**; or **Masks of Nyarlathotep**, **Walker in the Wastes**, and [Beyond the Mountains of Madness](#) for **Call of Cthulhu**, among others. Its heroic feel makes **Evernight** more akin to the original **Dragonlance Saga** published by TSR for **Advanced Dungeons & Dragons**, though with a much darker tone. And like that series of much-reprinted modules, **Evernight** is both very tightly scripted and linear, which will not be to the liking of all. *If* the purchaser can get around this -- and he is purchasing a "Complete Scripted Campaign," after all -- **Evernight** should give several long sessions of play. Hopefully, its sequels will maintain this quality, though perhaps at not quite so high a price tag.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Greek Gods (for d20 System)

by Steven Creech and Kevin Reusch

Published by Bastion Press

48-page color PDF; \$5.99

Greek Gods is the first of a three-part series of PDF **d20 System** sourcebooks adapting real world mythological pantheons to **d20 System** mechanics. This book focuses on presenting deific portfolios and full avatar stat blocks, as well as presenting some new domains, spells, monsters, and NPC heroes from Greek mythology.

The book does not provide an in-depth coverage of the stories about the gods or the Greek cosmology, but focuses on putting useable numbers to the major personalities of Greek myths. Myths and stories are referenced in individual god entries sufficiently to establish the authors are familiar with the legends, and to provide some flavor for a DM to use in roleplaying the gods or their followers.

Avatars are presented as thoughts the gods project onto the material world so that they can interact with it. These thought projections take the form of 20th-level characters with lots of powerful magic items, including weapons more powerful than mortals can craft, one unique artifact, starting abilities of all 18s, and usually with maximum hit points. They also have a number of divine immunities such as to all drains and mind-affecting abilities. If they have a class that casts spells, they automatically know every spell on their spell lists. However, despite these potent abilities they are all still listed as CR 20. Being the **d20 System**, these stat blocks take up a large amount of space, with most of the 17 gods taking up a page or two.

Each god also presents a minor boon to followers of certain favored classes, such as a bonus feat or ability boost. This is a neat flavor idea but unbalancing, and can be annoying in same games by favoring certain class choices. Most of the gods are depicted with full-color art, but the dimensions are a bit off making them look more like demihuman deities than classical divine icons. Unlike the next two books in the series, the artwork in *Greek Gods* is not Photoshop-altered pictures, but full-color drawings similar to other Bastion Press products such as *Minions: Rebirth* and *Druids and Druidism*.

Since the second book in the series, *Norse Gods*, is free, many will have picked that up before considering *Greek Gods*. *Norse Gods* was plagued with both poor layout editing and weird choices in matching gods to **d20 System** classes. *Greek Gods* is a far superior product in both respects. Apollo seems right as a paladin who focuses on archery, the portrayal of Ares as a raging barbarian is spot on, and Hades seems well suited as a cleric of the underworld. The only trend that seems a little off is that the mercurial Greek pantheon as a whole is slanted toward lawful alignments; in particular the philandering Zeus should at least be chaotic. The selection of magic items is also a little off in portraying the gods straight out of myth, but works fine in presenting them as **d20 System** equipped and adapted creations.

Each of the 12 original pre-Heraclean Olympians are presented as well as a number of lesser gods such as Thanatos and Eros. Noticeably missing is Hecate, the goddess of witchcraft. Nine new domains are listed as well as 35 new spells. Things that did not quite seem consonant in the *Norse Gods* milieu, such as the Sea Domain spells *dolphin companion* and *releasing the kraken*, make much more genre sense when found in the Greek mythology supplement. A few problems still hit some of the spells, such as weak static damage spells that are higher level for wizards than clerics. Also the lack of a short listing for the new spells is quite annoying and a hindrance to meaningfully using the spells.

The monster section of the supplement presents Boubo the clockwork owl from *Clash of the Titans*, a disappointingly weak 10HD (overrated to CR 20) portrayal of the three-headed underworld dog Cereberus, a decent Hephaestaen Cyclops, Zeus' white eagle, and a half god template. The template gives a +1 on saves, DR 5/-, high starting abilities, natural armor +1, and no aging penalties, resulting in a CR boost of +2. A 10-level prestige class Hunter of Hera is designed for NPCs who have been wronged by such demigods. The hunters devote themselves to Hera and wreaking vengeance against the half-gods. Since their abilities are so target specific and their prerequisites significantly limit the possible pool of applicants, it would be odd to see more than a handful of individuals who qualify and take the class on any given world. Still it might be used to make an interesting NPC.

Finally there are seven famous Greek heroes ranging from 15th level to 20th. Oddly, the half-god template is not applied to any of them, even though Heracles, Autolycus, and Perseus should qualify. Unfortunately, none of the heroes have descriptions or backgrounds, just **d20 System** stats. A few mechanical choices are odd as well, such as Homer and Hesiod as 20th-level bards whose only equipment are magic weapons and armor. Also, Heracles' strength is not as strong as a mortal being's could be before magic, and there is no representation of his great club, his invulnerable Nemean lion hide armor, or his hydra-poisoned arrows. Instead, he has a powerful vorpal sword (partially appropriate considering his Hydra fight) and a lot of protection items.

Overall, the strength of this product lies in the avatar concept, which closely tracks the established model of **Advanced Dungeons & Dragons 2nd Edition** deity avatars. This allows the actual gods to be safe but give them a powerful-but-character-based form to interact and meddle with the mortal world in a personal fashion. Given the Greek myths that have gods personally meddling in human affairs big and small, this is a good mechanical device to portray this aspect in a game without invoking the overwhelming epic monster power levels of deities and their avatars as presented in Wizards of the Coast's recent **Deities and Demigods** book.

--John Henry Stam

New Game, Old Characters

This week I had an idea that I haven't implemented, and is really in a weird proto-form. (So, really, instead of the half-baked thoughts you normally get, you're getting a quarter-baked column . . . chock full of yummy salmonella.)

Anyway, I was reading the first issue of J. Michael Straczynski's new Marvel comic series *Supreme Power*. If you're unfamiliar with the premise of this title (as I was until I started reading it), it seems to be a retelling of the tale of the Squadron Supreme, a benevolent super-team that exists in an alternate Marvel universe, and which was also an alternate version of the Squadron Sinister *evil* super-team, which started out, really, as an evil parallel knock-off of DC Comics' Justice League of America. (And who says comics don't make any sense?)

As I'm reading it, I considered one of the possibilities for a game, which might be an interesting way of revitalizing a long-running campaign.

I've talked in the past about ways to revitalize campaigns, ranging from [revisiting game worlds](#) to [blowing everything up](#). However, there's one possibility I hadn't considered until last night.

Restart a campaign, with the *same* characters. Replay the same adventures, if you'd like (updating them to a new campaign), or add new adventures. The campaign can branch out in new directions, or it can progress at a similar pace. Regardless, the core of those old characters (or some of them) would stay the same.

Think about it. On some level, many players like playing the same game over and over, perhaps with variations; this is one reason why the "dungeon crawl" is so satisfying. Unfortunately, many games are victims of their own success. A beloved character can grow too powerful to be enjoyed. A game world can become so crowded with its own continuity that further adventuring is impractical. Or there may have been a development with a character, plot, or background that makes the character (or the game) unplayable.

But if the players like the characters they have invested so much time with, why can't they keep playing them, or different versions of them? After all, many players do this subconsciously (or consciously) as it is; heaven knows I've played the witty-seemingly-sinister-andsecretive-but-really-a-good-guy-religious-paladin in a bunch of different games.

So what we're talking about here is a campaign "reboot," only the players (or some of them) will be playing the same characters (or new versions of them). "But wait!" I hear some of you cry. "How do these stories fit in with the other ones?" Well . . . they don't. All stories are imaginary, and playing the same characters in a new light doesn't distract from either set; 1966 and 1989 both had movies entitled *Batman*, complete with a version of the same character in both . . . but they exist independently. And, unlike [alternates](#), this is a "real" ongoing campaign instead of a diversion.

So, how do you go about doing this kind of campaign restart?

Again, stressing that I have not actually *used* this technique, it seems like it would be pretty easy, and -- unlike many campaign restarts -- the responsibilities can be divided more equitably between the GM and players.

Think about the campaign world, and if/how it will change. For example, a modern espionage game that is being rebooted might have begun as being set in modern times, only to learn that keeping up with the morass of modern events is a pain. So the GM might propose shifting the game to a different era -- perhaps the James Bond-esque 1960s, or the near-future Clancyverse of 2010 or so. Or maybe that *Star Trek* game will take place at a time when the battle of Wolf-359 went differently, and the heroes are now desperately fighting in a galaxy torn apart by war. Regardless, a change in scenery will enable even old, familiar characters to explore strange new options and seek out new life in old premises. (That's what we call an extended metaphor.)

Consider the core ideals of the campaign, and how they will change. If a game was optimistic at its core, then you might consider making the new version *more* optimistic . . . or it could be grittier. For example, in our espionage game,

we might decide that the government bosses of the heroes are completely trustworthy, noble, and good, and their missions are always just; we might also decide that the heroes will be asked to do many things that are morally gray. (Or the GM might throw the players for a curve and have them start out with a morally bankrupt agency, only to "defect" to an optimistic noble one in an early storyline . . .)

Consider adjusting the power levels of the characters. A great way to enjoy playing the same character but having a different experience is to adjust his power level. For example, when they restarted the Superman line of comics in the mid-1980s, they made him significantly less powerful than before. Contrariwise, when they revamped the Batman character shortly thereafter, they made him much tougher and smarter. Players should talk with the GM about what level of play they found most fun with their characters, then see if it's possible to start the character near that level. So if our espionage game above was most fun when the characters were inexperienced and able to make mistakes, lowering the power level will give them more room to explore that. Or if the players enjoyed being hyper-competent, consider starting them near there (with, of course, a higher degree of opposition!). It might even be possible to start a game at a completely different level of play, or even start characters out on *different* levels! (See the ["Power Level"](#) series I did last year.)

Think about how the Big Picture will fit together. One of the joys of a long-running game is its rich history. Unfortunately, from a storytelling standpoint these long sagas often don't make sense; seemingly important plotlines got dropped or bungled, while trivial bits assumed great importance through flukes. While this is fairly realistic, it can also be a fair bit unsatisfying. Say one character had a mentor who was never very interesting. Maybe that mentor could be killed early on, or be tied to another major plot.

Or say if one character had a significant love interest in the old game, but that interest was never integral to the plot or otherwise seem to "fit," now is a good chance to do so. The interest could be introduced earlier, or be tied to more plots, or tied more strongly to the origins of the other characters. Regardless, the player whose interest is introduced will know that the interest will (probably) be a love interest again . . . but he just doesn't know how or when, and in the interim that interest is more important than ever before.

Or, to pull another example from the world of comics, when they revised Superman they decided to have his parents, Ma and Pa Kent, still be alive. (In the old version they had died when he was a boy.) This opened up another avenue of story possibilities and gave Superman stronger roots to Earth.

Realize that not everyone needs to play along. In a reboot scenario like this, if not all players want to play a new version of their old character, that's fine. A lot of the fun of roleplaying comes from encountering different personalities, and interacting with changing characters. So if the campaign is being re-envisioned, it's entirely workable for some players to remake their old characters while other players make completely new ones; these "wild cards" will allow the old characters to branch out, or at least see new possibilities.

So let's look at a full example, pulled shamelessly from my own archives. I was in a long-running **Vampire: Dark Ages** game, where I played one of my patented secretive-seemingly-evil-but-really-not-paladins. If we were to try to recreate that game, I would put a vote in as a player for a relatively similar campaign world to start with; I might request that there be fewer supernaturals, to better focus on the unique nature of the PCs. It might also be interesting to push up the campaign by a few hundred years, so that instead of starting on the cusp of the Dark Ages we might start just shy of the Renaissance. I would want my old character to be more skilled in some ways and less skilled in others; he was never terribly intelligent, but I would want him to be more knowledgeable in the ways of war. The original version of the character had inhuman strength, vampiric mind control, and illusory powers; the ability to make illusions, although neat, always felt a bit incongruous with the rest of the character, so I would get rid of it. The religious aspect of the character was played up heavily in the old game, but it almost came too quickly; he never had a chance to fully "descend" before rising above his limitations. I would want this new version to be more "evil" for a time, before perhaps having some kind of revelation or (un)life-altering event that would make him see the error of his ways. In addition, I might make a request to have his old family be more important in this revision. The core of this revised character would focus initially on the struggle between a skill to do things subtly (which he would find distasteful) and a talent to do things bluntly (although not all problems can be solved with a sword). If he became more spiritual, he might consider his mind-controlling powers to be a sinister temptation. Regardless, I would

probably have, as a campaign-wide goal, the desire to become fully human again.

And in this fantasy campaign revisitation, who knows *how* the other players would reinterpret their own long-running characters, and what new direction they could go with them?

In a lot of ways, a lot of gaming is about reinventing the wheel -- over and over again. Players spend a lot of time creating interesting characters, making sure they work within the rules and support the team in an entertaining way. Then, when the characters get too old or die or the campaign is no longer interesting, those characters are scrapped in favor of *new* ones. If all are agreeable, there's no reason to reinvent the wheel; just give that old wheel a new paint job and you might find it can *still* take you fascinating places.

And if anyone tries this, why not drop me a line and let me know how it turned out?

--*Steven Marsh*

Planet Intoxica, Jewel of the Terran Hegemony

by [Chad Underkoffler](#)

Art by [Chris Cooper](#)

Genre: Space Opera with a dose of Noir

Style: Cinematic

Fidelity: Medium-Low

Themes: Intrigue and Crime

Campaign Setting and Background Information

(NOTE: This CiaB exists in the same setting as ["Planet Ugarte, Backwater of the Terran Hegemony."](#) and shares many of the same background elements.)

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-- Start Transmission --
Galactic Archive Datafile
Sector: 2814.
System: Zigma Zebbin.
Star: Kurosawa, F3 V Type (yellow-white).
Planet Name: Intoxica (Kurosawa IV, 2 AU).
Planet Type: Earthlike, Medium-Iron.
Density: 5.2.
Diameter: 8,151 miles.
Gravity: 0.97 G.
Moons: 1 (Zeffirelli).
Year: 503 Terran Days.
Local Day: 50 standard hours.
Axial Tilt: 27 degrees.
Atmosphere: Oxygen-Nitrogen (1.11 standard pressures).
Climate: Tropical; Three seasons -- Wind, Summer, and Rainy.
Hydrographic Percentage: 85% surface water; two small continents (Fist and Sword), with extensive river systems; several archipelago systems and islands.
Terrain: Weathered hills, jungle, and swamps; volcanic islands of varying age and terrain.
Mineral Resources: Plentiful radioactives (including Volium) and organics (including crude petroleum).
Native Flora: Notable species include Naran-grapes, Bergamoids, and Hawlo-Hawlo seeds (see datafile Xenoflora-Intoxica for full catalog). [NOTE: Intoxican flora is often poisonous to Terran-stem lifeforms to a greater or lesser extent; check with your Medi-Professional for personal interdictions.]
Native Fauna: Notable species include the Deep Wasp (pelagic), the Locust-Roc (aerial), the Ant-Wolf (swamps), and the Lake Beetle (freshwater); all native fauna is insectoid (see datafile Xenofauna-Intoxica for full catalog). [NOTE: Intoxican fauna is often venomous, and may pose a danger to Terran-stem lifeforms; check with your Medi-Professional for personal interdictions.]
Transplanted Terran Flora:
    [Engineered] AvocadoPlus (various); ChicagoCorp Tropical Citrus species (orange, lemon, lime, grapefruit); Haruka Kelpy-Kelp (variant 17Q); Headley Luxi-LTD Cacao, Coffee, and Sugarcane; Paragon Rice, Aleph series; Quanta-7 GGd-Tobacco.
    [Natural] Grapes, Roses.
Transplanted Terran Fauna:
    [Engineered] Genetech Wetland Sheep; Milkfish (various); Paragon Silkspider (Alpha One through Beta Six species).
    [Natural] Little Brown Bats; Honeybees.
Population: 10 million.
Government: Corporate "City-States," Military Meritocracy.
Import Restrictions: See Hegemony Importation, Schedule C4.
Export Restrictions: See Hegemony Exportation, Schedule K12-Annex -
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Intoxica. [NOTE: Many Intoxican compounds utilizing extractions or byproducts of native flora and/or fauna are classified as Schedule A pharmaceuticals or Schedules B through E narcotics. Export of any amount of these drugs is prohibited without appropriate Hegemony licensure.]
Starport(s): Port Paradise (northern tip of Fist) and Port Nexus (orbital station).
-- End Transmission --

Blasters & Swords



What Everybody Knows

Arms & Armor: We're talking rayguns and swords. Armor is limited to sturdy leather or leather equivalents. Star Guardsmen pack raygun carbines and cutlasses (officers carry a small sidearm); they wear ceremonial breastplates and small pot helms. The Intoxican Planetary Force (IPF) soldiers are armed with raygun pistols and rapiers, and wear sunglasses along with white spider-weave fatigues and field caps. These uniforms shed dirt and moisture, while protecting against UV rays.

Hyperspace, Hypergates, and Hyperdrives: Four hundred years ago, the discovery of *hyperspace* greatly enhanced the speed of interstellar travel. Provided that the realspace and hyperspace topographies were properly calculated, light years could be traversed in moments; if the topographies were not currently aligned or the calculations were off, then the same journey could take days, weeks, or months. While a few *hyperdrive*-equipped ships can leap into this new dimension on their own, most ships must enter through the ring of an orbital *hypergate*. The H-gate generates a *hyperfield*, much like the film of soap over a bubble-blowing ring. As a ship passes through the ring, receptors on the skin of the ship grab onto and hold the H-field, completely enveloping the vessel. So long as a charged H-field surrounds the ship, it is "lifted out of" normal space, and can skim across the dimensional interface at FTL speeds. Transition back to normal space can be achieved by passing through another H-gate, or by shutting down the H-field receptors (this latter choice is time-consuming and dangerous, though an H-drive-equipped ship is able to bleed the field off quickly). This opened the galaxy to . . .

Massive Human Colonization: Many worlds have been terraformed for human life. In a number of cases, the

planets have returned the favor, leading to . . .

Human Subraces: There are a number of human subraces, subtly changed as the different environments, circumstances, and gravities of the colony worlds worked upon the settlers. The heavy-worlders of Koschei and the water-breathing albinos of Thetis are but two examples. And then there are the . . .

Aliens: Sentient, sapient aliens have been discovered -- the Blob Men of Mogo, the Crystal Intelligences of Xarvaan, and the owl-like Huur of Xib' A' Teew are the most populous. No alien race is yet a part of . . .

The Terran Hegemony: In time, a number of strong colony worlds formed alliances with Mother Earth, creating the Terran Hegemony. However, over time, the colonies have become second-class citizens under the iron heel of Earth. The current Hegemon, Tsung Cain, is Emperor in all but name. The fanatically loyal Star Guard is responsible for carrying out his draconic whims and cruel fancies. This has led to the formation of . . .

The Freedom Legion: They fight against the forces of the Hegemon, trying to overthrow the tyrant and restore true liberty to the citizens of the Hegemony. The Star Guard hunts Legionnaires mercilessly throughout human space (and often, it is whispered, beyond). Suspected collaborators are punished severely -- as are their families and neighbors. This has led to many refugees fleeing to places like . . .

The Free Colonies: Outside the harsh rule of the Hegemony, the Free Colonies are a beacon to the hopeful. But the war-hungry Hegemon has dreams of expansion. The Free Colonies will never come together for mutual defense against the powerful Star Guard unless they can find a strong leader to rally around, like Raymond "Flash" Rogers, the man codenamed . . .

Centurion: The commander of the Freedom Legion, Rogers recently escaped the maximum security prison world of Tertius and vanished; his current whereabouts are unknown. But he could be anywhere, even . . .

Planet Intoxica: This lush, tropical world is one of the twelve "jewels" of the Hegemony -- a paradise known for wealth, beauty, and magnificence. While currently off the main trade routes, Intoxica is still a tremendous exporter of important resources -- especially the energy-mineral Volium -- and a vacation getaway for the rich and powerful.

However, even this Eden has its seamy underside: the native plants and animals are poisonous to Terran life to some degree, despite centuries of terraforming. Some act as nothing more than narcotics or hallucinogens on the human system, while others are deadly toxins. This quality -- along with its reputation as an "anything goes" party world -- gives Intoxica its nickname: "Planet Poison."

- *Governor Orlando Zirlaq & the IPF:* Governor Zirlaq is the local voice of the Hegemony. He commands the sizable IPF garrison, which provides necessary administrative, customs, educational, immigration, judicial, revenue, military, and emergency services planet-wide. However, chronic budget concerns hamper him, and he is increasingly beholden to the interests of the corporate-aristocrat Houses.
- *House Headley:* House Headley has been on Intoxica before the domes came down, and have their finger in nearly every corporate pie on the planet -- from genetic engineering to hotel & restaurant management. The current CEO of the House is Lady Kat Headley, an iron-willed businesswoman who has managed to parlay the Headley assets into virtual rule of the planet. Its House colors are blue.
- *House Tagliente:* House Tagliente is a comparative newcomer to Intoxica. Nearly a decade ago, during a particularly uncomfortable period of worker unionizing, this New Venice corporate House purchased a controlling share of Headley Planetary Mining. First, they changed the name of the concern to Tagliente Mines, Inc., and second, they ended all talk of unions and strikes with brutal and bloody tactics. Over the intervening years, they've gained control over other Intoxicant companies. House refugees from the recent New Venice Pacification have caused the Tagliente numbers -- and wealth -- to swell, and the "family" seems to have decided to make Intoxica its new homeworld. Its House colors are red.
- *Blobman:* Intoxica is one of the few Hegemony worlds to have a resident who is one of the enigmatic Blobmen of Mogo. It just appeared one day: no ships reported having carried a Blobman passenger for months, or even

having transshipped a package from Mogo. For its part, the Blobman either does not understand -- or refuses to answer -- the question. It answers to the name "Larry" and is fascinated with, well, everything. Like all its mysterious brethren, Larry is a humanoid pile of goop, known to be exceptionally strong, incredibly tough, insatiably curious, and flat-out *weird* (see also boxed text).

Larry



What Everybody Doesn't Know

The Hegemony's Secrets: The Hegemon has been hearing reports of a breakdown in public order on Planet Intoxica, in that corporate interests are threatening the ability of the IPF to exert government control. The last thing the Hegemon desires is for a single corporate House to get a hold on the resources of an entire planet. Thus, covert agents of the Star Guard are infiltrating the IPF and the local Houses, to investigate (and possibly exacerbate) the situation. If the IPF falters, the Star Guard will declare a "Crisis" and move in openly. (And it's only a short step from "Crisis" to "Pacification" and bringing the planet under the Hegemon's direct control, as demonstrated by recent events on New Venice and Arcadia . . .)

House Headley's Secrets: Unknown to most, House Headley *called in* House Tagliente to purchase their mining concern, "deal with" the unionization strike situation, sell it back to House Headley, and then get outta Dodge. It didn't work that way -- House Tagliente decided to stick around. Worse, they couldn't rely on their bought Governor and his IPF to kick the interlopers out: Duke Santiago had already gained his own hold on Zirlaq and key IPF officers. While initially Lady Kat intended to pull some Hegemony strings to resolve

The Blobmen of Mogo

Blobmen are amoeboid life-forms and their nature is not fully understood. Their cells are apparently undifferentiated and under conscious control, giving them a Good ability to Remold their shapes into whatever strikes their fancies. Among humans, they tend to take on roughly humanoid form, with sketchy facial features (since humans seem to be uncomfortable speaking to a blank head). Physically, they don't seem to need to eat, drink, or breathe, and are much stronger and tougher than a human (between Good and

this intolerable state of affairs, the recent Crises/Pacifications of New Venice and Arcadia have given her pause. If she calls in the Hegemon, she could lose everything. Better to fight the Duke on her own terms, on her own turf. She is driven to crush House Tagliente utterly.

House Tagliente's Secrets: Simply, House Tagliente wants more control over everything, and has been slowly applying "pressure" to Headley interests to secure that control. However, they view their dealings with House Headley as *just business* whereas they see their relations with Governor Zirlaq and the IPF as a *matter of survival*, given what happened to New Venice. They walk a fine line between trying to gain various grips (friendship, bribes, blackmail, threats, hostages) over Zirlaq and the IPF commanders, and keeping their noses clean (so as not to attract the attention of the despised Hegemony). Of course, as they are squeezed in their efforts to quietly gain this control over Intoxica by House Headley's resistance, *just business* is quickly changing into a *matter of survival*. The Duke wishes to cripple, but not destroy, House Headley, but that's starting to change as Lady Kat closes in.

Governor Zirlaq's Secrets: Governor Orland Zirlaq is trapped between the Scylla and Charybdis of the two warring Houses, with the Damoclean Sword of the Hegemon swinging about, ready to drop. Hamstrung, he's trying desperately to be a hardass in dealing with Lady Kat and Duke Santiago, despite their various holds on himself and his men. His primary goal is to stabilize the situation and keep it quiet -- that way, the Star Guards won't get called in.

Luckily, he's got a plan: get his son Hector (the commander of the IPF) to marry Lady Kat's daughter, Gemma, while simultaneously arranging for his son Herman (chum of Duke Santiago's son Ignatio) to become "adopted" into (a "made man" of) House Tagliente. Then, they'll all be one happy family, and Zirlaq will have information sources into and ways of placing pressure on the Houses that have been bullying him.

The Freedom Legion's Secrets: The Freedom Legion has a spy in House Headley -- codename Asp (see below). Their goal is to use Asp to glean information that can be useful in helping the Taglientes gain more influence on Intoxica. By proving invaluable to the Duke in his struggle against House Headley, they hope to enter his good graces (while they secretly encourage his hatred of the Terran Hegemony). Once they take full control, House Tagliente -- and thus, all of Planet Poison -- should be ready to ally with the Freedom Legion against the Hegemon himself when the Revolution comes.

Larry the Blobman's Secrets: First, Larry has split off two descendants: "Darryl-1" and "Darryl-2." Darryl-1 is currently stationed on the moon of Zeffirelli (absorbing enough energy to allow H-field generation and enter hyperspace), ready to courier information from Larry to Mogo in case of trouble. Darryl-2 is hidden within Larry's Intoxican residence and ready to bud, if necessary.

Second, Larry is on Intoxica to forestall the Hegemony moving in and taking over as they did on New Venice and Arcadia. If the Hegemony is "forced" to intervene in the internal politics of Planet Poison, they will gain a base of operations that -- while far away in realspace -- is nearly on Mogo's hyperspace doorstep. Larry is charged with destroying : 1) the planetary hypergate; and 2)

Master rank in Superstrong). They possess child-like curiosity and intellects comparable to an average educated adult human. They are whimsical, quiet, and have a surreal outlook on life (one wag described the typical Blobman personality as "Zen Buddhism by way of Monty Python.") They can speak by Remolding to create vocal cords and an internal air bellows.

They have a disconcerting habit of simply appearing on other worlds, then vanishing again, with no hints as to how this is accomplished. Galaxy-wide, the number of Blobmen who book passage on starships each month can be counted on the fingers of one (human) hand. They are suspected of possessing some form of teleportation technology or inherent power due to this habit. There are also unverified reports that they are a hive intelligence (sharing thoughts amongst themselves) and they could be photovores (they consume light).

The truth is quite different.

In short, Blobmen aren't individual beings, exactly. Nor are they a hive-mind, exactly. And they can't teleport.

Blobmen are the equivalent of white blood cells for a planetary organism: Mogo. They swarm its surface, proactively repairing injuries or repelling/neutralizing "germs." To that end, Blobmen have traveled to certain worlds who could pose a direct threat to Mogo's safety, ready to expunge any chance of danger if "infection" is detected.

as much Star Guard materiel and personnel possible, within two standard days of any Crisis-announcement .

Third, in support of keeping the Hegemony out, Larry is meddling in the conflict between House Headley and House Tagliente by providing tactical advice to both, to enhance their "quiet war" and turn them both against the Hegemony. He genuinely likes Ignatio Tagliente, who often asks the Blobman for personal advice and an outsider's perspective.

PC Backgrounds

Player characters might come from one of the following groups. All need not be from the same background, however, and a character can fit into multiple groups. Note that there may be tensions between PCs of different groups (say, one from Tagliente's Faction and one who's a Star Guard Spy) which may be the source of great in-game friction, or could utterly disrupt a game. Use caution.

Freedom Legionnaires: Secretly working towards the downfall of the Hegemon, PCs in the Freedom Legion have a codename; knowledge of simple ciphers, pass-phrases, and a few members of their local cell; and a zeal for freedom and liberty. To be a Legionnaire is a crime, so members should keep it close to their chest. Legionnaires may be asked to perform espionage, participate in sabotage, recruit new members, pass documents, harbor other Legionnaires, or go on other covert missions.

Headley's Faction: PCs could be part of House Headley, either a relation, employee, or client. Characters in this group are probably Intoxican born, and should possess a modicum of wealth and status. They fight and spy on the Taglientes and IPF, and support Headley interests.

Hired Guns & Mercenaries: PCs could be specialist operatives hired by House Headley -- mercenaries, spies, or private eyes -- brought in to help get rid of House Tagliente (or vice-versa).

Intoxican Planetary Forces (IPF) Garrison: Perhaps they're natives of Intoxica, old Star Guardsmen who've transferred their commission because they're close to retirement, or former smugglers who now get space-sick after that dogfight around Bohemia VII. An IPF soldier serves as both military defender and law enforcement officer: they are called out to patrol the streets, enforce the laws, make arrests, quell riots, oversee customs, and repel planetary invasions.

Jaded Jet-set: PCs could be wealthy dilettantes, offworld corporate nobility, or pleasure seekers caught up in the events on Planet Poison. "Look, Percy, they're dueling in the street again. How droll."

Refugees & Expatriates: On Intoxica by misadventure or choice after the Hegemony pacified their homeworlds, refugees and expatriates can serve as a grab bag of PC types. Nearly any profession, social status, or species can be represented, from University professor to wealthy plumber to dispossessed aristocrat. Depending upon their finances, refugees and expats could be scrabbling for a meal as a beggar or living it up in luxury hotels as characters of leisure.

Unknown to all others are the following secret abilities of the Blobmen:

1. They have Good skill at increasing, decreasing, nullifying, or reversing gravity's hold on themselves.
2. Their goopy bodies are natural hyperfield receptors (and detectors).
3. They can bud off two weaker Blobmen (this causes a reduction of their abilities by one rank; i.e., an Expert Superstrength Blobman becomes three Good Superstrength Blobmen, who can each become three Average Superstrength Blobmen, etc.).
4. All Blobmen may communicate telepathically to a range of 1 AU with its "ancestor" and its two "descendants," but not with its "sibling" or their "descendants."
5. They have a Good ability to sense and absorb energy (sunlight, hyperspace flux, raygun blast), and use it to heal their bodies, increase their abilities, or -- once out of planetary gravity - enter hyperspace.

Through coordinated use of these capabilities, Blobmen can exit a planetary gravity field, absorb solar radiation, generate an H-field, jump to H-space, navigate and travel through that dimension, sink back to realspace, and enter planetary gravity, all safely and without the need for a ship.

Spies (Star Guard or Alien): PCs could be agents placed there by the Hegemony or an alien government, set to observe (and possibly contribute to) the chaos of the inter-House conflict. Opportunities are already included in the write-ups for Tom Tildrum and Ignatio Tagliente (see below) for, respectively, Star Guard and Freedom Legion PC spies to take advantage of.

Tagliente's Faction: Whether born on Planet Poison or an escapee from New Venice, PCs might be part of House Tagliente. Such characters should definitely be skilled at taking care of themselves, mentally, physically, professionally, and socially; their greatest strength is their tightly-knit family connections. They build and strengthen Tagliente interests, and fight and spy on the Headleys, the IPF, and possibly the Hegemony.

NPC Backgrounds

(NOTE: The range of capability ranks -- from lowest to highest -- is Poor, Average, Good, Expert, Master.)

Freedom Legion

Nurse Kristyne Temple aka Asp: Hired to act as caregiver for the infant Gemma Headley twenty years ago, Nurse Temple has been in the service of House Headley since -- and in the Freedom Legion for five of them. Kristyne is Arcadian, originally, and once the Star Guard "Pacified" her world, she turned against the Hegemony. She fears history is about to repeat itself on Intoxica, and that this is in no small part due to Lady Kat's machinations. However, she is utterly loyal to Gemma, with a dedication surpassing her loyalty to the Legion or the House. She is an Expert Teacher and Caregiver, a Good Spy, and Poor at disobeying Gemma's commands.

IPF

Governor Orlando Zirlaq: The Governor's in a bit of a pickle: he's trapped between the machinations of House Headley, House Tagliente, and the Hegemony. He owes his position, power, or wealth to each of them in some regard, and all possess dirt on him. Like a man balancing spinning plates, he must divide his attention and care between each. However, self-preservation has shown him his path: keep everything quiet. If this can be done, he wins: the Star Guard won't swoop in, and two of his allies-cum-enemies will weaken the other. He's just got to keep the *appearance* of law, order, and public safety long enough for one faction to crumble. An Expert administrator, he has Good political acumen and wealth.

Commander Hector "the Handsome" Zirlaq: Hector is an Expert soldier, fencer, and athlete, and a Good leader of men. However, his real claim to fame is his Master rank appearance -- he's the finest-looking man in the entire sector. Unfortunately, this is his biggest failing, too: he is Poor at avoiding being narcissistic and vain. His father wants him to marry Gemma Headley, and he's actually become a bit smitten by the girl: she's nearly as lovely as he.

Herman Zirlaq aka Whimsy: Herman's not a soldier like his brother, but he is an Expert rank intellect and a Good fencer, shot, and socialite. Unfortunately, he's a bit of a wild-child, given to crazy acts and impulses (Poor self-control). "Whimsy" is Ignatio Tagliente's best friend, and would die for him without a second thought. His father wants him to join the business end of House Tagliente, and he's got no problem with that.

House Headley

Lady Kathryn "Kat" Headley: Once the ruler of Intoxica in all but name, Lady Kat used to be pro-Terran Hegemony -- that is, until the Arcadia Pacification. While previously, she had counted on House Headley's vast offworld network of commercial interests to insulate it from the Hegemon's reach, she hadn't counted on the bald-faced nationalization of businesses on Pacified worlds. If only she hadn't involved those grasping House Tagliente bastards in the mining problem, she'd be able to bolster Intoxica's defenses against the Star Guard. As it is, her attention is almost totally consumed by their quarrel. She is grooming her daughter to take over segments of House business, in order to turn her mind back to plots to maintain Intoxican sovereignty; she's already started machinating with certain (i.e., bribable) Star

Guard officers and Hegemony administrators. She is a Master of "high class culture" (dining, the fine arts, wines, luxuries); an Expert at scheming, willpower, and business, Good at public relations and social activities, and a Poor shot -- that's why she has bodyguards.

Gemma Headley aka The Ice Princess: Gemma inherited her mother's iron will, and her father's remarkable looks (Expert appearance and self-control). Her intellect is Good, and she's already started to learn how to run a few of the House concerns. She is Average at self-defense. She respects her mother, but is truly devoted to the woman who raised her: Nurse Temple. Despite her strength of character, she is Poor at dealing with her feelings of loneliness. (Note that Commander Zirlaq has begun to court her, but she hates his insufferable self-love.) If anyone ever manages to pierce the shell of her resolve, she will move heaven and Intoxica for them.

Thomas "Tom" Tildrum: Tom Tildrum is a nephew of Lady Kat's and holds the position of "special liquidations consultant" (i.e., assassin) in House Headley. An Expert duelist (with both sword and raygun) and intrusion specialist, he possesses a Good reputation as "a dangerous sort." His biggest flaw is his pride -- he has Poor self-control when insulted, and sees the entire farrago of dealings with House Tagliente as an insult. In short, he hates them with a burning intensity. He's very pro-Terran Hegemony, and one of his associates is -- unbeknownst to Tildrum -- a Star Guard spy.

House Tagliente

Duke Santiago Tagliente: Duke Santiago is just a simple businessman. If the ex-pat New Venetian sees an opportunity, he takes it. He buys low and sells high (and if sometimes you need to put a little English on the market, hey . . . it's what we call a "finesse"). He doesn't like Lady Kat because she's not doing half of what he could do with all her scratch. For example, he hates the Hegemony because of what they did to his homeworld. A man with the kind of money and resources that House Headley's got their mitts on could do some serious damage to Tsung Cain and his Starboys. That Flash Rogers character had the right idea, but the wrong conclusion. The point shouldn't be to overturn the Hegemon's dictatorship, but to make the right sort of guy the new Hegemon . . .

Ignatio "Iggy" Tagliente: The apple of his father's eye, Ignatio Tagliente is a hot-headed romantic, possibly more in love with the idea of being in love than he ever was with any of his paramours (Poor self-control in matters of the heart). An Expert duelist and charismatic type, he uses sword, fist, smile, and a Good head for business to administer much of House Tagliente's street-level concerns. He and his best friends Whimsy Zirlaq and William Jaeger also act as troubleshooters for the entire House, despite their youth. While even more loudly against the Hegemony than his father, he is unaware that one of his acquaintances is a Freedom Legion spy.

Consigliore-in-training **William Jaeger:** William Jaeger is the son of one of the Duke's advisors. He himself is being trained to serve in the same position for the Duke's son Ignatio, who also happens to be his best friend. William has a Master rank intelligence, an Expert grasp of House Tagliente business affairs, a Good grasp of House Headley's business affairs, and is a Good shot. Unfortunately, he's hopeless (Poor) at fencing, fisticuffs, or other physical activities.

Miscellaneous

TAT3 aka "Larry": Blobman of Mogo and mentor to Ignatio. Enjoys growing plants, especially those poisonous to humans. His hobby is attempting to replicate Terran bagpipe music himself. Energy Absorption (Good), No Need to Eat, Drink, or Breathe (Average); Personal Grav Control (Good), Remold (Good); Superstrong (Expert); Inability to control curiosity (Poor); Telepathy with ancestor & descendants (Average); Too weird to blend in (Poor).

Locations

There are a number of locations that can serve as the stage for action on Planet Poison. Here are the main divisions, in brief:

Faction Headquarters: All of these should be exceptionally secure (with a number of armed guards on duty and plenty of technological countermeasures) and safe. Direct assault is probably not an option, but sneaky reconnaissance or entry by stratagem is possible. Examples include the Headley estate, the Tagliente mansion, the Governor's compound, the IPF garrison, the hidden Star Guard outpost, and the secret Freedom Legion safehouse.

- *Faction Holdings:* These could be service businesses (casinos, hotels, amusement parks, clubs, etc.), industry installations (factories, plants, warehouses, mines, vineyards, commercial transport), or secondary residences (beach houses, cabin in the woods, houseboats, etc.). They are less secure than Headquarters, and more easily taken by force.
- *Public Areas:* The Public Square. Port Paradise Starport. Numerous parks and monuments. The Beach. The Hall of Hegemonic Justice. Public transport. These places are terribly insecure, and serve as the settings for most open conflict between factions.

Landing

Events & Possible Story Arcs

The Fix Is In!: At the Globe Casino, the biggest boxing match of the decade is about to happen: Junior Jambon vs. Claude King for the heavyweight title of the sector. But why has Junior's estranged mother Trudy shackled up with his opponent? It seems to be making Junior a little nuts. Worse still, disturbing rumors are starting to percolate that the match has been rigged by the Taglientes. Will Junior really take a dive in the fifth, or is it all just a bluff?

Serial Killer?: There's a serial killer stalking Intoxica's seedier districts, preying on average citizens. His *modus operandi* is an execution-style murder of a prominent member of a corporate House. "The Ghost Gangster" is also becoming known for the messages he's been sending to the newsfeeds, filled with crime scene details and taunts aimed at the Governor and the Commander. How long will his spree continue? (In actuality, there's no Ghost: it's a PR scheme cooked up by Orlando and Hector to cover isolated casualties in the inter-House gang war.)



Blobman Tourist: Larry (you remember, the enigmatic alien known to be weird, tough, and superstrong?), in a Hawaiian shirt, wandering around Intoxica, seeing the sights, humming bagpipe music to himself. Hilarity ensues. Any questions?

Signature Story Arc: "Starcrossed"

A Signature Story Arc (SSA) is a timeline for what happens if PCs *don't* get involved. An SSA can serve as a skeleton to create adventures -- even whole campaigns -- around, with various subplots and side-adventures weaving in and out. It can be altered, edited, speeded up, slowed down, or utterly warped to serve the current campaign.

An SSA is *not* intended as a way to railroad PCs. The real fun is to see how the PCs' actions disrupt and change "what would have normally happened," and follow up on the ramifications of those PC-inspired changes.

The following Episodes detail: 1) what will happen without PC involvement and 2) opportunities for PC involvement

at that point. GM-only information appears in [square brackets]; and a section on *SSA Advice* is offered below the Episode descriptions.

Episodes A1 through A3

A Trio of Inter-House Altercations

What Happens

After three altercations between House Headley and House Tagliente which meet two of three criteria (*public*, *costly* in terms of property or life, or *disruptive*), go to Episode B. A bloodless bar-brawl won't count, nor will an isolated execution, nor even a break-in at a Headquarters (unless it's really, really messy). Without PC involvement, the three altercations will be:

1. A Tagliente courier skimmer "accidentally" rams a Headley transport floater. This causes a massive wreck that rains burning debris into a non-Faction hotel resort and snarls air-traffic for hours.
2. Headley raygunmen open fire on Tagliente soldiers in a non-Faction commodities broker's office and vaporize a good chunk of the building in the crossfire.
3. Crews decked out in Headley and Tagliente colors mix-it up swashbuckler-style (swords and daggers) in Port Paradise Starport. In the confusion, a Tagliente starship explodes, ruining a pod of public ship-cradles. (Tom Tildrum was involved in this fracas, and is one of the few survivors.)

PC Involvement

PCs could be part of any one of these altercations for just about any background -- whether as part of a House Faction, as IPF soldiers responding to the chaos, or simply as observers. If fully involved with a House Faction, feel free to replace any of the above with any mayhem perpetuated by the PCs that meets the criteria.

Episode B

Gubernatorial Decree

What Happens

[The Governor holds a private meeting between Lady Kat, Duke Santiago, and their advisors to inform them that any further "loud" conflicts will result in harsh measures by the IPF. That means anyone who starts anything, dies. This decree is issued to forestall the Hegemony declaring that Intoxica is in Crisis.] The pair agree to Zirlaq's terms, and pass the word to their Factions.

PC Involvement

None really, unless they're high up in one of the three Factions represented here; if they're also a spy for the Freedom Legion or Star Guard, much mileage can be gotten out of this agreement.

Episode C

Masquerade

What Happens

House Headley throws a big costume party for Gemma's 21st birthday. Iggy, William, and Hector gatecrash, they have a dust-up with Tildrum, ruffled feathers are smoothed by Lady Kat. Then, Iggy sees Gemma and falls for her like a ton of bricks. [Later, Iggy sneaks into her chambers and puts the moves on her; she responds to the impetuous young man with a surprising (even to herself) ardor.]

PC Involvement

PCs can be guests at the party, and get involved with any element of the episode. Perhaps they tell Tom that Taglientes are in the house, help separate Iggy and Tom, bring the Lady to stop the duel, or point out Gemma to Iggy.

Episode D

Secret Marriage

What Happens

Iggy has a long talk with Larry about "human mating." Afterwards, Iggy scopes out the Headley estate and its workings. About the same time, Gemma starts studying Tagliente operations. [Iggy's trying to figure out a way to get in to see Gemma again. Gemma's trying to figure out a way to see Iggy again. Nurse Temple is eventually co-opted to deliver a message to Iggy.] Iggy acts very friendly towards distrusting Headley employees. [Temple passes a message to Iggy, setting up a rendezvous; Iggy and Gemma are wed secretly in Larry's rented bungalow.]

PC Involvement

PCs might overhear the discussions between Iggy and Larry, or Iggy and Temple, and decide to investigate. They might also notice the reconnaissance that both Iggy and Gemma are performing, and could possibly be tapped to help or hinder these efforts, without necessarily being clued into their true purpose.

Episode E

Duello

What Happens

In the public square, Tildrum attempts to provoke Iggy into a duel. Iggy refuses, Tildrum attacks anyway, and in the scuffle, Herman is seriously wounded. Iggy attacks, Tildrum flees.

PC Involvement

PCs can join into a general melee on either side, or attempt to stop the fighting (especially if they're IPF soldiers).

Episode F

Duello Redux

What Happens

While being med-evac'd, Herman dies. Iggy leaps from the ambulance skimmer, and starts tracking Tildrum. Eventually coming upon him in a tavern, they duel, and Iggy kills Tildrum.

PC Involvement

PCs could help Iggy locate Tildrum, hide and/or patch-up the wounded Tildrum, or trying to somehow hold back the tides of blood.

Episode G

Exile or Death

What Happens

When his son's murder is reported to the Governor, he summons the Lady and the Duke to attend him publicly. Orlando wants an explanation, *now*. The tragic death has stiffened his spine: the Governor will be ruthless in stopping the gang war [indeed, Star Guard spies may already be reporting that the Intoxican situation has moved to a Crisis point]. He orders the execution of Iggy at the urging of Lady Headley. However, when the facts of Episode G are brought to light [and a quiet threat from the Duke], he alters this to permanent exile upon pain of death. Lady Headley is not happy at all with this commutation of sentence, but the Governor is firm. [The Governor urges Hector to press his suit with Gemma and pursue alliance, in order to ameliorate the Lady's feelings over his decision.] Iggy flees the planet, and goes into hiding on the orbital station, Port Nexus.

PC Involvement

PCs could be recruited to (on the Tagliente or covert IPF sides) to spirit Iggy away or (on the Headley side) to hunt him down and assassinate him. PCs could help arrange or locate Iggy's hidey-hole on the orbital station.

Episode H

Poison Plot/Wedding Banns

What Happens

Lady Kat pushes her daughter to accept Hector's offer of marriage; Gemma refuses for a time [Temple and Gemma come up with an idea to fake her own death: once "dead," she can meet up with Iggy, and they can flee the sector; she sends a message to Iggy on Port Nexus], then relents. The wedding announcement is broadcast system-wide.

PC Involvement

PCs could be tasked with delivering Gemma's message to Iggy, or stopping the message from getting through. They might also be called upon to help with wedding preparations, if they are in House Headley or the IPF.

Episode I

The Return of Iggy

What Happens

[Iggy hears the wedding announcement, and decides to return, burst into the wedding, kill Hector, and steal Gemma away.] Gemma Headley dies under mysterious circumstances; her body is transported to the Port Paradise Hospital morgue. Lady Kat blames Tagliente assassins, and gears up for war. [Iggy hears of the death when he gets dirt-side, and runs to the morgue.] Duke Santiago, all the while protesting Tagliente involvement, nonetheless makes war-preparations as well. [The Duke attempts to contact Iggy, but cannot; this adds to his stress.] The IPF goes into full-riot-slapdown mode. Iggy is sighted making for the Port Paradise Hospital. Mass hysteria as all forces converge on the Hospital. [Iggy discovers Gemma dead and commits suicide; Gemma rouses herself, sees Iggy dead, and commits suicide.] The dead lovers are found, along with forged identi-cards and exit visas made out to "Mr. and Mrs. Shaxberd" (see *Now What?*).

PC Involvement

Even if the PCs have been assiduously avoiding the SSA, the Return of Iggy should demand their attention, because Intoxica is going to hell all around them. Every Faction is trying to get to the Hospital for one reason or another, under order or on their own initiative.

SSA Advice

First off, the SSA is intended to be a coat-rack for the PCs to hang their jackets on. If it's becoming too railroady (that is, the SSA is more important than what the PCs do), *throw it out!* Deviation from the "What Happens Next" is encouraged, if not mandatory. That being said, if one wishes to use the SSA, the following advice may come in handy:

Pacing: If a multi-session campaign, the first session could be totally unrelated to the SSA, allowing the players to get comfortable with Planet Intoxica and its denizens. An Event or PC-driven subplot would work well here to set the mood. If desired, there can be full non-SSA sessions between A1 through A3; almost no time between A3 and B; a half-session between B and C (gotta get ready for the party!); a session between C and D; a half- or whole session between D and E; almost no time between E, F, and G; one or two sessions between G and H; and a half-session between H and I. Non-SSA sessions can be used to weave in other Events, subplots, and missions into the campaign, so that the SSA is a background plot that occasionally moves to the front, rather than being stage-front every session. "The Fix is In!" works well if it happens at the same time as D, and "Blobman Tourist" is particularly good alongside A1, A2, A3, or C.

Now What?: In a more orderly universe, finding the corpses of Iggy and Gemma might make House Headley and House Tagliente realize the dangers of vendetta and allow them to bury the hatchet. However, it's more probable on Planet Poison that catharsis will involve stabbing, shooting, or explosions.

But wait, there's more: the city-wide panic caused by the Return of Iggy has an excellent chance of being the proverbial straw that breaks the Hegemonic camel's back. Obviously, the Governor cannot properly govern his unruly citizens; thus, the Hegemon will declare an "Intoxican Crisis" and send in the Star Guard to "restore order." In the face of planetary invasion, can this vendetta be set aside?

Monkeywrenches: Again, if the PCs get caught up in the SSA, they *will* perturb the plot. For example, if the PCs eliminate Nurse Temple before the Poison Plot (by murder, accident, blowing her cover, or simply delaying her too long), Gemma's subterfuge will probably be detected, and the SSA cannot proceed as written. *This is a good thing.* GMs just need to keep in mind the personalities, motivations, and goals of the NPCs, and evaluate what they would do as events change. The possibilities are -- and should be -- endless! Use the SSA as a jumping off point to allow your players to tell their own stories, be they interwoven with the SSA or completely divergent.

Other Resources

- Flash Gordon and His Universal Serial Compatriots -- <http://members.iquess.net/~taldr/>
- The Space Hero Files -- <http://www.slick-net.com/space/text/>
- *Goodfellas* -- <http://us.imdb.com/Title?0099685>
- "Last Movie Standing" -- <http://www.metroactive.com/papers/metro/09.26.96/last-man-9639.html>
- *Red Harvest* Review -- http://www.brothersjudd.com/index.cfm/fuseaction/reviews.detail/book_id/804/RedHarvest.htm
- *Romeo and Juliet* (1968) -- <http://www.filmisite.org/rome.html>

SPIN: Blob Harvest (aka Yoblobbo, A Pseudopod of Credits, or Last Blob Standing)

Here's an alternate take: Larry's not there to make sure the Hegemony stays out of Intoxica: he's there to make sure that it *does* intervene. He's goading both Houses and the Governor -- secretly serving as an agent for each -- to up the stakes and bring Planet Poison to a boil. Then, the Star Guard will swoop in, and all sides will take heavy losses. After that, Larry, Darryl-2, and Darryl-2's descendants will appear and neutralize the Intoxican threat to Mogo.

Irregular Webcomic

by **David Morgan-Mar**

Irregular Web Comic



Gaudeamus Igitur: Age and Society in Roleplaying

Part II -- Youth

by Michele Armellini

*"Let's rejoice, therefore,
While we are young.
After a pleasant youth,
After a troublesome old age,
The earth will have us."*

--*Gaudeamus Igitur*, translation from the C.W. Kindeleben 1781 version

The [first article](#) of this series pointed out how age classes and conventions about age groups characterized different civilizations through the ages, and how these defining elements can be useful in roleplaying as background elements and adventure hooks. This article deals with what is possibly the most interesting age class, and the most useful for many promising adventurers: youth. The ideas and suggestions presented here should be useful to everyone; one section is **GURPS**-specific.

Rites Of Passage

Every reader went through it (with the exception of those who are undergoing it now!): awesome changes, raging hormones, the challenge of finding a proper place and a respected role in a more complicated world, new needs, new responsibilities.

This experience is so universal that it speaks to the heart of everyone, and it's so stressful, intense, and important that it has been the theme of countless fictional accounts; for Germans, it's even a literary genre on its own, the *Bildungsroman*. The well-known teenagers' angst has indeed existed in every human civilization -- but today it's only a shadow of what it was in the past.

In today's affluent societies, adolescence may be psychologically challenging, but it's a protracted, protected process. Typically, after having reached sexual maturity, teenagers still spend many years living with their parents and studying. At 18, they get full rights, but often they still have limited duties. As long as they have an insufficient income, or rely on their parents', they are not independent; conversely, if the parents are too generous, money that isn't earned the hard way can become a problem on its own. This prolonged dependence and cohabitation, of course, can cause conflicts (see also below).

But this is nothing compared to what happened in earlier times. Having to face a much shorter life span, our ancestors wasted no time, and youth was a moment of passage rather than many years of adolescence. Normally, biology defined that moment, and puberty meant one was no longer a child; he had become a man (she, a woman). The passage was often marked by impressive rituals (see below).

Once the youths had passed their initiation, in many civilizations they were considered as adults under every respect. This brought more responsibilities than any Western 15-years-old would gladly accept today; those youths had to grow fast. Nevertheless, they simply lacked the experience and perspective that only age can give, and one wonders how they coped: Joan of Arc arrived at court when she was 17 or 18, and there she met Charles VII, who had been king (though still uncrowned) since he was 19. Some inexplicably rash, impulsive, or naïve deeds by famous historical figures might well become more understandable if one just looks up their date of birth.

Less lofty people also had to quickly adapt to the demands of their careers and lives. In tribal societies, the youths were now expected to be skilled hunters and to contribute to the family needs. In war, they would still have secondary

roles for a while, as carriers, horse-holders, or skirmishers, but they could well have to face a foe bent on killing them. As to skirmishers, some military historians maintain that at low-tech levels this role wasn't very effective exactly because it had been devised to give the hot-blooded youths something to do. They'd advance in the no-man's-land, trade insults, rocks, and maybe a blow or two with their peers of the opposing tribe, without achieving much apart from testing their own bravery and warming up the battle; then they'd fall back to let real men do the real work. This point of view may be accurate, but a boy isn't less wounded just because the enemy skirmisher who hit him hasn't achieved anything else.

A craftsman's youth began early and lasted more than that; most crafts and trades required a long apprenticeship. An apprentice would begin to work (and learn) as young as 8, and his "youth," featuring lots of hard labor for virtually no retribution, ended when he became a full craftsman or a journeyman. Only at that time was his long ordeal paid back, because by then he knew his craft and had gained a chance of admission to the guild. Often, his initiation resembled what we'd call an examination today.

A farm boy's life would change with marriage; this might well happen real soon, often being the last thing his father decided for him. This was the turning point for girls, too, in virtually every civilization. In a poor countryside setting, at 20 a woman could already have three children, not to mention the babies who had already died; add to that the labor in the fields, and she would probably look like she was 30.

Indeed, youth as we know it in sociological terms is basically a by-product of learning. Complex societies, where a made man of the upper classes was expected to have a vast knowledge and many skills, simply needed to invest more time in training at least some of their manpower. Studying often leaves some free time, and above all the energy to try and exploit it. That's where the tune providing the title to this series was born. Medieval university students are the quintessential example of this philosophy: while we train for life, we'll have some good ol' fun.

Within this class, there is an interesting special case: the boys who trained to take monastic vows. Their discipline was no less strict than the full monks', and the final choice they were studying for was often taken for granted. But the novice's condition is interesting, since those final vows haven't been taken yet, but he still lives within the monastic community. And while he's there, he might have some access to all sorts of intriguing things (from manuscripts to reliquaries), while still being a boy.

Initiation

Up to today, "initiation" resonates with powerful social and psychological overtones. "Initiation" means access to a beginning, and it often implies entry into some kind of exclusive circle: a mystery cult, a lodge, or simply a guild, or even a frat. However, the first and most important exclusive circle one had to enter into was the grown-ups of his own tribe.

A primitive initiation could feature several different rituals; for starters, one or more tests, as to skill, bravery, and resistance to pain. The skill test would often regard hunting and survival, such as surviving far from the tribe for a month, hunting on one's own, and being treated by the tribe as an enemy. Pain could be self-inflicted, and involve ritual wounds, scarification, tattooing and even minor mutilation. Note that as long as the tribesman remains within his culture, *not* having the initiation tattoos makes him an Outcast (Social Stigma); but if he reaches civilized lands, they immediately qualify him as a Primitive (Social Stigma!) and may even be an Unnatural Feature.

Magical and/or religious rituals would take place, too; in certain cultures, mind-altering substances or procedures could be used (fungi, burning herbs, fasting, dancing to exhaustion) so that the initiate could attain a trance-like status. The shaman would then interpret his visions or dreams, giving the boy insights about his destiny or his relationship with the tribe's totem, or maybe his own personal totem animal. This might include acquiring one's true, adult (and possibly secret) name.

Before, during, or after these rites, the initiate would also be taught the adults' secrets: magical and/or religious precepts, sexual customs, secret knowledge, bywords or full languages, and more.

Boys are initiated by men, and, sometimes with lesser rituals, girls by women. Spying on the rituals by underage boys or by strangers is an abominable sacrilege, as is spying on the secrets of the other sex.

Initiation customs were diluted with the advancement of civilization, until they became just a harmless religious ritual, or maybe just the day one shaved for the first time and changed clothing style. Yet adolescence initiation elements still survived or resurfaced here and there, from the ritualized face-scarring duels in German universities a century ago, to the humorous challenges to join a frat and the bloody tests for a street gang. This whole concept makes for a wonderful RPG tool, of course. It is an ideal way of starting out with new characters. It may be the theme of an adventure in itself; even with preexisting adult characters (if they want to be accepted in the tribe they must be initiated as if they were boys!). It might also be an unforgettable way to characterize a primitive society.

Portrait Of The Character As A Youngster

GURPS makes quite a good job of portraying starting adventurers as teens; after all, **GURPS Basic** makes it clear that 100-point concepts are not heroes yet, and the sample character is 18. There are, however, a few things to remember if the youngster has to be realistic and balanced in **GURPS** terms.

At the borderline between youth and childhood, a 14-year-old character should take advantage of the free increase in ST and IQ (+1) when he turns 15 (see p. B14).

Second, from 15 to 17, the teens are subject to their mandatory Disadvantage: Youth (-2/-4/-6, p. B29). If the GM is going to have a group of underage PCs for a while, he'd do well to define what they cannot do, exactly. For instance, the description on p. B29 does not mention buying alcohol, voting, owning restricted items etc. Also note that if the "legal age" is higher (see "Voting Age", below), the value of this Disadvantage will change (if the legal age is 21, and the character is 16, it's a -10 Disadvantage). Youth also brings a -2 reaction modifier (lack of respect!) from adults. This may vary; in a transhuman society, those having a few centuries of experience might regard a 17-year-old as little more than a child.

When creating teen characters, other Social Advantages and Disadvantages should also be carefully considered. Can the boy's parents be considered Patrons? Does a group of close friends provide Claim to Hospitality, or even Ally Group?

Money and status can be tricky, because usually they are the family's, not under the direct control of the teens themselves. Independent Income might be a way to represent the lavish monthly allowance of a privileged daddy's boy, while conversely many students are less wealthy than their own family. If high Status is hereditary, the heir is considered one level lower in Status than his father (and his younger brothers, and sisters, may well be -2 Status). Attention should be paid to issues of actual power; the son of a Duke is Status 5 like an Earl, but the latter is the ruler within his domains, while the former's authority, if any, amounts to what his father decided to delegate.

Other interesting conditions that may come into play are Disowned, Heir, Uneducated.

Finally, there are a few Disadvantages that look so typical of teens that they would make a soap-teen-opera campaign really light-hearted: Compulsive Carousing, Impulsiveness, Overconfidence, Stubbornness, Shyness, and Klutz. As to Advantages, some wiry boys always seem to be Pitiable.

High School

Ordinary youths in ordinary times are the protagonists of successful fiction . . . so there must be something compelling about them! If these ideas just sound too old, a clever GM could still use them not so much as adventure themes in themselves, but as easily recognizable subplots or sideshows.

- **The Jock, the Nerd, the Belle.** These are the archetypes of countless High School movies. The secret for enjoying such a simple setting is to embrace simple objectives: have fun, gain status and respect, be popular, be

happy; avoid humiliations, bad marks, and your parents' wrath (they might ground you!). Then again, are these objectives really simple? If the players think so, a GM may always use High School life as a backdrop for more momentous events.

- **Why Jack?** A "jack" may be "any of various contrivances, originally one that took the place of a boy." Considering that jacks can also be used to lift vehicles, this tells a lot about the thankless jobs that unskilled apprentices had to face. Especially in low-tech settings, going to school isn't an option for everybody. The PCs toil through grueling routine in the fields, workshop, or factory. They survive building-yard accidents. They try not to be bullied by older workmen, who might be resentful because the boys are paid less to do the same work. They attempt to learn something from their master and to get all their wages from the embezzling foreman. When the players are tired of this, the GM may let the *real* adventure begin.
- **Dealing with Dad.** This is a theme as old as Oedipus. Youths need to affirm their own personality, and the quickest way is to question authority. It is already quite difficult to get a father to see his child's reasons under the best conditions; unfortunately some fathers are self-righteous moralists, or violent alcoholics, or just plain stubborn. While the most typical treatment deals with the father-son interaction, a GM can throw in a mother and/or a girl, too. This situation could be a good starting point for a new group of 17-year-old adventurers. They decide to leave their town to go treasure hunting in the Dark Hills . . . but first they'll have to ask for their fathers' permission! Or will they dare go without asking? Suggested soundtrack: Cat Stevens' *Father and Son*.
- **Peer Pressure.** As long as one is a child, his parents are his guides; but their importance will soon pale in comparison to the group of his own peers (what many parents call "bad company"). Most youths will go to great lengths not to disappoint their peers, from keeping secrets that would be better told to the headmaster (or the police), to committing crimes.

Bitter Apprenticeship

Perfectly ordinary youngsters can make for really interesting characters if the times they live in are extraordinary! Here are a few ideas:

- **They'll Talk to Us.** The aliens have arrived (or the Elves, or the demons). But there is a psychic incompatibility between them and the adults, or so they say . . . as they talk with teens. Do the intruders just want to deal with more pliable, less experienced minds? And what about the boys and girls they select as "interpreters"; are they brainwashed? Are they sincere when they try to explain what the newcomers want . . . and fail for lack of words? The visitors, of course, are feared by the adults, but they are becoming immensely popular with the teens. What do they really want?
- **The First Blood.** It's another initiation, the first kill. A trace of the ancient hunters' rituals sometimes survives in the barbaric gesture of smearing the quarry's blood on the face of a frightened boy. A young hunter's first buck can be a defining moment -- not to mention his first bear, or mammoth. But this is nothing compared to wartime, when the eager would-be warriors' prey is a human being. Will they be bloodthirsty or shocked? Will the prey be more difficult than the boys' trainers expect? Will the lesson go awry?
- **Voting Age.** The world has grown old, and the laws have adapted. After all, only the senior citizens cared to vote, right? So, the voting age is now 30, and until then, one is a "boy" (that's the way he'll be addressed) with limited rights. The state's budget caters to the voters, and robots do menial jobs; cheap drugs will keep the boys happy, and tough hi-tech cops will keep them in line. The PCs should cling to their low-paying job, risk a fine for going to that unlawful concert, and be polite with their elders: there's always a camera watching.
- **Dim Lights, Big City.** The big city is unforgiving, with seedy neighborhoods, gloomy shantytowns, abandoned industrial districts, and nightmarish sewers. Living there is hard for an adult with a home and a job, but it's much harder for the homeless and jobless. And the worst is to be, on top of that, boys; street urchins, *meninos da rua*. The PCs' friends beg, steal from the drunkards, run from the police, sniff glue and, from time to time, disappear. The heroes may try surviving in the street, in Yrth's Megalos, Medieval Paris, Victorian London, or modern Rio. If they reach 20, they'll be a statistical anomaly.
- **Lambs to the Slaughter.** In this disturbing setting, the boys only have vague remembrances of their sad, young mothers; at six, they were taken away to work in the fields around the Compound. Big men with hair on their faces, the Guards, punish them if they don't work hard enough. When they turn 14, the Teachers, harried, frightened youths that are just a few years older than the heroes, tell them about sex; if they make children they'll

live longer. Meanwhile, the weak, the rebellious, and the smart disappear in the night. The Masters take them away. Even the Guards fear the Masters, and they sometimes call them with a different name: Vampires. Can the heroes run away from the Compound, hide from the Guards during the day, and from the Masters at night?

Great Expectations

Here are a few adventure or campaign ideas for the truly extraordinary youths.

- **A Coming of Age.** This is the title of Timothy Zahn's SF novel. On that colonial planet, a mutation affected the settlers. Strong psychokinetic powers were bestowed on them . . . but they lose them shortly after puberty! Grown-ups have to rely on responsible boys and girls for help, and knowledge must be strictly guarded to prevent social unrest or outright chaos. This setting would be extremely interesting both for [children](#), as well as for adolescent PCs, who are losing the ability to fly and hurl things, and must cope with the change. What if some precocious genius starts a revolution? Or if somebody claims to be able to preserve the PK powers beyond puberty?
- **Changing Changelings.** Puberty may be the time one *acquires* his powers. It happens with werereatures in many fictional settings. Or it might be the time the X-Man begins to learn how to control and use those powers. In typical changeling stories, this might be the time the real parents or people come to fetch the strange boy. But what if this changeling refuses the change, or has somehow partially changed into a "normal?" What if he wants to stay where he grew up? Suppose a few potential X-Boys simply say "no thanks." Will their would-be mentors leave them alone? Will *their enemies* leave them alone? Will their normal friends, girlfriends, and relatives accept them as if nothing had changed?
- **Growing Pains.** In *GURPS Goblins*, childhood experiences (where "experiences" is usually pronounced "abuses") shape the characters' minds and bodies. In *GURPS Supers*, stress can activate mutagenes. In this strange low-power Supers setting, everybody has some small, trivial super capability, and they are both activated and shaped by the experiences, desires, fears and stressful situations of their adolescence. And there is a catch. Higher stress bestows greater powers, but this also makes adolescence longer, and it "locks in" adolescent personality traits. The most powerful persons on the planet, regardless of their real age, still behave like teenagers. And some of them are super-villains.
- **A Brave New Youth.** An epidemic condemns everyone who has already achieved puberty to a slow but sure death within a couple of years. The vaccine was found, but for the adults it's too late. Soon, the species' survival will be in the hands of those irresponsible boys and girls; desperate, dying parents and mentors strive to teach them the fundamentals, while hateful bands of adults are bent on taking Samson's stand. And the teens will soon have their despised little brothers to look after, too!

Roleplaying Tips

Behave as you did when you were a teen! Or, even better, think about the excessive, rebellious black sheep your mother warned you against, and behave like him. Or you might roleplay the mousy, shy girl who stays away from bullies -- but has a little secret of her own.

Most teenagers lack some typical balancing features one only develops over time: experience, balance, cautiousness, even common sense. On the other hand, they also often lack some less positive aspects of the middle-age mindset: cynicism, moral relativism, remissiveness. Adults are conservative and pragmatic, youths are revolutionary and idealistic (no shades of gray; it's either black or white!).

When roleplaying a teen, however, one should remember that nothing is cast in stone; it's a moment of transition and of hesitation. One day he might be bold, the next one he'll be shy. He may chafe under his parents' rule, then feel abandoned and insecure if suddenly freed. There will be, however, some turning point sooner or later, and/or a general trend of development. Disadvantages (both the typical ones listed above, and others) can give useful roleplaying guidelines. If the character is Impulsive, Overconfident and Curious, or Stubborn and Intolerant of authority figures, the player already knows what to do!

Suggested Reading

- [*I Was a Teenage Dinosaur*](#), by James L. Cambias
- [Bildungsroman](#)
- [A bibliography of ethnographic videos](#)
- Information on Timothy Zahn's [*A Coming of Age*](#).

67 Words For "Damage," No Word For "Parlay"

This is another one of those columns where I point out something that's obvious to me, but might be worthwhile to repeat anyway. (And even if it isn't, it should at least buy me some breathing time before [Dragon*Con](#) draws me out of my secluded peninsula and into the wilds of Georgia next weekend.)

Anyway, there's a [common saying](#) (which may or [may not](#) be significant) posits that there are a bunch of different words for "snow" in the Inuit language. In the general sense this is usually brought up to drive home the idea that, when you've got a whole lot of something, it tends to figure more prominently in your linguistic choices. (For example, Kansans have 117 words for "flat.") Contrariwise, many times you'll hear that "such-and-such a language" doesn't have a word for some concept, such as "compromise" or "privacy" or "freedom," usually ascribed to a country whose citizens seem lacking in compromise, privacy, or freedom. (This is, of course, [malarkey](#).)

However, drifting from the realm of languages (and away from supportive links designed to limit the irate emails I get from various linguists), I note that the basic ideas behind these two concepts have implications to RPGs. Namely, a game has stats and rules for things it generally thinks are important, while a game that lacks certain concepts will make it more difficult to accomplish those activities.

I first noticed this in good ol' first edition *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*, which didn't have a skill system per se, or even any means of determining success or failure at a task that *didn't* involve separating critters from their hit points. The closest it had was, in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, the Secondary Skills Table, which randomly assigns useful secondary skills to PCs. (As an aside, according to that table, in the 1st Edition universe there are more professional gamblers than miners, armorers, shipwrights, or bowyer/fletchers, and 18% of the adventuring world has "No skill of measurable worth." For some reason I envision skill-lacking would-be adventurers lounging on the couch in their underwear, becoming inspired by a chainmail-clad former television star saying, "Do you want to make more money? Sure! We all do . . .") On this table, even if you *did* get a skill that would seem useful, there was no mechanic in place to allow use of it; it was up to the DM to determine whether or not, say, an armorer could make something with his skill. As a result, that system didn't really encourage anything that didn't involve knocking critters into the afterlife.

Contrariwise, games that have stats and abilities as an integral part will (probably) find players using those abilities more. For example, the Storyteller System has three categories of attributes -- Physical, Social, and Mental -- and requires players to prioritize those categories. When I saw that, I noted that it was the first system I had seen that placed social attributes on an equal footing with physical and mental ones. Mayfair's *DC Heroes*, on the other hand, had three categories of its own: Physical, Mental, and Mystical, while *Fading Suns* has a Faith attribute (which exists in direct opposition to the Ego attribute; the more you place focus and discipline within yourself, the less you can turn to a higher power . . . and vice versa).

What's the upshot of all this? Well, in games with detailed social rules you can expect to *use* them . . . presumably in a number of social settings. Likewise if a game decides that much of a person's makeup is Mystical in nature, then that aspect will probably fit into the game.

(Of course, it should be noted that the mere existence of a trait does not necessarily indicate it will be important; FASA's original *Star Trek* game, for example, had a Luck attribute, which seemed to have little game significance outside of giving humans something that they were good at that no one else was, and thus explain why they weren't turned into Romulan barnacle-scrappers centuries ago.)

So what's the point in mentioning all this (besides filler)? Well, namely that it's reasonable to expect players' actions to reflect what's possible in the game, and *not* reflect what isn't possible. For example, in most games I play in or GM, attempting to intimidate characters or otherwise persuade them through force of will is uncommon . . . unless a character doesn't have anything else to do. But in *Champions*, where "Presence" is an attribute and "Presence Attacks" are given extensive rules, it's entirely possible to craft a character with a powerful attack that consists of him saying, "Bow before me!"

So the upshot of this advice is two-fold. First, if there are actions the players will want to do, or activities the GM wants to encourage, then they need to make sure the game system supports it. For example, if it's important for the game that religious conviction (or lack thereof) plays an important part, then picking a system which intrinsically supports that element -- either with a "Faith" rating, a system with game effects for belief or nonbelief, or the like -- will do much to promote that element. (In my experience, it certainly works better than the GM merely standing on a table and saying, "C'mon, guys; I know there's no good reason, but in this game world you're supposed to do X!")

The second prong of that is to explore the game system you're using for activities and options you may not have been aware of. This can be trivial abilities; for example, I discovered in our ***Vampire: Dark Ages*** that, thanks to my character's inhuman strength, he was also good at jumping . . . very good. Shortly thereafter I was hopping around like Tigger on methamphetamines. ("How tall is the castle wall we're invading?" "Ummm . . . not more than 20 feet." "I jump it." "There are bad guys on the other side." "I jump them." "The mastermind is on the top floor of the central tower . . ." "I jump up to the top floor.") Although my exuberance of that new-found ability wore off quickly, I nevertheless always kept that jumping ability as part of my arsenal.

On a less whimsical side, I realized in our ***Fading Suns*** game that, owing to the wonky nature of the system, I was better off dumping most of my experience into the "Faith" ability and praying for things to work out (or at least not much worse off than in placing my trust in the standard task resolution system). In addition to getting a [Murphy's Rules](#) out of the experience, it also encouraged me to explore the religious aspect of that character and the universe more fully.

Of course, some games encourage the addition or inclusion of attributes that will be important to the campaign; some games, like ***Fudge***, can allow attributes that are unique to one *character*. And other game systems -- like ***GURPS*** -- have rules that can cover just about any situation. But some games have a core system, stat, or concept that it's enough to wrap an entire game around. (For example, immediately springing to mind are 1986's ***Marvel Super Heroes***, with its Karma system that enforces a moral code; ***Torg/Masterbook*** with its card system that gives players extensive control over the scene; and ***Aberrant***, with its elegant Super-Attribute system that easily yet evocatively simulates abilities beyond those of mortal men.) And other games have hidden gems that can bring new aspects or foci into a game (such as ***DC Heroes/MEGS*** system allowing Hero Points to be spent to modify the scene; ***Conspiracy X/GURPS Conspiracy X***'s system for pulling strings; or ***Exalted***'s combat system that directly rewards evocative and descriptive combat maneuvers).

And hopefully any games you play will have the vocabulary you need to play with snow problem.

'Gheliphrex

for *In Nomine*

by Loki Carbis

'GHELIPHREX

Demon of Unexplained Noises

Impudite Knight of Secrets

Corporeal Forces - 3	Strength 4	Agility 8
Ethereal Forces - 6	Intelligence 11	Precision 13
Celestial Forces - 5	Will 6	Perception 14

Charisma +3

Skills: Fast-Talk/6, Lying/6

Songs: Dreams (Celestial/3), Entropy (Ethereal/4), Thunder (6), Tongues (Corporeal/6)

Attunements: Demon of Unexplained Noises, Distraction, Djinn of Secrets, Habbalite of Dark Humor, Imbroglia, Impudite of Dark Humor, Impudite of Nightmares, Impudite of Secrets, Knight of Derision, Knight of Hidden Doors

Rites: 'Gheliphrex generates 1 point of Essence each time he manages to convince someone that the noise they just heard wasn't what they thought it was. He usually does this by quickly suggesting two or three additional explanations, and doing what he can to make it hard to figure out which one (if any) is the true explanation. If he can convince other people to do it for him, he gains 2 Essence.

It all went weird for Phrex the day he asked for his Word, about three centuries ago. Up until that time, he'd served Kobal, working fairly closely with the Prince. He'd attracted the jealousy of his fellow Servitors -- always a sign that a demon is doing a good job -- and was regarded as something of an up-and-comer to those in the know. His closeness to Kobal no doubt assisted him in this, but no one could deny that he was good at his work. And so, Kobal summoned Phrex one day, and told him that the time had come for him to petition Lucifer for a Word. Naturally, Phrex did so. He asked for a relatively minor Word -- Unexpected Noises. Phrex, like Kobal, greatly appreciated the comic value of a well-timed fart noise, but wanted to expand his repertoire.

Lucifer considered his request, dismissed it, and granted Phrex a different Word from the one he'd asked for. Gheliphrex was given the Word of Unexplained Noises. As an afterthought, Lucifer added an apostrophe at the start of Phrex's full name, and reassigned him to Alaemon, declaring that the explanation of any noise was a secret. Furthermore, he commanded Phrex not to enter his presence again until such time as Phrex had figured out how to pronounce his new name properly. Phrex is fond of joking that Lucifer's words were his first real experience of unexplained noises.

Since then, Phrex has served his new master well, largely out of terror, and risen in power. Alaemon's largely hands-off leadership style took him a while to get used to, especially after working with Kobal. In fact, centuries later, Phrex has still not met Alaemon. Somewhat tentatively, he has assumed that this is a good sign, and that his independence is a mark of Alaemon's trust in him. Certainly the several Attunements he has received from his new master would seem to be positive signs.

In the meantime, just in case they aren't, he's taken advantage of the Prince of Secret's blind eye to form good working relationships with several other Princes, notably Beleth (who appreciates the fright value of things that go bump in the night) and Malphas; it is rumored that the additional gun shots some people claim to have heard when Kennedy was assassinated were the work of Phrex, as a favor to Malphas, and Malphas is well satisfied with the results. More often than anything else, though, Phrex works with the Servitors of Media -- often in fairly minor ways, through his vessel

as a Producer for several alternative musical acts.

On the other hand, several other superiors take a dim view of him -- notably Fleurity (who thinks that drugs are all the explanation anyone needs) and Vapula (who has lost untold production hours trying to track down nonexistent but noisy mechanical faults). And relations between 'Gheliphrex and Kobal are a still precarious; each still suspects the other of having pulled a fast one on him.

Phrex is that *rara avis* in Hell: a demon who stays bought. Not that he doesn't lie and cheat . . . but he never breaks a deal if he can avoid it. There are those who whisper that he's aiming for redemption, but in truth, Phrex is just trying to establish a little insurance for himself. He's well aware that most Princes take a dim view of demons changing Superiors at all, let alone a second time, and he wants to make sure that his new boss trusts him (at least, as much as any demon ever trusts another).

His Word allows him to create all sorts of Unexplained Noises more or less at will. A Noise that is merely disquieting or beneath conscious notice costs him 1 Essence, while a Noise that is truly shocking or otherwise inexplicable could cost up to 3 points of Essence. For 5 points of Essence, he can create a noise that sounds to any Celestial like a Infernal disturbance of the Symphony. Furthermore, by linking his Word and his resonance, he can Steal Essence from anyone he has previously stolen Essence from in person, so long as they are actively puzzling over the explanation of the noise they heard at the time. This ability has no range modifier, although it will not work across Planes. Other than that, it is identical to the normal Impudite Resonance.

Encountered

As a general rule, 'Gheliphrex is still the merry prankster that he was when he worked for Kobal, but now his pranks have a nastier edge, and are more likely to cause fear and paranoia than humiliation (although that's still fun, too). In fact, Phrex is increasingly a mercenary; so many words find the occasional Unexplained Noise useful to their plans, and Phrex is the best in the business.

If players are Servitors of Secrets, Phrex most likely outranks them. There aren't a lot of Words under Secrets, after all. 'Gheliphrex is aware that his Word is considered basically dead-end by most other demons, but he thinks that he can prove them wrong -- and possibly change Superiors again. Beneath his playful exterior, Phrex is all ambition. Unlike most demons, though, he's prepared to bargain more or less fairly for what he wants.

Adventure Seeds

Does Unexplained Equal Ineffable? Phrex has been going all out lately, trying to develop another special rite. He wants to have the ability to make a noise that even a Malakite who have trouble distinguishing from the true ineffability of the Symphony -- think how many angels could fall to Hell then!

Right now, Phrex is busily trading favors and making deals with everyone he can. Anyone he can. He owes Lilith a lot of Geases (she'll be the only other one to get the rite when he's done -- and if he fails, he still has to pay, so she wins either way), and lately, he's been seen talking to an individual many think is the long-lost Eli.

Demons can be assigned to help or frustrate him in his quest, depending on how their Superiors feel. Angels will simply be asked to investigate the possibility that Eli is consorting with demons.

Honor and Offer -- Mammon has taken exception to the work of 'Gheliphrex for reasons he refuses to explain, as has Andrealphus. Together, the two Princes are scheming to bring down the Demon of Unexplained Noises before the paranoia and confusion that spread in his wake destabilize their Words any further. Their chosen method is simply to set up the Impudite -- if it looks like he's trying to redeem himself in Heaven's eyes, he'll soon be brought down by Asmodeus.

Unknown to them, several Archangels, including Yves himself, have assigned Angels to the job of helping Phrex

redeem. Whether or not Phrex actually wants to redeem himself is a question that only he knows the answer to. The answer is "yes"; it's just that he feels that he has to complete his current assignment first. This is likely to make an enemy of Nybbas, when it disrupts an important broadcast . . .

Demons may be Servitors of either Prince, Servitors of Secrets or the Game trying to find out what is going on, or just caught in the middle. Angels will be members of the team trying to get the Impudite to redeem.

Caladraland

Tribes of the Volcano Twins For *HeroQuest*, with *GURPS* Notes

by Jamie Revell

based on original material by Greg Stafford and Vesa Lehtinen

South of Dragon Pass lies Kethaela, more commonly known as the Holy Country, a region containing six nations, each traditionally associated with a particular element. Once united under the rule of the benign and immortal ruler Belintar the Stranger, in the four years since his mysterious disappearance, the individual nations have begun to revive their ancient rivalries. The southwestern nation is Caladraland, the land of fire.¹

The Land and the People

Caladraland is a rugged land with a subtropical climate. Geysers, hot springs and fumaroles abound throughout the region, which boasts three intermittently active volcanoes. Fire magic suffuses the area, even affecting the climate, which is drier and warmer than neighboring lands, with most of the rain falling in spring. Below the high peaks, the predominant vegetation is open evergreen hardwood forest and scrubland. Native wildlife includes brown bears, golden jackals, wild goats, yellow-face deer and saber-toothed cats.

The wild and forbidding landscape is for the most part sparsely settled. The natives are a barbarian people living in small clans based in individual villages. The clans are gathered together into loose tribal alliances on the basis of kinship or tradition, but there has been no central authority since Belintar's disappearance. Each clan practices slash-and-burn agriculture, and so must relocate to different areas as soils become depleted. While the presence of widespread agricultural magic specifically suited to volcanic soils means that such movements are less frequent than they would otherwise be, skirmishing between tribes over potential farmlands is frequent and sometimes bloody.

A moderately dark-skinned people, Caladrans wear light tunics and skirts of linen, or just simple loincloths in the height of summer. As with many Gloranthans, much of their life revolves around rituals in which the entire community comes together to cast magic to improve agriculture, ward off enemies or propitiate the gods. On such occasions, people daub themselves with ash and red pigments in patterns distinctive to their clan and their gods. Since the gods and spirits of Caladraland are believed to communicate through song, ceremonies are always musical, with singers accompanied by flutes and drums.

All adult male Caladrans, and some women, are trained to fight with bronze- or obsidian-tipped spears and can be mustered in defense or for large-scale raids. By comparison, professional warriors are relatively rare, because of the expense of maintaining them in times of peace. Nonetheless, every tribe will have a few, armed with spear, bronze axe and leather shield. Such tribal warriors sometimes wear leather armor, but generally prefer to rely on protective magic imbued in the patterns of ash they daub on their face and body before entering battle.

While the great majority of Caladrans live among the rural tribes, there are also a few large urban settlements within the nation. These are all important religious sites whose fixed nature has resulted in the creation of large temples and, with time, an urban infrastructure to serve the needs of the priesthood. It is only in the cities that specialist craftsmen can be found, along with other relatively civilized professions such as merchants and scribes. The cities trade for their food and other supplies with the neighboring tribes, but have only limited political power beyond their own boundaries.

Religion and Magic

In ancient times, before the dawn of recorded history, it is said that the goddess Caladra erupted from the earth here, creating the Vent volcano. Together with her twin brother Aurelion, born on an island far to the south, she is now the deity of the land that bears her name, and the principle object of worship of almost all of its inhabitants. The Twins share a single priesthood, whose members are the most respected members of their society. Together they represent the combined powers of earth and fire, including destruction, purification, mineral wealth and the fertility brought by volcanic ash.

Most Caladrans are initiated into the cult of the Volcano Twins when they reach adulthood. They are taught the basic magic of the gods, although only professional acolytes and priests can harness their full power. Alongside this divine magic, simple folk magic is also widespread, aiding even the most humble farmer or water-carrier in their day to day activities. A few people, mostly in the cities, worship other deities that support unusual professions such as scribe, merchant or healer, and some foreign warrior gods are also known. Finally, there is a small cult worshipping Heler, the god who brings the summer rains; his worshippers are considered strange by the common folk and tolerated only for their useful magic.

To the people of Caladraland, the world is alive with local spirits². Those associated with geysers, hot pools and fumaroles are particularly respected, and whenever a clan moves into a new region, the priests seek out these spirits to appease them and sometimes to share in their magic.

Things To Do

In past years, Belintar the Stranger kept Caladraland and its neighbors largely free from trouble through both powerful magic and political coordination. In the few years since his disappearance, however, foreign raiders have already begun to make their presence felt in increasingly daring and violent raids. The aggressive storm-worshipping Solanthi barbarians to the west of Caladraland are its most frequent foes, and both native Caladrans and foreign mercenaries might find themselves called to deal with that threat. Old rivalries between the six nations of the Holy Country are also being resurrected; in particular, the Pelaskan water-worshippers of the islands to the east raid the Caladran coastline, sometimes with the aid of their strange and sinister merman allies.

Threats exist within the country, too. Packs of saber-toothed cats and even magical lava creatures can be found wandering close to settlements. Hostile spirits may need to be propitiated, and the volcanic nature of the land leads to many natural hazards, such as clouds of smothering gas, earth tremors and, of course, actual eruptions. Foreign visitors might be in particular danger from such threats, if the priests decide that they have offended the gods. At the most extreme, human sacrifice is not unknown in Caladraland, with the bound victim thrown into a lava pit to meet the Volcano Twins in person. In a similar vein, volcanic fissures are seen as entrances to the Otherworld where the gods dwell, and suitably powerful magic might enable a raider to enter the realm and survive long enough to steal potent magical artifacts or powers. Player characters could take part in such a raid, or seek to prevent one.

Far to the north lies the expansionist Lunar Empire, devoted to a philosophy that tries to welcome all aspects of the world, even those that are evil and chaotic³. They have already captured the coastal Caladran city of Half-Town, but have made no inroads into the interior. None the less, their missionaries may be found anywhere, trying to break up established societies and overthrow ancient laws and traditions.

Some of the interesting places to visit in Caladraland include:

- **Ashmount** -- a horse trading center, sponsoring annual horsemanship competitions
- **Gemborg** -- a dwarven city built into the flanks of the Bluesmoke volcano. Although normal distrustful of humans, the dwarves here have long-standing trading deals with the Caladrans. As the name implies, the dwarves mine gems here, especially diamonds.
- **Half-Town** -- a city literally divided in half between Caladran and water-worshipping Pelaskan neighborhoods, this is now under foreign military occupation, much to the disgust of both communities.
- **The Howler** -- a particularly violent volcano, inhabited by a petty god who refuses to be propitiated as others are, and seems actively hostile to the Twins' priests. The ghosts of burning people haunt the surrounding land.

- **Lighthouse** -- a port city standing beneath an extinct volcano, on top of which stands a huge tower inhabited by an eternally glowing light spirit.
- **The Petrified Sea** -- Caladra once transformed this area of stormy sea into solid rock, where the shape of the waves can still be seen. Outlaws, cannibalistic ogres and dangerous chaos beasts are the only inhabitants.
- **The Vent** -- At 7000', Glorantha's highest volcano. On the higher slopes stands the High Temple, headquarters of the Twins' cult.

HeroQuest Keywords

Homeland Keyword

- **Occupations Available:** Entertainer (drummer, flautist, singer), Farmer, Healer, Hunter, Merchant, Priest, Scholar and Warrior (clan warrior, temple warrior; spear, axe and javelin)
- **Native Abilities:** Caladran Customs, Caladran Myths, Know Local Area, Singing. Men add Close Combat (spear), women add Foraging.
- **Typical Personality:** Energetic, Outgoing, Passionate
- **Typical Relationships:** To clan, to tribe, to chosen deity (usually the Volcano Twins)
- **Magic:** Common magic; initiated to Volcano Twins or other deity (Chalana Arroy, Ernalda, Heler, Humakt, Issaries, Lhankor Mhy, Maran Gor, Yelmadio)

Cult of the Volcano Twins Keyword

- **Mundane Abilities:** Devotee of Volcano Twins or Initiate of Volcano Twins, Mythology of Volcano Twins, Singing, Volcano Lore
- **Virtues:** Courageous, Pragmatic
- **Ash Affinity:** Armour of Ash, Choking Ash, Fertilize With Ash, Find Gems, Heal Burns, Sharpen Obsidian
- **Lava Affinity:** Burning Wind, Burning Spear, Direct Lava, Heat Ground, Ignite, Resist Heat
- **Twins Affinity:** Command Lava Daimone, Communicate Silently, Sense Volcanism
- **Secret:** Summon Eruption
- **Other Side:** The Pools of Liquid Light lie between the realms of fire and earth in the God World. In the center lie the Diamond Halls, from which a traveler may visit the Storm Age, Darkness or Underworld.

GURPS Information

Caladraland is a TL1 culture. Some iron weapons are known, but they are not produced locally, mostly being purchased from the dwarves of Gemborg. Literacy is a relatively rare advantage, being restricted mainly to the priests and some scribes in the cities. Sacred writings are carved onto copper plates, making them difficult to transport in bulk.

Typical Caladrans will have at least Singing HT-1 [1/2] and Survival (volcanic hills) IQ-1 [1]. Most men would also have Spear DX-1 [1]. Acolytes and priests of the Volcano Twins would have Singing and Geology/TL 1 at 12+ in addition to more standard professional skills.

Social Status

- 5 Chief Priest and Chief Priestess of the Vent
- 4 Senior Twin Priest
- 3 Clan chieftain, Twin Priest, highly renowned warrior
- 2 Twin acolyte, priest of minor god, renowned warrior
- 1 Wealthy farmer, specialist craftsman, healer, scribe, warrior
- 0 Farmer, hunter, craftsman, merchant, entertainer

- 1 Poor farmer, hunter or entertainer, freed slave
- 2 Slave (ash digger, water carrier)
- 3 Outcast

Magic

Gloranthan folk magic, such as that practiced by the Caladrans, is generally below the level of the magic described in **GURPS**. It can be assumed to be rolled into mundane skill levels, and requires no special rules.

Most Caladrans have some magic, but only acolytes and priests will typically have Power Investiture, reflecting their closer bond with their deity. Spells taught to worshippers of the Volcano Twins might include any of the following:

All spells of the Elemental Fire College

Earth Vision, Earthquake, Essential Earth, Seek Earth, Shape Earth, Volcano Armour, Repair

The GM might also wish to devise further spells, using those listed under the three Affinities in the Cult of the Volcano Twins keyword above as a guideline. Where possible, existing **GURPS** spells should be described so as to reflect the volcanic nature of the religion. For instance, Essential Earth would require sprinkling the ground with volcanic ash as part of the casting procedure.

* * *

¹ Information on Esrolia, the land of earth, and Heortland, the land of air, is provided in **HeroQuest**.

² Actually daimones in HeroQuest terms.

³ For more on the Lunar Empire, see **HeroQuest**, or the recently published **Imperial Lunar Handbook**.

Designer's Notes: GURPS Planet of Adventure

by James L. Cambias

I had a lot of fun writing *GURPS Planet of Adventure*. Even at the darkest times (when the manuscript was about 75 percent done and I began lying awake at night wondering if I was really cut out for game design) I was never reluctant to go back to work on it. Tschai is a fun place and I liked spending time there.

I did a close reading of the novels, taking careful notes which I then organized under the appropriate headings in the outline. Though in many places I expanded on what Jack Vance described (especially in matters like local government structure), my goal was to avoid actually contradicting anything in the text.

The book contains several adventure seeds and campaign outlines, but one idea which never made it even into the proposal was the notion of a random adventure generator. The concept fits Tschai's swashbuckling, peril-filled environment, but there just didn't seem to be enough room. So what follows isn't quite an outtake; call it a shard from a vanished reality in which *GURPS Planet of Adventure* was a 256-page tome.

The Random Tschai Adventure Generator

To create a Random Tschai Adventure, first roll to determine who the main adversaries will be. The table is biased in favor of Dirdir, Dirdirmen, Humans, and Blue Chasch, since those are the most active and numerous groups on Tschai. Wanek and Old Chasch are the least likely opponents. Since the aliens on Tschai are fairly territorial, the nature of the adversaries usually determines the location. If you're facing Dirdir, that probably means you're in Dirdir territory in Kislovan; Chasch as enemies indicates Kotan. Ordinary humans and Pnume can turn up anywhere, so the GM can pick a location that seems interesting, or simply use the current location of the party.

Example: Gamemaster Wilbur is creating an adventure for tonight's game. He rolls a 14 for the adversaries: Green Chasch. Since the Green Chasch spend all their time on the steppes of Kotan, that gives him the general location.

Next determine the goal of the adventure -- what the PCs are trying to accomplish. If the adventure is to be a long and elaborate one, roll multiple times. The first roll becomes the overall goal, with one or more subsidiary goals which must be accomplished first.

Example: Wilbur continues to create tonight's adventure. He rolls a single goal, number 12: Find an Object. He decides that the PCs will be searching for a Terran supply drop from space which was knocked off-course by hostile missile fire. It landed in Green Chasch territory, so the PCs will have to get it and avoid the alien nomads.

Another Example: Meanwhile, Gamemaster Jim wants to create an epic story arc for his Tschai campaign, which will span a month or more of gaming. He first rolls to determine the overall goal, and gets number 10: Rescue a Person. To perform that rescue, however, the PCs must first accomplish three subsidiary goals (one for each gaming session before the finale). Jim rolls three more times and gets 13, 15, and 9. So the party must defend a place, conquer a place, and reach a destination. Jim decides to rearrange them, so that the PCs have to help defend a way station against raiders, make a long trek by caravan, and finally recapture a fortress which has been seized by bandits. Only then can they proceed to rescue their lost comrade.

Once you have a goal, come up with problems. The adversaries are naturally the biggest problem, but there are others. Again, depending on how long a game session you want, roll once or several times on the Additional Perils table. For total randomness, roll a die to see how many times to roll on the table.

Additional Perils are difficulties, either serious or minor, which the characters must face in addition to the chief adversaries. Savage Beasts is pretty self-explanatory: the PCs encounter dangerous animals (or possibly carnivorous plants). In some cases the beasts may be connected to the primary adversary -- night-hounds and/or Phung if the party

is in conflict with the Pnume, for instance.

Hostile Tribes indicates that the party comes into conflict with a group of humans for reasons unrelated to the main adventure. The humans can be pirates, bandits, religious fanatics, or just xenophobic natives.

Lack of Funds may mean the party are faced with exorbitant prices beyond their means, or that they have come to a region in which sequins are not the common mode of exchange and they must find some way to get some local currency. Fraud or Sharp Practice is common on Tschai; in this case it means someone tries to cheat the party in the course of the adventure. Note that the PCs may not realize they have been cheated until it is too late to confront the crook.

Lack of Transport indicates some difficulty in getting to a particular destination -- either the party's vehicle malfunctions or is lost, commercial transport is unavailable, or there simply is no way to go to a specific place. Coping with a Lack of Transport may mean working passage, stealing a vehicle, or surviving an arduous cross-country trek.

Complications provide opportunities for roleplaying and intra-party conflict; some GMs may prefer not to roll on the Complications table. Most are self-explanatory. A Person in Distress asking for help gives the party the choice to get involved; if they do help, they may gain a useful ally -- or get suckered by a con artist. If they don't, the person may hold a grudge and take revenge later on.

A Conflict between two factions means that the PCs stumble into the middle of somebody else's battle. The battle need not be strictly physical combat, of course. Note that if one of the factions is the current adversary of the PCs, the party may be able to form an alliance of convenience with the other group. A crash, shipwreck, or mutiny is a problem with transportation that occurs in mid-voyage. Sometimes it can serve as an opportunity rather than a hazard -- PCs could join the mutineers and gain control of a vehicle as leaders.

Erotic Attachments between PCs and NPCs can lead to trouble when the relationship goes sour. In this case an NPC previously attracted to one of the party grows to dislike him; results may include awaile (suicide), simple desertion, petty revenge, betrayal, or assault.

Inadvertently offending local customs is all too easy to do on Tschai. Every group or village has its own peculiar traditions, and many of them seem designed to entrap strangers. This can be as serious as violating a taboo which carries the death penalty, or as (relatively) minor as wearing an orange sash without knowing it's the sign of prostitution.

A Traitor in the Group indicates that one of the party -- an NPC or even one of the player characters -- is working to oppose the aims of the others. This can mean the traitor is in league with their enemies, but could also indicate a personal vendetta (possibly the effect of an Erotic Attachment which has failed), or simply personal goals at odds with the group's.

Tables

Adversaries (roll 3d)

3-5:	Wanek
6:	Pnume
7:	Gzhindra
8:	Wanekmen
9:	Dirdirmen
10:	Dirdir
11:	Ordinary Men
12:	Blue Chasch
13:	Chaschmen

- 14: Green Chasch
- 15: Pnumekin
- 16-18: Old Chasch

Goal (roll 3d)

- 3-6: Escort one or more Individuals
- 7: Capture a certain Person
- 8: Steal an Item
- 9: Reach a Destination
- 10: Rescue a Person
- 11: Escape from Captivity
- 12: Find an Object
- 13: Defend a Location
- 14: Transport an Item safely
- 15-18: Conquer a Location

Additional Perils (roll 1d for the number of perils, then 1d for the nature of each)

- 1: Savage beasts (including Phung)
- 2: Hostile Tribes (ordinary Men unrelated to adversaries)
- 3: Additional Adversaries (roll again on table 1)
- 4: Lack of Funds
- 5: Fraud or Sharp Practice
- 6: Lack of Transport

Complications (roll 1d for the number of complications, then 1d for the nature of each)

- 1: Asked for Help by a person in distress
- 2: Caught up in a conflict between two factions (roll for both on Table 1)
- 3: Crash, Shipwreck or Mutiny
- 4: Erotic Attachment Sours
- 5: Inadvertently Offend Local Customs
- 6: Traitor In the Group

Spell Points

A New Arcane Magic System for the *d20 System*

by Scott Carter

The pack of winter wolves closed in on the three surviving adventurers, ragged and desperate after their fight through the ice caves.

"Quick, Serena!" yelled Keshra as she readied her flaming Kamas. "We need a fireball! Now!"

"I can't." Serena whimpered. "I forgot how."

How often in *The Lord of the Rings* do we see Gandalf sitting quietly going over his spell book? Or being unable to cast a spell at need if he had already used it that day? Or any wizard or spellcaster in any fantasy novel?

The answer is of course: never, or at least hardly ever. The peculiar habit of base ***d20 System*** wizards to be unable to cast a spell spontaneously they once knew has always bothered many people. So to has the limitation of the seemingly less-adaptable Sorcerer class. Then there is the problem of calculating spells known and spells per day when considering Ability bonuses. Once metamagic feats get involved the average spellcaster spends a great deal of time just figuring out what he can and cannot do, and with the Wizard that problem changes every "day."

To address some of these problems this article proposes the Spell Point System, a more straightforward method of choosing and casting spells in the ***d20 System***, while simultaneously being more suited to personalization and variety.

Spell Points

Spell points are a way of measuring how "in tune" a caster is with magic. Depending on your campaign world this might reflect their inherent ability to store and manipulate mana, or tap the Weave, or any other explanation you might have for the existence of magic and magical creatures.

Spells in this system cost a number of spell points (SP) equal to their spell level plus one. Therefore 0 level spells cost 1 SP, while 6th-level spells cost 7 SP. This is the cost to *both* learn and cast the spell.

When learning spells a spellcaster has a given number of SP. These can be spent to learn a lot of spells or a few spells, however the player chooses. This will mean that casters of the same level might know a widely different number of spells depending on how they have chosen to spend their SP; one PC might know a few really powerful spells while another might not know any "big" spells but be a lot more adaptable. For example, a spellcaster with 4 SP might learn four 0 level spells, two 1st level spells, one 3rd level spell, or two 0 level spells and one 1st level spell.

The number of spells per day is then equal to a number of spells whose SP is equal to or less than the total SP earned. A spellcaster who has earned 10 SP might know two 0 level spells, two 1st level spells, and one 3rd level spell. He might then cast in a day 10 0-level spells or five 1st-level spells or any other combination of spells whose SP adds up to 10 or less. At a higher level a spellcaster with 200 SP might cast two hundred 0 level spells (for some reason) or 20 9th level spells (perhaps if in combat with a dragon).

Unused SP saves but does not stack. No spellcaster can ever use more than the total SP he has earned in a day. If a spell caster has earned a total of 200 SP then he can only cast 200 SP worth of spells that day, even if in the previous day he only used 50 SP and had 150 SP "saved." Regardless of race or class, SP regenerates at the rate of 1/4 total earned SP per two hours of absolute rest, whether it is the sleep required by most races or the meditative state of elves. Therefore, casting spells whose sum cost is less than one's total possible SP in a day will not allow for more spells the

next day, but it does mean that less rest is required to once again be at the maximum SP for a day. Regular physical needs and penalties for lack of rest still apply.

Magecraft

Magecraft levels limit Spellcasters by putting a cap on how powerful a known spell can be. Magecraft 1 allows for a caster to know spells whose base cost (the cost before adding metamagic feats) is 4 SP or less and he cannot cast any one spell with an adjusted cost (cost after calculating any metamagic feats) more than 4 SP. Magecraft 2 increases the cost to 7 SP, while it increases to 10 SP with Magecraft 3.

Metamagic

In this system magic users never "prepare" spells, nor do they need a spell book; they simply cast the spells they know until their energy is so drained they can cast no more. They still requires any components the spells might need. The use of metamagic feats must be adjusted accordingly, since there is no preparation. To apply metamagic feats, calculate the SP for a spell based on the spell slot it would have used in the standard system. In most cases this simply means adding a number of SP equal to the spell slot adjustment given in the Feat description. For example, *magic missile* is a 1st-level spell and would cost 2 SP to know and cast. If Empowered using the metamagic feat it would be a treated as a 3rd-level spell and therefore cost 4 SP to cast. If it was Empowered, Maximized, and cast Still and Silent it would be considered an 8th-level spell and cost 9 SP to cast. Metamagic feats can be applied at any time. Players do not have to learn the improved version of a spell, as long as they know the base spell and have the appropriate Feats.

Spell related factors such as save DC or Spellcraft checks work as in the standard system.

Spell Points And World Variations

The Spell Point System can be used to alter the nature of magic in a campaign world. In the typical **d20 System** fantasy world, magic is equally common throughout and works much the same from one place to another. This does not have to be the case. The Spell Point System can be used to introduce Mana Levels, Ley Lines, and other magical variations into a campaign world. The SP costs to learn and cast spells would be typical of a Normal Mana area, but some areas might have different degrees of mana. A traveling spellcaster can encounter many in the course of his adventures. While mana differences do not affect the SP cost to learn spells, or the total spells known, it does affect the SP to cast. When entering an area with a different mana level, GMs should allow players a check against Knowledge (Arcana), Spellcraft, or another appropriate skill to become aware of the change. If the first check fails, a new check should be allowed every time an attempt at casting is made. Successful results might reveal only the fact that the mana level has changed, the direction of the change, or go into details as the game warrants. Alternately, in-game clues can be left to direct players to a better understanding of their environment. GMs who wish to hide the magical nature of the area should keep track of player's SP using the adjusted levels, ultimately revealing to the player that he has less SP left than he thought, or that he has suddenly discovered a new reserve of energy.

In a low-mana area indigenous spellcasters would be rare, as would creatures with spell like abilities. In such an area add 1 SP to the cost to cast any spell. Increasing DC for Use Magic Device, decreasing area effects, and increasing the number of rounds needed for a spell to take effect would heighten the sense that magic does not work as well in this area. SP regeneration takes twice as long. If using the idea of Ley Lines and Nodes (threads of power that carry magical energy) a low mana area would have few or no such lines. Spellcasters would rely on the minimal background mana for spells.

In a high-mana area, native magic users would be common. All local NPCs might have at least one level as a spellcaster and magical creatures would be more abundant than in the average campaign world. Spells in a high mana region would have cost to cast reduced by 1 SP. Spell effects have a greater duration and area. Magic items are easier to use and receive small bonuses to their abilities. SP regenerates at the rate of 1/4 total SP every hour of rest. Ley Lines would be thick in this region.

Very high mana regions should be scarce, and perhaps only exist for short periods of time. They might be sites of power for ancient gods, natural geysers of mana, or markers of extra-planar intrusion in the campaign world. Spells are easy to cast, costing 2 to 4 SP less than normal, and some spells might even be cast for free. Spells with varying effects would always yield the greatest possible result. Powerful magical creatures are likely to be drawn to such places, making them exceedingly more dangerous. Spellcasters resting in such an area would find their SP regenerated at the rate of 1/2 total SP for every hour of rest. Ley Lines converge into unnaturally dense nodes here, and using any magical device can be unpredictable.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, no-mana areas should be equally rare. Spellcasters who enter such an area would find that their spells are very difficult to cast, costing twice the SP. Once SP is used, it's gone, completely, no regeneration. Spellcasters would be wise to stay out of such regions. Unnatural and magical creatures would not exist at all, and might slowly revert to their more mundane counterparts if they happened to wander in and stay for an extended period of time. Magical items lose their puissance in such an area, and magical devices do not work. Optionally, GMs might choose to treat a no-mana area as an extended version of a beholder's anti-magic field, in which no spells work. Best reserved for extremely small areas, canny players might actually learn to use such pockets of anti-magic to their advantage.

Another variation GMs might introduce relates to kinds of mana. In some areas the type of Ley Lines might affect certain schools of magic or energy effects. Ley Lines that conduct elemental energies would allow some spells to be cast more easily, while others could only work at a greater cost. To add further color to a game world, a GM could allow spellcasters born in a particular region a benefit to learning certain kinds of spells and a penalty on others.

Below is a new spellcaster basic class that is designed to take the place of the Sorcerer and Wizard classes. The SP bonuses at each level are calculated to represent a spell per day capacity that falls roughly halfway between the Sorcerer's and the Wizard's. A modified version of school specialization and the Wizard's bonus feats has been retained to provide greater adaptability.

The Mage

Colloquially mages are referred to by different names depending on their governing attribute. Spellcasters who rely on Charisma are called Sorcerers; Wizards rely on Intelligence, while Warlocks and Witches rely on Wisdom. A mage may have come to his power through study, observation of nature, or through self-awareness. He is likely to have been guided by a book, mentor, or tradition, even one understood poorly at first. Since mages take different paths to their powers, it is difficult to generalize them. However, all mages are motivated by their dedication to the Art. Since they believe that magic touches every aspect of life they are often insightful, very aware of the world around them and quick to try and learn more about it.

Abilities: Mages cast spells dependent on their Charisma, Intelligence, or Wisdom, as chosen by the player at character creation. This Ability cannot be changed later. To cast a spell the Mage must have a governing Ability of 10 + the spell's level. At each level the Mage gets a certain number of Spell Points + bonus spell points at his Ability's Modifier in levels 1-10. Starting at the 11th level he gains further Insight into his craft and gets a bonus of $+ 2 \times$ his Ability Modifier.

Alignment: Any

HD: d4

Class Skills: Class skills are Alchemy (Int), Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Gather Information (Wis), Knowledge (all skills, taken individually) (Int), Profession (Wis), Scry (Int, exclusive skill), Search (Wis), Sense Motive (Wis) and Spellcraft (Int)

Skill Points at Level 1: $(2 + \text{Intelligence modifier}) \times 4$

Skill Points at Each Addition Level: $2 + \text{Intelligence modifier}$.

Class Features

Weapons and Armor Proficiency: Mages are proficient with all simple weapons and are not proficient with any

armor or shield. Armor can interfere with somatic components of spells and can cause them to fail.

Spells: A Mage casts spells based on the Spell Point System. He starts with Magecraft 1 and the ability to learn spells whose base cost is 4 or less, likewise he may cast any spell he has learned whose adjusted cost is 4 or less. At the 7th level he progresses to Magecraft 2 and at 14th to Magecraft 3.

Bonus Languages: A Mage may substitute Draconic or any one Outsider language for one of the bonus languages available to the character because of his race. This ability reflects the variety of paths one may take to become a Mage.

Familiar: A mage may obtain a familiar as a sorcerer.

Bonus Feats: At the 1st, 5th, 10th, 15th, and 20th levels a Mage gains a bonus feat. This feat must be a metamagic feat revised for the Spell Point System or an item creation feat.

Specialization: A mage may choose to specialize in a magic school. Spells in the chosen school cost 1/2 (rounded up, never less than 1 SP) while forbidding access to spells in an opposing school or schools. This allows for quicker access and more frequent casting of powerful spells in the chosen school at the expense of variety. For opposing schools see the Wizard entry in the standard *d20 System*.

The Mage

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Additional SP per level	Special
1	+0	+0	+0	+2	9	Familiar, Magecraft 1, Bonus Feat, + SP per level = Ability Modifier.
2	+1	+0	+0	+3	+3	
3	+1	+1	+1	+3	+3	
4	+2	+1	+1	+4	+6	
5	+2	+1	+1	+4	+6	Bonus Feat
6	+3	+2	+2	+5	+9	Magecraft 2
7	+3	+2	+2	+5	+9	
8	+4	+2	+2	+6	+12	
9	+4	+3	+3	+6	+12	
10	+5	+3	+3	+7	+15	Bonus Feat
11	+5	+3	+3	+7	+15	Insight (grants +SP per level = 2 × Ability Modifier)
12	+6/+1	+4	+4	+8	+18	Magecraft 3
13	+6/+1	+4	+4	+8	+18	
14	+7/+2	+4	+4	+9	+18	
15	+7/+2	+5	+5	+9	+21	
16	+8/+3	+5	+5	+10	+21	Bonus Feat
17	+8/+3	+5	+5	+10	+21	
18	+9/+4	+6	+6	+11	+24	
19	+9/+4	+6	+6	+11	+24	
20	+10/+5	+6	+6	+12	+24	Bonus Feat

Other Classes

Obviously, retooling the other arcane magic-using classes will take some additional effort. To keep the classes relatively balanced, calculate SP per level based on the number of spells that can be cast per day without bonuses due to Ability Modifiers. A bonus SP can then be given for Ability Modifiers at each level to reflect bonus spells gained. Magecraft 1 is given at first level, Magecraft 2 is given when the class would have access to 4th level spells, and Magecraft 3 is given when the class would have access to 7th level spells.

Pregenerated NPCs can be played with the original arcane spellcasting class as given if chosen. Simply take for granted that they would choose to use their SP in a way that would reflect the more traditional system. While there are some obvious differences in magic abilities between the standard versions and the mage, for short-term use NPCs they should not be too significant. Otherwise, the DM may choose to take the NPCs caster level and convert it to the mage

and select spells as closely as possible to the given spell list.

Divine magic users can be converted using a similar system to the one outlined here. However, in many ways it makes more sense for a divine spell caster to spend time in meditation or prayer each day, preparing spells then as needed. If you wish to totally adopt the Spell Point System, change Magecraft to Soulcraft and apply as given. Domain spells can either be bought for 1/2 SP, as with School Specialization, or at each level the Cleric can be given a designated number of SP that must be spent on spells within the chosen domains. The latter is probably more reflective the class description as given in the base ***d20 System***.

Ultimately, a full application of the Spell Point System in any game world would require a lot of time and playtesting. What has been presented here is just an attempt to add more variety and adaptability to your game play, while minimizing time spent on spell selection. Whether you want to play a "big gun" spellcaster who stands on the battlefield decimating armies or a quiet scholar poking around in ancient tombs for mystic secrets, the mage class can be adapted to your desires. The point is to have fun in a world of magic.

And don't forget your fireball.

Pyramid Review

Traveller's Aide #1: Personal Weapons of Charted Space

Published by [Quiklink Interactive/RPG Realms](#)

Written by Martin J. Dougherty with Fred Mars, Shane Mclean, Megan Robertson and Mark Urbin plus Frank G. Pitt

Art by Bryan Gibson, Chad Fidler and Steve Bryant

48-page b&w softcover; \$10.95

The first supplement to be released for RPG Realms' *d20 System* adaptation of the *Traveller* setting is *Personal Weapons of Charted Space*. Also the first in the *Traveller's Aide* series, it looks specifically at the type of melee weapons and firearms carried by "Travellers" (or adventurers) during a game, but not guns or other hardware of a military nature. Thus weapons such as the Advanced Combat Rifle, the Gauss Rifle, and all Fusion and Plasma Guns will be detailed in another supplement, as will armor and other defensive systems. Further, it provides statistics for not only [Traveller T20](#), but also *Classic Traveller*, drawing specifically from *Book 1*, *Book 4*, and *Supplement 4* of the *Classic Traveller* line, as well as *MegaTraveller* and later incarnations.

The layout of this slim supplement is clean and tidy, with just the occasional line drawing of a melee weapon or more frequently a firearm to break up the text. It could use more of these illustrations and the lack of them -- especially for some of *Traveller's* more esoteric weapons -- is perhaps the only real letdown to *Personal Weapons of Charted Space*. Two types of voice are employed throughout, one objective for the rules and associated subjects, while the other is subjective, used to present in-game thoughts and opinions upon the place of personal weapons within the Third Imperium.

Personal Weapons of Charted Space opens with a look at "Weapons Permits And Accreditation." Specifically, this is a look at how the Imperium regards its citizens holding, owning and using weapons of all types. For the most part, those characters that muster out of their career with a weapons benefit will also be granted an Imperial Weapon Permit. This may be General -- allowing ownership of any weapon within a category -- or Specific, restricting ownership of a single weapon within a category. The purpose of the permit system is to stop the trade by arms dealers to low-law worlds, but the Ministry of Justice will also intervene where its jurisdiction supersedes that of the local law. Of course, characters are really in trouble with the Imperial authorities if they lack permits for their weapons, but that will only happen if the characters bring such implements to the attention of said authorities. The referee is free to use these rules or not as he wants, but they could be used to form the basis of an adventure or two, as the characters go in search of a much wanted permit for say, an Advanced Combat Rifle.

Before presenting all of the weapon statistics in a series of tables for both game systems, the supplement examines every type one by one. Each is given a description that corresponds to the average model of that type, including some of the more esoteric categories, such the Discharger (Baton or Thud Gun, and Riot Gun) and also the Non-Lethal category (sprays, tranq guns, sonic Squealers, and electric stun guns). Also covered is a range of sights from the telescopic to the Heads-Up Display, plus various types of ammunition.

Where the tables so neatly organize and categorize average examples of each weapon, the next set examines those produced by some of the Gateway Region's leading arms manufacturers and suppliers. These are accompanied by descriptions of both the companies and their products, which makes for interesting reading as well as serving to add a dash of color to a character's particular weapon of choice. Although this information is particular to the Gateway

Region, there is nothing to stop the GM from adopting them for his own campaign, or using the information to as a model to create weapons for that campaign.

The few new rules in ***Personal Weapons of Charted Space*** are mainly aimed at the **T20** referee. They cover Weapons Detectors and Weapons Concealment for those times when characters do not want to advertize that they are armed, and of course, the penalties for when they are caught. The penalties listed are guidelines only, as on some worlds the law is more stringent than on others. Rules for burst and fully automatic fire, area and suppressive fire, and panic fire are included for both **T20** and **Classic Traveller**. Together with the rules for gun combat from either version of **Traveller**, the referee should be able to cover most situations that the characters land themselves in.

The supplement is rounded out with nine Patron Encounters presented in the standard format, plus a single Amber Zone. This last is by Frank G. Pitt, while the various Patron Encounters come from the book's other contributors as well as its author. All of them have a weapon orientated theme -- which isn't surprising given the nature of this book -- and all are generic enough that they could be set in almost any campaign or setting.

Not every **Traveller** campaign is necessarily going to need a book of guns, but in all likelihood, most will. Unless the GM is running a military or mercenary-orientated game, ***Personal Weapons of Charted Space*** is likely to be all that he needs in the way of a supplement on this subject. Of course, it will be useful for such military campaigns in addition to the future supplements planned by the publisher. Either way, ***Personal Weapons of Charted Space*** is well written, easy-to-use (despite the lack of an index), and reasonably priced for what it provides. Cleverly aimed at the owners of both the original and the latest incarnations of **Traveller**, referees of either should have a copy of this supplement on hand for their games.

--Matthew Pook

[with thanks to Roj at Wayland's Forge]

Pyramid Review

Monster Manual v.3.5 (for Dungeons & Dragons)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Written by Skip Williams

Revised by Rich Baker & Skip Williams

320-page color hardcover; \$29.95

This is the book that the third edition *Monster Manual* should have been.

First and foremost, it has more monsters in its 96 more pages, which increases the play value over the original right there, even if all are drawn from previous *Dungeons & Dragons* material. Some, like the gauth, are radically changed from their old *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* appearances, but the vast majority of the creatures included are from the *Monster Manual Third Edition* or other third edition works like the *Psionics Handbook* and the *Manual of the Planes*.

This new edition takes the stat block format of the *Monster Manual II* (itself improved over the original version in *Monster Manual*) and refines it further. The improvements include separate lines for standard and full attack action, the clear marking of which feats are bonus feats, and the inclusion of the Level Adjustment for PC monsters. The only minor nuisance is that *Monster Manual v.3.5* uses the simplified 3.5 space statistic (which is only an issue if you preferred the third edition facing rules).

Where the new *Monster Manual* really shines is the tools it gives for customization. The system behind monster abilities was not made explicit in the third edition; you could do customization, but the book omitted details. That's changed. Now extensive guidance is given on improving monsters by adding hit dice, class levels, and templates. As mentioned above, the difference between bonus feats and merely typical feat choices are marked. Monster creation rules are now included, expanded and better explained than their previous publications in *Dragon Magazine* and the *Monster Manual II*. The monsters-as-characters sections are vastly expanded and improved (in most cases, at least -- some like locathah got shortchanged). This alone almost justifies the \$10 price differential between the first printing of the *Monster Manual Third Edition* and *Monster Manual v.3.5*.

The biggest defect of the new *Monster Manual* compared to the old is how the monsters are organized. The most glaring example is the dispersal of the animal subtype. In the move to the 3.5 version, all beasts were reclassified as either animals or magical beasts, but the newly-categorized animals were not moved into the Animal chapter, while those that were animals in the third edition were not moved to the main monster chapter. The vermin also remain in a separate section. But the entries that always made the most sense to keep separated -- the templates, which are functionally dissimilar to all the other entries -- are now entirely interspersed in the main monster chapter. This makes less sense than either the way the previous *Monster Manual* did it or a combined alphabetical listing interspersing the animals, vermin, and templates.

Yet the greatest overall defect of the new *Monster Manual* is inherited directly from the old -- lousy layout. We still have entries irregularly broken over two columns and page changes, wrapping around borderless images. This does mean more information per page, but is frustrating to read. Many argue that the original didn't deserve its Origins Award for graphic design, and this one is just as bad.

Then there are the relatively minor things, both good and bad. The new narrative descriptive text communicates the

appearance and feel of the monsters much more effectively than the old, irregularly placed descriptions. There are the inevitable mistakes, like the mismatch between the descriptive text of the kolyarut and its picture, of course. Some of the fixes from third seem a bit odd; for example, mechanically, the crossbow always made more sense for kobolds than the sling, but 3.5 changes the crossbow to a sling in the stat block instead of the slings to crossbows in the text. The round-by-round tactics on a few entries (like the mind flayers) are nice, but not very common. It's nice they've added an actual table of contents for the book above the alphabetical listing of monsters.

All-in-all, the ***Monster Manual v.3.5*** is a vast improvement over the third edition version. It is so much so, in fact, that even if you're planning to stick with the ***Third Edition*** of the ***Dungeons & Dragons*** rules, you should seriously considering buying it anyway. As said at the beginning of the review, this is the book that the ***Monster Manual Third Edition*** should have been. If you're playing ***Dungeons & Dragons***-style fantasy with a non-***d20 System*** game, this book may be useful for you, too. But this is labeled "Core Rulebook III" and means it -- if you aren't playing in the ***d20 System***, and aren't playing ***Dungeons & Dragons***-style fantasy, then there isn't much here for you.

-- Steven E. Ehrbar

Pyramid Review

Formula Dé Mini

Published by [Jeux Descartes/Eurogames](#)

Created by Eric Randall & Laurent Lavaur

Illustrated by Bernard Bittler

Graphic design by NEXUS/Guillaume Rohmer

Edited by Ron Magin

One double-sided mounted map board, one 20-sided die and five specialty dice, eight cars and eight spoilers in four colors, eight wooden gearshift pawns, eight "dashboards" with jig-cut ends, 200 Life Point tokens, 16-page full-color rulebook (German, French, Spanish, and English rules); \$24.95

It's not as though *Formula Dé* was all that tough a game to get into to begin with, but perhaps Euro Games needs a way to pull in more raw recruits. To introduce fledgling racers to the larger game, they now offer a slimmed down version called *Formula Dé Mini*.

The game runs, in most ways, identically to its parent system. Players take the role of a driver in charge of one or more little plastic racecars and run laps around a track. Dice are thrown to see how many spaces you move, and higher gears offer more spaces. When the flag waves, the driver must consider how best to strain his car to get into, and keep, the lead. Cars zip past each other from one lane to the next, taking dangerous hairpins by making sure their playing piece stops in each turn before entering the next straightaway. You can make a pit stop to repair the wear and tear suffered by your vehicle thus far, but you risk losing the lead as you do so. The first person to cross the finish line after the third lap is the winner.

Most of the differences between the old and new incarnations are small, but there are a number of them. For starters, one of the tracks provided has only two lanes instead of the usual three, which means less maneuvering room. The most noticeable change is wear points. Where you used to have to track several sets of points -- wear on your tires, fuel usage, brakes, etc. -- you now track only Life Points. These are represented by small plastic disks that look like gold coins. Each car gets 20 of these, and they are expended no matter what happens to your vehicle. If you run your engine too hot in a high gear, you lose an LP. If you bump into another racer, your bodywork stands to lose another LP. If you run out of LPs and suffer more damage, your car is destroyed.

There are still pit stops, though the addition of LPs changes how they are adjudicated. There are fewer rules: no weather effects and tire choices here. Once per game, you have the option of spending three LPs to advance one additional space (almost every game will have an occasion where you'll be glad you can do this).

Turns on the track used to be rated for the number of stops you had to make in them. The tighter the turn, the more stops you had to make, slowing your progress considerably. In the Mini version, you need only make one stop in every corner you take (then again, the straightaways aren't as long). Sixth gear (and its corresponding die) is gone, as are the little pads of sheets you use to score one-, two-, and three-lap races. In their place you're given eight cardboard tracks (called, alternately, "dashboards" or "cockpits"), two each of four colors. They list all six gears but the sixth gear is

graphically "faded" out. If you want to tell apart two cars of the same color, you can still switch the attachable colored fenders. The cardboard tracks come with jig-cut extensions so if you have a red car with a blue fender, you can affix a blue puzzle piece to the end of your red track. There are eight wooden pawns, also in the same color scheme as the tracks, for keeping track of your current gear.

The components are still first-rate. The board is heavy, mounted, double-sided (you get two tracks), and sports the same surreal artistic backdrop as the other maps in the series. The LPs are tough little chunks of plastic, the cars and their detachable spoilers are apparently cast from the same quality molds as the originals, and it's hard to argue with little wooden pawns. Given the premium components in the box, the price is a small miracle.

The big question about the game is really "Why do a simplified version?" Perhaps producing map after map supplement wasn't pulling in the cash. This design doesn't run much faster (nor, to be fair, any slower), and a lot of the new rules may rankle die-hard **Formula Dé** fans, but some of the changes actually play rather well. As such, it might have made more sense to provide the changes as an optional supplement to the full version, or even post them as extras to the company website.

If you already have the larger set, there's little point in buying **Formula Dé Mini**. The new components aren't hard to duplicate (just use pennies or beads instead of LPs), and once you've played a friend's copy of the smaller set, you can't help but remember any rules you want to swipe. **Formula Dé Mini** comes in a smaller box compared to its hefty papa, but the difference in play space required is negligible. Buying **Formula Dé Mini** first and then moving up to the full game seems like a waste of money, given that complexity doesn't change significantly either.

None of this is to say **Formula Dé Mini** isn't a worthwhile game -- it is, providing the same fast, challenging, and entertaining racing experience -- but buyers need to beware. Neither version is clearly better, they're just different. If you feel the need for speed, your decision should probably be based on comparing the price tags, because **Formula Dé Mini** sports no other advantages that put it in the lead over its predecessor.

--Andy Vetromile

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Big Brother is an Idling Bachelorette Survivor

Conclusion

by Steven Marsh

The final confrontation between our two stalwart BBiaIBS competitors was a titanic . . .

Aw, heck; it's not like we're relying on the suspenseful conclusion to buoy our ratings for our sponsoring advertisement puppeteers. Let's just go right to the results, shall we?

1. **Andy Vetromile** -- 3.4594 (320 votes)
2. **Sandy Antunes** -- 3.2823 (333 votes)

And so the winner was Andy Vetromile, who -- even now -- has been whisked off to the lavish BBiaIBS corporate headquarters and awarded with a recording contract, a copy of the home game, and all the 100-siders he can stuff in his cheeks. Sandy Antunes, as the BBiaIBS runner-up, does not need to endure any of these fates.

We thank all our competitors for rising to the challenge, and our readers for indulging our little experiment.

And we now return you to your normal *Pyramid* Magazine, already in progress.

Eight Million Bayonets

Bayonet Fencing in GURPS WW2

by Marc Goldstein

"In my training as a young officer I had received much instruction in how to kill my enemy with a bayonet fixed to a rifle. I knew all about the various movements -- right parry, left parry, forward lunge. Indeed, I had been considered good on the bayonet-fighting course against sacks filled with straw, and had won prizes in man-to-man contests in the gymnasium."

-- General Bernard Montgomery

During the World War II all the major Allied and Axis nations issued bayonets to their troops and retained rifle-bayonet drills as a key component of basic training, even though bayonets had been derided as military weapons since the age of Napoleon. Actual casualties caused by bayonets diminished rapidly as the weapons of war grew more fearsome. During WW2, modern tanks, artillery and aircraft made daylight bayonet charges a preposterous anachronism. On the occasions that fixed bayonets did see use, it was often to murder unarmed prisoners and civilians without wasting ammo. Nevertheless, the bayonet retained a powerful mystique. It symbolized the military spirit and hearkened back to a more chivalrous age, when killing was done up close and personal. This article describes the bayonets used in WW2 and outlines a martial arts style -- Bayonet Fencing -- appropriate for use in a **GURPS WW2** campaign. To use the style templates, you will need **GURPS Compendium I**. Also highly recommend are **GURPS Martial Arts**, **GURPS Swashbucklers**, and the [errata](#) for **GURPS Japan, Second Edition** to make full use of the style templates.

The Fourth Form of Fencing

Like bayonets themselves, rifle-bayonet fighting techniques originated in France, where bayonet was considered the fourth form of fencing following foil, épée, and saber. The early styles derived their movements from French and Italian fencing and from spear fighting skills passed down by European armsmasters. George McClellan translated his 1852 Manual of Bayonet Exercise for the U.S. Army directly from French sources.

The armies of Britain and Japan took keen interest in improving their bayonet drills. Britain eventually instituted a fencing system derived from the Italian school. This style, unfortunately, emphasized presentation over purpose. During competitions, rifle-bayonet fencers were forbidden to grapple, emit battle-cries, or strike with anything save their rifle. The Japanese, finding the French program inadequate, drew on their own armed martial arts tradition. Techniques from spear and staff fighting were integrated into a unified bayonet fencing style, called Juken-Jutsu, in the late 19th century. In a 1904 rifle-bayonet fencing competition, a Royal Marine team was routed by a Japanese Army team that kicked, kneed, pushed, and screamed while attacking. After that, British instructors loosened the restrictions on vocalizing. Nonetheless, most European nations (and the U.S. Army) adopted versions of the British system around the time of the First World War.

Training & Tactics

In the 19th century, soldiers sparred with flexible, blunt-tipped training bayonets fixed to old surplus or dummy rifles. They practiced drills against cavalry and foot soldiers armed with lances, sabers, pikes, and bayonets. They also rehearsed executing mass bayonet charges in rigid formations. By the time World War II began, the goal of bayonet drilling had drifted from teaching a sophisticated fighting system toward simply instilling aggression and confidence. With live bayonets, soldiers trained by charging practice dummies. For sparring, they used sheathed bayonets or padded pugil sticks which began to replace training bayonets in the 1930s. Unfortunately, pugil sticks lent themselves more toward staff techniques, emphasizing swinging attacks at the expense of more efficient thrusts.

Many instructors, attempting to inure troops to the horrors of battle, went out of their way to make bayonet drills traumatic. U.S. drill instructors stuffed dummies with animal entrails, while the Japanese army took the next horrific step and ordered soldiers to execute bayonet attacks on bound, helpless prisoners.

The Russians learned a profound respect for the bayonet during the Russo-Japanese War, where the Japanese had successfully executed unnerving banzai charges at night. Unfortunately, this experience encouraged both sides to labor under badly out-dated tactics. The First World War caused other countries recognize that success in modern warfare depended more upon small-unit actions and individual close-combat rather than mass bayonet charges. Russian and Japanese drills, however, continued to teach soldiers how to perform bayonet charges in tight formations. Both nations would revise their tactics as the war progressed, but bayonets still played an important role. The Japanese became masters of night-time infiltrations, creeping through enemy lines to bayonet sleeping soldiers in their foxholes. The Soviets employed similar tactics, especially in urban combat zones like Stalingrad.

While mass bayonet charges were obsolete, rifle-bayonet fencing still held value for any unit that anticipated close-combat skirmishes with the enemy. For this reason paratroopers, marines, commandos, and units specializing in jungle or urban warfare received extensive bayonet training.

The simplest bayonet fencing programs taught footwork, weapon handling, parrying, thrusting, and striking with the butt of the rifle. More comprehensive programs added throw-point lunges, slashing attacks, feints, leg sweeps, and combination maneuvers. Some instructors also taught soldiers the proper way to use their rifle as a club when the bayonet was dismounted.

Few soldiers received sufficient training time to actually qualify for the Bayonet Fencing styles described below. In a realistic campaign, run-of-the-mill riflemen will not possess any special training beyond one or two points of Spear skill. Only elite troops, close-combat instructors, and other specialists should qualify to study Bayonet Fencing or Juken-Jutsu. On the other hand, the style is especially well suited for heroic and cinematic campaigns!

On Guard!

Rifles make clumsy hand weapons: they are covered with knobs, buttons, levers, and other protuberances; they are not specifically balanced for use as hand weapons; and after several rapid-fire shots, their barrels get too hot to handle safely. A fixed bayonet is used with Spear skill at a -1 penalty. With or without a bayonet, the rifle may also be used with Staff skill at -1 (see weapon table below). When grasped by the barrel and swung like a club, a rifle uses Two-Handed Axe/Mace skill at -1. When mounted, a bayonet disturbs the rifle's balance and alters the vibrations of the barrel, degrading accuracy. Apply a -1 penalty to Guns skill.

Many techniques for parrying attacks and striking with the rifle butt depended on stances taken from staff fighting, especially as pugil sticks supplanted training bayonets for sparring. It requires a Ready action to switch from spear to staff grip and vice-versa. Instructors taught soldiers to aim butt strikes at the head, abdomen, and groin; while bayonet thrusts were aimed at the abdomen, chest, or throat.

Weapon Table

Staff (Two hands, Parry at 2/3 skill)

Name	Type	Damage	Reach	Weight	ST	Cost	Notes
Rifle Butt	Cr	Sw	1	--	9	--	Staff skill -1
	Cr	Thr+2	C,1	--	9	--	Staff skill -1

Bayonet Fencing

This style template describes the European forms of Bayonet Fencing. It includes no complementary grappling or

brawling techniques; these were covered in other hand-to-hand combat drills, and were not holistically integrated into bayonet instruction. Similarly, use of the dismounted bayonet as a knife was taught elsewhere.

GMs should feel free to tinker with the template. During WW2, bayonet drills varied not only from nation to nation, but often from unit to unit! For example, the U.S. Army and Marine Corps adopted completing systems (see the Biddle style below). For realistic campaigns, it is certainly reasonable to limit players to watered-down versions of this style. Nations issuing spike bayonets would omit the Tip Slash. Programs that emphasized pugil stick sparring often lacked thrusting maneuvers like the Lunge. In general, bayonet instruction became more simplified in the later years of the war.

Soldiers picked to compete on fencing teams would emphasize the sport-oriented bayonet skills (some critics argue that pugil stick sparring only teaches the "Sport" version of these fighting skills).

Bayonet Fencing

7 points/-- points

Primary Skills: Spear, Staff.

Secondary Skills: Body Language.

Optional Skills: Fast-Draw (Bayonet), Spear Sport, Staff Sport, Tournament Law (Bayonet Fencing), Two-Handed Axe/Mace.

Maneuvers: Hit Location (Spear or Staff), Lunge [thrust] (Spear), Pass [thrust] (Spear), Retain Weapon (Spear or Staff), Tip Slash (Spear).

Cinematic Skills and Maneuvers: None.

Anthony Joseph Drexel Biddle (1874-1948) was a pioneer of hand-to-hand combat training in the U.S. Marine Corps during the First World War. In 1937, the Corps published Biddle's close-combat instruction manual, *Do or Die*. The Corps recalled him to active duty in 1942 at age 68 to serve as a close-combat instructor. Biddle's bayonet fencing style drew heavily from swordplay; Biddle insisted attacks be parried with the bayonet blade and restricted use of butt strikes. Some questioned the real combat effectiveness of Biddle's program; U.S. Army close-quarters combat expert Rex Applegate dismissed Biddle's "duelist approach." Nonetheless, the Marine Corps taught Biddle's system throughout the war.

Biddle Bayonet Fencing

9 points/-- points

Primary Skills: Spear, Staff.

Secondary Skills: Body Language.

Optional Skills: Fast-Draw (Bayonet), Spear Sport, Staff Sport, Tournament Law (Bayonet Fencing).

Maneuvers: Feint (Spear), Hit Location (Spear), Lunge [thrust] (Spear), Pass [thrust] (Spear), Retain Weapon (Spear), Sweep (Spear), Tip Slash (Spear).

Cinematic Skills and Maneuvers: None.

Juken-Jutsu

Like most nations, when Japan adopted the bayonet they also inherited the French bayonet fencing style. Finding the French program unsatisfactory, the Japanese army supplemented it with techniques from Sojutsu (spear fighting) and Bojutsu (staff fighting). The unified style, Juken-Jutsu, was formalized in the late 19th century. In addition to field training, most large Japanese bases had dojos dedicated to bayonet training, where various kata could be demonstrated and practiced.

While all Japanese riflemen studied Juken-Jutsu, few could dedicate enough time to qualify for the full style description below. GMs running realistic campaigns may restrict players to diluted versions of the style. Like most Asian martial arts, Juken-Jutsu was infused with mystical import and lends itself well to cinematic abilities.

Primary Skills: Brawling, Spear, Staff, Sumo Wrestling.

Secondary Skills: Body Language.

Optional Skills: Fast-Draw (Bayonet), Brawling Sport, Spear Sport, Staff Sport, Tournament Law (Bayonet Fencing).

Maneuvers: Hit Location (Spear or Staff), Kicking, Knee Strike, Lunge (Spear), Pass [thrust] (Spear), Retain Weapon (Spear or Staff), Spinning Strike (Spear or Staff), Sweep (Spear or Staff), Sweeping Kick, Tip Slash (Spear).

Cinematic Skills and Maneuvers: Kiai, Power Blow (Spear), Sweeping Counter Parry (Staff or Spear), Whirlwind Attack.

WW2 Bayonet Catalog

Australia

Owen Mk. 1 Knife Bayonet

254mm (10") single-edged blade with semi-spear point. Treat as a regular Bayonet.

Fits Owen submachineguns.

In 1943 Australia introduced this bayonet for its native Owen machine carbine. It was essentially a shortened version of the British Pattern 1907.

Finland

m/27 Sword Bayonet

420mm (16.54") single-edged blade with spear point. Treat as a Long Bayonet.

Fits VKT Kivääri malli 27, 28, and 28-30 rifles.

Among their improvements to the Mosin-Nagant M1891 rifle, the Finns replaced the Russian spike with a sword bayonet.

m/39 Knife Bayonet

300mm (11.81") single-edged blade with spear point. Treat as a regular Bayonet.

Fits SAKO Kivääri malli 39 rifles.

Believing its sword bayonets too cumbersome, Finland introduced the Kiv/39 rifle in 1941 with a shorter, handier knife bayonet.

France

Epée-Baionette Mle 86/35

335mm (13.19") cruciform spike. Treat as a regular Bayonet of Cheap quality with no cutting edge.

Fits Lebel Model 1886 rifles.

These old Lebel épée-style bayonets were retooled and shortened in 1935. The thin spikes still frequently bent or snapped under duress. The original Mle 86 bayonets boasted a 520mm (20.5") blade. Some could still be found in

service during WW2 (treat as a Cheap-quality Long Bayonet with no cutting edge).

MAS 36 Bayonet

330mm (13") cruciform spike. Treat as a regular Bayonet, with no cutting edge.
Fits the MAS 36 rifle.

Stored and mounted in a hole in the rifle's forearm, the MAS 36 bayonet was designed to never leave its rifle. No scabbard was issued, and it lacked a proper handle for use as a knife when dismounted (apply a -1 penalty to Knife skill).

Germany

S84/98 Knife Bayonet

250mm (9.84") single-edged blade with spear point. Treat as a regular Bayonet.
Fits Mauser 1898 carbines and rifles.

The standard bayonet issued to German riflemen during WW2.

Italy

Modello 91 Knife Bayonet

300mm (11.81") single-edged blade with spear point. Treat as a regular Bayonet. Fits Mannlicher-Carcano Fucile Modello 91 rifles and carbines.

The standard bayonet for older versions of the Modello 91 rifle.

Modello 91/38 Folding Knife Bayonet

175mm (6.87") single-edged blade with spear point. Treat as a Small Knife or as a regular Fixed Bayonet when mounted.
Fits Mannlicher-Carcano Fucile Modello 91/38 rifles and carbines.

This design folded like a pocket knife, allowing the blade to fold down below the barrel when the bayonet was fixed. The folding mechanism proved fragile and later designs deleted the feature altogether.

Japan

Type 30 Sword Bayonet

395mm (15.55") single-edged blade with clip point. Treat as a Long Bayonet.
Fits the Arisaka Type 38 and 99 rifles; Type 100 submachineguns; Type 11, 96, and 99 light machineguns.

This sword bayonet was issued to Japanese troops from 1897. Quality was Good until the final months of the war, when material shortages reduced production versions to Cheap quality.

United Kingdom

Pattern 1907 Sword Bayonet

432mm (17") single-edged blade with semi-spear point. Treat as a Long Bayonet.
Fits SMLE No. 3 rifles and Lanchester SMGs.

Leftovers from the First World War, the Pattern 1907 saw use in the Pacific and other secondary theaters where the old No. 3 rifles were still plentiful. The Australians and Indians were particularly fond of them. Factories in Britain, India and Australia continued to produce the Pattern 1907 through 1945.

No.4 Spike Bayonet

200mm (7.88") spike. Treat as a regular Bayonet of Cheap quality with no cutting edge.
Fits SMLE No. 4 rifles (and Sten SMGs from 1944).

Britain converted to this crude spike in the late 1930s primarily to conserve resources and ease manufacturing burdens. It was uniformly disliked by troops. It lacked a handle for use as a knife when not mounted, though Home Guards were issued a "broomstick" attachment that allowed it to be used as a close-combat thrusting weapon (use Knife skill at -1.)

No.5 Knife Bayonet

203mm (8") single-edged blade with bowie point. Treat as a regular Bayonet.
For the No. 5 "Jungle Carbine" version of the SMLE rifle, the British returned to a proper knife bayonet design. It was accepted for service with the No. 5 rifle in September 1944.

U.S.A.

Model 1905 Sword Bayonet

405mm (16") single-edged blade with spear point. Treat as a Long Bayonet.
Fits the Springfield M1903-A3 and M1 Garand.

The U.S. began the war with this vintage sword bayonet. U.S. arsenals manufactured a virtually identical copy, designated the Model 1942, in 1942 and 1943.

M1 Knife Bayonet

253mm (10") single-edged blade with spear point. Treat as a regular Bayonet.
Fits the Springfield M1903-A3 and M1 Garand.

Believing that the 1905 and 1942 bayonets were unwieldy and wasteful of resources, the U.S. military decided to shorten the blades of existing sword bayonets. This shortened design was dubbed the Model 1905E1. When the 1905E1 proved successful, manufacture of the new design was accepted in 1943 as the M1.

M4 Knife Bayonet

172mm (6.75") single-edged blade with spear point. Treat as a Small Knife or as a regular Fixed Bayonet when mounted.
Fits the M1 Carbine.

The army approved this bayonet for use with the M1 carbine in July 1944.

U.S.S.R.

Mosin-Nagant 1891 Socket Bayonet

500mm (19.69") cruciform spike with flat-head screwdriver point. Treat as a Long Bayonet with no cutting edge. Fits Mosin-Nagant M1891 rifles.

Fitting with Red Army doctrine, this bayonet was designed to always be fixed to the rifle. It had no handle for use as a knife when dismounted and was not issued with a scabbard.

SVT-40 Knife Bayonet

244mm (9.62") single-edged spear point. Treat as a regular Bayonet. Fits SVT-40 rifles.

In a break from Red Army policy, this bayonet came with a sheath and was mounted only when needed. The earlier SVT-38 rifle was originally issued with a 362mm (14.25") blade (treat as a Long Bayonet).

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Class Action: Ability Focused Characters

Self-Improvement Classes for *d20 System* Games

by Owen K.C. Stephens

The class and level structure of *d20 System* games assumes characters spend most of their time pursuing a career or vocation of some kind. While a wide variety of life paths can be simulated with the vast number of classes now available and multiclass combinations mixing them, very little exists for characters who focus on improving themselves. A character who wishes to focus on improving his Strength or endurance outside the paltry one ability point improvement every four levels has few options.

In fantasy games, this is often overcome through the use of magic items. A player who wishes his barbarian to become known for his great Strength simply buys a pair of gloves that augment his physical power. While this works on a game-mechanical level, it's often unsatisfying for players who see their characters as more than a collection of possessions or numbers.

Since raising an ability score can have significantly more impact on a character than a single feat, it's not mechanically sound to allow feat gains to be spent on ability score increases. The only other mechanism for a character to improve is class levels. Thus presented below are six short prestige classes, each emulating a character's increase in physical or mental abilities after a period of training.

Though these are not traditional prestige classes, in that they do not represent a change in a character's vocation to some specialist or acceptance by a particular group or order, they do model a character spending considerable effort to improve one aspect of himself to the exclusion of advancement in his actual vocation. The prerequisites for these classes are simple, but do restrict the classes to characters who have already spent some effort to improve their ability score. This represents the amount of time and effort any self-improvement regimen requires before results become noticeable.

Strength Focused Character

The strength focused character spends a great deal of time exercising, eating high-protein foods, and testing his physical might by lifting, bending and breaking things he comes across. Most strength focused characters are warriors who wish to become even more dangerous with a great sword, who or engage in combat-sports such as wrestling or pugilism. A few, however, are more frail individuals who seek not herculean muscles, but just enough extra power to carry a few more books without being so weighed down they cannot move.

Prerequisites

- 8 or more ranks of a Str-based skill.
- Must have increased Str ability score by 1 or more points.

Table 1-1 Strength Focused Level Progression

Base Level	Attack Bonus	Fort. Save	Ref. Save	Will Save	Special
1	+1	+0	+0	+0	Great lift
2	+2	+0	+0	+0	Increased Strength
3	+3	+1	+1	+1	Mighty effort
4	+4	+1	+1	+1	Increased Strength
5	+5	+1	+1	+1	Constant effort

Class Rules

The game rules for playing a strength focused character are listed below.

Health: In games using hit points, strength focused characters receive 1d8 hit points plus their Con modifier at each level. In games using some other form of health points a strength focused character should receive fewer than a dedicated soldier, but more than scholars, rogues or technicians.

Skills: A strength focused character's class skills [and the key ability for each skill] are Climb (Str), Craft (Int), Jump (Str), Profession (Wis), and Swim (Str). In games using new or unusual skills, a GM should add any skill with a key ability of Str to the strength focused character's class skills.

A strength focused character receives a number of skill points equal to (2 + Int modifier) at each level.

Proficiencies: A strength focused character gains no armor or weapon proficiencies.

Great lift: The strength focused character has learned to apply his Strength more effectively for long periods of time. this increases the amount of weight the character can carry by 50%. All calculations based on the character's carry capacity (lift over head, lift off ground, push or drag) are calculated from this increased carrying capacity.

Mighty effort: The strength focused character is able to call upon a surge of strength when attempting brief, short-term acts of physical power. Whenever the strength focused character makes a Str check to break down a door or break an object, he gains a +4 circumstance bonus to the check. This also applies to grapple checks made to escape a grapple or pin, but not any other grapple checks.

Increased Strength: A strength focused character gain a +2 to his Str ability score at 2nd level. This increase is treated just as if the character had added Str points using his ability score increase gained every 4 levels, but is separate from that gain. The strength focused character's Strength increase by another 2 points at 4th level.

Constant effort: The bonus to Str checks the strength focused character gains from his mighty effort ability is now applied to all Str checks and Str based skills, as well as all grapple checks.

Dexterity Focused Character

Dexterity focused characters must train themselves to improve their speed, coordination, agility, and flexibility. His often involves throwing small blades, juggling, contortions, stretches, and sleight-of-hand tricks. Most dexterity focused characters are rogues or entertainers seeking to improve their numerous Dex-based skills. Archers and similar ranged combatants also sometimes become dexterity focused characters, though only those who wear light armor gain the full benefits over a straight fighting class.

Prerequisites

- 8 or more ranks of a Dex-based skill.
- Must have increased Dex ability score by 1 or more points.

Table 1-2 Dexterity Focused Level Progression

Base Level	Attack Bonus	Fort. Save	Ref. Save	Will Save	Special
1	+0	+0	+2	+0	Spry
2	+1	+0	+3	+0	Increased Dexterity
3	+2	+1	+3	+1	Great agility
4	+3	+1	+4	+1	Increased Dexterity
5	+3	+1	+4	+1	Great agility

Class Rules

The game rules for playing a dexterity focused character are listed below.

Health: In games using hit points, dexterity focused character s receive 1d6 hit points plus their Con modifier at each level. In games using some other form of health points a dexterity focused character should receive fewer than a typical adventurer or missionary, but more than a scholar or cloistered priest.

Skills: A dexterity focused character's class skills [and the key ability for each skill] are Balance (Dex), Craft (Int), Escape Artist (Dex), Hide (Dex), Move Silently (Dex), Open Lock (Dex), Profession (Wis), Ride (Dex), Sleight of Hand (Dex), Tumble (Dex) and Use Rope (Str). In games using new or unusual skills, a GM should add any skill with a key ability of Dex to the dexterity focused character's class skills.

A dexterity focused character receives a number of skill points equal to (4 + Int modifier) at each level.

Proficiencies: A dexterity focused character gains no armor or weapon proficiencies.

Spry: The dexterity focused character's training has paid off, increasing his agility, hand-eye coordination, and manual dexterity. The dexterity focused character gains a +2 bonus to all Dex checks and Dex-based skills.

Increased Dexterity: A dexterity focused character gain a +2 to his Dex ability score at 2nd level. This increase is treated just as if the character had added Dex points using his ability score increase gained every 4 levels, but is separate from that gain. The dexterity focused character's Dexterity increase by another 2 points at 4th level.

Great agility: The dexterity focused character is allowed to choose one of the following special abilities: +10 base move, evasion, skill mastery (3 Dex-based skills) or uncanny dodge. At 5th level the dexterity focused character may select a second special ability. If the uncanny dodge, took evasion at 3rd level he may take improved evasion at 5th, and if he took uncanny dodge at 3rd level he may take improved uncanny dodge at 5th.

Constitution Focused Character

Typical constitution focused characters are survivalists who have had a near-death (or return-from-death) experience, and wish to harden their bodies and minds against the dangers of the world. They expose themselves to the elements, eat diets full of special herbs, and push their bodies until they hurt, then learn to ignore the pain. Overtime they harden themselves to the ravages of diseases, poisons, exhaustion and wounds. Even so few characters take more than a few levels of constitution focused character, with only extremists pursuing the test of flesh to its outer boundaries.

Prerequisites

- Great Fortitude feat
- Must have increased Con ability score by 1 or more points.

Table 1-3 Constitution Focused Level Progression

Base Level	Attack Bonus	Fort. Save	Ref. Save	Will Save	Special
1	+0	+2	+0	+0	Hard to Kill
2	+1	+3	+0	+0	Increased Constitution
3	+2	+3	+1	+1	Endurance
4	+3	+4	+1	+1	Increased Constitution
5	+3	+4	+1	+1	Ascetic

Class Rules

The game rules for playing a constitution focused character are listed below.

Health: In games using hit points, constitution focused character s receive 1d12 hit points plus their Con modifier at each level. In games using some other form of health points a constitution focused character should receive more than any other class, even dedicated fighters.

Skills: A constitution focused character's class skills [and the key ability for each skill] are Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), and Profession (Wis). In games using new or unusual skills, a GM should add any skill with a key ability of Con to the constitution focused character's class skills.

A constitution focused character receives a number of skill points equal to (2 + Int modifier) at each level.

Proficiencies: A constitution focused character gains no armor or weapon proficiencies.

Hard to kill: The constitution focused character has toughened his body and honed it to stand up under massive punishment. He has also learned to push it beyond the boundaries of its normal limits. The constitution focused character has a 50% chance of not taking damage if he takes a standard action while disabled, a 50% chance of stabilizing when at negative hit points, and doesn't die until he reaches a number of negative hit points equal to his Con score or -15 (whichever gives him the most hit points to death).

Increased Constitution: A constitution focused character gain a +2 to his Con ability score at 2nd level. This increase is treated just as if the character had added Con points using his ability score increase gained every 4 levels, but is separate from that gain. The constitution focused character's Constitution increase by another 2 points at 4th level.

Endurance: At 3rd level the constitution focused character gains the endurance feat as a bonus feat. If the character already has this feat, he doubles all the bonuses to checks it provides.

Ascetic: The constitution focused character needs only half the sleep, food and water as a typical member of his species.

Intelligence Focused Character

Intelligence focused characters are generally scholars, researchers and spellcasters who find they spend too much time going to others to find answers to important questions. These characters are driven to know everything, and to learn how facts and ideas can be built off one another through creative thinking, logic, and rigorous testing of practical theories. They spend most of their spare time reading ancient texts, working logic puzzles and word games, and designing experiments to test the physical laws of their world. Only dedicated scientists, inventors and researchers take the full set of this class' levels, as spellcasters lose too much arcane power.

Prerequisites

- 8 or more ranks of an Int-based skill.
- Must have increased Int ability score by 1 or more points.

Table 1-4 Intelligence Focused Level Progression

Base Level	Attack Bonus	Fort. Save	Ref. Save	Will Save	Special
1	+0	+0	+0	+0	Knowledgeable
2	+1	+0	+0	+0	Increased Intelligence
3	+1	+1	+1	+1	Increased Intelligence

Class Rules

The game rules for playing an intelligence focused character are listed below.

Health: In games using hit points, intelligence focused character s receive 1d4 hit points plus their Int modifier at each level. In games using some other form of health points an intelligence focused character should receive the fewest of any other class, on par with research scientists, wizards and commoners.

Skills: An intelligence focused character's class skills [and the key ability for each skill] are Appraise (Int), Craft (Int), Decipher Script (Int), Disable Device (Int), Forgery(Int), Knowledge (all)(Int), Profession (Wis), Search (Int) and Spellcraft (Int). In games using new or unusual skills, a GM should add any skill with a key ability of Int to the intelligence focused character's class skills.

An intelligence focused character receives a number of skill points equal to (8 + Int modifier) at each level.

Proficiencies: An intelligence focused character gains no armor or weapon proficiencies.

Knowledgeable: An intelligence focused character gains a +2 bonus to all Knowledge checks, and may make Knowledge checks untrained. If the character has a special knowledge-based ability (such as bardic knowledge), the bonus applies to these checks as well.

Increased Intelligence: An intelligence focused character gain a +2 to his Int ability score at 2nd level. This increase is treated just as if the character had added Int points using his ability score increase gained every 4 levels, but is separate from that gain. The intelligence focused character's Intelligence increase by another 2 points at 3rd level.

Wisdom Focused Character

Wisdom focused characters are rare, most often coming from primitive or shamanistic cultures. Hey go on lengthy vision quests, meditate, contemplate their dreams, and practice perception games designed to increase their general awareness. Some philosophers, priests, and poets intentionally try to focus on their personal wisdom, while other characters find their way into this class after undergoing an enlightening experience, effectively stumbling into the class.

Prerequisites

- 8 or more ranks of a Wis-based skill.
- Must have increased Wis ability score by 1 or more points.

Table 1-5 Wisdom Focused Level Progression

Base Level	Attack Bonus	Fort. Save	Ref. Save	Will Save	Special
1	+0	+0	+0	+2	Intuition
2	+1	+0	+0	+3	Increased Wisdom
3	+2	+1	+1	+3	Increased Wisdom

Class Rules

The game rules for playing a wisdom focused character are listed below.

Health: In games using hit points, wisdom focused character s receive 1d6 hit points plus their Wis modifier at each level. In games using some other form of health points a wisdom focused character should receive more than scholars and wizards, but fewer than adventurers and scouts.

Skills: A wisdom focused character's class skills [and the key ability for each skill] are Craft (Int), Heal (Wis), Listen (Wis), Profession (Wis), Sense Motive (Wis), Spot (Wis) and Survival (Wis). In games using new or unusual skills, a

GM should add any skill with a key ability of Wis to the wisdom focused character's class skills.

A wisdom focused character receives a number of skill points equal to (4 + Int modifier) at each level.

Proficiencies: A wisdom focused character gains no armor or weapon proficiencies.

Intuition: A wisdom focused character has heightened his intuition to an extraordinary degree. He can often realize something, without knowing how or why he gained the knowledge. The character may avoid being surprised even if unaware of an impending attack by making a Wis check (DC 18), and move on the surprise round if successful. Additionally, the GM should instruct him to make Listen, Sense Motive and Spot checks anytime there is valuable information to be gained by such checks, even if the character's player doesn't think to seek such information. The DC for such checks is 5 higher than if a character was looking for something specific, but the checks are a free action.

Increased Wisdom: A wisdom focused character gain a +2 to his Wis ability score at 2nd level. This increase is treated just as if the character had added Wis points using his ability score increase gained every 4 levels, but is separate from that gain. The wisdom focused character's Wisdom increase by another 2 points at 3rd level.

Charisma Focused Character

Charisma focused characters are almost always performers, artist, writers or romantics. They study classic plays, practice painting, sculpting or music, and make an effort to understand and sympathize with everyone. Many charisma focused characters are schemers and con men, who ruthlessly use their good charms to take advantage of others and ain a lifestyle they have not earned. Others are truly kind souls, who are well liked because they are bright cheerful folk. Spies, performers, courtiers, courtesans and diplomats are most likely to undertake a regimen of mental exercises to increase their appeal, though some spellcasters who fuel their magics with force of personalty do so as well.

Prerequisites

- 8 or more ranks of a Cha-based skill.
- Must have increased Cha ability score by 1 or more points.

Table 1-6 Charisma Focused Level Progression

Base Level	Attack Bonus	Fort. Save	Ref. Save	Will Save	Special
1	+0	+0	+0	+0	Alluring
2	+1	+0	+0	+0	Increased Charisma
3	+1	+1	+1	+1	Increased Charisma

Class Rules

The game rules for playing a charisma focused character are listed below.

Health: In games using hit points, charisma focused character s receive 1d4 hit points plus their Int modifier at each level. In games using some other from of health points an charisma focused character should receive the fewest of any other class, on par with research scientists, wizards and commoners.

Skills: A charisma focused character's class skills [and the key ability for each skill] are Bluff (Cha), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Disguise (Cha), Gather Information (Cha), Handle Animal (Cha), Intimidate (Cha), Perform (Cha) Profession (Cha), and Use Magic Device (Cha). In games using new or unusual skills, a GM should add any skill with a key ability of Cha to the charisma focused character's class skills.

A charisma focused character receives a number of skill points equal to (6 + Int modifier) at each level.

Proficiencies: A charisma focused character gains no armor or weapon proficiencies.

Alluring: A charisma focused character learns how to make friends and influence people. They can conceal their personal dislikes, compliment people they consider entirely unremarkable, and ingratiate themselves easily into a party. This Grants them +2 bonus to all Cha checks and Cha based skills.

Increased Charisma: A charisma focused character gain a +2 to his Cha ability score at 2nd level. This increase is treated just as if the character had added Cha points using his ability score increase gained every 4 levels, but is separate from that gain. The charisma focused character's Charisma increase by another 2 points at 3rd level.

Pyramid Review

Heart of the Machine (for Dragonstar)

Published by [Mystic Eye Games](#)

Written by Stefon Mears

Illustrated by Ed Bouelle, Brad McDevitt and Jeremy McHugh

Cartography by Ed Bouelle

64-page b&w softcover; \$13.99

Although there have been no adventures from Fantasy Flight Publishing for [Dragonstar](#), its *d20 System* campaign setting that really put *Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition* into space, the company granted Mystic Eye Games the licence to publish them instead. The first of these was *Raw Recruits*, an adventure designed to take the player characters from 1st to 4th level as the crew of the Starship Evarstanza, a vessel strangely shaped like a tin opener lying on its side . . .

The second and latest is *Heart of the Machine*, an adventure designed for 4th-level characters that takes place on a minor world beyond the Outlands of the Dragon Empire. Drelga has a small Imperial population, mostly living around the star port city of Drelandan; that city supports the mining and fishery industries that provides the planet's major exports. The player characters can start the scenario as natives of Drelga, but the adventure set-up works better if they are visiting during a stopover, perhaps while their ship could have its Starcaster (the *Dragonstar Campaign Setting's* equivalent of the FTL drive) recharged. If the DM has run the earlier *Raw Recruits*, then this ship could just as easily be the Evarstanza.

[BEGIN SPOILER ALERT!]

Heart of the Machine begins with a young man imploring the party for aid and telling them that he has witnessed a kidnapping, while the two men following him claim that he owes gambling debts. Of course, the young man's tale of kidnapping is true, tying into a rash of disappearances, and the others are members of a kidnapping gang known as Jack 23. Now that the player characters have some inkling of this, the gang will do its best to shut them up, and the party will have to investigate and act against Jack 23 to stop the assaults on them. The trail leads them to one of the gang's hideouts and hints of strange experimentation, and from there out into the wilderness to the alien source of these experiments.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

The adventure is decent enough, its plot being the *Dragonstar* equivalent of the necromancer wanting fresh bodies for his zombie horde, but it is rather linear and should neither challenge an experienced group, nor provide more than a long session or two. But where the *Heart of the Machine* really scores is in the support it adds to both the adventure and a campaign. For the adventure there are several well-mapped locations, including a motel, a bar, Drelga's First Unification Church, a Druidic Grove and a pair of gang hideouts. All of the NPC's are fully statted up, as are four ready-to-use player characters.

For the campaign, there are rules for handling vehicular chases by rolling on a chart of on-the-road encounters, while a separate table provides an example for use in the adventure, should the DM not want to roll himself. There are also

new spells and equipment, a new race (the villains of the plot), and a lot of new vehicles and robots. The vehicles range from ground cars, hover cars and bikes up to several economy starships. All of these are welcome additions to the **Dragonstar** setting, but they are let down by a lack of illustration, especially for the spaceships. Of the four new spells, the most interesting are *Analyse Lifeforce*, a 1st-level arcane spell that allows the caster to ascertain whether a target is dead or alive, its Hit Dice, and what creature Type/Subtype it is, while the zero level *Arcane Umbrella* protects the caster from the rain.

Although each of the several locations described in ***Heart of the Machine*** comes with several adventure hooks, no advice is included for continuing the main story thread of the adventure. Instead, the page that comprises "Appendix 4: Continuing The Adventure" just reprints the hooks already given. Not only does this waste a page, it also feels rather cheap when the time could have been taken to suggest possibilities beyond the adventure.

In terms of production, this book has its good points and its bad. The good includes the writing (which covers most of the actions that the characters might undertake during the adventure) and also the the nicely done maps. Just as nicely done are the "Theme Boxes," which clearly indicate to the DM how the adventure can be scaled to the abilities and the level of the player characters (whether they include either several fighters, rogues, or mechanists within the party or particularly capable members of these classes), and possibilities for if the players prefer to roleplay rather than roll-play. While the artwork can be said to be at best average, the really irritating problem with the layout are the boxes used to contain stats for minor NPCs. Placed at the edge of the text's two-column layout, they are unbordered, but done on a grey background with their contents poorly positioned within them. To be blunt, these are ugly as sin, and give the book a very amateur feature that stands out like a sore thumb. Also giving the book a very amateur look is the complete lack of apostrophe use throughout the book, and while a space between the word and the letter "s" is left, it does look rather odd and takes some getting used to.

These problems aside, what ***Heart of the Machine*** really provides is a reasonable interlude between the rest of a DM's own campaign. Its set up is perfect for this and once played does include plenty of items that can be added to a campaign. Had its really minor problems been addressed prior to publication, it would have been better described as decent rather than reasonable, but ***Heart of the Machine*** is still worthy of a **Dragonstar** DM's attention.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Lunar Rails

Published by [Mayfair Games](#)

Created by M. Robert Stribula

Boxed set; \$38.00

Some of Mayfair Games' earliest successes were the *Empire Builder* series of rail games. After the initial success of *Empire Builder* (since re-released as *North American Rails*) numerous games have followed that have adapted the same enjoyable game mechanics to other regions. Thus we have had *British Rails*, *Eurorails*, *Japan Rails*, *Australia Rails*, *India Rails*, and even *Iron Dragon*, an attempt to re-locate the system to a fantasy world. After all of these locations, I was left wondering what could conceivably be covered: South American Rails, maybe, or perhaps Africa Rails. Then the thought struck me: wouldn't an adaptation of the system to the moon be interesting?

Apparently someone else had the same idea . . .

After several years in development, *Lunar Rails* has finally been released. It is an excellent addition to the series, with enough novelty in its execution to challenge even the experienced player of the other Mayfair rails games. Players old and new will find something to enjoy in *Lunar Rails*.

First, the basics. For those unfamiliar with the system, the game itself is very simple. The map is a wax-coated board with a series of dots overlaid onto the terrain. The object of the game is to make money by first building and then shipping loads along a rail system. Crayons are provided to draw line right on the board, which can be wiped clean at the end of each game; no two games are the same, as players build competing lines of rail track. Each player is given a certain amount of money with which to build a few lines of initial track, and then dealt three demand cards, each of which gives three possible delivery runs for three different amounts of money. Players must manage the pickup of commodities, which are only available at certain locations on the boards, and their deliveries to various cities on the map. In the first portion of the game, profits are ploughed back into the frantic building of rail lines to service different cities and acquire different sources of commodities. Later in the game, players can upgrade to swifter or more capacious trains, as they concentrate on making money faster than their rivals. To complicate matters, every so often in the commodities deck there are hazard cards that cause various problems (rail strikes, excess profits tax, etc.) which cause problems, and throughout the game in the construction of rail lines there are terrain features to be reckoned with (mountain areas cost twice as much to build into as flat areas, and so on). The winner is the first player who comes up with \$250 million, and who has connected to a specified number of the major cities on the map.

Lunar Rails adds a few new wrinkles to the tried-and true Mayfair train game formula. This is, after all, the moon, so some of the commodities are different: in addition to familiar products like tourists, bauxite, and fruit, one has unusual things like scientists, KREEP ore, He³, and so on. In addition, the moon has a some unique terrain features. For instance, the larger craters are detailed on the board, and provide a special building challenge. Also, there are no rivers to flood and wreck track as in previous Mayfair train games; here the hazards are meteor strikes, which can hit randomly and destroy sections of track unpredictably. Furthermore, due to the scale of the game, there are a great many more mountains, particularly on the Far Side of the moon, which make rail-building tricky. There are other minor differences as well; since the moon's gravity is lighter, trains run a little faster than in other Mayfair train games. However, the biggest difference (and the most novel for experienced players) is the nature of the board itself: instead of being a rectangular projection of a section of territory, it is the two faces of the moon, Near Side and Far Side, with special connector points around the rim of each. What this means is that one can build track off the end of one face of the moon and on to the end of another, nicely simulating that although the map is flat, one is, in fact, playing on the

surface of a sphere. This adds an element of three-dimensionality to the game that is novel for new players and experienced players alike. One has to balance the fact that areas which don't necessarily look close to each other may in fact be so.

It is this three-dimensional element that adds the largest element of strategy to the game. My wife is an experienced Mayfair train games fiend, and we have discovered that despite her skill, she is very often beatable at ***Lunar Rails***, even by less-experienced players. Long-standing Mayfair fans might find the mental switch from a two-dimensional to a three-dimensional playing field to be a bit of an adjustment, though I like it just fine. Otherwise, there are very few design problems to the game. The only one we have noticed thus far is that in every game we have played to date, whoever built on the Far Side first and monopolized the profitable D'Alambert Crater robot or Tsiolkovsky Crater diamond commodity runs usually won. Whether this is a matter of strategy or an accident of the demand cards drawn for each game remains to be seen. Furthermore, Mayfair train games usually boast the minor benefit of an educational function, as they teach the player the geography of the areas in which game they're playing. While this is true (and in the case of geography-ignorant Americans, usually helpful), but somewhat less of a feature of ***Lunar Rails***, given that all of the settlements on it are fictitious. The craters are real, though, and the designers have thoughtfully labeled some of the major American and Russian 20th century landing sites of historical interest -- a nice touch that maintains some educational interest to the game. I did find that my prior knowledge of lunar geography gave me a definite edge over other new players, until they learn the terrain and it stops being confusing to them. Any other difficulties I had with the game are minor. As with all Mayfair products, graphics and production design are excellent overall. My only peeves were the designs of the trains on the train cards, which look like locomotives instead of the advanced rocket-propelled or maglev units that are described in the rules, though naming them after historical rocket types was a nice touch. Furthermore, in a nod to a Certain Movie, a commodity available only at Tyco Crater is alien Artifacts -- these are represented by a little squiggle design on the commodity cards when, darn it, they should have been little black rectangles . . .

Overall, ***Lunar Rails*** is a very enjoyable game. It offers much for the beginning player, while still remaining challenging for the experienced player. And the pedagogical value of learning the lunar geography is always useful. It is my hope that this one might be able to rope some of the science fiction fans into the enjoyable world of Mayfair train games. This may be the board game that fans of ***Transhuman Space: High Frontier*** or ***GURPS Terradyne*** have been waiting for. Who knows; maybe ***Mars Rails*** waits on the horizon . . .

--C.J. Beiting

The Shadow Under Dunwich

"[The Suffolk coast is] quite new to me except that I read of it in the Odyssey as the shore of Hades. Do you know it? It is unlike any other known to me. Fancy a cathedral city, which had its Bishop and members and six great Churches, one a minster, and an immense monastery and hospital for lepers -- and now the sea has slowly swallowed all but two shells of ruined masonry, and just twenty cottages, inn and school included. This is Dunwich -- literally built on the sand -- on and behind a high crumbling sea-bank, looking out to a sea where the nearest land is Denmark."

-- Algernon Charles Swinburne, letter to Edwin Harrison of Jan. 10, 1876

At once quotidian and mythical, the town of Dunwich is Suffolk's best known sacrifice to the sea. Its desolation inspired poets and horrorists, but sprang from nothing more mysterious than the wind and the waves. Slowly, however, the tides and storms built up a skerry of legend and lore running from the throne of Tristram to the land of the dead. With that in mind, let's go down to Dunwich.

"Her town of Dunwytche is by Rage and Surges of the Sea daylie wasted and devoured, And the Haven of her Highness' said Towne, by diverse Rages of Wyndes continually landed and barred, so as no Shippes or Boats can either enter in or oughte . . ."

-- from the royal records of Queen Elizabeth I (1578)

Although three Roman roads point resolutely to Dunwich, nobody has managed to find the slightest sign of Roman occupation, despite what must have been a tempting harbor. Hence, the history of Dunwich town begins rather abruptly with the Saxons, or rather the Angles, under whose King Sigeberht in the 7th century Dunewic was briefly the capital of East Anglia and seat of the bishopric of St. Felix. Dunwich went from strength to strength, repelling a rebel siege by Robert of Leicester in 1173 and gaining a Templar "temple" in 1185 and a charter in 1199 -- its population was probably over 3,000. By the mid-13th century, Dunwich's eighty galleys were fighting the king's wars, shipping golden Suffolk corn to Flanders, and raking in huge catches of herring from the North Sea. But the burghers of Dunwich had already been forced to build a sea wall (at their own expense) and continuously dredge the mouth of their harbor as the shores slowly crept south and west. And then the storms began.

On the night of the vernal equinox in 1286, "through the Vehemence of the Winds, and Violence of the Sea, several Churches were overthrown and destroyed," and Dunwich began to falter. Citizens turned to piracy and smuggling, gaining the town a bad reputation at court, which cost it dearly in lawsuits with the Bishop of Ely and with other towns along the coast. On January 14, 1328, another storm blocked the harbor entirely, and one in 1349 washed away 400 houses in Dunwich. Without their harbor, the people of Dunwich could not pay to rebuild; the relentless sea consumed building after building. Four churches drowned by 1385, two were demolished in 1540 before the sea could take them, and in 1608 the Temple went "over the cliff." Cemeteries slid down the cliffs, bones and coffins sticking out of the shingle on their way into the deeps. The Dunwich marketplace drowned in 1677, ending the town's economic existence. In December of 1739, a great storm leveled the remains of the village, and on November 12, 1919 the last church tower in Dunwich collapsed into the strand. Dunwich had ceased to be a place long before its last resident was buried in its last churchyard, in 1826. But like the all-consuming sea itself, the idea of Dunwich continued to erode and undermine the brittle, bright rationalism of post-Enlightenment Britain.

*"Tombs, with bare white piteous bones protruded,
Shroudless, down the loose collapsing banks,
Crumble, from their constant place detruded,
That the sea devours and gives not thanks.
Graves where hope and prayer and sorrow brooded
Gape and slide and perish, ranks on ranks.
Rows on rows and line by line they crumble....
Earth, and man, and all their gods wax humble
Here, where Time brings pasture to the sea."*

-- Algernon Charles Swinburne, "By the North Sea" (1880)

The printer John Daye, a resident of Dunwich, commissioned John Stowe to write a history of Dunwich in 1573, to capitalize on the Elizabethan taste for "ancient Britain." Although for some reason the history never wound up getting published, London antiquarians kept the memory of "sunken Dunwich" alive long enough for the ruins to become a picturesque spot for Gothic tourism. One such picturesque Goth, the poet Algernon Charles Swinburne, was powerfully affected by the Dunwich genius loci. His poem "By the North Sea" sets out a cosmology of human works -- including God and the gods -- drowned in the all-devouring sea of Time. It uses the "one hollow tower and hoary/Naked in the sea-wind" of Dunwich's All Saints Church as a central image, and alludes to the "displaced, devoured and desecrated" graves of Dunwich's cemeteries. Swinburne was an excellent and devoted swimmer, but the sea in his poetry is always both numinous and terrifying: "impelled of invisible tides, and fulfilled of unspeakable things/White-eyed and poisonous-finned, shark-toothed and serpentine-curved."

And in that respect, he resembles the other bard of Dunwich, whose works also speak of the transience of pitiful human gods and histories beneath the tread of Time -- and who also warns of the "unspeakable things" beneath the sea -- [H.P. Lovecraft](#). Lovecraft's Dunwich was inland, although intriguingly based in part on towns drowned by the construction of the Quabbin Reservoir in 1926. But his once-prosperous, now wracked shipping town of Innsmouth also echoes Dunwich's later history of murder and inanition. (The fen country around Dunwich still leads England in webbed feet and other deformities.) Lovecraft (like Swinburne) got ideas from dreams and visions; like Swinburne, he was occasionally subject to fainting spells or even fits. Lovecraft read Swinburne, and must have been affected by Swinburne's lines: "Ye are Gods, and behold, ye shall die, and the waves be upon you at last/In the darkness of time, in the deeps of the years, in the changes of things,/Ye shall sleep as a slain man sleeps, and the world shall forget you for kings." Lovecraft adopted a Swinburnian meter to some of his poetry (especially "Nemesis"), described Swinburne as "the only real poet either in England or America since the death of Mr. Poe," and eventually placed himself and Swinburne in the same "aesthete-pagan tradition."

Other writers were also seemingly trapped in the Dunwich undertow. H. Rider Haggard visited Dunwich often, and mentioned it in (intriguingly female-titled) novels like *Red Eve*, *Stella Fregelius*, and *The Witches Head*. Edward Fitzgerald, who translated the [Sufi mystic](#) Omar Khayyam, also seemed drawn to Dunwich, visiting it constantly between 1855 and 1878 despite describing it as "rough lodging." Even Jerome K. Jerome, whose hapless boaters seemed to symbolize Victorian innocence, found Dunwich irresistible, and was on his way there when he died of a sudden stroke in 1927.

"The coldest winter in memory was 1709

The sea froze off the coast of France all along the Neptune line

By the lost town of Dunwich the shore was washed away

They say you hear the church bells still as they toll beneath the waves."

-- Al Stewart, "The Coldest Winter in Memory" (1989)

But if Swinburne and Lovecraft are working to wash Dunwich out into the sea of myth, it seems that Dunwich itself is an outcropping of fact joined to the peculiarly British legend of the "sunken city." In Dunwich, they say, you can hear the church bells still ringing deep under the sea -- despite the decree of Queen Elizabeth that the bells of Dunwich churches be melted down to pay the town's increasing debts. But Britain is ringed round with submerged church bells -- lost Shipden in Norfolk, Selsey in Sussex, Kilgrimod in Lancashire, and Ravenser on the Humber for instance. Spectral bells also ring out from the famous Cantref y Gwaelod in Wales and Lyonesse in Cornwall. Both claim to be the original of the Breton legend of "Ker Ys," in which drunken lust leads a woman to open the bronze sea-gates and submerge the town, from which one single rider escapes. Dunwich, in Stowe's legendary history at least, had "brazen gates" in its "stone wall," and even today boasts a spectral horseman riding across the heath by the full moon -- although the offshore bells only ring on moonless nights.

One is inevitably, if only intuitively, reminded of Lovecraft's tossed-off allusion from "The Descendant": "In London there is a man who screams when the church bells ring." In this context, it's also interesting that Swinburne wrote an epic on "Tristram of Lyonesse." It ends with the lovers entombed, "and over them, while death and life shall be/The light and sound and darkness of the sea." Swinburne's Tristram, like King Arthur and the other heroes of Britain, has gone not just "over the water" but *under* it as well.

"On the opposite coast, in Frankish territory but exempt from taxation, dwell the mariners who, without catching sight of their passengers, carry the dead across the Channel. At midnight they are notified in a mysterious manner, and go to the shore. There they see empty boats, not their own, but strange ones. Upon setting out, they see the boat is laden choke-full, but see no one. Even with their heavily laden boats they succeed in reaching the island of Brittia in a single hour. Upon their arrival the souls are called out by name, and the ferrymen thereupon return with their empty boats so light that they only dip a keel in the waves."

-- Procopius, *History of the Wars* (ca. 555)

Scyld, Balder, Arthur, Sigmund, Iarlmagus, and the Maid of Ascolat all take boats to the land of the dead -- as do the nameless ghosts in Charon's barge and in Procopius' "heavily laden boats." And where, then, do they go, these heroes and ghosts? This land has many names, although Greeks, Gauls, and Egyptians all knew it to be an island to the West. For our purposes, though, it can be Tir fo Thuinn -- the "Land Under the Waves." The voyages of Maelduin and Ruadh both lead to an Otherworld beneath the ocean, a golden paradise and timeless shadowland alike. This may be somehow cyclically connected to the ancient notion of the sea (and the sea-goddess) as the home of all life -- for example, the Gothic *sáivala* -- "the soul" -- is cognate with *sáivs* -- "the sea." But "sea-born" Venus was also a goddess of the dead, and as such came in for special attention by (you know it) Swinburne, whose poem "Laus Veneris" recasts the Tannhäuser legend as a hymn to the [Queen of the Underworld](#). (Perhaps here lies yet another connection to Dunwich habitué H. Rider Haggard, who also wrote his greatest work in praise of a mysterious Queen of riches and eternal beauty, in an ancient cavern-temple.) Swinburne's "Hymn to Proserpine" (an even more explicit death-fertility goddess) goes even further out to sea: "Where beyond the extreme sea-wall, and between the remote sea-gates/Waste water washes, and tall ships founder, and deep death waits."

In this context, it's interesting to note that the historian Marcellus, commenting on the legends of the ineffable (and deadly) [Amazons](#), and on their foes in (the sunken land of) [Atlantis](#), claims that the British Isles are sacred to Proserpine -- and that Britain itself is sacred to Pluto. We seem to see above that Procopius identifies Britain explicitly as the Land of the Dead -- although he differentiates between "Britain" (the former Roman province, now settled by Angles) and "Brittia." The latter is divided in two by a great wall, with an earthly paradise on one side and snakes and poisonous fumes on the other -- and to that island, the dead are ferried from Europe. Essentially, Procopius' two-fold Brittia echoes a two-fold Britain -- one overlaying the other, with daylight history on top and a shadowland of death beneath. Where the two overlap, you hear the bells ring in sunken churchyards -- such as those in Dunwich.

Dunwich, which seems to have sprung full-grown from nothing in the sixth century -- just as Cantref y Gwaelod and Lyonesse sink under the waves. In legend, it even appropriates their stone sea-wall and "brazen gates" as the Dolorous Blow destroys Arthur's Logres and drives them into the Otherworld. Just then, too, the sober historian Procopius is testifying to the existence of two Britains, one a shadow realm of the dead. Is Dunwich upthrust by a great [reality quake](#)? Did its vibrations stir up a tidal wave of images, decanted by the Queen of the Dead, to pour into the unsuspecting mind of Swinburne, and from his poetry like a psychic virus into the neurasthenic H.P. Lovecraft? Does Swinburne's "woman in all tales" echo our half-hidden [Spider Goddess](#) Cybele, or the vampiric [Dark Lady](#) we see in Shakespeare's Cleopatra? Did Queen Elizabeth know of her submarine rival, and withhold the bells of Dunwich to secure her own throne from erosion? Does the Queen of Brittia yet wait beneath Dunwich to ["drench our steeples"](#) and "crack nature's moulds," feasting meanwhile on the ghosts of Templars and the flame of poets? The Dunwich horror waits on the dry salvages of Time, "white-eyed and poisonous-finned, shark-toothed and serpentine-curved." Don't hesitate to ring.

Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Odds & Ends: A New Beginning

It's been a while since I subjected you all to a column of odds & ends, so I thought I'd rectify this. I assure you, my motivations for presenting these snippets of columnloaf have *nothing* to do with the fact that I'm nowhere near a computer right now, but instead in Atlanta, enjoying myself in the comicy gothalicious scifilectable gamerly haven that is [Dragon*Con](#) after having assembled this issue a week early.

* * *

I love chachkas (Yiddish for bric-a-brac). In addition to the wall-to-wall bookshelves, my apartment is pretty much covered with odds and ends I've accumulated over the years - action figures, assembly toy kits, puzzles, odd toys, mock (and real) weapons, and the like. (Of special note is my stuffed Cthulhu doll, who is wearing a plastic chain taken from an old *Dungeons & Dragons* display, a bow tie, and a brown Australian "Trav'ler" hat. He's holding a tennis ball.)

The way my mind works, I think I *need* a certain amount of chaos in my life to keep my thoughts freely flowing. Tripping over, say, my mirror-illusion coin bank might trigger a thought on the nature of anti-gravity, illusions, magic tricks, and so on. Seeing a random padlock might inspire me to think of something ununlockable for my gaming players, or useful as a prop to show metaphorically how something might be "unlocked."

And having stuff lying around means I can do dumb stuff like substitute the pistol my character uses in the *Maltese Falcon* stage adaptation I'm in for a lightsaber during a rehearsal. (This lead to jokes on the *Pyramid* [chat room](#) like the *Maltese Millennium Falcon* and *Noir Wars*, a title so cool I'm bound to steal it for something someday. Thanks, **StevenEhrbar** and **Robert**.)

But there's a certain type of chachkas that holds a special place in my heart: stuff that exists as "real" world artifacts for a fictional universe. I have literally dozens of these things:

- T-shirts (Daily Planet staff shirt, Gotham City Athletics shirt, Mooby shirt)
- Jewelry (Green Lantern ring; Professor Xavier's School For Gifted Youngsters class pin; Enterprise-C communicator pin, complete with chirping board)
- Props (various *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* goodies, among other things)

And, of course, being the gaming geek that I am, I have a number of these items that tie into gaming worlds. I have things like the ***Mage: The Ascension*** tarot deck, a Arkham University diploma, and my ***Fading Suns*** Questing Knight medallion. (Sadly, I do *not* have my Origins ***Autoduel*** tool set . . . my parents didn't throw away my comics; they threw away my computer games.)

Anyway, the point I'm trying to make is <goes back and skims column> ah, yes! I remember. The point is that I love these "official" company props; they help spur my imagination ("Hmm . . . how would I smuggle this lightsaber aboard a ship?") and remind me of cool gaming stuff even when I don't get to sit around the table.

Perhaps more importantly, they serve as cool in-game props, prompting increased involvement and interaction with the world. For example, in my *Star Trek* game I ran several years ago I made a point of providing *Next Generation*-style communicator pins for the players; without any prompting they all wore them *and* tapped them when they wanted to use the communicator. So in another example of what I would do if I was Benevolent Dictator for Life of the Universe, I'd encourage gaming companies to make these props available, either as honest-to-goodness replicas or perhaps low-cost PDFs or even "do-it-yourself" creation ideas.

Of course, to do that game world makers need to create or evoke ideas that are prop-worthy . . . which may be a separate issue altogether.

* * *

I'm a big fan of the old *Dungeons & Dragons* cartoon. While not a masterpiece of Western civilization (or even Saturday morning kidvid), it nevertheless captured the spirit of what *Dungeons & Dragons* was for me back when I was a wee lad: exciting epic plots, a continuing story wrapped around episodic installments, snazzy magic items, and cool character classes.

Back when I only had a few of the *Classic Dungeons & Dragons* boxed sets, these kids all got to be characters I'd never even *heard* of.

But as I was recounting these memories in the *Pyramid* chat room last week, I noted that, y'know, the gal who got to be the Acrobat must have felt *really* ripped off. I mean, all the other classes were these interesting, powerful archetypes that were evocative of high adventure. All, that is, except the poor Acrobat, who immediately brought to mind a circus performer.

"Fear not: Ranger. Thief. Barbarian. Wizard. Cavalier . . . and Mime."

When I pointed this out in the chat room, **thomasm** noted that her magic item wasn't very interesting either:

"Oooh; I've got a magic *stick*."

Surprisingly, there *does* seem to be a gaming lesson here; namely, if you're before someone with the power to chart the course of your destiny - either an animated Dungeon Master or a real one - try not to be the last one named, created, or joining the team. Otherwise you run the risk of being the "also-ran" idea, where everyone earlier got the "cool" ideas. (This also explains Aquaman's membership to the Justice League.)

Now all I need is to warm up my ultradimensional transport so I can acquire a DVD set of the episodes . . . preferably with the fabled unrealized [final episode](#).

* * *

Yesterday and today I've needed to adjust to an increase in traffic in my fair city; the college students who have been mercifully absent for the blistering summer months have returned like swallows to Capistrano, only with slightly less resultant poop on my car.

As a minor gaming point I'd note that just about any game can benefit from a periodic scheduled, known event that will harm or help the game world. Any game set in New Orleans should have the specter of Mardi Gras looming down it annually, any campaign set in ancient Egypt would probably have the periodic flooding of the Nile as a big deal, and any game where the heroes are agents for the US government may well be curious as to the result of our presidential and congressional elections. ("Strikeforce Munchkin? You've been zero-funded.")

And even as I write this I realize the horror of our football weekends, which shall soon bring the city to its knees . . .

* * *

And speaking of braving increased traffic, I'm mere minutes from heading out of town to [Dragon*Con](#). Play nicely, folks, and try not to burn down the mag before I get back!

--Steven Marsh

Istanbul

by Matt Riggsby

Few cities become capitals of great empires. Fewer serve as capital for two, and even then one is usually just another phase of the one before. Born as Byzantium, rebuilt as Constantinople, and remade yet again, Istanbul is perhaps unique in that it ruled two empires which were essentially unrelated. Religiously, legally, culturally, and linguistically, the Byzantine and Ottoman empires were profoundly different, but the city on the Golden Horn was the lynchpin of both.

We'll be using Istanbul (mixed Greek and Turkish for "to the city", the most common in Turkish documents and used at least since the 13th century) to mean the city after the Turkish conquest and Constantinople to refer to it before, but in fact all the older names surfaced from time to time. In particular, Konstantiniye, a Turkish translation of Constantinople, was used through the Ottoman period. The name was *officially* changed to Istanbul only at the establishment of the republic in 1923, and even then it was slow to catch on in Europe (modern Greeks make it a point to call it Constantinople).

This article makes reference to previous articles on [Constantinople](#) and [Byzantine society](#). You may want to skim over those for background.

Geography and Land Use

The underlying geography of Istanbul is, of course, the same as that of Constantinople, and the land was used in about the same way: habitation is densest towards the eastern end of the Golden Horn, falling off toward the west. However, the Turks packed fewer people into the space. Istanbul's population probably didn't pass a half-million for most of the Ottoman period. The Turks took advantage of the difference in population density to leave more trees and green areas within the city than the Byzantines had.

History

The history of Ottoman Istanbul begins where the history of Byzantine Constantinople ends: the morning of May 29, 1453. When the Turkish sultan Mehmet II took the Byzantine capital, it was little more than the shell of a once-great city, inhabited by people of a different religion and ethnicity to boot. However, the site's ample natural advantages were good enough for Mehmet, who decided to use it as his capital. Like the early Byzantine emperors before them, the first Ottoman sultans in Istanbul rebuilt their capital. Istanbul was slowly transformed from a Christian Greek town to a Muslim and predominantly Turkish but nevertheless cosmopolitan city. People were brought in from the Ottomans' growing dominions. Aqueducts were constructed or repaired to bring water to the city. Old palaces were reoccupied and repaired, new homes were constructed, mosques and madrasas were built (sometimes using recycled churches), and new markets were laid out.

In 1453, the Ottomans controlled most of Anatolia and the southern Balkans. A century later, they controlled the Levant and Egypt, extended their empire into Persia, Libya, and the northern Balkans up to Austria and Hungary, annexed the Arabian peninsula, and together with their Crimean vassals controlled most of the Black Sea coast. The empire reached its height in the early-mid 16th century under Suleyman I. As treasure poured in from conquests in Europe, Africa, and western Asia, Suleyman undertook an immense number of building projects. Most of these buildings were designed by the brilliant and seemingly inexhaustible architect Sinan, a retired military engineer in the janissaries. Sinan lived into his nineties, building a reputed 400 works. Many were mosques and palaces, but he also oversaw the construction of tombs, hospitals, aqueducts, and other structures across the empire. Much of Istanbul's skyline was the product of his work.

Suleyman was regarded by Europeans as their greatest threat since the Mongols three centuries earlier. The feeling was

mutual. The Ottomans remembered centuries of Crusades (although the crusading movement was just as remote as the Mongol hordes by this time) and witnessed commercial powers such as Venice, Spain, and Portugal expanding their spheres of influence into the Islamic world. For their part, Europe had never fully recovered from the shock of the fall of Constantinople, and every report of another Turkish conquest in Europe was that much more ominous. In 1529, the armies of Suleyman, advancing into Habsburg-controlled Austria, reached the gates of Vienna, now Christendom's easternmost major city. Fortunately for the Europeans, "the Turk" was overextended and was unable to drive home the assault. Suleyman concluded a peace agreement with the Habsburgs and concentrated on expanding into Persia, eventually taking Baghdad. There would be another attack on Vienna years later, but the Ottomans had reached the limit of their westward expansion.

After Suleyman, the empire began a long, slow decline. The root of the problem is often identified as the sultans' response to the question of successors. Through Suleyman's reign, as in most monarchies, the ruler's close relatives served as generals and important officials, giving them a sort of on-the-job training that would qualify them for the crown. But someone who is qualified to take power is also qualified -- and far too often inclined -- to depose the current ruler. Suleyman's two oldest sons attempted to revolt and had to be executed. A despondent Suleyman all but retired from government in his later years, handing effective rule to his chief vizier, and excluding his youngest son, Selim, from power. When Selim reached the throne, he had neither the skills nor the desire to rule. Instead, he indulged in all the pleasures the wealth and influence of a supremely powerful monarch could obtain, leaving others to handle the day-to-day drudgery of administering the empire.

For self-preservation, future sultans followed the practice of excluding heirs from any position where they might get enough power to challenge the current ruler. In fact, they went to a terrible extreme. Sons were imprisoned in a building called the Cage, and no successor was named until the reigning sultan died. When one heir came to power, the others were quietly strangled. This did not improve the quality of the sultans who were to come. For decades, sultans assumed the throne having spent years in a single room (save for some very infrequent excursions), in fear of casual murder but supplied with all the luxuries which could be brought to them. At best, these sultans were lazy and hedonistic. Many, though, ranged from slightly unstable to downright insane.

Without the sultans exercising their authority, actual power fragmented as it moved a rung down the ladder. The palace was the scene of constant intrigues between viziers, janissaries, eunuchs, and the harem. The influence of sultans' mothers and consorts has led to this period sometimes being called "the sultanate of women." Occasionally, a competent favorite would arise and nudge the increasingly corrupt government in the right direction, but effective administration was the exception rather than the rule.

Constant infighting in the palace prevented the Ottoman empire from taking suitable steps against new challenges from the west. Much of the empire's wealth was based on its control of overland trade routes between Asia and Europe. European exploration and the precursors of the Industrial Revolution rendered that control moot. European sailors bypassed Turkish middlemen for Asian goods, and growing European factories, not duplicated in the east, could produce goods far more cheaply than Turkish craftsmen, further cutting down Ottoman exports. Westerners continued to visit Istanbul, but they were more frequently tourists with a taste for the exotic than merchants.

In the 19th century, a string of sultans realized how far the Ottoman empire had fallen behind Europe and attempted reforms, but it was too little, too late. Ethnic revolts and interference from European powers stripped away the empire's possessions until there was nothing left but the core territory of Anatolia and a toehold in Europe. Istanbul remained much as it was in earlier centuries, acquiring limited train and telegraph service, while Western Europe barreled forward into the age of steam and beyond. The Ottoman Empire saw its final importance as a minor player in the "Great Game." During the 19th century, Britain and Russia struggled for supremacy in central Asia, which led in turn to a number of subsidiary alliances and proxy conflicts as the two powers worked against one another. Though in decline, the Ottoman empire was still regionally important as a British ally, and Istanbul was an important location for diplomatic wrangling.

A coup in 1909 turned the last few sultans into mere figureheads and the monarchy was done away with in the 1923 when Kemal Attaturk's nationalists proclaimed a republic. There's a certain sadness at the passing of an ancient dynasty, and yet . . .

When the sultan Abd-al-Hamid was deposed in 1909, his concubines were freed. They were temporarily moved from the harem at Topkapi to another residence, and their well-attended procession was the first time ever that people outside the palace had seen the inmates of the harem. Announcements were circulated in the Circassian mountains, from which most of them had come. In what was by all accounts a moving episode, a crowd of rustic mountaineers came to reclaim their sisters and daughters. There were hundreds of tearfully happy reunions, although for those who had been in the harem longer, it took some wrangling to establish who was related to whom. It may have been the end of an era, but the captives of the harem could finally go home.

Government

The sultan was an absolute ruler. The Turks reasoned that if a ruler was dependent on the approval of others, he could be influenced by their interests and was therefore subject to corruption. A ruler subject to no one but Allah, therefore, was best suited to keep things honest.

And keeping things honest was the ruler's main function. He was expected to uphold justice for the common people and spend most of his time overseeing officials and stamping out corruption. In addition to personally reviewing decisions and occasionally observing officials at work, the sultan had a network of spies keeping an eye on officials throughout the empire. In the early years, this seemed to work fairly well. The system only began to collapse when the sultans began to lose interest in governing.

Although he held supreme power, the sultan didn't have time to do *everything*. He was supported by a cabinet of ministers called the Divan. The Divan consisted of the Grand Vizier, a chancellor, a pair of high qadis (judges), three ministers of finance, and a few other advisors. The Divan met at the palace several times each week to discuss business and hear petitions. The vizier served as a chairman, directing petitioners to the other members of the Divan for consideration. Originally, the sultan attended these meetings to oversee the work of his ministers (silently; he just watched while the vizier ran the proceedings). After Suleyman, sultans stopped attending regularly. However, there was a screened room adjacent to the council chamber where he could eavesdrop on the Divan without being seen.

Topkapi Palace

Westerners' most fevered, romantic dreams of decadent life in a harem are fueled by tales of the Topkapi palace, chief residence of the sultans for most of the Ottoman period. The hotly imagined picture of a bevy of beautiful, scantily clad women serving the pleasure of a single man, protected by an army of eunuchs and shielded from the eyes of outsiders, is far from complete, but it came closest to being real here.

The first sultans occupied existing Byzantine palaces, but they proved unsuitable. Therefore, they built a new one, called Topkapi by the Turks and the Grand Seraglio by westerners. This palace sits at the very end of the city's peninsula. Like the old Byzantine imperial palace, it was not a single building, but rather a palatial district, containing gardens, barracks, classrooms, offices, hospitals, mosques, baths, kitchens, and living quarters for the sultan and an army of servants and bodyguards. Topkapi was enormous: nearly a mile from north to south and about half a mile east to west. About three quarters of this area was open space, including orchards and parade grounds. Most of the buildings were concentrated into a roughly rectangular area that constituted the palace proper.

The entrance to the palace was the Ortakapi (central gate). Everyone, regardless of race or religion, was allowed into the first and second courtyards of the palace. The right to petition officials was an important one in the Ottoman empire, and this is where the common people could come to appeal to the Divan. However, silence was strictly observed. Anyone making noise was seized by guards and beaten. The second courtyard had, among other buildings, quarters where ambassadors waited for the sultan to receive them (sometimes for days).

Few, however, were allowed into the semi-public sections beyond the second courtyard; there were three more courtyards, private mosques, schools for the children of the sultan and his resident relatives and servants, more kitchens, treasuries, quarters, and so on. And at the very core of the palace was the most secret part of all: the harem. Outsiders, including diplomats, were not admitted. The only exceptions were craftsmen required for repairs and new

construction and a few women visiting relatives or selling goods to the harem's inmates.

The harem's most notable inhabitants were the sultan's concubines. The concubines were bought or given as tribute, selected for grace and appearance. However, the harem also included the sultan's close female relatives, as well as multiple ranks of servants for both the relatives and the favored concubines. At the harem's height, the women probably numbered well over a thousand.

But no matter how large the harem, a pleasure-loving sultan can indulge in only so much amusement, and none of the women, whether a relative or simply property, was allowed beyond the harem's well-protected walls unless she was married off, given as a gift, or retired to a lesser palace. Luxurious as it was, the harem was a prison. The day-in, day-out tedium was a serious problem, leading to depression and even suicide. There was considerable effort to find amusements for the harem inmates and develop useful skills. For example, the women might play games, learn and recite poetry, or play musical instruments. According to legend, belly dancing was developed as both recreation and exercise for the harem's inmates. They might also involve themselves in dangerous, covert affairs with eunuchs (some retained their original function), servants and janissaries from the outer palace (requiring considerable ingenuity just to communicate), and, no doubt, each other.

The most profitable use of their time, though, was in politics. Although the inmates of the harem were limited to a very narrow scope of action, that scope happened to include the sultan. Ambitious women who could attract and keep the attention of the jaded sultan could and did effectively rule the empire. The sultan's mother, while she lived, was usually the most important, followed by the *kaidins*, women who had borne sons. Factions would arise within the harem, supporting or opposing favorites and hopefuls, and anyone could be disgraced or even assassinated.

The palace hosted a large body of servants of all descriptions, with an emphasis on the unusual. Eunuchs, dwarves, and mutes were common in the palace. Eunuchs were employed for much the same reasons as they had been by the Byzantines. Moreover, they could reasonably be expected not to have improper relations with the sultan's women. The eunuchs, of whom there were anywhere from one to two thousand at any given time, were divided racially into black and white eunuchs. Each division was led by its own chief, the *kizlar agha* and *kapi agha* respectively. The white eunuchs mostly served in the outer parts of the palace, working as bureaucrats as well as servants, while the black eunuchs served in the harem itself. The *kapi agha* was initially master of ceremonies, gatekeeper, and receiver of correspondence from outside, while the *kizlar agha* administered internal communications. For example, he served as official messenger between the sultan and the grand vizier. Over time, the *kizlar agha* was given many of the *kapi agha*'s responsibilities and so became the most important official of the palace.

The grounds were maintained by a veritable army of 400 gardeners. All were foreigners, typically boys selected with an eye toward recruitment as janissaries. At times, they served as an auxiliary guard along with a separate group of 50 or so halberd-armed gatekeepers. The gardeners were directed by the *bostanji-bashi* (head gardener). The *bostanji-bashi*'s responsibilities went far beyond those implied by his title. He was also, for example, the palace's chief executioner, responsible for executing the highest condemned officials.

Military

The Ottoman military elite and de facto police force in Istanbul was the janissaries. The janissaries were the sultan's personal bodyguard. They were originally drawn from captives and the children of Christians, taken as tribute and raised as Muslims. The janissaries numbered about 20,000 by Suleyman's time, and they were probably the most formidable single fighting force in Europe. They initially used bows, swords and axes, trading bows for muskets when gunpowder weapons become current. Regardless of weapons, they were well-trained professionals through the age of Suleyman. In fact, they were the only standing army in Europe until the French established one in the 1600s.

When the sultanate declined, the janissaries went with it. They assumed civil powers and acquired a number of privileges, making it very desirable to be a janissary. Admission became open to their sons (janissaries were forbidden to marry until the 17th century) and even to people who were born Muslim. Although no janissary could become sultan, they nevertheless played an important role in palace politics and deposed several sultans who displeased them. As their importance and numbers increased (130,000 by 1800), their effectiveness as a fighting force evaporated. The

later sultans realized that the usefulness of the janissaries had passed, but it was not until 1826 that Mahmud III could organize a new army to replace them (and, incidentally, massacre them in their Istanbul barracks).

The janissary organization was expressed in terms of kitchens and cooking. Most officers had cooking-related names (head chef, bread-baker, soup-man), and a janissary orta (a unit of several hundred men) was commanded by its chief cook. Janissary helmets were decorated with spoons, and instead of a banner, the chief symbol of a janissary unit was its monumental soup cauldron, a vessel large enough to feed over a hundred men. Knocking over the cauldron (and thereby symbolically rejecting the food provided by the sultan) was a classic method for expressing displeasure with authorities.

Trade and Industry

The Islamic world had a long and honorable merchant tradition, and despite a brief interruption around Mehmet's conquest, trade in Istanbul remained as healthy as it had been in Constantinople. Knowing that a great deal of their revenue depended on it, the Turks encouraged international trade, granting broad access to foreigners wishing to trade there. When the Turks took Constantinople, they confirmed and continued the privileges that Italian merchants had enjoyed under the Byzantine emperors, and later merchants, including the French and English, were granted similar rights.

Although there were open-air markets, the Turks preferred to build large sheltered ones. The shelters are huge masonry vaults, pierced here and there by skylights and ventilation shafts. From within, they are a forest of pillars and archways inhabited by merchants selling anything one can imagine. In addition to imported goods, a number of locally produced products can be found. The Turks excelled at carpet-making, an art dating back to their days as nomads, and fine embroidery. The production of painted ceramic tiles is a major industry in this period as well. The famous Blue Mosque, a monumental mosque built by Suleyman, is encrusted in rich blue tiles made in Istanbul.

Scholarship

During the early years of the empire, and like so many other things reaching its height with Suleyman, Istanbul was a center of learning rivaling anything in the rest of Europe. Although there were no large universities, there were a great many small schools and a number of libraries. Suleyman actively encouraged a wide variety of scholarly activities, so one was as likely to find a map of the New World in Istanbul as in, say, Italy or France, and translations of important western works were available alongside original works in Turkish.

However, unlike western Europe, where the printing press was revolutionizing book production, books in Istanbul were hand-written through the period in question. Calligraphy remained an important art (a modified version of the Arabic alphabet was used), and books were still decorated with hand-painted miniatures and careful applications of metal leaf. The Turks were also pioneers in the art of marbling paper.

Buildings and Streets

After a major earthquake in 1509, which did tremendous damage to the predominantly Greek-style earthen buildings, buildings in Istanbul were largely made of wood. These buildings may have been more resistant to the earthquakes that plague the eastern Mediterranean, but they magnified another danger: fire. And, in fact, fire did become a major hazard in Istanbul, destroying large parts of the city every few decades. The exteriors of homes were plain, even shabby, and mostly windowless, but their interiors were often far more luxurious than their façade suggested.

Although Istanbul was less densely populated than Constantinople at its height, the areas that were inhabited were crowded. The streets were extremely narrow, and the buildings often leaned inwards to the point where residents of buildings on opposite sides of the street might be able to touch hands from the top floors. Many streets were paved, but apparently they were never cleaned and were frequented by stray dogs in large numbers. Wheeled vehicles were rarely used, probably owing to the narrowness of the streets, and in some periods women rarely ventured outside.

Accounts of visitors suggest that Turks liked having trees around. Rather than clearing all the trees off of a building site, they would try to maintain at least a few, perhaps building near or even around it so that the branches provided a nice finishing touch to the roof.

Religion and Ethnicity

After the first few decades of Turkish rule, Istanbul is predominantly Muslim and Turkish. However, Orthodox Christians remained a significant minority; the Patriarchate remained headquartered in Istanbul, albeit in reduced circumstances. Christians were prohibited from building new churches, so the Orthodox used increasingly decrepit Byzantine-period buildings. There was a sizable Jewish enclave as well.

The city was also ethnically mixed. In addition to the Turks, there were a great many ethnic Greeks in residence, as well as people from all over the Ottoman empire: Arabs, Persians, Egyptians, Syrians, various Balkan Slavs, even Gypsies and Russians. Most non-Muslims lived in Galata, but a number lived in the city proper.

Food

Turkish cuisine is closely related to the food of the Middle East, but there are influences from Greece, India, and the central Asian plains. Soups, pilavs, and slow-cooked vegetables are staples of the Turkish diet, and stuffed foods are common, from dolma (stuffed grape leaves) to stuffed gourds to kofte (small stuffed balls of ground meat). Visitors to Istanbul happily remarked that a wide variety of fruits and nuts are available year-round, and sweet pastries are popular; baklava is probably a Turkish invention. Most dishes are usually eaten by hand; as in similar cuisines, having clean hands is very important. Families take meals together where possible, but if guests are present, men and women eat at separate tables.

From the mid-16th century onward, coffee is popular. Turkish coffee is made from espresso-like powdered beans (the grounds may be used for divination like tea leaves), sweetened during brewing rather than at the table, and sometimes spiced. It is served in small cups and is very, very strong. Despite Islamic prohibitions on alcohol, Istanbul hosts a great many taverns, particularly in the "foreign" neighborhoods of Galata, serving all manner of alcoholic drinks. In the 17th century, a distilled beverage called raki appears, instantly becoming wildly popular. Raki, a close relative of Greek ouzo, is powerful, flavored with aniseed, and turns a cloudy white when water is added.

Clothing

Typical Turkish garb includes slippers or boots (janissaries in particular wear very high boots folded over at the top), baggy trousers, and layers of shirts, tight vests, long-sleeved jackets, and robes. The number of layers someone wears bears some relationship to their importance. Turkish clothing was often elaborately decorated with embroidery or, by those who could afford them, precious metals and stones. When women venture out, they were often completely covered, to the point where a man could pass his wife on the street and not know it, although old women enjoyed some exemptions.

Most men, particularly the wealthy and important, wear large turbans. A Turkish turban may be wrapped around a tall cap that protrudes through the top of the turban, and it may be ornamented with a decorative pin at the front. Many women also wear tall hats; fashionable hats have a high point in front, described by visitors as resembling a unicorn horn. The Turkish fez is more of a "common man's" hat.

Things to See and Do

An unfortunate theme in the accounts of visitors to Istanbul is that, with its narrow, dirty streets, it is much more attractive at a distance than close up. Nevertheless, it's an active, diverse city with a lot to do. Most of the Byzantine landmarks remain or have been replaced by Turkish equivalents, and the Hagia Sophia (with four minarets added)

serves as a model for other large mosques. Here are some other places to go:

- **Coffee houses:** Coffee houses are important centers of social activity in Istanbul, matching the importance of taverns in Europe. As with western taverns, people may meet friends there or hold meetings of brotherhoods and political groups. Coffee is often served with an array of snacks (*meze*) which can constitute a meal in their own right. The coffee houses are also home to a popular genre of puppet theater, which could be used for anything from light comedy to political commentary.
- **Baths:** One Turkish custom which visiting Europeans may find perplexing is public bathing. With separate hot, warm, and cold pools, Turkish baths are almost identical their Roman predecessors. It was common to meet friends there, eat snacks, gossip, and otherwise entertain oneself while getting clean. Although partial nudity is common (and, indeed, necessary), bathers may maintain minimal standards of modesty with a loincloth or a towel wrapped around the waist.

Istanbul in the Campaign

In a historic campaign, Istanbul makes a convenient exotic port of call for Western adventurers. It combines matchless grandeur and the appeal of the unfamiliar with surprising accessibility. It is, after all, a short sea voyage from many Western ports, not far from the familiar waters of Italy and southern France and Spain. Indeed, for a character from Italy, Istanbul is closer than regular trading partners in London and the Hanse towns. It's also a natural center for characters from the Muslim world. For almost all of the period in question, the Ottoman empire is the biggest Muslim power in the world, as well as the capital of most of the Muslim world west of the Persian Gulf. In a fantasy campaign, Istanbul can function much like the Baghdad of the *1001 Nights*, while its mad sultans make good rulers for a horror campaign.

An entire campaign could be set within the walls of the palace, with PCs playing eunuchs, concubines, ministers, and so on. It would afford little scope for swashbuckling adventure but considerable room for political intrigue. A somewhat more conventional campaign might be build around a group of Janissary PCs. In addition to participating in military campaigns, they might serve as police in Istanbul or guards at the Grand Seraglio.

Foreigners will find a lot to do in Istanbul as well. In addition to being a center for trade, Istanbul was often a center of political and diplomatic activity. For example, Suleyman recognized the Protestant threat to Catholicism, which in turn had the potential to destabilize the Catholic Habsburgs, so he apparently provided active support to Protestant countries. An adventure might involve Huguenots or German Lutherans appealing to Suleyman for aid. The French and the Habsburgs will want to stop them, of course, and the Catholic church will be no help to them either. By the 19th century, espionage is a serious possibility. The Great Game can be played out as a Victorian Cold War (perhaps with steampunk gadgets). Indeed, with the UK vs. the Russians, any number of James Bond-esque plots can be recycled without having to change names and nationalities. PC spies might try to subvert the Anglo-Ottoman alliance, waylay potentially hostile regional strongmen visiting the Divan, head off potential diplomatic disasters, and work to counter enemy agents.

A number of the adventure possibilities for [Constantinople](#) can be recycled in Istanbul, with Muslim Turkish elements laid over. Here are some more suggestions:

- **Abduction from the Seraglio:** If it was good enough for Mozart, it should be good enough for your PCs. The comic opera has its heroes rescuing their beloveds from the harem of a mercurial sultan, an eminently gameable scenario as either comedy or drama. Any PC can get involved in a plot to rescue a female friend or relative from the harem. Female PCs might *need* rescuing, or might decide to escape on their own. An interesting complication is that once would-be rescuers reach the intended inmate, she might not want to leave.
- **Yelling "Fire" in a Crowded Bath:** The PCs must apprehend or assassinate a well-protected rival. The one thing he leaves his fortress-like home for is regular visits to a popular bathhouse. He may be surrounded by bodyguards, but when he's at the baths, no one has any arms more formidable than a rolled-up towel.
- **At the Mosques of Madness:** The PCs (or someone they know) finds hideous evidence that the famous architect Sinan was, in fact, an evil djinn enslaved by Suleyman. As revenge, he arranged the mosques he built in a subtle but blasphemous form of sacred geometry, trapping the palace in a web of madness which will, in time, bring

down the empire. The PCs must figure out exactly how Sinan's plans work and how to dismantle the web. And once they do, they'll have to come up with an excuse for dismantling some of the greatest mosques in the Dar-al-Islam. Heroes of the 16th century might even go head-to-head with a demon Sinan.

Further Reading

- *Lords of the Golden Horn*, Noel Barber.
- *The Harem*, by N. M. Penzer. A comprehensive architectural and historical consideration of Topkapi palace.
- *Letters*, by Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq. de Busecq was the Habsburgs' ambassador in Istanbul in the mid-16th century.
- ***GURPS Castle Falkenstein: Ottoman Empire***, by Phil Masters. This magical steampunk take on the Ottoman Empire proposes a significantly different alternate history, but certainly captures a useful Ottoman flavor.
- <http://www.exploreturkey.com> -- A web site devoted to Turkish tourism, with a very well-illustrated section on [architecture](#).

Pyramid Review

Twilight of Atlantis (for d20 System)

Published by [Avalanche Press](#)

Written by Jim Lai, Jason Donovan, & John R. Phythyon Jr.

48-page b&w softcover; \$12.95

Twilight of Atlantis is a mythological campaign setting for the **d20 System**. The authors attempt to recreate the Atlantis of Plato's *Republic* (the Critias and Timaeus in particular) and present it as a setting for fantasy adventure. It is firmly set in a Greek Mythological prehistory, with the Olympian Gods being major players as well as a few defined cultural factions: the Atlanteans, the Egyptians, the Spartans, the Athenians, and everybody else, including a few non-humans.

Atlantis was created by the god Poseidon as a magical paradise garden island where he married a mortal and had septuplet sons who became kings of the land. Poseidon's bloodline spread throughout the island and combined with the magic of the island, creating a magically powerful and long lived race of men. The sons set out in antiquity, learning from other cultures and developing all that they learned to never before seen heights. Specifically they learned architecture from the reptilian Lemurians, and metallurgy from the bestial Mue; they developed magic on their own. They then built up an empire that conquered the known world, until they hit Greece where the other Olympian Gods protected the mythical prehistoric city-states of Athens and Sparta, the only entities to successfully repel and turn the tide on the Atlanteans. When the counter-invasion of the Athenian navy and the Spartan army reached Atlantis, there was a matricidal accident where one of the sons killed his mother; in his grief, Poseidon appeared and broke his trident, sinking Atlantis and dooming the empire forever.

This campaign is set at an unspecified time before this fall. It is sometime after the conquering of the world and the first contact with the Greek city states, but before the cataclysm.

Twilight of Atlantis details a number of new races, including three types of Atlanteans depending upon how much divine blood they have; and an uplifted humanoid cat race, the Bastai, that were made to ease in the conquest of Egypt. The Lemurians and Mue are presented as standard monsters, but have favored classes and ECL information.

It also gives four 10-level prestige classes detailed for Atlantean culture: Artificers, who gain mastery over all types of item creation; Orpheans, warrior who have died and had their spirits bound to their bodies by orichalcum and magic; Resonants, who gain a number of metamagical abilities; and Spellbanes, a Bastai monk class with antimagic strikes designed to counter Egyptian sorcerers.

Atlantis is a land of long lived people with an affinity for magic. Many become masters of wizardry and magic items are commonplace in the city. Atlanteans control their weather, shape the land, and even set up the permanent whirlpool Charybdis to block the Athenian navy from venturing towards Atlantis or some of the Atlantean colonies.

One of the real sources of Atlantis' magical power is the metal orichalcum, which is only abundant in the mines of Atlantis. This metal laces the imperial city, powering many effects and preventing teleportation into the city due to the high concentration of magic. It can be used as a raw material in magic items, each 5gp worth replacing 1 xp needed to create the item.

This book also presents 10 spells, mostly for arcane casters. Each has a nice Greek background flavor and go well with the setting. No mechanics for major power effects are given, but epic spells from the **Epic Level Handbook** or rituals from **Relics and Rituals** or **Spellbound** would fit well in the high magic Atlantean setting.

The magical feats were not terribly impressive; Resonance is nice granting a free second use of a spell once a day, but the Imbue Tattoo feat does not say what effects you can actually put into a tattoo, just that it costs extra because it is an unslotted item. The warrior polearm feats are quite nice, allowing reach weapons to strike close for an attack penalty, using a long spear in one hand, and reducing cover penalties from allied shield towers; these beat the Close Order Formation feat from ***Dragonlords of Melnibone*** by a lot.

Being a Bronze Age world there are rules for bronze weapons, including ancient equivalents of the long and greatsword. Bronze is just as effective in weapon attacks and damages but has less hardness and hit points, making it easier to sunder bronze weapons, an elegant technology adjustment. There is also a list of weapons, armor, and tools that would be anachronistic in the bronze age of Mythical Greece -- no crossbows, fancy pole-arms, or monk weapons. Generally the only armor types are leather, scale mail, breastplates, and small and large shields.

There is a brief overview of the Atlantean world and Atlantean society and culture, and a little bit about running campaigns in a classical world setting, along with three adventure seeds.

There are no developed NPCs of the setting or even an in-depth overview of the current island or imperial city. The only map is a rough one centered on the Mediterranean, showing Greece, Egypt, Crete, and Atlantis in the Atlantic. There is no ready-to-run developed base of operations but the society and cultural atmosphere is presented with good thematic mechanical additions and restrictions.

Despite the shortness of the book, ***Twilight of Atlantis*** presents a fun fantasy setting. The combination of omnipresent Greek mythology, high magic, and the struggles of an empire unrestrained by actual history make for a great playground to adventure in. The feel of the world is easily accessible and many standard monsters fit naturally into the setting, perhaps more so than in a medieval fantasy world.

--John Henry Stam

Pyramid Review

The Most Dangerous Game (for When Darkness Comes)

Published by [Twilight Creations, Inc.](#)

Game Concept & Design by Kerry Breitenstein & Todd A. Breitenstein

Art by Dave Aikins

Written by Todd A. Breitenstein, David Carl, Steve Crow, Les Simpson

16-page rulebook, 64-page scenario book, 48 disks, 8 tiles; \$19.95

Twilight Creations, Inc., is finally getting some mileage out of the Variable Tile System. They've gotten the good folks at Alderac Entertainment Group to collaborate on a version based on their popular *Spycraft* espionage game for the **d20 System**. The odd thing is, in spite of being its first big crossover, *When Darkness Comes: The Most Dangerous Game* is not a standalone.

In this incarnation, instead of playing skulkers in the shadows investigating supernatural goings-on, the players create spies looking to stop world-shattering plots. Although the action is based on the *Spycraft* game, it's not heavily influenced by the *Shadowforce Archer* series of setting books. The general espionage attitude is there, so most of the plots are about tracking down high-tech scientific discoveries and taking out masterminds and their criminal henchmen.

The game has a few adventures to get buyers started. Like the entries in the original *When Darkness Comes* line, these amount to a few "quickie" modules and one story with a grander feel that will probably take all night or longer. Each escapade is prefaced with a brief bit of fiction that sets up the scene.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

"Something in the Air" has agents racing to stop a madman from releasing a virus; "Found and Lost" puts a wounded spy's life on the line as the rescue team tries to get him and his package before the enemy; investigators have to uncover a sleeper in "Don't Look Now," then an agency mole in "Misfire;" and "Turn of the Cards" is a mini-campaign that links four missions, all geared toward tracking and stopping a mastermind from unleashing a new pathogen on the nuclear disarmament talks.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

The adventures start to feel similar before too long (those that aren't "track down 'the package'" are attempts to stop betrayal from within), though the fiction manages a little more atmosphere here than in previous entries into the line. "Don't Look Now" is particularly unsettling. This supplement also deserves kudos for not always taking the predictable route -- in the campaign adventure the agents work for the Brazilian government, of all things.

The components meet the same high standard as the other sets, including some swell new artwork from other artists riding shotgun with Dave Aikins. New disks settle the game into an espionage groove. There's a mastermind and his henchmen, and some thugs, security guards, and civilians to get in your way. The unpredictable Foil (who's side is she on, anyway?) may trail and undermine your party. There are traps and other dangers players can mix in to sow confusion. A couple of "floppy disk" disks give agents something to chase after, and several vehicles give them

something with which to chase after them. Best of all, there are six agent disks that correspond to the six basic classes in the ***Spycraft RPG***: Wheelman, Faceman, Soldier, Fixer, Pointman, and Snoop. These are double-sided, showing a gray picture of the agent in disguise on the opposite side in case they want to make use of the disguise rules.

There are eight new tiles. Here you get the agency HQ and mastermind lair (of course), a market, a cathedral, a government building, a casino, and a pair of generic city street tiles (each unique) with some interior streets to make chases a little tougher.

The rulebook contains a variety of new rules. Each player class, for example, has special abilities that define their character; the Pointman can add to another agent's rolls, while the Fixer can create a kit from whatever he finds lying around in a house. There are guidelines for running chases, both on foot and behind the wheel of cars or cycles. These mostly boil down to comparing movements until losing sight of one another or meeting up on the same square (at which point combat occurs).

The Disguise skill allows you to "overcome" villains without engaging in combat; successfully beating the villain's TN gives you Victory Points. This set also introduces Investigation Leads, a way of measuring how much you've discovered about the plot. ILs have to be earned to learn things about the plot (according to each scenario's setup), and when you have 10 of them, you can add the mastermind to the disk pool. You're closing in on him . . . but you also have to worry about Failure Points. Get three of these and you get sent back to HQ to start over, sans your ILs. Troublesome plot elements may also be overcome with the judicious use of the Demolition or Computer Hacking skills.

The rulebook is rounded out with several useful tables of information, some optional rules for weapons, new Fate tables, some Quickstart rules, skills from other supplements that are carried into this one (you can't have espionage without the Sneak skill), and some tips on combining the horror and spy elements from both versions.

The game does come with its own set of problems. Thankfully, the poor editing that characterized many entries in WDC thus far isn't one of them; the product isn't perfect, but the impediment has gone from an open flaw to a minor point. There is no table of contents; you'll need to find things (like the Quickstart Rules, mentioned everywhere but the front of the rulebook) on your own. You need the basic ***The Awakening*** set because it has components not included here. The rules are only in that set, too; there is plenty of new material here, but it still depends on that first release, crossover audience notwithstanding. The chase rules are pretty easy to follow, and you can even play them solo (using dice rolls for movement). On the other hand, given the six-square confines of the tiles and the double-digit movement of cars, chases can be awkward. They also make generous allowances for travel -- run to a van using the last of your foot movement and you can still move almost the full rate for the vehicle.

When Darkness Comes: The Most Dangerous Game is a solid supplement that gives folks an idea what the system is capable of when the designers set their minds to it. They've included a lot of what it will take to make the change from horror to international intelligence work, most of it with smooth, simple mechanics that keep ***When Darkness Comes*** from becoming top-heavy. With AEG and Twilight Creations working hand in hand so well, hopefully other companies will sit up and take notice of the potential offered by the Variable Tile System.

--Andy Vetromile

Designers' Notes: Transhuman Space: Under Pressure

by David Morgan-Mar, Kenneth Peters, & Constantine Thomas

Conception

*"I was quite looking forward to [**Blue Shadow**], if (as Kenneth Peters suggests on his web site) a significant chunk of the book would concern Europa and its world ocean."*

-- Constantine Thomas, Yahoo! Groups **Transhuman Space** group, January 12, 2002

Transhuman Space: Under Pressure began as an idea named **Blue Shadow** on David Pulver's initial list of planned **Transhuman Space** titles. It was to deal with life on and under the oceans of 2100, building on the vast technological and social upheavals outlined in the core book. The name was changed to **Under Pressure** during production, to avoid confusion with **GURPS Blue Planet**, an excellent conversion of Fantasy Flight Games' aquatic campaign world.

When the core book was released in January, 2002, **Blue Shadow** had not yet been assigned an author. Constantine and I (DMM) were talking on the [Pyramid Chat](#) soon after, when David Pulver appeared. Knowing Constantine was a planetary scientist, he asked him if he would like to write **Blue Shadow**. Although keen on the idea, Constantine felt such a project would be too large for him to take on alone, and the conversation turned to other matters.

Afterward, I approached Constantine with the suggestion that we collaborate on a proposal for the book, since I felt I could handle the Earth-based material if he could do the extraterrestrial stuff. We sent a query to David Pulver, who suggested we add Kenneth Peters to our group, as a **GURPS Vehicles** expert qualified to write the Modular Vehicle Design System that was required. With that, our triumvirate was born.

Brainstorming

"Yes, you too can play a clam. No, not uplifted or mutated or psionic or magical or a refugee from another universe. Just an average, everyday clam. But! It can be given an Aerospace Piloting skill set and be uploaded as a Shadow and then downloaded into a toaster! Does the part where you stick the bread in count as a Flesh Pocket? Hey, stop looking at me!"

-- Kenneth Peters, e-mail to David Pulver, February 12, 2002

The easy part done, we had to come up with a proposal stuffed to the gills with so many cool ideas that The Powers That Be could hardly say "no." In this stage were born many of the concepts that made it into the book, such as aquacrete, cetanism, and squidpacks. We also discussed and rejected some ideas, such as introducing native macroscopic life to Europa, and bioships. Although submarine bioships -- vehicles grown as genemod organisms -- sounded cool, the difficulty of making them suitably pressurized to carry human passengers in the sea forced us to conclude that they would be too expensive and impractical to be realistic.

We developed the Calamarine, a gengineered squid bioshell, at this stage. It was originally envisioned to be based on the giant squid, some 80 feet long, with a biological blue-green laser weapon to complement its already awesome natural armament -- an idea that caused Kenneth to draw comparisons to Dr. Evil's "sharks with frickin' laser beams attached to their heads." The vulnerability of such a large creature to heavy weaponry made us rethink the concept, and we finally settled on the smaller Humboldt squid-based "shock troop" design seen in the book.

Execution

*"There are three planned books on Earth: **Fifth Wave**, **Broken Dreams**, and **Blue Shadow**. The three books form one of those 'balanced triangle' things like they use to promote healthy diet and stuff. If I were to summarize each in one*

word, I'd say **Fifth Wave** is 'Technology,' **Broken Dreams** is 'Society' -- and **Blue Shadow** is 'Environment.'
-- David Morgan-Mar, Pyramid chat, May 31, 2002

I said that before I had seen a copy of **Fifth Wave**. Jon F. Zeigler later said to me that he thought **Fifth Wave** was about society too, and I agree with him, though I would add that it is how society has reacted to technology. Nonetheless, the overlying theme of **Under Pressure** is the interaction of transhuman technology with the environment -- a theme only touched on by the other books.

We used this theme to drive much of the material in the book. The oceanic focus and the interaction of humanity with the environment, both on Earth and off it, provided background or inspiration for many of the technologies, organizations, and occurrences that we developed. Extrapolations from present-day trends led to sometimes frightening conclusions, that had to be tempered or avoided by technology.

An overriding constraint was fitting our material into the **Transhuman Space** canon. Four books had been released and another four had been through playtest by the time we finished writing, so there was a wealth of material to draw on, and to be consistent with!

The ecoterrorist organization Blue Shadow caused particular problems. From the core book we knew that it was "preservationist," yet it was dedicated to protecting and rescuing uplifted sea creatures -- a seeming inconsistency with the ideals of Preservationism. We solved this by mixing the pan-sapient rights meme into Blue Shadow's brand of Preservationism, providing justification for saving existing uplifts while at the same time campaigning against their creation. This also neatly explained Blue Shadow's aversion to inflicting casualties of any kind.

Writing underwater material to be consistent with existing **GURPS** rules was a real challenge. We caused more than our fair share of gray hairs on Dr. Kromm's head as we bounced rule interpretations, rewrites, reality checks, and new rules off him. We worked closely with Jon F. Zeigler and Bill Stoddard on these issues, so we could have a consistent set of underwater rules with **GURPS Blue Planet**. Anthony Jackson was a great help with many technical and rules issues.

The mechanics of writing the manuscript were complicated by the fact that we had three authors . . . on three different continents. Thankfully, the manuscript divided fairly neatly into parts that we could work on independently before integrating them into a whole. Despite being in widely separated time zones, we often had long private discussions on the Pyramid Chat about various ideas and passages of writing. This particular piece of 2002 technology proved invaluable in the assembling of the book, by allowing virtual meetings, without which our cooperative effort would have been almost impossible. The telepresence world of 2100 has its beginnings in the here and now.

Real life intruded on the writing process in interesting ways. I lost my job to the downturn in the I.T. industry. Constantine was busy writing and revising his Ph.D. thesis -- on the internal structure of the Jovian moons. His European ocean model was developed with state-of-the-art planetary modelling software created for his thesis, and will hopefully be the subject of a scientific paper! Kenneth, meanwhile, received involuntary recall orders for active duty with the USMC in Hawaii. Some of his emails from there got lost, and we were imagining his C.O. leafing through detailed technical statistics of military submersibles that had been intercepted being sent from Sergeant Peters' account . . . On the plus side he had better access to military periodicals and the knowledge of the logistics officers he works with (who as active duty and reserve Marine officers also had a great breadth of experience in other fields).

The Crunchy Bits

Even though our page count expanded from 128 to 144, and finally 160 pages, there was a good deal of material we couldn't squeeze in. And then there was some material we came up with that simply *shouldn't* have gone in . . .

"And today, a pod of environmentalist Pilot Whales beached themselves near a crowded human city in protest at the simians' continuing destruction of the oceans. As usual, the humans were too stupid to realize what they were doing and put them back in the water. A repeat protest to hammer the point home ended in tragedy when all 47 whales died after the humans couldn't be bothered with them any more."

Character Types

We cut the following two character types, suitable for many *Transhuman Space* campaigns, from the manuscript. The names are Russian.

Boyevik ("Mobster")

*"Yeah, I'm a Triad and an ethnic Russian, so what? Haven't you heard that crime went international over a century ago? Hey, don't look at me like that, we serve a useful function for society. There will always be losers and dropouts -- I don't care how long people live or what their bodies look like or even how much money they have in the bank -- we give these people a purpose and control them at the same time. Why do you think we're called **organized** crime? The only alternative is a bunch of independent rabble looting and pillaging like mad dogs."*

Whoever said, "crime doesn't pay" was never a criminal. You maintain "investments" around the world that make you more money than a small corporation. Hundreds of millions of dollars pass through your hands each month; you're not risking your life for nickel and dime racketeering and prostitution. You dabble in funding ecoterrorists in Nigeria so they disrupt a competitor's mining platforms and recently blackmailed a genetic engineer at VeldtKorp so you can sell their newest proteus nanovirus developments to your contacts in the Martian Triads. Just a few more lucrative operations and you'll move up and join the "old men" who pull your strings and really make things happen. In your mind there is very little difference between what you do and the CEO of a multinational corporation, although the CEO may have less assassins on the payroll.

Advantages: Allies and Contacts are important. Alternate Identities and Zeroed can be instrumental in evading arrest and your competitors. Wealth (including levels of Multimillionaire) are appropriate, but if it was just money you wanted it would have been easier becoming a corporate manager.

Disadvantages: Enemy, Greed, Involuntary Duty (to your cartel), Paranoia, Secret. Bloodlust and Code of Honor (stays bought) are common with some of the older gangsters.

Skills: Acting, Administration, Detect Lies, Law, Merchant, and Streetwise. Holdout, Guns, and Intimidation will be useful during the occasional cartel shakeup.

Volk ("Wolf")

"A lot of people have moved to the oceans to escape the stifling control of governments, corporations, their parents, the media, whatever. Many escaped the tyranny of nanny states like the United States and most of Europe. But they still have problems they need dealt with, justice still needs to be served at its most basic level -- an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. The sheep of the world need to hire wolves like me to keep the other predators at a safe distance. It can get a bit messy, but that's why I charge a premium."

Problems have solutions, and that's where you come in. You're a professional contract enforcer, sometimes working for criminal syndicates but usually doing your best to keep your clients safe by force of reputation. Those who haven't lived a day outside their carefully managed arcologies call it extortion; to the inhabitants of a floating shantytown off the New Mumbai arcology you're the closest thing to the law they have. Communities occasionally hire you to keep the peace, and those are the jobs you like the best. At least then you can pretend you're not just a legbreaker working for the highest bidder. You make your living based on the fact that people trust you to complete your contract to the letter. Some people get the idea they can bribe you out of fulfilling your contract; those people usually end up dead.

Advantages: Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Danger Sense, Fit, Hard to Kill, Reputation.

Disadvantages: Bloodlust, Code of Honor (stays bought), Contacts. You may have a Higher Purpose.

Skills: Brawling, Guns, Interrogation, Intimidation, Law, Streetwise.

Hardware and Wetware

Transhuman Space is a mix of conservative and optimistic views of the future. The concepts behind almost all of the technology are either already being experimented with or there are programs underway to explore those possibilities. Much of the technology in Chapter 6: Aquatic Technology we'll probably see by 2020 in some form or another. Much of what looks like science fiction (like the shark repelling field generators) you can buy now!

I (Kenneth Peters) used **GURPS Vehicles** heavily in developing the hardware, partly because it gives a starting benchmark for performance at various Tech Levels, but mainly because it helps keep the technology consistent. I've listed some of the technical assumptions we used in Chapter 6 so you have an idea of what we were smoking to get the statistics.

Oceanic Energy: The OTEC generator was originally a vehicle module in the Appendix (based on the rules in **GURPS Vehicles Expansion 1**), but we decided that it was so massive and limited in application that it fit better in Chapter 5. The other generators are not designed with **GURPS Vehicles** -- because that book has no system to cover them.

Microgenerators: There were some questions as to what the point of these were compared to batteries. One reason is that they are solidly TL8 and thus readily available to Fourth Wave individuals. Weight tends to be higher overall, but the generators are built with a structure and armored -- they become more advantageous over longer periods.

Muscle Generators: This was built as an extra-light steel structure with a 0.4-kW muscle engine, cycle seat, and integral 0.4 kWh hour battery. Surface area was based on a volume of 0.5 cf (components volume is 0.2 cf). We bloated the cf listed as that's the minimum it takes to actually operate -- consider it an Exposed "Very Cramped" Standing Room requirement.

Lift Bags: Lift bags are "built" by multiplying their inflated surface area by 0.3 to get weight and 10 to get cost. Hardcore gearheads will note this is 100 times the gasbag weight and cost on p. VE20. This multiplier gives good results matching real lift bags at TL6 and TL7.

Personal Transport: The finpants and finsocks were built using **GURPS Vehicles**, albeit taking some liberties with determining what hydrodynamic lines they have.

Supercavitating Minitorpedoes: Pure **GURPS Vehicles** designs, with the *one* exception that underwater drag was *not* rounded. I based their volume on the weight of the standard missiles in **Transhuman Space** so they could be fired from standard launchers. I divided their weight by 50 to get volume in cubic feet, then consulted the surface area calculation on p. VE18 (the chart does not have enough detail for stuff this small).

- **15mm:** 0.002 cf body (0.1 sf) with advanced submarine lines. Structure is extra-light metal-matrix composite with the supercavitating option and is sealed. The warhead is a 15mm small warhead. It has two solid rockets, a 10 lb., 0.017 minute boost rocket to reach supercavitation speed and a 2 lb., 0.035 minute endurance sustainer rocket bought as a guided missile (×2 cost). Remember that the boost rocket has *halved* thrust underwater! Underwater drag is 0.0125.
- **30mm:** 0.016 cf body (0.38 sf) with advanced submarine lines. Structure is extra-light metal-matrix composite with the supercavitating option and is sealed. The warhead is a 30mm small warhead. It has two solid rockets, a 90 lb., 0.017 minute boost rocket to reach supercavitation speed and a 35 lb., 0.05 minute endurance sustainer rocket bought as a guided missile (×2 cost). Underwater drag is 0.0475.

Note: Hydrojet powered designs are problematic with straight **GURPS Vehicles** because of their minimum weight (even if that is ignored they have horrible performance at this size).

Lost Technology: Direct Blood Oxygenation

This was an interesting idea that simply didn't pass muster as far as feasibility and competitiveness with liquid breathing and rebreathers.

Direct Blood Oxygenation Unit: The blood oxygenator bypasses conventional respiration completely, and does not interfere with cetacean-analog diving reflexes. The unit consists of an invasive routing system that takes deoxygenated blood out of the body, a filtration and gas injection unit using the same electrolysis technology as artificial gills, and a return catheter to supply freshly oxygenated blood back to the body. Gas partial pressures are computer controlled, so there is no risk of oxygen toxicity or the bends. Does not interfere with the Oxygen Storage advantage, unlike other breathing systems. Purchase as an artificial gill with ×2 weight and ×10 cost.

Vehicles

Vehicles suitable for adventuring tend to be military or utility vessels, but we wanted to include (and there was considerable demand for) civilian cargo vessels. Unfortunately, the last minute cut to word count meant that the cargo container text was shortened considerably, and two cargo vehicle designs were dropped. These components and vehicles, plus an emergency submarine escape capsule design, are presented here.

Optional Rule: Larger and Smaller Hydrofoils

There is normally no allowance made for smaller hydrofoils and there is no advantage to using larger foils other than the increased volume and HPs. For additional depth to the design system, any size hydrofoil may be used as long as the size does not exceed that of the main hull.

Hydrofoil Variable: Divide the chosen assembly's surface area by that of the normal hydrofoil for that hull type. If the variable is less than 0.2 it is too small to function. Otherwise modify the following performance statistics.

Variable	Hydrofoiling	hMR	hSR
0.2-0.5	×1.5	-2	-2
0.51-0.8	×1.2	-1	-1
0.81-0.9	×1.1	--	-1
0.91-1.2	×1	--	--
1.21-1.5	×0.9	-1	+1
over 1.5	×0.8	-2	+2

Hydrofoiling is the multiplier to the required minimum speed to begin hydrofoiling.

The hMR and hSR modifiers are how many rows you move down (negative) or up (positive) if using the extra detail option for hydrofoil maneuverability.

New Hull Types

Type	VSP	Wt.	Cost	HP	Area	Top
Stupidly Large Arcoblock	45,000,000	1,080,000,000	M\$13,500	3,765,000	2,510,000	840,000
Superdimensional Fortress	90,000,000	2,160,000,000	M\$27,000	6,000,000	4,000,000	1,330,000

Transhuman Space Technical Appendix Additions

In addition to the basic setting modifications, the following rules were used to design vehicles:

Supercavitating Lines: The designer may ignore the ×1.05 weight multiplier.

Very Fine Lines: Not normally available (at least, not for free!).

Hull Shapes: A simplified hull shape system is to assign a ×1.2 volume multiplier for "cylindrical" hulls -- submersible hulls are already cylindrical and do get no benefit from this option. Multiply by ×2 if spherical.

Submersible Design Option: This is not required in **Transhuman Space** unless you wish to simplify the design process. Instead, purchase ballast tanks as storage tanks with a ×2 cost multiplier to cover vents and trim ducts.

Plastic Armor: This has an M of 0.1 and a C of 0.5. For every 10 points of damage it sustains (regardless of whether it protects or not) one point of DR is destroyed afterward.

Roll Stabilizers: Replace with Fin Stabilizers, multiply surface area by 0.01 to get weight, and 0.2 to get cost.

Periscopes: Build these as turrets but increase rotation space by 10% for every foot of length it can extend.

Snorkel Tubes: These are free if the vessel has submarine lines (either type).

These designs are *far* too large to mount realistic hydrofoils, but hey, you can always build some in **GURPS Vehicles** and see what happens.

Standard Containers

Cargo containers are built with old extra-light aluminum structures and DR 2 steel armor; the structure is waterproofed and will normally float even with a full load. All have a Complexity 2 computer and one or more short-range (10 mi.) radio transponders, forming a manifest tracking and emergency recovery system. The computer tracks everything in the storage area using v-tags and monitors access to the container (and broadcasts an alarm if there is an unauthorized entry). The computer can write new records but cannot delete or modify them. There are ports for inspection cyberswarms to gain access to the containers, even if they are sealed. When received, the contents are checked against the records from the originator, the shipping company, and the container manifest to look for discrepancies.

Large Container (Twenty-foot Equivalent Unit, or TEU): 20'×8'×8'. 250 VSP cargo.

Very Large Container (Forty-foot Equivalent Unit, or FEU): 40'×8'×8'. 510 VSP cargo.

Container Type	VSP	Weight	Cost	DR	HP	Size
Large (TEU)	256	2,000	\$10,000	3	262	+5
Very Large (FEU)	512	4,000	\$20,000	2	525	+5

Sealing: \$5,600 for large containers, \$11,200 for very large. *Reefers:* Containers with climate controls for cargo (-30°F to 230°F). This costs \$10,000 and requires 10 kW for a Large container, double for Very Large. This includes a D cell (5 kWh) incorporated into the frame, used during transfers. When on board a ship or in dock, reefers are plugged into external power.

Note that Container Cells can hold either two TEUs or one FEU container.

Vehicle Designs

Wright-Waterman C1200 LASH

The Wright-Waterman *C1200* is a mid-sized "lighters aboard ship" (LASH) vessel designed to operate without significant local port facilities or expensive fuel. It carries a small fleet of lighters to help offload cargo, and has

Sonar Communicators: Divide range by 100 rather than the 10 specified in **GURPS Vehicles Expansion I**.

Sonar: Sonars use conformal arrays and distributed transducer arrays for full coverage. Flat sonars that cover a single hemisphere are available at half weight, volume, cost and power. If range is over 1 mile then *square* the range before multiplying by the values below. New sonars multiply weight and volume by 0.5, but cost is multiplied by 4.

TL	Type	Weight	Volume	Cost	Power
Old	Active Sonar	40	0.8	\$4,000	2

The towed array and dipping sonar options are technically available but not recommended for use.

Passive Sonar Targeting: Passive sonar can be used for targeting.

Magnetic Anomaly Detectors (MAD): This technology was approaching obsolescence in regards to antisubmarine warfare by late TL7 and had hit a wall in the physical limits of their detection capability. In TL9 it is an interesting toy mainly useful for picking up emag signature spikes. It will not detect submarines (even if they are made of steel the signature reduction is such that it's a fool's game).

Sonar IFF: Can be used, but active sonar can work as a sonar IFF out to twice its normal range (this does not impede normal function).

Bilge Pumps: You don't get free bilge pumps.

Diving Controls: You get a free extra set if you purchase duplicate maneuver controls.

Planing: Multiply Ath by 1.2 to see if the vessel can plane if it has a lifting body hull.

Submerged Hydrodynamic Drag: Equal to (surface area ×2.5)/Ls.

Crush Pressure: As in **GURPS Atlantis** but the shape modifier is 6 for submersible lines and 3 otherwise. Spheres have a shape modifier of 24 and cylinders have a shape modifier of 6. Only watertight compartments need to calculate a crush pressure. Note that sonars must be in contact with the working fluid in order to function so they are usually placed in a flooded section of the hull.

375 lbs./VSP Flotation, are you mad!?

There's a method to this madness. In **Under Pressure**, flotation rating is hull volume in VSP

numerous cranes located around the hull, including an aft-mounted loading crane with 80-ton capacity used to load and unload lighters from their storage section. The payload assumes the lighters are unloaded, this vessel operates like a hybrid LASH or SEABEE (Sea Barge) ship, loading and unloading containers before taking them aboard. They can be loaded if necessary but the limit is the crane and possibly the limits of buoyancy.

The *C1200* requires the Shiphandling (Steamer) skill. It has computerized controls. Standard payload includes 48 empty lighters (see below) stored in an aft 115,200 VSP cargo hold and 2,000 loaded Very Large containers in the cells. The external cradles are usually empty, but can hold tugboats or a launch for the crew. A standard crew is 10 sailors.

Subassemblies: Medium Arcoblock Body +12, 2,400 VSP Superstructure +7.
P&P: 40,000-kW ducted screw, 40,000 kW fusion reactor, 10,000 kWh batteries.
Fuel: 200 years endurance from fusion reactor.
Occupancy: 4 RCS
Cargo: 4,500 cf (Superstructure)

Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
Hull:	3/5	3/5	3/5	3/5	3/5
Superstructure:	3/5	3/5	3/5	3/5	3/5

Equipment

Hull: Short-range sonarcomm; PESA array; sonar array; precision navigation instruments; 2 2.5-ton external cradles; 4 bilge pumps; 4 safety systems; 1 water filter; 80-ton crane; 3 40-ton cranes; 2 20-ton cranes; 1,200 container cells; 872.76 bilge space. *Superstructure:* Two duplicate maneuver controls; 12 cabins; 20-man environmental controls; Complexity 8 mainframe; 2 medium-range radios; radio IFF transponder; hall; 500 sf landing pad.

Statistics

Size: 800'×115'×35' *Payload:* 56,037.2 tons. *Lwt.:* 64,716.8 tons
Volume: 6,012,000 cf *Maint.:* 2 hours. *Price:* \$99,393,230.
HT: 5. *HP:* 150,000 [Hull] 6,000 [Superstructure]
wSpeed: 20 *wAccel:* 0.1 *wDecel:* 0.3 *wMR:* 0.05 *wSR:* 8
Draft: 43.8' *Flotation:* 187,500 tons

Design Notes

Superstructure is Large Cutter with no hydrodynamic lines. Structure is light steel on hull, medium aluminum on superstructure, surface is waterproofed.

Fine hydrodynamic lines with fin stabilizers. Armor is cheap steel on hull, steel on superstructure. Long-term access space for fusion reactor and batteries. Crew stations have bridge access. Ewt 17,359,400 lbs.

Komar MLV-3 Lighter

This is a boxy unmanned vehicle either carried aboard LASH ships for transporting cargo from ship to shore, or used

multiplied by 375 lbs. This is equal to 62.5 lbs. (base flotation in lbs./cf) times 5 (cf in one VSP) times 1.2 (volume multiplier for Average/Submarine Lines). This stays constant so that if your vessel changes to No Hydrodynamic Lines it has the right flotation rating and you don't recalculate based on your Lines. This simplifies a bit of *GURPS Vehicles* arcana and works in most situations. In my opinion, a 100-VSP ship is 100 VSP even if it has less volume usable because of hydrodynamic shaping -- it just has the equivalent of broken storage for internal components. This should answer puzzled gearheads scratching their heads over why that value was used rather than 312.5 lbs.

as a general cargo barge. Standard payload is 10 Very Large containers: 4 in the cargo hold and 6 on the top deck, stacked 3×2. Requires the Shiphandling (Steamer) skill. It has computerized controls. \$193,180.

Structure: Waterproofed Large Cutter (SM +7, 3,000 HP, HT 6, 375 tons flotation) with old light steel structure. No hydrodynamic lines. PD 3, DR 5 aluminum armor. 50' long. 12,000 cf total volume.

Equipment: 280-kW hydrojet; 2,800-kWh battery (10-hour endurance); Complexity 6 small computer with backup; medium-range radio; PESA array; radio transponder; bilge pump; 11,500 cf cargo hold.

Weights: Ewt 20.65 tons. Payload 275 tons. Lwt 295.65 tons. Performance: wSpeed 5; wAccel 0.2; wDecel 10; wMR 0.25; wSR 7; Draft 5.6'

SafetyONE ERS-5 Emergency Capsule

This is an emergency system deployed on some large submersibles. They became popular after a string of gruesome accidents with civilian and military submarines in the 2020s. They allow the crew to reach the surface from standard civil operating depths, at which point the emergency transponder activates and the radio can be used. More capable, but significantly more expensive, systems are used on deep-diving military and civilian submersibles.

A small cargo area holds minimal emergency supplies. It has no controls and simply drifts with the currents on the surface. Uses the extra detail armor volume rule. \$28,735.

Structure: Sealed Medium Boat (SM +3, 900 HP, HT 12, 3.75 tons flotation) with old extra-heavy aluminum structure. No hydrodynamic lines. PD 4, DR 100 titanium armor (3 VSP). 6' long. 120 cf total volume.

Equipment: 5 CS; 7-kWh battery; short-range radio; radio transponder; 1 man-day limited life system; 2.5 cf cargo hold.

Weights: Ewt. 5,910 lbs. Payload 2,050 lbs. Lwt. 6,960 lbs. Performance: Draft 1.27'; Crush Pressure 39.8 atm.

Appendix Out-Takes

The Aquatic Vehicle Modular Design Sequence (AVMDS) is the second modular system in *Transhuman Space* that is based directly on *GURPS Vehicles* -- the other being the Wheeled Vehicle Modular Design System (WVMDS) in *Transhuman Space: In The Well*. (The spacecraft design system in the core book is sufficiently different in scope and format that it's not included.) The systems are directly compatible, and some components were left out because they appear in *In The Well*.

Using the WVMDS and AVMDS Together: There's one issue that needs to be brought up immediately -- without using *GURPS Vehicles* there is no way to determine how big the wheel subassemblies are for the hull types! So your dreams of an off-road wheeled Large Arcoblock are dashed without a bit of work. But it's simple to use components back and forth.

Design: The bodies in the WVMDS can be used in AVMDS with no changes, just remember that the hulls in *Under Pressure* already include hydrodynamic lines -- WVMDS bodies are hulls with No Hydrodynamic Lines but they can be given lines (divide volume by 1.2 for Average lines). For hydrofoils, pick a set for a hull that is of comparable volume to the WVMDS body.

GLUB GLUB! Driving Underwater

Sealed vehicles can operate underwater by simply driving around on the sea floor, a few with ballast tanks can do this intentionally -- others just hope they sink in shallow water!

Some underwater areas are completely impassable by driving, and even the nice areas are quagmires -- *halve* off-road speed unless it has extremely-low ground pressure (note that current flotation rating will reduce the effective loaded weight for this) or has legs. A vehicle with high, very high or extremely high ground pressures will get stuck if the a Driving-4 roll is failed, roll every 10 minutes. Getting unstuck requires a Driving-5 roll, and a failure by more than 3 means it's *really* stuck and needs outside help.

Performance: The most obvious place to start using the AVMDS to calculate water performance for ground vehicles that can float (you've waterproofed their structure or sealed their hull). When determining water speed, legs and wheeled drivetrains with off-road wheels generate 2 lbs. of aquatic thrust for ever kW of motive power. Determine crush pressures normally.

The Last Word

"Scientists today were celebrating after seven years of genetic research produced the first whale that could talk. Humanity awaits what wisdom they could learn from the whales."

"The Whale Speech project was terminated after the subject rattled off an endless list of millions of atrocities perfectly recorded in Whalesong memory for the past 1,000 years. She was still talking when the voicebox was deactivated."

Building A MSTRE

by William Blake Smith & Andy Vetromile

They were close now. They ran past towering bins and rows of boxes and crates, the clack of distant boot heels resounding off the corrugated steel walls of the warehouse. Suddenly a flash of light, followed by the sound of a metal door being slammed -- then silence but for their own slowing footfalls. When they rounded the corner they found a dead end, and footprints in the dust trailing into a solid concrete wall. General Gorman had disappeared, and taken the Stone of Arimathaea with him.

Storing your stuff can be challenging, more so when the stock is leaking radiation, magic, or worse. The ever-cautious scientists and shamans at Warehouse 23 have come up with an ingenious method for storing inventory: the Multi-dimensional Storage, Transport and Recovery Engine (MSTRE) System.

A MSTRE in the Making

The MSTRE System was created by Dr. Anton Spiller, then the foremost authority on interspatial relations. He demonstrated a prototype that allowed him to retrieve anything he needed from a single desk drawer. Warehouse staff immediately set about establishing a full and workable version of the system on a facility-wide scale. Spiller's fate is unknown -- his folder was, ironically, lost -- but it has been suggested he fell victim to the labyrinthine permutations of his own creation. (The last any witnesses heard from him, he said something about "Version Two.")

The principle behind MSTRE is simple (although the actual parapsysics would make the average scientist froth at the mouth). By manipulating the time-space-reality continuum, it is possible to create doorways to locations where space isn't at a premium, and the temporary storage of magical, alien, and secret artifacts won't be noticed -- places like your grandmother's basement on the bottom shelf, behind the fertilizer. Sometimes the effects of such storage go unnoticed and nobody suffers. Sometimes the items have catastrophic effects on the surrounding environment. For example, the storage of the "real" Hope Diamond in a dusty filing cabinet under the New York Stock Exchange has had a deleterious effect on the world economy.

Amazingly, through the flexibility in time, space, and dimensions afforded by the MSTRE System, it is possible for Warehouse 23 to use the original resting places of artifacts as temporary storage nodes. This has confounded a few adventurers who sought a difficult-to-reach artifact, only to find men in coveralls gently placing the item on its pedestal before leaving through a solid wall.

The Nuts and Bolts

A single doorway connects warehouse workers to all of these distributed MSTRE locations. (The staff has been understandably hesitant to add another entrance -- or, indeed, make any kind of upgrade -- since Spiller's disappearance.) This doorway is disguised as a freight elevator. It has two large steel doors that must be opened by pulling down on a leather strap. Then the user must open a metal cage. Inside is the greasy, soda-stained interior of a cargo lift. The only difference between this elevator and any other in the warehouse is that the control pad has only the numbers 0-9 and a network jack. Warehouse personnel have small computers that they use to program the keypad controls. The 1-9 buttons allow the workers to store the last nine places to which they've traveled. Some locations see more portal traffic by a level of magnitude (like Stonehenge and San Francisco International), so shortcuts can be a real time saver. They also allow for a quick getaway if the team is compromised. The 0 button is always keyed to return the MSTRE transport to Warehouse 23.

The elevator itself works much like a "standard" dimensional door. It is a two-dimensional opening and would only be visible to someone outside if they were facing the open side and the elevator's built-in stealth system were disabled. Usually the users program the doorway to open on the backside of a shelving unit or storage area where they can add

and remove warehouse inventory without drawing attention to themselves. Occasionally, a doorway opens several feet from the destination node, with the gulf of dimensionless chaos in between. Falling into this netherworld would be bad for the user.

If the MSTRE unit is damaged or left open without its stealth system engaged for more than 30 minutes, it is set to return to Warehouse 23. (Damage to the portal can have disastrous consequences all by itself, as there is no way to predict if or how that damage might be translated to other locations.) Occasionally this "boomerang" function has led to unauthorized warehouse entry. Consequently, when the system is being utilized for scheduled operations, two security guards are placed on watch. Only a few workers have disappeared forever into the distributed storage network, making MSTRE duty one of the least lethal in the Warehouse system.

Navigating the warehouse and its abutting halls and storage areas can be tricky. Having a good sense of direction or an accurate internal clock is invaluable. Having both is a potent combination that will get you a job offer. Most who venture into the MSTRE have very specific instructions on where to go and what to do so they need not depend on their own senses to recover from misjudged system use.

The Darker Side of the System

There are rumors that some people get lost in the twisting, Escher-like halls and realities and live off what they find in the various areas they encounter. Some superstitious workers leave food and useful accessories lying about in the passageways and broom closets the system comprises. This is either to appease the ghostly figures reputed to wander the infinite spaces, or in hopes that, should they share the same fate, others will show similar kindness to them.

Another rumor holds that entire bands of these passage dwellers travel like nomadic tribes from one era or mystic site to the next. That their appearances explain everything from the Anasazi tribe to the crew of the Flying Dutchman is a tale that remains unconfirmed by the warehouse staff, like most illuminated gossip.

Building the Beast

Erecting portal nodes or extending the system can pose its own problems. Most of the time expansion just means adding another hallway in null space or bending Newtonian dynamics, some of which can be accomplished by remote manipulation of the system. Talented users can even make passages to new locations "on the fly."

Other times, though, setting up a hallway has to be done the old fashioned way: with nails, rivets, metal plating, and a self-contained environmental suit. Few people like hanging by a tethered lifeline over the gaping maw of null space; it takes a special breed that can stand the limitless gray. Some have been known to go mad looking at it for lengthy periods. These people are generally avoided at the canteen: They can't see the menu but they can see the taint in your aura.

Newtonian dynamics are stubborn and often refuse to shift without something else giving. This is usually no trouble; at someone's house somewhere in the suburbs, little Billy is suddenly unable, in violation of the laws of probability, to break one of the windows with a baseball. Other times, like when the Brisbane Police start bailing out more suspects than they had in custody, the problem is a little more noticeable and needs amending.

The subjective physics index is also troublesome. If a team needs to make an incursion into a specific area, local physics may not want to play along. The immediate mana level, sunspots, or the statistical likelihood of a refund check from the IRS can conspire to solidify against incursion a piece of real estate the warehouse staff wants for MSTRE. At that point, a construction team has to go to the location they want to use and start building a MSTRE node, chronospatially navigating their way back to the main system. Subtlety is the watchword, and when you bring a portable reality stabilizer and the contents of a home improvement superstore with you to a civilian's tool shed, you can watch the word subtlety pull a fast fade.

Adventure Seeds

Special Effects: One of the PCs inherits a piece of seemingly worthless property. While cleaning up the junk in the house they find a minute spent in the bedroom equals an hour anywhere else in the house. A scheduling error has targeted the bedroom as a MSTRE site, and the PCs could encounter guards, creatures, or fabulous gizmos while they try to figure out the chrono-anomaly.

Was That Door There?: While handling a museum security job the PCs are told to use the freight elevator on the loading dock to move their equipment. When they come out of the elevator they find themselves in the Hall of Mummies. In Egypt. In 5000 BC. Hopefully it will be the least interesting place they will be forced to visit.

Stairway to Newhaven: The heroes travel to the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library in Newhaven, Connecticut to deliver a mysterious volume to the collection, but to their chagrin the book is reported stolen before they can even leave town. Security cameras show a man stepping out of a solid wall and taking the book!

Four Guys and a Room: The party is told to put a rather large chunk of fallen satellite technology into storage. When they reach the storage location, that spot is clearly too small to hold the item in question. Their manual tells them in cases where the item is too big for the room, the room must be made to fit the item. The PCs must now use conflicting and abbreviated instructions from the manual to reconfigure the room. For clever, well-prepared, or insane GMs only.

Internal Affairs: A squad of well-armed and well-informed soldiers is loose in the shifting architecture, and the team must venture in to find them and neutralize the threat they pose. Running gunfights may break out in storage areas (some of which may contain weapons and vehicles and the space to use them).

Damage Control: Some fool had a running gunfight in the storage area, and now the MSTRE System is on the fritz. A technical crew has to go in, find the problem, and fix it. With meeps and gremlins running loose under the floorboards (not all of the creatures are escapees from the warehouse, and not all of the floorboards are on the floor), the repair may turn into a war of attrition.

What Does This Button Do?: When they load into the elevator, the workers discover the controls have changed. Did someone add controls? Where's the new manual? What do the new controls do? Is this the right lift, or has some outside force piggybacked its entry portal onto a portion of the system to help themselves to the warehouse's facilities?

Joy Ride: Your group has had a long week at the warehouse, and now they want to kick up their heels, maybe catch a movie. But the remoteness of the warehouse means they'll never get to the theater in time, certainly not before all the tickets for *VR Volkswagen and the Hippienauts* are sold out. Surely the brass wouldn't mind if someone borrowed a control pad, just for the weekend, just for a quick trip?

Well, yes, they would mind. Another team comes looking for you, armed with South American sap guns and restabilization nets. Bad enough you're cruising around with illuminated property without the proper forms, but you allowed an unattended babbling psychic to slip through a reality crack under her bed and scarper into the local mall.

Have We Got a Job for You: Your tribe led a peaceful existence until the strangers came, wearing their odd garb and offering everything your clan needs for its survival. They asked you to invade the wyvern's caves and retrieve an item known only in legends among your people -- but they were right. It was just where they said it would be. And when you presented it to them, they made you another offer, for another item.

Who are these people? How do they know so much of your lands and the tales surrounding them? Why are they so generous with their goods? And how do they appear and disappear at the canyon when there is but one way in or out?

Nice Work If You Can Get It: During a visit to a small island in the Philippines, a race of goblinoid creatures approaches you. They have what you want -- a small idol rich in jungle-aspected mana -- but they offer something else as well: their undying fealty to you, their new gods.

Do you dare perpetrate such a fraud? When will they get wise to the ruseâ?or do they know of your corporeal nature already? They always seem to have just the artifact you came to obtain, always just what it takes to bring you back again. Who's using whom?

Random Destination Generator

This table is designed to help the GM create quick random locations for the MSTRE device.

Roll 3d6

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Die 1	Barren	Dusty	Dark	Antiseptic	Glowing	Slime-Coated
Die 2	Alien	Toxic	Mystical	Abandoned	Temporally Warped	Experimental
Die 3	Warehouse	Cave	Shelving Unit	Cabinet	Field	Garage

Combine the results to form your description. Example: On a roll of 2,4,1 you would get a, "Dusty, Abandoned Warehouse." A 3,2,3 would get you an "Dark, Toxic Shelving Unit."

Plotting as Oral Storytelling for GMs

by Patrick Dunn

Oral story telling is as old as human civilization. Perhaps older. It's certainly older than writing; in fact, some scholars now think that when a culture develops writing, they forget how to tell oral stories. Of course, as gamers, we know that this isn't entirely true: oral stories continue as games, and the same tricks that make oral story telling possible must be reinvented by every GM. After all, GMs cannot plot as novelists or other writers can: we cannot plan, control our characters, or revise. Yet we can manage to tell coherent and interesting stories, if we have some tricks. We can borrow those tricks from the ancient story-tellers of prehistory, the scops and bards. Here are three ancient tricks that you can make new again in your storytelling:

Steal Your Story

Take Homer for instance. There is plenty of evidence in the text of Homer that it was originally an oral story, and that it was a story the audience was familiar with. The tale of Troy and the voyages of Odysseus was familiar to every Greek. (In summary: the Trojan War between the Achaeans and the Trojans drags on for years. Finally, Achilles, who refuses to fight because his commander stole his girlfriend, joins the fray and wins the war, but is killed shortly thereafter. Achilles' friend Odysseus tries to get back home, but meets with many obstacles; finally, he returns home to find out that his wife is being courted by a group of bandits, whom he kills.) This was an old story, borrowed by Homer for his song.

You can do the same thing, stealing a plot from another source and grafting it on your story. Fortunately, this is made easier by the fact that there are, essentially, very few possible plots; one critic names a total of 36. And everything in any given plot is reversible or otherwise changeable. Take the Trojan war: a valuable artifact is stolen by a powerful prince of a neighboring city-state. The king conscripts an army to retrieve the artifact. The characters are, because of their exceptional skills, placed in a special unit and given various missions. Or, you can reverse the story: the king's foolish son makes off with a rival city-state's prized gizmo, and now the rival city-state has invaded and carried off some valuable booty. The king can't avoid war, but . . . and here you can change the story to fit your players. Are they more diplomatic? In that case, he asks them to carry a secret message to the enemy camp for a meeting to negotiate peace. Are they backstabbers? The foolish son can enlist their aid to assassinate his father because the son wants to press the war against his dad's wishes. Are they beefy fighters who relish combat? Then they're wall defenders. It's all the same plot; you let the characters decide the switches you flip.

You don't have to steal from mythology, of course. You can also steal from movies or books that you've enjoyed. This might seem dangerous, and sometimes it is. For example, if you steal the plot of a popular fantasy novel only to discover that half the group had read the books and recognized the plot immediately, you're going to have problems. Fortunately, you can switch around details to make a plot unrecognizable. None of the plots above look much like the *Iliad*; just enough has been changed to make them seem different and original.

Here are some additional tips for creative stealing: Never use a character's name from the original story. If you call the foolish son "Paris," you'll have a few suspicious players on your hands. Use the plot only for the basic inspiration; don't be hidebound into the plot. That leads to bizarre games in which the GM tries to force the players to make the "right" choices. Finally, ask yourself with every detail, "what if I reversed this to its complete opposite?" You might end up with something entirely original, when all you intended to do was steal.

Use Formulas

One of the primary characteristics of an oral story -- and one of the ways that scholars can tell if a story was originally oral and not written -- is the use of formulas. In *Beowulf*, for example, there are certain phrases that fit the meter and form of the poem that are used over and over again, such as "unlocked his word-hoard" for "made a speech."

"Unlocked his word-hoard" doesn't always work in the poem, of course, so you have a list of formulas for "made a speech," including "spoke formally;" "stood and spoke;" "remembered his oath;" and, from a different poem, the "Battle of Maldon" -- "shook his spear."

Of course, you don't have to tell your story in verse (and probably wouldn't want to, unless you have a very odd gaming group!). But you might also have formulaic plot points that can be dropped in a story. The classic and overworn example: "you meet in an inn" and its science fiction twin, "You meet in a spaceport." But you can find a set of relatively original plot formulas that you can use when you can't think of anything else. Some possibilities:

- **A mysterious message arrives.** From whom? You as GM don't even have to know at this point. But it'll get the players moving. Particularly if it's something like a head in a box, or a lawyer with a summons.
- **An innocent is caught in the crossfire.** Perhaps a sleeper is caught in a mage battle, or perhaps a waif is discovered living in the orc camp. In any event, this plot device gives you an NPC to play with and a possible, but not necessary, future development. Again, you don't have to know the purpose or history of this person when you use it; you'll develop it as you go.
- **Someone powerful seems to have noticed the NPCs.** Possible employer? Enemy? Ally? Neutral but interested party? Let it depend on how well or poorly the PCs react.
- **The PCs are invited to a party or other large social event.** You can use this to introduce players, of course, but you can also use it wrap games up, or as an interlude in between dungeon crawls.

The use of such plot formulas can be used to spark major plot directions; at the party, for example, they could meet the main villain and embarrass him in public, thus causing him to swear vengeance. Or, they can be used to suggest possible plots to players who may or may not find them interesting. The waif might be returned to her parents, or one of the PCs might take her on as an apprentice, opening up new directions of roleplaying. Either way, it's the players' decision whether or not to accept that plot hook, and most players enjoy making an impact on the plot.

Build a Kernel, Don't Plan a Plot

Some GMs claim to have success planning out a plot in intricate detail, but many GMs find that exercise frustrating in the extreme. After all, you'll planned for your players to find the cursed dagger at the end of the first session, but they've spent time arguing with the blacksmith and challenged him to a duel, and never even got to the tomb by the end of the session.

You don't really need to plan out the plot exactly, though, especially if you have a compendium of plot formulas and stolen plots knocking about in your head (or in a box of notecards, if you prefer the organized approach). All you really need to build a plot are the following things:

First, you need a conflict. Decide what two things will be in conflict. In traditional plotting, there are only certain possibilities: Man against Nature, Man against Man, Man against God, and so on. Consider in terms of ideas, not in terms of Men and Gods. Your conflict might be Loyalty and Power: when your PCs become powerful, will they reject their old patrons? (You could steal from *Henry IV 1 & 2* for that plot, or make your own) Or Love and Death: what happens when the players begin to lose the things they love? Do they despair? Or do they find a way to fight even death? Any two ideas that can be set against each other can be the core of a plot idea.

Once you have a conflict, decide a set of possible complications. You won't use all of them, but jot them down just in case. Before each gaming session, decide which complication you'll use. If you're going with Loyalty and Power, for example, your complications might be:

1. Players are knighted, and patron (the thief guildmaster) elicits promise to be loyal and not betray him.
2. Patron calls in a favor in a public place, risking the players' position as knights.
3. Players are called in by the Chamberlain to explain the rumors of past criminal connections.
4. Players discover that the Chamberlain has hard proof of their prior criminal activities.

This approach isn't quite planning out a plot, because you know going in that you won't use all of these. If, for

example, the thief guildmaster asks for the promise of loyalty and the players, soon to be knights, say, "No, old man, we're going to betray you the minute we have that medallion of knighthood!", there goes your careful plot. But good! Because after the session, you sit down for ten minutes and draw up some new complications:

1. Guildmaster hires assassins to kill the new threat.
2. Players find out that the king's nephew is one of the assassins.
3. Players find out that the Chamberlain has been paid off to destroy the knights' reputation.
4. Players discover that the Chamberlain has hard proof of their activities, and intends to present it to the king.

Notice that the plot is brought back to approximately the same point. And that this point still enforces the basic plot conflict. Now, instead of deciding, "are we going to be loyal to our old patron and friend, or to our new powerful position?" they have to decide, "are we going to be loyal to the law we're sworn to uphold, or are we going to kill the chamberlain or steal his evidence?" You don't have to return to the same plot point as done above, if you prefer not to. In fact, you don't even have to know how you'll resolve the plot when you start out. Half the fun for some GMs is finding out what happens in the end.

Finally, you'll want to have a few NPCs. Give each NPC a conflict as well: Your thief could be Kind but Desperate. Your cleric could be Pious but Greedy. Only do this with important NPCs; people who drive carts and so forth should be given very little detail, other than local color. Also ask your PCs to sum up their characters' motivations in terms of these conflicting adjectives. Some gaming systems already do this, but it can be wise to ask them to come up with a specific conflict that drives their character. These conflicts, if you can trust your players to play them, making plotting much easier. You can predict with some accuracy what choices the players might make, and tailor individual complications to specific players.

These three tips won't make you into Homer, but they will help your plot move along without having to call time out long enough to figure out the next step. They also have the advantage of requiring less planning than writing out an entire plot. You can even come up with a plot in a matter of seconds for those surprise sessions. Just steal from a movie or book you enjoyed, change a few things around, decide a conflict and a handful of complications, and roll up some characters.

Once, scops sat beside the fire and sang the songs that made people laugh and cry. Today, we sit around a table of nachos and dice, and tell the stories that make us look forward all week to gaming night. To think that we continue an oral storytelling tradition that most people think died out in 700 CE is exciting. How much more exciting our games become, then, when we can consciously use those techniques of oral storytelling to enrich our plots.

Pass the root beer, Unferth. It is time to unlock the word-board.

Making the Most of Moves

Cinematic Combat in the *d20 System*

by Geoff Skellams

A common criticism of the *d20 System* system is that the combat system isn't cinematic enough. The rules seem to almost mandate the use of miniatures, turning a roleplaying game back into a tabletop war game. For some people, this "clunkiness" is enough to turn them off *d20 System* altogether. However, other roleplaying games -- such as *Feng Shui*, *Dragonfist*, and *Marvel SAGA* -- have wholeheartedly embraced the action paradigm and include mechanics that allow players to attempt the wild stunts seen in the movies. With some creative thinking and a little flexibility, the *d20 System* combat system can easily do the same cinematic style almost as easily as games created specifically for it.

The *d20 System* rules break combat into six-second rounds. If you read the more recent editions (for example *D20 Call of Cthulhu* or *D20 Modern*), a character has a variety of actions each round, with most of them involving a move action and an attack action. Whether the character attacks first and then moves, or moves then attacks is left to the player. The move action doesn't necessarily mean walking across a room, either. It can be as simple as standing up, or picking up an object.

Hong Kong action movies in particular make great use of movement before and after attacks. For example, in Jackie Chan's *Who Am I?* there's a fight scene where Chan slides backward across a table and then falls to the floor with the chair. As soon as he lands, he kicks out, sending the chair sliding underneath the table to knock the feet out from underneath the guy who was chasing him.

The key to cinematic *d20 System* combat is being as creative as possible, particularly with the move action. Make the move action's description as colorful as you possibly can and set yourself up for the attack. The clearer the description is, the more enjoyable it is for all those playing. In writing circles, the old adage is, "Show, don't tell." The same is true when describing the actions your character is doing. Don't just say he's trying to hit his opponent. Instead, use word pictures that show us exactly how he's going about that goal. To use the Jackie Chan example again, the move action would be the sliding across the table and onto the chair, while the attack action would be kicking the chair into the opponent's legs.

It's a good idea to look at your character's skills and feats (particularly the active ones like Balance, Jump, and Tumble) and work those elements into the your move actions descriptions. By concentrating on your character's strengths, you give yourself a much better chance at succeeding with the wild stunts. It also allows your character a chance to use those skills and feats that might not otherwise get used.

As a player, it's important to think not only about your opponent, but also the combat's location. Try to think of the sorts of objects that you would expect to find in a location like that, and then work those into your action descriptions. It doesn't matter if the GM hasn't explicitly said that the object isn't there. If he's playing along, you should be allowed to get away with it, provided that you don't try something too outlandish.

Don't try to do too much with your action descriptions, though. Basically, you should aim for one quick sentence for each part of your action, with perhaps no more than one "and" to join them together. If your idea is any more complicated than that, chances are you're trying to do too much in one round and will probably be stopped by your GM. By keeping the descriptions short, sweet, and colorful, combats will go much faster and be more fun for everyone.

Setting Things Up For A Fall

As a GM, it's vital that you encourage the players to experiment with their descriptions and not make it difficult for

them to achieve their actions. One of the easiest ways to do this is to actually have the NPCs work in the same way, and for you to describe the NPC's actions the way that you would like to see the players describe their characters actions. Most players should quickly follow suit.

The other way you can help make your combat sessions more cinematic is to stage the locations carefully. When running a combat, it's easy to fall into the trap of thinking of the combat taking place in a vacuum. The attention is focused almost entirely on the characters and little thought is given to what's actually around them. By thinking about the combat's location before the session, you can seed the combat with the sorts of things you want to happen. Things to include are some props for both the PCs and NPCs to use in the fight and some strange terrain or obstacles that will complicate the fight and make it more interesting for everyone concerned.

Don't be afraid to ask players to make additional skill checks if their movement descriptions are relatively complicated. To go back to the Jackie Chan example, the sliding backward across the table should require a Tumble check, say DC 15. If the Tumble check was successful, the attack should have a -2 penalty, because the chair is being used as an improvised weapon. However, don't make it impossible for the PCs to succeed with their stunts or they will give up trying them.

In the ***Feng Shui*** RPG, Robin Laws suggests that GMs work out a list of cool things that can happen during a fight scene. This is wonderful advice, as it really helps set the tone for the sorts of stunts that will happen during play. The list doesn't have to be very long or very detailed. A few dot points should be enough to jog your memory when you're actually running the game. It also helps focus your attention on the sorts of props that need to be included in your description of the scene itself when the PCs first encounter it.

The other thing that both ***Feng Shui*** and ***Dragonfist*** recommend is learning to say "yes." This style of cinematic play relies as much on the players thinking things up as it does on the GM. If the players think of a prop that should belong in the scene, then allow them to use it, even if it hasn't even been mentioned up until now. It takes a little getting used to, but the extra flexibility and creativity that it allows is a wonderful thing.

d20 System combat can be somewhat dull and mechanical, but it doesn't have to be. With a bit of thought and some colorful descriptions, the ***d20 System*** is just as capable of allowing cinematic action as other games that were written to specifically capture that feel. Bend the rules a little if you have to; remember, the idea is to have as much fun as possible.

Big Questions Answered; No One Notices

Many games revolve around search for -- and possibly finding -- "the truth." Unfortunately, I believe far too many games allow it to be found.

Consider the biggies: life, death, is there a higher power, how will the world end, is there free will, what's six times nine . . . all the unknowables.

Depending on the game world, many of these are, indeed, answered. Where do we go when we die? Well, to one of 16 planes, depending on your alignment and a couple other fiddly bits. Is there life after death; sure! Spock and Superman hung out in the hereafter a while, playing **Wiz-War**. How will the world end? Well, the scarf-clad Doctor knows how things turn out on Earth and at the edge of the universe.

In short, in most worlds the questions that most of us struggle with day in, day out -- questions that plague us on a macro and micro level -- are both answerable *and* answered.

Does she really love me? -- Easy to know in a world with mind-reading.

What will the future bring? -- Trivial with precognition or time-viewing.

Is this really a good person? -- Cast *detect good/evil/law/chaos*.

Have I done anything important with my life? -- Just wait for Clarence to talk you off the bridge on Christmas Eve; he'll set you straight.

Consider that questions which were near-unknowable in the not-too-distant past that we *can* now answer:

- Child paternity
- Definitive collaborative blood evidence
- Accurate time-dating of artifacts
- The mathematical understanding of heredity

It wasn't long ago in the human scale where the movements of stars and heavenly bodies were the deepest of mysteries. That's almost cliché to think about . . . but not when you realize that unlocking those mysteries led to radical changes in society and thought.

So what does this mean for your average gaming? Well . . . nothing. Which is part of the problem.

Most of the time ordinary folks in gaming universes act just like their counterparts in our world, despite any elements that *should* make them rethink things. How could someone *not* believe in the Force, when there are robe-clad mystics levitating objects, fogging minds, and hopping around like Grover on acid? Why didn't the world's religions react when there was an honest-to-goodness *angel* as part of the Justice League?

Consider *Star Trek*. They've established on the show that there are still religions in the 23rd and 24th centuries. If that's the case, then how can people encounter -- or hear about -- any the myriad Beings of Nigh-Infinite Power, and not be spiritually moved? Why hasn't a Cult of Q sprung up on the *Enterprise*? Q is able to do just about everything that major religious figures have been claimed to do, *and* he'll sign 8"×11" glossies for \$20 apiece! At the very least someone might corner Q and ask him for the truth about his own religion. (Then again, one should never ask any questions one does not want to know the answer to; Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End* explores this area nicely.)

Quoth Hamlet:

*"For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office and the spurns*

*That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin? who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscover'd country from whose bourn
No traveler returns, puzzles the will
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?"*

In other words, the only reason your standard peasant doesn't fling himself into the thrasher is that he doesn't know what will happen in the hereafter if he does. How, then, does that sit with your average fantasy-setting peasant? His priest quite probably has a direct link to the divine, bestowing him with power and wisdom. He has probably heard tales of those who came back from the dead, and he probably has some solid proof as to where he will go when he dies.

There should be no agnostics in the Forgotten Realms.

How, then, does all this relate to gaming?

Well, I'm not entirely sure yet. (Hey, it's a column about the results of answering life's unanswerable questions . . . gimme a break!) But I have some proto-thoughts about the whole thing.

Consider carefully whether or not any of the Big Questions will be answerable in the game world. Sometimes the answers to some questions will be unavoidable; for example, if there's mind-reading in the game world, then secrets about what people are *really* thinking are probably going to be difficult to keep. (On the other hand, the classic Dick York *Twilight Zone* episode "A Penny For Your Thoughts" shows the fallibility of mind-reading . . . just because someone is thinking or fantasizing about something doesn't mean it has any actual bearing on reality.)

Other times, however, GMs will include the answer to a Big Question as a Darn Tantalizing Carrot with which to motivate PCs. Being able to meet an omnipotent being, travel through time to witness the truth about some point in history, or [cheat death](#) are all fascinating plot elements, but they may well also change the game world in ways everyone doesn't expect.

Consider making knowledge a zero-sum game. *In Nomine*, for example, neatly skirts a surprising number of metaphysical issues by noting that no one knows the whole truth . . . or if they do, they're not talking. Thus most of the basic religions are still equally valid, and no one belief system is more "right" than others (although, again, agnostics would have a hard time in the game universe if they knew the extent of the War).

You can also make knowledge zero-sum by having the "truth" revealed that there is no truth . . . or if there is, then it isn't revealed. For example, *Star Trek V* (in the tradition of many original series episodes) centers around the idea that Kirk and the gang find God, only it turns out it wasn't really Him. (Mind you, it would have been more satisfying if the *Enterprise* crew had learned that *Star Trek V* itself wasn't real . . . but you take what you can get.) This zero-sum truth is a good way of satisfying more "realistic" game campaigns, but it is also more unsatisfying for players . . . especially if used too often.

Consider the implications of game knowledge, especially on common people. Although heroes may be made of sterner stuff than your average street Schmoes, there are a *lot* more of them than there are heroes. In general consider that established religions and beliefs will try to incorporate or explain most phenomena. For example, one of the best things about ***Aberrant***, in my opinion, was its detailed accounting of what the various religions thought about the sudden appearance of these super-powered Novas; some were very supportive, others were more apprehensive, and still others viewed them as tools of the devil and acted accordingly.

To return to our fantasy campaign, then, let's consider the implications of knowing that there is a definitive afterlife. In that case, religions and philosophies probably focus more on the *whys* of that phenomenon; why are there various kinds

of afterlives for those who are pure of heart, and what are the implications of that? (In good ol' *Dungeons & Dragons* terms, if you are Chaotic Good and your wife is Lawful Good, then you both might be assured of having a pleasant afterlife . . . but it might be stressful to realize you won't be there together. As such, there may be fundamental philosophical differences based not on how good a life you live, but on how orderly or spontaneous an existence you lead.) In a world that knows of the existence of reincarnation for all, there might be those who act in seemingly unusual ways; for example, an organization may build around the idea of helping others through brutal and horrendous means, figuring that this current cycle of life is already ruined for them, but they might as well try to help others before they die and come back.

And, of course, if suicide is universally agreed to send you immediately to the Plane of Painful Sores and Unsweet Tea, then you'll probably keep your bodkin where it belongs.

Finally, reconsider recasting these Truths as not-so-universal. For example, if our fantasy world has some of its denizens being reincarnated, while others get to go to an afterlife, and there's no obvious discernable pattern as to what determines one over the other, then this can be the lynchpin of faith the campaign revolves around. One religion might say that those who adhere to its scriptures will go to their just rewards while those who still haven't learned will return. Another religion might say that those who are born under certain astronomical situations, or those who are part of certain castes, will be assured a place in the afterlife. And others might believe it's entirely random and unknowable, and there's no point in living life differently than you would otherwise . . . in other words, you *can* have agnostics in a world of mystery and wonder.

On many levels, games are often about wish fulfillment. But having too many wishes fulfilled can damage the integrity of the game world itself, especially if those wishes involve bringing knowledge back to the game world. Since the essence of faith is something improvable, then providing proof in-game may well destroy faith, or make it more difficult to explain why faith still exists in the world.

And, to quote *Wormy*, "Lotsa fokes got all the answers . . . and they don't seem to be the least bit concerned with the questions."

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Pyramid Review

Vice Squad: Eighties Police Adventure

Published by [Politically Incorrect Games](#)

Written by Marc Bruno with Brett M. Bernstein

48-page downloadable PDF; \$4.00

It should take little or no difficulty to break down the TV cop genre into their respective decades, and all with a few generalizations. For example, the 1950s TV Cop needs no more than a decent suit, a belief in the law and a desire to get "Just the facts, Ma'am." The 1970s cop should have a sheepskin coat or woolly cardigan, a bull dog of a car, and an attitude to match -- white stripe optional, of course. The 1990s needs grit, strong language and shaky camera angles, while the current crop of cop shows brings the ultrachic high tech science of forensics to the art of criminal detection. In between are the 1980s, when all a cop needed were cool shades, an even cooler foreign car and a light linen ensemble in soft colors.

Barring Task Force Games' *Crimefighter RPG*, the genre of the TV cop show remains little explored and while we were promised the chance to "*Leef it oowwtt!!!!*" for the all 1970s buddy-cop game *Git Yer Trousers on, Yer Nicked!*, it is doubtful that this New Style game designed by James Wallis will ever get out of the squad room. In the meantime, and while we await the arrival of *Crime Scene: Police Investigation*, the *d20 System* game of forensic detection from the new Hogshead Publishing, Politically Incorrect Games lets you wander back to the 1980s with *Vice Squad: Eighties Police Adventure*. So slip into something sub-tropical and pastel, make sure your shades are black and shiny and the keys to your Maserati are in your pocket, and let's go get that alligator-pet keeping drug czar! Oh, and socks are entirely optional for this review.

Vice Squad: Eighties Police comes as a 1.54-meg 48-page PDF, with a full-color cover and a black-and-white, art-free interior. Designer Mark Bruno has some experience with this kind of game and format, having worked for Deep7 on their XPG title, [Mean Streets RPG](#) and also having created the self-published space opera [Armada-X](#).

This game comes divided into two sections. Both print the game's rules, but do so in different formats and to different ends. Laid out in landscape format, the first 13 pages are not meant to be printed out, but instead read from the computer screen. To this end, hyperlinks are built into the layout to facilitate ease of access, navigation and use. The second section reprints the rules, but in the traditional portrait format and without the hyperlinks. This section is also followed by the game's character stereotypes, vehicles and four scenarios, all of which is used with either version of the rules.

The game is the third title in PIG's "'genre Diversion' Quick Fix Games" each of which -- like those of Deep7's 1PG line of titles -- is designed to facilitate a single night's play in between a campaign or as a break from the current one. But there the comparison between a 1PG title and a "genre Diversion" one ends, as the latter are slightly more complex. Indeed in terms of complexity, the "genre Diversion" rules are on a par with Deep 7's XPG games, such as *Mean Streets*, if not slightly more so. Essentially, they are a cut down and simplified version of the mechanics used in PIG's *The Colonies RPG* -- and can be played in basic or advanced mode.

Basic mode has a player attempt to roll equal to or under a skill total to succeed using a pair of six-sided dice. From the same dice roll, the advanced mode requires the difference between the skill total and the total, this margin being compared against a difficulty set by the GM. For ease of play, the success table is printed on the character sheets. The number of dice thrown can be altered by a character's action or situation, and even by the equipment being employed. For example, if a character has been grievously knocked to the ground, he has a penalty of two dice on their roll; if he

was firing a shotgun at close range he would receive an extra bonus dice. Bonus and penalty dice cancel each other out, and whatever the roll, only a total of two dice count: the worst or highest two if there were more penalty dice applied, or the best or lowest two if the bonus dice held favor.

Character generation is a reasonably quick and simple affair. four primary traits -- Fitness, Empathy, Reasoning and Willpower -- are rated from zero to five, and have 11 points divided among them. Alternatively they can each be rolled for on a six-sided die. Another 25 points go on skills rated from zero to 10, which can be no higher than twice the associated trait under normal circumstances or higher than six at the end of character generation.

Characters also receive several clichés, one from each of the five categories. Each cliché is a special ability designed to simulate a particular aspect of a game -- obviously in this case, that of an eighties cop show. These categories are combat clichés, chase clichés, investigation clichés, contacts clichés and authority clichés. Some of the best and most fun include:

From the combat clichés, Fiery Wreck -- firing a gun at a parked or crashed car will always cause it to explode; Conversational Nod, in which our hero never needs to talk to communicate his intentions in a tight situation; and the ever-popular Magic Clip, from which bullets never run out.

From the Chase clichés, Super Star -- the hero owns a luxurious sports car that makes him more studly and thus gives a bonus on seduction rolls; Multi Tasking Driver, for when a hero needs to drive, shave, and let off a round or two; and the amusingly named Frogger, by which means the heaviest of traffic can be crossed in complete safety!

From the Contacts clichés comes Spec Ops, for the hero with a Special Forces military background and who still maintains his contacts; and Don't Go Against the Family, for heroes with mob ties. Other contact clichés cover sports, local politics, the police department, the underworld, and business and retail.

From authority clichés comes Squeaky Clean, which always keeps Internal Affairs away from the hero; Squad Lieutenant give them rank; Planted Evidence provides something extra with which to frame a suspect; and Vigilante Judge, where you're always guaranteed to get a warrant in a hurry.

Alternatively, players can select one of the ready-to-play police officer stereotypes. These include the Loner, the Maverick, the Grizzled Veteran, the Rookie, and the Dishonest Cop. These come with their own pregenerated clichés, but it would be easy enough to substitute these with those more to a players' liking. As such, there are no rules or guidelines for handling a cliché in play. This is a shame, as they are an integral aspect of the game and do serve to enforce the conventions of the game.

As well as combat and other actions, the rules cover vehicle chases, simply and succinctly in just a single page. They deal not only with highway pursuit and motorboat chases -- no surprise given the obvious inspiration for ***Vice Squad: Eighties Police Adventure*** -- but could in a pinch also handle light planes and possibly helicopters. Just as the characters have their stereotypes, the chase rules are backed up with a selection of high performance cars -- the Maserati Merak SS, the Corvette, the Lamborghini Countach, Ferrari 308 GTB, the Triumph TR8, and even the DeLorean are all included. The selection is rounded out with a typical automobile and motorcycle as well as the Plymouth Gran Fury Police Squad Car. The lack of a Porsche was surprising, however. Six pages of very expensive yachts, a fast cigarette boat, and a pair of police launches round out the vehicles section.

Villains and their incarnations as a 1980s cop show stereotype also get their own page. This discusses the types suitable to the game, from Gangster/Crime Boss and Drug Czar to Drug Smuggler and Rogue Cop, before suggesting a few clichés suitable for their use. There are only nine provided, including Immortal, always able to revive from fatal injuries; and Can't keep Him Locked Up, always able to escape prison within a year; but a GM may want to boost their bad guys with a cliché or two from the player's list.

Vice Squad: Eighties Police Adventure is rounded out with four scenarios, each of which is a little over two pages long and should each give a solid evening's worth of play or so.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

"Like Father Like Son" begins with an undercover operation to bust a drugs dealer gone tragically awry and the lucky apprehension of a Drug Czar's son, who perhaps will spill the beans on daddy's dealings. In "Hunting Season," the squad must investigate the kidnapping of the wives of local Colombian importers and the subsequent deaths of both husbands and spouses; this could be plain old gangland violence or something else. Another kidnapping is at the center of "Deliver Her From Evil," though not of the wives of Colombian drug dealers, but that of an up-and-coming fashion model. Finally the player characters need to provide protection to a visiting South American dissident in "Man on the Run."

[END SPOILER ALERT]

It should be noted that "Deliver Her From Evil" is actually an expansion and adaptation of the author's adventure previous "Vendetta," written for [Full Clip: Hong Kong Action RPG](#) published by Deep7. The expansion is nicely done, and suggests crossover potential between the source material for both games.

If ***Vice Squad: Eighties Police Adventure*** is lacking anything, it is in the little advice provided for the GM. That said, if the GM knows the genre, it should not be much of a problem. Unfortunately, no bibliography is given to that end. Thus ***Vice Squad: Eighties Police Adventure*** works better for the more experienced and older GM, as well as the players, who possibly need to be of a certain age to get the most out of the game. In addition, ***Vice Squad: Eighties Police Adventure*** does not have the immediacy of a 1PG title -- one cannot quite as simply pick up and start running this game. This owes as much to the traditional RPG design and format as anything else; even then, ***Vice Squad: Eighties Police Adventure*** is still pretty quick to get going. The genre is nicely handled and enforced through the use of the clichés and despite the lack of explanation of their use, it will be interesting to see their like employed in future "genre Diversion" titles. Indeed, without the presence of the clichés, ***Vice Squad: Eighties Police Adventure*** would not really stand out from the growing range of RPGs published in PDF format, but together with the very genre they help evoke, ***Vice Squad: Eighties Police Adventure*** is a diverting slice of fun.

--Matthew Pook

Characters for "Strange Bedfellows"

Pregenerated Characters for *In Nomine*

By Elizabeth McCoy

These are pregenerated PCs with both **GURPS** and ***In Nomine*** stats, designed for the "Strange Bedfellows Expanded" adventure that begins in this issue. Naturally, GMs may use any of these as NPCs or pregenerated characters for other adventures!

The Characters

These are all 9-Force angels, too new to modern Earth to have been given Roles yet. (They do have drivers' licenses, though, with sufficient backing to withstand a traffic ticket or two -- but not a higher-level investigation.) All have variable genders -- alter the default one as desired.

The **GURPS** translation has been altered from a straight conversion in some places, for elegance and to make them 100-point (plus racial template, Choir template, and Choir Attunement) characters. All have Literacy, Essence Control 9, and 5 points from Quirks (some left blank for players to define).

OZEM

Ofanite of War

Ozem is first in his age-set classes, a young prodigy of motion (if prone to daydreaming during Earth studies). He's quite unaware that his vessel is attractive -- he just thinks it's decently streamlined, and tends to view it as yet another vehicle to drive. He's on a fast-track to being a covert warrior, and thus has had a *little* training in restraining his natural Ofanite impulsiveness. A little. Ozem had never met Judgment Servitors before, but he's expecting them to be just as annoying, pedantic, hidebound, and supercilious as his fellow Michaelites seem to believe. (He's a good character for anyone who's already impulsive!)

GURPS Character Sheet

ST 12 [-15]; **DX** 16 [20]; **IQ** 12 [-15]; **HT** 13 [-10]

Advantages: Alertness +4 [20], Extra Hit Points +7 [35], Power Investiture (all 3), Vessel (Attractive Appearance) [35].

Disadvantage: Servitor of Michael [-8]

Quirk: Clueless about Earth - except cars.

Skills: Acrobatics-14 [1], Brawling-16 [1], Climbing-15 [1], Dancing-11 [0], Driving (Car)-15 [1], Escape-13 [0.5], Fast Draw (Knife-17 [1], Pistol-17 [1]), Fast-Talk-7 [0], Guns (Pistol)/TL7-19 [2], Holdout-10 [0.5], Knife-18 [4], Running-11 [1], Shadowing-11 [0.5], Tactics-10 [1]

Song: Numinous Corpus: Wings-9 [4]

In Nomine Character Sheet

Corporeal Forces - 3	Strength 5	Agility 7
Ethereal Forces - 6	Intelligence 5	Precision 7
Celestial Forces - 5	Will 5	Perception 7

Vessel: Human/2, Charisma +1 (Body Hits: 25)

Skills: Acrobatics/2 [9], Climbing/2 [9], Driving/2 [9], Escape/1 [8], Fighting/2 [10], Move Silently/2, [9], Ranged Weapon/3 (Pistol) [10], Running/2 [9], Small Weapon/4 (Knife) [11], Swimming/1 [8], Tactics/2 [7]

Songs: Wings/3 [6]

Attunement: Ofanite of War

KEHELAHATH

Kyriotate of War

Kehelahath -- "Kel" for short -- has been down to Earth a few times, to get used to the concept of . . . lying, to cover for one's host-body. Since her Will is so weak for one of the Dominations, she's not likely to do much possessing of animals unless she gets lucky or spends Essence to boost her Will. Still, Kel's happy enough in the vessel her Kyriotate of War attunement gives her -- so long as she has her Big Honkin' Axe around. Like Ozem, her opinions of Judgment are thoroughly steeped in Michaelite "bad attitude," though she's had little actual experience with triads. (Despite being a Kyriotate, her Will is low enough that she would be a good character for someone who doesn't want to worry about resonances or less-human Choir attitudes.)

GURPS Character Sheet

ST 18 [45]; **DX** 17 [30]; **IQ** 14; **HT** 14

Advantages: Combat Reflexes [15], Extra Hit Point +1 [5], Power Investiture (Corporeal 4, Ethereal 3, Celestial 2), Vessel [30].

Disadvantages: Servitor of War [-8], Reduced Alertness 2 [-10], Weak Will 4 [-32].

Skills: Acrobatics-14 [0.5], Acting-13 [1], Axe-17 [2], Brawling-17 [1], Climbing-15 [0.5], Driving (Car)-15 [0.5], Fast Draw (Pistol)-18 [1], Fast-Talk-14 [2], First Aid/TL7-9 [0], Guns (Pistol)/TL7-19 [1], Stealth-16 [1], Throwing-14 [0.5], Two-handed Axe-17 [2].

Songs: Healing (Corporeal-12 [6]), Motion (Corporeal-12 [6])

In Nomine Character Sheet

Corporeal Forces - 4	Strength 9	Agility 7
Ethereal Forces - 3	Intelligence 6	Precision 6
Celestial Forces - 2	Will 4	Perception 4

Vessel: Human/1 (Body Hits: 45)

Skills: Acrobatics/1 [8], Climbing/1 [8], Dodge/5 [12], Driving/1 [7], Emote/2 [6], Fast-Talk/3 [7], Fighting/2 [15], Large Weapon/3 (Battleaxe) [12], Lying/2 [8], Move Silently/2 [9], Ranged Weapon/2 (Pistol) [8], Throwing/1 [8]

Songs: Healing (Corporeal/4 [8]), Motion (Corporeal/4 [8]).]

Attunement: Kyriotate of War

SOPHEREETH

Seraph of Judgment

"Sophie" has been on exactly one Earth mission, and still takes her job very, very seriously. She leans slightly toward the "Mercy" faction in Judgment -- but is naively unaware that Judgment *has* factions. As Dominican Most Holy go, she can be reasoned with surprisingly well; she won't let people get away with things, but she will delay the lecture if it seems prudent. She's not thrilled to be working with Michaelites -- they're always so "disorganized and irrationally rude (sung in the strong opinion chord)" -- but she will do her duty and retrieve the AWOL Cherub before he Falls! From a more War-like point of view, she's nosy, ivory-tower, and can barely hold her own in a firefight -- a total civilian. (Her curiosity may well increase the friction between herself and Parnach . . .) Sophie's probably best for someone with previous roleplaying experience, being by turns soft-hearted, intellectual, or stern.

GURPS Character Sheet

ST 11 [-20]; **DX** 11 [-20]; **IQ** 16; **HT** 12 [-15]

Advantages: Charisma +1 [5], Servitor Attunement (Heavenly Judgment) [45], Vessel [30]

Disadvantages: Clueless [-10], Curious [-5], Servitor of Judgment [-10].

Quirk: Ivory Tower Naivete.

Skills: Artist-13 [0.5], Brawling-10 [0.5], Computer Operation/TL7-16 [1], Criminology/TL7-15 [1], Detect Lies-13 [0.5], Guns (Pistol)/TL7-13 [1], Interrogation*-16 [2], Law-15 [2], Leadership-16 [0.5], Research-15 [1], Singing-14 [4], Stealth-11 [0.5], Tactics-13 [0.5], Typing-15 [16], Writing*-16 [2].

Songs: Form (Ethereal-13 [6]), Motion (Celestial-13 [2]), Possession-13 [2], Shields (Celestial-14 [4])

* Sophie's Interrogation skill is geared toward effective use of the Seraph resonance and Detect Lies. Writing is technical writing, to take efficient notes and write up reports.

In Nomine Character Sheet

Corporeal Forces - 2	Strength 4	Agility 4
Ethereal Forces - 3	Intelligence 7	Precision 5
Celestial Forces - 4	Will 8	Perception 8

Vessel: Human/1, Charisma +1 (Body Hits: 10)

Skills: Artistry/1 (Drawing) [9], Computer Operation/2 [9], Detect Lies/1 [9], Fighting/1 [7], Move Silently/1 [5], Ranged Weapon/2 (Pistol) [7], Singing/1 [9], Tactics/1 [8].

Songs: Form (Ethereal/4 [7]), Motion (Celestial/2 [6]), Possession/2 [6], Shields (Celestial/3 [7])

Attunements: Seraph of Judgment, Heavenly Judgment

CLEMENT

Cherub of Judgment

Clement is firmly in the "Mercy" camp of in Judgment. He's sweet, easy-going, and tries to explain to subjects that Judgment's only harassing them because they're all angels, and even Judges care about people. He's the sort to request that the Seraph ask if a subject has learned from his mistakes and is truly repentant, so they can avoid overworking the Celestial Tribunal. Nevertheless, even his laid-back temper gets strained by Michaelite hostility. (Parnach is likely to especially annoy him, since "we're both Cherubim together, so we should get along.") As soon as he summons his Big Honkin' Sword, he'll garner some envy from the Michaelites, though. Naturally, he's attuned to Sophie. His Earth experience is minimal -- two missions. Clement is a peace-maker character, suitable for players who avoid getting involved with in-character strife.

GURPS Character Sheet

ST 16 [20]; **DX** 17 [30]; **IQ** 10 [-30]; **HT** 16 [20]

Advantages: Alertness +2 [10], Artifact: (Corporeal 1, Bastard Sword, Summonable for 0 Essence, Immediately Recognizable as Artifact) [18], Extra Hit Points +2 [10], Power Investiture (Corporeal 4, Ethereal 2, Celestial 3), Strong Will +2 [8], Vessel [30].

Disadvantages: Chummy [-5], Honesty [-10], Overconfidence [-10], Servitor of Judgment [-10].

Skills: Acting-8 [0.5], Artist-7 [0.5], Broadsword-17 [2], Brawling-16 [0.5], Climbing-12 [0], Detect Lies-7 [0.5], Driving (Car)-15 [0.5], Fast Draw (Rifle)-16 [0.5], Guns (Rifle)/TL7-17 [0.5], Running-13 [0.5], Stealth-12 [0], Swimming-16 [0.5], Two-handed Sword-15 [0.5].

Songs: Healing (Corporeal-7 [2], Ethereal-4 [1], Celestial-5 [1]), Shields (Corporeal-7 [2]), Numinous Corpus: Claws-8 [6].

In Nomine Character Sheet

Corporeal Forces - 4	Strength 8	Agility 8
Ethereal Forces - 2	Intelligence 3	Precision 5
Celestial Forces - 3	Will 6	Perception 6

Vessel: Human/2 (Body Hits: 48)

Skills: Artistry/1 (Drawing) [7], Detect Lies/1 [7], Dodge/1 [9], Driving/3 [8], Fighting/2 [14], Large Weapon/3 (Broadsword) [11], Lying/1 [7], Ranged Weapon/1 (Rifle) [6], Running/1 [9], Swimming/1 [9].

Songs: Healing (Corporeal/2 [6], Ethereal/1 [3], Celestial/1 [4]), Shields (Corporeal/2 [6]), Claws/4 [8].

Attunement: Cherub of Judgment

Artifact: Broadsword/1, Summonable for 0 Essence, Obviously a Relic

EBED-DAN

Elohite of Judgment

As a direct counter to Clement, Ebed-dan is an old-school Elohite who believes the Symphony is well-served by a bit of inflexible, inexorable Justice. If he didn't also believe in advising -- rather than overruling -- the Seraph of the triad, he'd be horribly annoying at best. He was last on Earth in the days of horses and crossbows, with a Role as a seaport tavern owner, and is suffering a bit of culture shock. (Naturally, he doesn't express it overmuch, lest it unsettle his Seraph, but pretending that he's Perfectly Fine would only lead to grief as well, in his objective opinion.) He's encountered enough hostility from Servitors of War to return it -- though typically only as aloofness and the occasional snide remark. (He did get his crossbow, since the Michaelites have *their* weapons.) Like Sophie, Ebed-dan is better for players with previous roleplaying experience.

GURPS Character Sheet

ST 10 [-30]; **DX** 12 [-15]; **IQ** 19 [60]; **HT** 13 [-10]

Advantages: Common Sense [10], Combat Reflexes [15], Extra Hit Point +1 [5], Musical Ability +3 [3], Power Investiture (Corporeal 2, Ethereal 4, Celestial 3), Rapier Wit [5], Servitor Attunement (Incarnate Law) [15], Vessel [30].

Disadvantages: Reduced Alertness -1 [-5], Servitor of Judgment [-10], Weak Will -3 [-24].

Skills: Acting-20 [4], Animal Handling-17 [1], Area Knowledge (1400s Italy)-19 [1], Artist-16 [0.5], Beverage-Making-20 [2], Brawling-11 [0.5], Cartography/TL3-18 [1], Cooking/TL3-20 [2], Cooperage-20 [2], Crossbow-14 [4], Detect Lies-16 [0.5], Diplomacy-16 [0.5], Escape-12 [4], Fast Draw (Arrow)-12 [0.5], Fire-Making (Flint Sparking)-14 [4], First Aid/TL3-20 [2], Forensics/TL3-16 [0.5], Games (Chess)-20 [2], Holdout-17 [0.5], Interrogation-17 [0.5], Knife-14 [4], Knife Throwing-12 [1], Language (1400s Italian)-19 [2], Law*-18 [2], Lockpicking/TL3-17 [0.5], Psychology-16 [0.5], Research-17 [0.5], Riding (Horse)-14 [1], Savoir-Faire-18 [0.5], Singing-17 [2], Stealth-14 [1], Tactics-16 [0.5], Veterinary/TL3-16 [0.5].

Song: Shields (Ethereal-16 [2])

*Besides being out-dated, Ebed-dan's Law skill is now subsumed by his Incarnate Law attunement.

In Nomine Character Sheet

Corporeal Forces - 2	Strength 3	Agility 5
Ethereal Forces - 4	Intelligence 8	Precision 8
Celestial Forces - 3	Will 5	Perception 7

Vessel: Human/2 (Body Hits: 12)

Skills: Artistry/1 (Drawing) [8], Detect Lies/1 [8], Dodge/1 [6], Riding/1* (Horse) [6], Emote/2 [9], Escape/1 [9], Fighting/1 [6], Lockpicking/1 [9], Lying/1 [9], Medicine/1 [9], Move Silently/2 [7], Ranged Weapon/1 (Crossbow) [9], Savoir-Faire/1 [9], Small Weapon/1 (Knife) [9], Tactics/1 [9]

Songs: Shields (Ethereal/2 [6])

Attunements: EloHITE of Judgment, Incarnate Law

*Riding (Horse) is based on Agility.

VANIAH

Malakite of Stone

While not the brightest gem in the quarry, Vaniah's good-hearted and devoted to the concept of *unity*, *dammit*. (Though it wasn't all-capital or profanity-ed until three minutes after she met the group she was supposed to keep together -- Dominicans and War-angels . . .) Though strong and sturdy, she often lets her mind wander when matters aren't immediately interesting. She's also got a very simple fighting style -- wade in swinging. This makes her easier to dodge, but once she connects with something, it's going to be pretty well smote. (Vaniah's for players who like smiting -- in moderation, as Stone's dissonance conditions forbid hitting first.)

GURPS Character Sheet

ST 17 [30]; **DX** 15 [10]; **IQ** 10 [-30]; **HT** 16 [20]

Advantages: Alertness +1 [5], Choir Attunements (Malakite of Stone [0], Mercurian of Stone [30]), Power Investiture (Corporeal 4, Ethereal 2, Celestial 3), Strong Will +2 [8], Vessel (Attractive) [35].

Disadvantages: Absent-Mindedness [-15], Easy to Read [-10], Servitor of Stone [-18].

Skills: Acrobatics-12 [0.5], Acting-10 [2], Brawling-15 [1], Climbing-13 [0.5], First Aid/TL7-9 [0.5], Running-13 [0.5], Staff-15 [4], Stealth-14 [1].

Songs: Form (Corporeal-13 [20]), Tongues (Corporeal-7 [1]), Numinous Corpus (Wings)-9 [4].

In Nomine Character Sheet

Corporeal Forces - 4 Strength 10 Agility 6

Ethereal Forces - 2 Intelligence 4 Precision 4

Celestial Forces - 3 Will 7 Perception 5

Vessel: Human/1, Charisma +1 (Body Hits: 50)

Skills: Acrobatics/1 [7], Climbing/1 [7], Detect Lies/1 [6], Emote/3 [8], Fighting/2 [16], Large Weapon/4 (Staff) [14], Medicine/1 [5], Move Silently/2 [8], Running/1 [11]

Songs: Form (Corporeal/6 [10]), Tongues (Corporeal/1 [5]), Wings/3 [7]

Attunements: Malakite of Stone, Mercurian of Stone

MINNI

Mercurian of the Sword

Minni is pert, perky, cute, and not what one would expect of a demonbane Laurencian. She's barely even excellent (by Sword standards) with her saber. On the other hand, her ability to dodge is boggling, especially when she feels like being acrobatic about it. She's looking forward to more Earth experience, and a Role as a Bounty Hunter. Now, if only War and Judgment could settle their differences and work together as God's Plan asks of angels. Sheesh! (Minni's a good character for someone who wants to play up the religious and faith aspects of *In Nomine*, or simply be an acrobat.)

GURPS Character Sheet

ST 12 [-15]; **DX** 16 [20]; **IQ** 14; **HT** 14

Advantages: Combat Reflexes [15], Enhanced Dodge [15], Power Investiture (all 3), Sanctity [5], Servitor of Laurence

[1], Vessel (Attractive) [35].

Disadvantages: Broad-Minded [-1], Imaginative [-1].

Skills: Acrobatics-16 [4], Climbing-14 [0.5], Dancing-14 [0.5], Detect Lies-11 [0.5], Diplomacy-11 [0.5], Driving (Car)-14 [0.5], Fast Draw (Sword)-16 [0.5], Fast-Talk-12 [0.5], First Aid/TL7-13 [0.5], Fencing-17 [4], Guns (Pistol)/TL7-17 [0.5], Judo-14 [1], Stealth-14 [0.5].

Songs: Charm (Corporeal-12 [8]), Numinous Corpus (Wings)-11 [4].

***In Nomine* Character Sheet**

Corporeal Forces - 3	Strength 5	Agility 7
Ethereal Forces - 3	Intelligence 6	Precision 6
Celestial Forces - 3	Will 6	Perception 6

Vessel: Human/1, Charisma +1 (Body Hits: 20)

Skills: Acrobatics/4 [11], Climbing/1 [8], Detect Lies/1 [7], Dodge/6 [13], Driving/1 [7], Fast-Talk/1 [7], Fighting/1 [9], Medicine/1 [7], Move Silently/1 [8], Ranged Weapon/1 (Pistol) [7], Savoir-Faire/1 [7], Small Weapon/4 (Saber)* [10]

Songs: Charm (Corporeal/5 [8]), Wings/3 [6]

Attunement: Mercurian of the Sword

* Use Shortsword values (***In Nomine***, p. 65) for a saber.

Strange Bedfellows Expanded

An Adventure in Two Parts Part One: The Adventure Begins

By Elizabeth McCoy

*(While full of **In Nomine**-specific details, this adventure could be stripped to the bare bones for other settings: someone is missing. The PCs need to find him, starting by searching his apartment for clues to where he might have gone. Once they find him, they need to rescue him -- and the child he's babysitting -- from enemies who are willing to kill to acquire the child. Many of the complications will still apply.)*

Overview

This is an expansion of the adventure seed, "Strange Bedfellows," from **Superiors 1: War & Honor**, pp. 136-137. It supplies NPCs and pregenerated PCs with both **GURPS** and **In Nomine** stats, allowing a Game Master to run it as a quick one-shot. (Or, due to length, a two-shot.) This isn't the only way it could be fleshed out, of course!

Each stage of the adventure lists a Goal, some Possible Solutions, and Complications. If the GM desires, the urgency of the main goal can be toned down, and *all* the complications used to make a short campaign arc.

The premise -- for those without **Superiors 1** -- is that a Cherub Vassel of War, Ziba, has hidden his Heart and gone to Earth. A Dominican triad discovered that he was AWOL before it could be dealt with "internally," and the agreement is that a mixed team of Judgment and War angels will be sent to get Ziba back. Since Judgment and War mix together about as well as nitro and glycerin, one of the Judges has sensibly called in some favors to get other angels assigned to the team as well -- Servitors of Stone and/or the Sword. (Of course, the GM can allow other kinds in as well or instead, but the pregenerated characters are Servitors of the Archangels from **Superiors 1**.)

Designed to be "newbie" friendly, the [pregenerated PCs](#) are relatively new-to-Earth angels, assigned to this hunt for some "seasoning." The GM can explain things as the plot goes along. A quick overview of the group's Archangels, the Bands and Princes is in order, with the most attention being paid to Lilim, Lilith, and Baal. The other Princes can be given one-sentence overviews; e.g., "Haagenti is the Calabite Prince of Gluttony, and is not known to be a heavy thinker. He's allied with Kobal, Impudite Prince of Dark Humor, whose job is to make suffering Funny." For GMs who wish to disguise the relevant information, a good excuse is that Lilith is a human ("and no one knows how Lucifer made her a Princess"), while Baal is Michael's opposite number. The expansion on Lilim can be excused as a digression because of Lilith's unique nature.

The players should know that some of the "meat" of this adventure is roleplaying the hostility of Michaelites toward Dominicans, and the determined, annoyed neutrality-if-it-kills-us-(mostly) of the Judgment triad toward the War angels -- while the Stone and/or Sword Servitors work on keeping the peace.

The senior member of the team is Parnach, Cherub of War (see *NPC*, below). Technically, he's in charge of the mission, since he's got the most Forces and is a friend of Ziba's. Michaelite characters should (technically) follow his lead.

The Judgment team is Seraph, Cherub, and EloHITE. Naturally, the Seraph (Sophereth) is in charge, but can be overruled if both of her triad-partners vote against her. Any of them may be NPCs -- if Sophie is, the GM may have her and Parnach argue frequently, to force the PCs to work together. A player-character Sophie sets the tone while NPC partner(s) follow her lead. (They'd be a bit passive, to save the GM's sanity.)

There are two other angels, there to keep the peace. Vaniah is a Malakite of Stone while Minni (whose name means

"prepared"), is a Mercurian of the Sword.

(*GM Note:* Dominic is unlikely to send two angels on Ziba's trail; either it's a full triad, or Parnach could be dropped and Sophie made the theoretical leader of this mission (probably with more than 9 Forces in this role). There should be at least one Michaelite along, and things will work more smoothly with at least one of Vaniah or Minni as a buffer.)

Part One: Starting Out

The team is assembled, equipped, and may exchange opening shots. They're then sent to the site of Ziba's last known location on Earth: his apartment. Unfortunately, no one has a key . . .

Goal: Get into Ziba's third-story apartment to search it for something personal so that Parnach can use his Song of Affinity to locate Ziba. Avoiding both excessive Symphonic disturbance and being arrested is a plus.

Possible Solutions: Convince the next-door neighbor to relinquish the spare key -- or at least accompany someone in. Sneak in the window (Corporeal Healing *will* work on windows, if they're not totally smashed). Pick the lock and get away before a nosy neighbor calls the police. Go celestial and zip inside the room, despite the disturbance.

Complications

- The next-door neighbor, Chris McClough, is a mundane, an atheist, and a UFO nut. (He's perfectly functional and normal, save on that one topic.) He might be fooled by someone impersonating Ziba (e.g., Corporeal Song of Form), or successfully convincing him that they need to get something Ziba borrowed. However, he's sensitive to "lights from the sky," and would respond to supernatural phenomena by grabbing his camcorder and filming it all with as much stealth as possible (so the aliens won't turn their anti-tech rays against him!). Of course, he'd respond to a mere burglary by calling the cops.
- The apartment immediately below Ziba's is owned by a couple with marital problems. While Mr. George Smithsen is on a business trip, Mrs. Linda Smithsen is at home and frequently tipsy from drinking George's prized wine collection. If contacted by the PCs, she makes a reaction roll to each one. If she gets a Good reaction/check digit 4+ to one of the male-vesseled ones, she'll make a pass. If she gets an Excellent reaction/check digit 6 to one, she'll make a pass no matter the gender! (This is to get back at her husband for having an affair (she's right, he is). She would, afterward, be guilty that she broke her marriage vows.) If Linda sees someone breaking into the apartment above, make the reaction roll -- on a Very Good/check digit 5+, the GM should assume that she's tipsy-to-drunk and will invite the burglar in! (She might threaten to call the police if refused, or offer sanctuary if the police are already on the way.) Otherwise, she just calls the cops.

On the Trail

Once the PCs have acquired some hair from Ziba's hairbrush, Parnach can use his Song of Affinity (with extra time or extra Essence) to start tracking Ziba. Clever use of triangulation -- if the PCs think of it, because Parnach won't -- will have Ziba stationary. He's still a city or two over, though. Now they just have to get there. (This should take at least a full 24 hours, which will restore 1 Essence to everyone at dawn.)

If the GM wants to be kind, the group has two cars, and can separate the Dominicans and Michaelites. For more opportunities to snipe, they have a minivan.

Goal: Getting from point A to point B, staying together (if with two cars), and negotiating the hazards of pump-your-own gas stations and late night biker gangs. As usual, Symphonic disturbance is frowned upon.

Possible Solutions: Carefully read the car manual regarding gas tanks, and the instructions on the gas pumps. Combat or evade any hostile mundanes.

Possible Complications

- Running out of gas in the middle of the night, or other [car trouble](#). At the least, an annoyance as the group must decide whether push the van to a gas station, or divide the group to send someone (or two) for gas while the rest wait. If there are no all-night gas stations nearby, or the complication below shows up, it can be a major delay.
- A nastier breed of biker gang, looking for trouble. If the PCs are in their cars or van, ignoring the gang will work -- after a few attacks with crowbars or chains, which will dent cars or crack windshields. (Convincing Michaelites not to retaliate may be difficult; appealing to Parnach's sense of urgency about the mission will work.) If the group is pushing the van, or waiting at the side of the road for someone to get back (such as Parnach), the gang stops to offer "rides" to female PCs and/or be generally insulting. Careful diplomacy or fast-talk can clear them off without violence (if the PCs are determined to avoid fighting), and supernatural displays may convince the bikers that something was in their beer, but it's far more likely that there'll be a rumble.

Gang Members: Figure one biker thug per PC present. **GURPS** - ST 11, DX 11, IQ 10, HT 10. Motorcycle-14, Brawling-12 and one of Broadsword-12 (used with crowbars, not swords), Flail-10 (with chains), or Knife-12.

Advantages: Toughness +1 or High Pain Threshold. **Disadvantages:** Bad Temper, Bully. **In Nomine** - Corporeal Forces 2 (Strength 5, Agility 3), Ethereal Forces 2 (Intelligence 3, Precision 5), Celestial Forces 1 (Will 3, Perception 1). Advantages: Toughness/1. Body Hits: 15. **Disadvantage:** Angry/1. Skills: Driving/5 [10], Fighting/3 [8], and one of (Large Weapon/3 (Crowbar) [8], Small Weapon/2 (Chain) [7], or Small Weapon/3 (Knife) [8]).

- If the fight goes against the PCs too severely, a second biker group will show up -- and aid the PCs. At least one has a cell phone to call police. (Not all bikers are violent bullies -- just the NPCs when a combat is desired.)

Non-Player Character

The **GURPS** character sheet presumes the Basic Celestial Template, p. IN9, and is built according to the guidelines on p. IN16: it gets Choir, and Choir Attunement for free, and buys the Duty and Superior Invocation package (usually as a disadvantage). The **In Nomine** sheet has target numbers in square-brackets, for ease of reference.

PARNACH

Cherub of War

Parnach is an older Cherub, and a bit hidebound -- he's unlikely to investigate unusual happenings unless ordered to do so, figuring that it's "just life." (This is why Ziba is a Vassel of War, and Parnach isn't.) Still, he's steady, reliable, has decent leadership skills, and is a surprisingly gentle soul for a minion of War -- he goes out of his way to make sure that innocent bystanders aren't damaged, and becomes morose if they are. He's also a sucker for soulful canine eyes, despite being a winged bull in celestial form, and keeps dog biscuits in his coat pockets in case he runs across a stray. Parnach has been in Heaven for a while, but isn't totally out of date.

Parnach's role in this adventure is to provide focus -- his goal is to find Ziba, without spending a long time on the various distractions provided. (If using this as a short campaign arc, he'll be less impatient.) If he's not used, the GM should either give the Ethereal Song of Affinity to someone else, or provide a loaner-relic.

Resonance Information

Malakite: Within the last week: most noble -- agreed to this joint mission, despite considering Judgmenters somewhere on the level of pond scum. Most ignoble -- let some students off easy in training, because he didn't want them to look bad in front of a roving triad. Within the last year, his most noble actions were: this mission; patiently training a group of Mercurians of other Archangels in the most non-damaging self-defense methods possible (instead of pushing them "just in case they encounter a demon," as many Michaelites would); and sneaking into a hospital to heal some victims of a car-chase between him and a couple of Calabim of Belial. Ignoble are: letting students off easy; not thinking of

investigating some suspicious (in retrospect) fires that turned out to be caused by the Fire Calabim; allowing bystanders to be damaged during the Calabim's attack. Most noble: entered Trauma in a kamikaze strike against a hostage-holding demon (successfully eliminating the danger to the innocent bystanders). Most ignoble: not noticing when a mortal lover followed her (female vessel) and got himself killed attempting to protect her from the Baalite Parnach was chasing.

Mercurian: Parnach considers himself immensely superior to the Judgment Servitors, more experienced than the other Michaelites, equal to Vaniah, and slightly superior to the Mercurian of the Sword -- this is enhanced by being the nominal leader of the expedition. The name most people call him is "Parn"; his geographic origins are North American; his cultural origins read as somewhat dated British (a contradictory combination that hints at his celestial nature, though a suitably quirky home life could also result in such readings); his job is "Teacher and Lead Troubleshooter of a Troubleshooting Team," and his hobbies are watching motorcycle races and attending dog shows. His relationships are teacher-to-student (none currently present), leader of the current team, and subordinate to his Boss (whom he basically worships without question). The importance of these relationships is in inverse order: his Boss is most important, his role as leader is next, and his role as teacher is (currently) least important.

Lilim: Show up the Dominicans so that they understand who's the better angel (Geas/2); Find Ziba (Geas/3); Save Ziba's fuzzy butt from the Dominicans (for Michaelite justice) (Geas/4); Get a Role that permits him to have a dog (Geas/5).

GURPS Character Sheet

ST 15; DX 15; IQ 13; HT 14.

Advantages: Alertness +1, Essence Control 11, Power Investiture (Corporeal 4, Ethereal 3, Celestial 4), Servitor Attunement (Howl), Vessel (human male).

Disadvantages: Incurious, Pacifism: Cannot Harm Innocents, Servitor of War [-8; p. IN40].

Skills: Animal Handling-10, Axe-16, Brawling-16, Climbing-13, Diplomacy-10, Fast Draw (Pistol)-14, First Aid/TL7-12, Guns (Pistol)/TL7-16, Leadership-12, Motorcycle (Medium/Heavy)-14, Orienteering-12, Savoir-Faire (Military)-12, Scrounging-12, Sex Appeal-11, Stealth-15, Survival (Urban)-12, Tactics-12, Teaching-12, Tracking-14, Traps/TL7-11, Two-handed Axe-15.

Songs: Affinity (Ethereal)-10, Form (Corporeal)-11, Healing (Corporeal)-9, Light (Celestial)-11.

In Nomine Character Sheet

11 Forces

Corporeal Forces - 4	Strength 8	Agility 8
Ethereal Forces - 3	Intelligence 5	Precision 7
Celestial Forces - 4	Will 7	Perception 9

Vessel: Human/2 (Body Hits: 48)

Role: none

Skills: Climbing/1 [9], Driving/1 [8], Fighting/3 [15 Corporeal], Knowledge/1 (Animal Handling) [6], Large Weapon/5 (Axe), Medicine/1 [8], Move Silently/3 [11], Ranged Weapon/1 (Pistol) [8], Survival/2 (Urban) [11], Tactics/3 [8], Tracking/4 [13]

Songs: Affinity* (Ethereal/3 [6]), Form (Corporeal/3 [7]), Healing (Corporeal/1 [5]), Light (Celestial/3 [7])

Attunements: Cherub of War, Howl

* The Songs of Affinity are akin to the Corporeal Song of Attraction; Ethereal Affinity requires some hair or blood.

Designer's Notes: Strange Synergy

by Mark Ahlquist

Last century, in 1985, years before *Magic: The Gathering* shook the gaming world, we were dabbling with cards that combined their effects in unpredictable ways. I remember reading *Magic* cards and thinking to myself, "They should've worded that one differently." Then, more often than not, the next edition of the card would read very closely to my guess. This is not because I'm some sort of super genius, but because some of the same issues the inventors of *Magic* were grappling with were already explored by me and my partner Brian, in our own game, *Strange Synergy*.

I wanted a game that would continue to surprise me even after playing it a hundred times. The answer, I felt, was in combinations. Super-simple rules, lots of cards that modify the rules. Take any three cards and the modifications would likely be interesting. (Actually, I didn't really think it through like that. I just wrote.)

The first draft of the rules fit easily on a three-by-five-inch index card. My memory of them is vague now, but they went something like, "Move: 1, Attack: 50%, Damage: 1(hard), Life: 10. Two actions per turn, per warrior."

For power cards I tore index cards in half. The powers were things like "bottle" and "swing on light." It represented a fight in an old west saloon.

I persuaded my brother to play and he whooped me 15 straight games; still, it was fun. We both wrote up some more power cards and played some more. Then more cards, and more playing. The objective was to destroy your enemies, but the real objective was to write cards that were cool and/or made your brother laugh. The saloon scenario was long forgotten.

More friends played in the days that followed, and they all wrote new power cards. Everyone had different concepts about the game mechanics, the physics of the game world, and even what the hell was going on. Why are these guys fighting? I had no idea. One kid figured they were giant monsters so he wrote the card "rocket-powered turtle shell." Another guy imagined super heroes so we got "elastic body" and "retractable claws." Yet another produced cards from high fantasy; "talking sword" and "unicorn" were added. And of course there were the downright silly, like "biggest hat ever." In one game I battled the "vengeful ghost" of "giant Bullwinkle balloon," equipped with "machine-gun nipples." I succumbed to this worthy foe, but since I had the "Kansasizer," my warrior awoke from a dream and the game was a draw.

I eventually realized this game was a winner. Everyone who played it played it enthusiastically, and wanted to play again. Why not publish it? So the fun part ended and the hard work began. I accidentally used the phrase "hard work," and when I looked up, only my good friend Brian was still there.

Good thing he was, too, because the game was a killer. It was easy and fun to come up with crazy new powers, but now we had to make them all get along. Cards like "Fast" just add to a warrior's speed, no problem. But a card like Giant Magnet adds new physics to the game world. Are smoke bombs magnetic? Smoke Bombs create line-of-sight issues. But what about Stench? Stench is omni-directional! Surely nothing beats Stench. Hold on, Robot Body is immune to Stench, but makes the warrior magnetic . . .

I wasn't comfortable with cards that added new physics. As a purist, I felt that each card should be entirely self-contained, and resolve its own issues. But then I wrote "Bat Wings." I went nuts trying to write all the rules for flying on one card. They just wouldn't fit. And each other gadget or mutation that enabled flight had their own quirks that would have to be described on the card too. I gave up and wrote flight into the rules, but I didn't like it.

Flight turned out to be a can of worms of a different color. It seemed to screw up everything. Now, two warriors could occupy a single space. Was it a diagonal attack to strike at someone who was flying? How high could they fly? Where is this battle taking place anyway? We finally decided to remove the third dimension altogether, but keep it in reserve for a possible expansion. As it turned out, no one missed it.

The difference between magnetism and flight was that magnetism added some real interaction to play. Now you could move your enemies around if they didn't let go of the magnetic thing, and it really mattered when there were bottomless pits around. Flight just let you move over bottomless pits, and there were sneakier ways to do that.

So the game was written card by card, and rewritten many times. Finally we said, "Perfect enough!" We pitched it to Steve Jackson Games. He responded that he liked it, but since it was heavy on components, it would be on the back burner.

Then 10 years later he e-mailed us: "We're finally ready to move on ***Strange Synergy*** . . ." Oddly, it wasn't overcooked a bit. In fact, they suggested many small improvements of the kind where you say, "Now why didn't I think of that?"

Amusingly, the SJ Games development team had some questions about certain cards, but Brian and I hadn't really thought about them for years. It had been a while since we had played the game, and we were busy with other projects. Luckily Brian had many of our old drafts stored away. He pulled out the rules and cards and we looked them over. We realized that to answer their questions we needed to know which version of the game they had. Brian always insisted we keep meticulous track of version numbers, and I said it was a waste of time. Boy, was I proven wrong.

Our duty was clear. We had to play the game a bunch of times to refamiliarize ourselves with it. The old gang was called out of retirement, just like in the *Blues Brothers*. We played into the wee hours. Hilarity ensued, but in the end the verdict was unanimous. ***Strange Synergy*** is still a blast!

Cludge

Classless, Levelless, Universal d20 Gaming Environment

by Owen K.C. Stephens

There's no avoiding the fact that **d20 System** games are everywhere. For players who enjoy the basic **d20 System** engine, with its strong class and level mechanics, this is great. There are enough sourcebooks that even if your favorite genre isn't covered, it can be put together from elements of other **d20 System** games. Quality varies wildly, but a number of well-written supplements and adventures exist, giving the discerning gamer extensive support for his **d20 System** campaigns. But for players who don't like the basic premises of the **d20 System** engine, the flood of material compatible with it can be annoying.

Two of the biggest complaints against **d20 System** games are that they're strongly tied to classes and levels, and can't easily be adapted to ignore these concepts. The main drawback of class/level game systems are that certain common character concepts cannot be easily made, and characters achieve power in large blocks that soon propel them to dizzying heights of power. They can also be very difficult to adapt to new genres. Even if there are elements of **d20 System** games you could combine into a new campaign setting, the feel of the game is limited to an epic heroic progression by tiered power levels. Players are also limited to character concepts supported by an existing class unless the GM is willing to write whole new classes for his setting, and try to ensure they're all balanced against each other.

For groups who want the freedom to, for example, create a pulp-style Victorian game set in 1900, drawing from elements of old west, prehistoric, fantasy and even Asian games, setting the heroes at a single consistent power level well above that of normal mortals, it would be useful to have a system that ignored classes and levels, but was still compatible with standard **d20 System** games. This article presents a set of game sub-rules designed to be a Classless, Levelless, Universal d20 Gaming Environment (Cludge). By stripping away the class system and allowing character skills, feats and special abilities to be purchased à la carte, Cludge frees characters from the constraints of a few archetypes and allows games to be set at a consistent power level.

Cludge is most useful for gamers who enjoy most aspects of typical **d20 System** games, but want more freedom to create a specific gaming style within those rules. Of course the system isn't perfect, and lacks the strong game balance and organization mechanics most **d20 System** games promote as strengths. Put simply, Cludge is a kludge. But for gamers who are already familiar with **d20 System** game mechanics who want to explore new ideas and niche genres without writing their own sourcebooks, Cludge allows for quick and unfetter experimentation. Equipment, monsters, spell systems and stylistic rules can be taken from any number of different games, and easily Cludged together.

Basic Rules

Cludge does not replace any normal **d20 System** rules other than character creation and advancement systems. Rules for combat, social interaction, alignment, equipment, magic, and condition definitions are covered by whatever core **d20 System** rulebook you choose to take them from. It's best to pick a single **d20 System** rule set to answer these questions, though of course you may wish to add elements from other books.

Though Cludge characters may draw upon any rulebook the GM is comfortable allowing into his campaign, it's best to stick to one edition of each rules set. If taking rules from a series of **d20 System** books about star knights, make sure you draw all the rules from the same edition of that game. This avoids confusion and contradiction from two characters having skills or feats with the same name but different game effects.

It's important for GMs to remember Cludge is *not* self-balancing. Though the system is consistent, clever players can quickly find combinations of feats and powers that are more powerful than others. A GM must enforce his own best judgement both to prevent gross abuses of the system, and to ensure characters match his view of whatever genre the

Cludge campaign is emulating.

Power Rank

A campaign's Power Rank determine numerous things about the player characters in it. It is roughly equivalent to class level in a traditional **d20 System** game. When a GM sets the game's Power Rank he is determining the approximate power of the characters for the duration of the campaign. Whatever level of play the group most enjoys should be selected as the game's Power Rank. For example, a group of gamers who most enjoy playing 5th-7th level characters should set their Cludge game at a Power Rank of 6.

The Power Rank sets the number of Attribute and Character points characters get, as well as the maximum Attribute bonus and skill ranks. In most Cludge games character's Power Rank rarely if ever increases, though characters can grow and expand themselves within a set Rank.

It's important to note that just because all the player characters are set at a single Power Rank, that doesn't mean all NPCs are at the same rank. Mooks and thugs can and should be set at lower levels (often significantly lower), and major enemies and allies may well have a higher Power Ranks. As a general rule, characters have a CR equal to their Power Rank. A GM may decide to use the normal class and level system for minor NPCs, rather than taking the time to design them as Cludge characters.

Ability Scores

You can use any of the numerous methods for determining ability scores published in various **d20 System** core rulebooks. Characters may buy up ability scores using character points (see below). In many cases, groups that prefer Cludge to normal games also prefer point-buy ability score systems. A simple point-buy system for heroic characters is presented below, but a GM should feel free to modify any ability score system he likes for his own Cludge games.

For standard Cludge ability score generation characters start with 8s in all their scores, and have 24 ability points to buy up their ability scores. Games stating at a higher Power Rank should give characters an additional (Power Rank/2) ability points.

Ability Score	Ability Points
8	0
9	1
10-11	2
12-13	3
14	4
15	5
16	7
17	9
18	12

Knacks

A character's knacks are one-time bonuses that cannot be bought up. They may represent innate bent, childhood training, or just talents picked up as part of a character's background. All characters get two and only two knacks regardless of the campaign's Power Rank. Each knack may be selected only once.

Knacks

- +2 to Fort Saves
- +2 to Reflex Saves

- +2 to Will Saves
- +10 Class Skills
- +5 Proficiencies

Attributes

Characters receive a number of Attribute Points equal to the game's Power Rank $\times 4$. These are spent to determine things normally assigned by a character's class in other **d20 System** games. A character's Attributes can be bought up using experience, at a rate of 15 Experience Points per Attribute Point (see Experience Points, below). Attribute Points are assigned as bonuses to a character's Attributes, which have a base of 0 or 4 (in the case of Class Skills).

These numbers are assigned to your:

- Base Attack Bonus
- Fortitude Saves
- Reflex Saves
- Will Saves
- d10 Hit Dice
- Class Skills +4 (No Power rank limit)
- Bonus Feats
- Spellcasting Power

Base Attack Bonus: Attribute Points spent equal the character's base attack bonus. This works just like an attack bonus gained from class and level in typical **d20 System** games. A character who's base attack bonus is +6 or higher gains multiple attacks if he takes a full attack action. Additional attacks are at a bonus five lower than the previous attack. For example, a character with a +12 base attack bonus may make three attacks with a full attack action, at base attack values of +12/+7/+2.

Fortitude Saves: This is the character's base Fort save, to which is added his Con modifier, and any other modifier gained from racial abilities, feats or special effects, just as with normal **d20 System** games.

Reflex Saves: This is the character's base Reflex save, to which is added his Dex modifier, and any other modifier gained from racial abilities, feats or special effects, just as with normal **d20 System** games.

Will Saves: This is the character's base Will save, to which is added his Wis modifier, and any other modifier gained from racial abilities, feats or special effects, just as with normal **d20 System** games.

d10 Hit Dice: this is the number of 10-sided hit dice the character gets, adding his Con modifier to each. The first hit die is automatically considered to be a 10, and further hit dice are re-rolled if they produce a result of 5 or less. A character with no d10 hit dice gets 4 + Con modifier hit points, though this is replaced by his first d10 hit die.

In games using some other form of health, each rank of this Attribute should be as useful as a level of the warrior/soldier/fighter class common to the **d20 System** game the health rules are taken from.

Class Skills +4: This is the number of skills the character treats as class skills. This Attribute has a base of 4, which is added to the Attribute value assigned (for example, a character who assigns +1 to Class Skills has 5 class skills). The player decides what skills are class skills up to his maximum, with all other skills considered cross-class skills. Unlike other Attributes, a character's class skills may be assigned a value in excess of the campaign's Power Rank.

Bonus Feats: This is the number of bonus feats the character receives. The character must fulfill the prerequisites for these feats normally. A GM may wish to restrict bonus feats to a particular category (all combat feats, or all metamagic feats), depending on the style of the campaign.

Spellcasting Power: This is the casting level of any special effects the character gains access to (see below). When the

character uses magic items, their maximum casting level may also be restricted to the character's spellcasting power. This Attribute also replaces spellcaster level as a prerequisite or item creation feats.

Optional Attributes

The conventions of a particular genre or play style may call for Attributes other than those presented here. A GM could add a Defense Bonus (granting the character an innate Dodge bonus to AC/Defense), Max Skill Ranks (requiring characters to buy the right to have more than a few ranks in their skills), superpowers (if adapting a superhero genre's rules to Cludge). Similarly, a campaign might decide to do away with Special Effect Power or Hit Dice, setting those automatically at a campaign's Power Rank (or ½ Power Rank, or whatever the GM decides fits his game).

To maintain the power balance presented in Cludge, characters should receive a number of attribute points equal to the number of Attributes used /2 at each Power Rank. Of course a campaign can produce more powerful characters by handing out more Attribute Points, or weaker ones by offering less.

Character Points

Character points are used to buy feats, skills, special effects, innate abilities and additional wealth. Character start with 20 character points, +20 per Power Rank of the campaign. Thus characters in a PR 5 game begin with 120 character points. Additional character points may be bought with Experience Points, at the rate of one Character Point per Experience Point spent (see Experience Points, below).

Ability Scores

It takes 8 character points to buy one additional ability point, which is then used to buy ability scores using the ability score chart. A GM using a flat one-for-one ability score point-buy or random ability score determination should charge 10 character points per ability score.

Feats

Every character starts with one feat for free. Additional feats may be granted by your Attributes or race. Additional feats cost 5 character points, +1 character point for each feat prerequisite the feat taken has. You must qualify for the feat normally.

Proficiencies are considered half-feats (you get two weapon or armor proficiencies for each feat slot expended). A GM should select proficiency categories appropriate for his campaign, possibly taking them from a standard ***d20 System*** core rulebook. A proposed set of proficiencies is present below.

- Light Armor
- Medium Armor (requires light armor)
- Heavy Armor (requires medium armor)
- Simple Archaic Weapons (standard fantasy simple weapons and thrown, including grenades)
- Martial Archaic Weapons (standard fantasy martial weapons, requires archaic simple)
- Pistols
- Longarms
- Cannons
- Siege Gear (catapults and such)
- Eclectic (any 5 specific non-exotic weapons)
- Exotic (any 1 exotic weapon)

Skill Points

Characters receive a number of skill points equal to their Int mod $\times$ (Power Rank +3). Additional skill points cost one Character Point each.

A character may buy a maximum number of ranks of a class skill equal to the game's Power Rank +3, and half this number of ranks of cross-class skills. Class skills cost 1 skill point per rank, while cross-class skills cost 2 skill points per rank. If a character gains additional class skills (by buying up his class skills Attribute) his new maximum ranks and cost per rank improve, but the ranks he has already bought are unaffected.

Special Effects

For Cludge, special effects are any amazing powers, such as spellcasting, psionics, or mutant superpowers, granted to a normal **d20 System** class with an increase in access (level of ability and uses per day) at each level of that class. This includes the spellcasting ability of standard **d20 System** fantasy bards, clerics, druids, paladins, psionics, rangers, sorcerers, and wizards, and similar special effects from many other **d20 System** games. All special effects have a casting level (for level-dependent effects, such as range, duration and damage dice) equal to the character's Spellcasting Power Attribute.

To access special effects, a character must pay a "buy-in" cost. For a standard campaign, this is 15 points, allowing the character to use items as a member of the class. Each level of access to special effects of that class cost an additional 15 character points. Thus a Cludge character who wants to have access to spells as a 5th level wizard must spend 90 character points (15 to buy into the wizard, then an additional 75 for 5 levels of special effect access). Of course these spells are cast at the characters spellcasting power Attribute.

For games with low access to special effects, the buy-in and access cost for spells and similar abilities can be increased, though it shouldn't go higher than 25 unless special effects are extremely rare in a campaign. Lowering the cost makes special effects much more common, and costs shouldn't be lowered to less than 10.

In a campaign where low-level special effects are common, but more powerful ones rare, the cost changes from a flat cost to a graduated scale. The buy in costs maybe reduced, but most importantly access costs 5 points per level of access bought, with each rank bought separately. Thus 1st level access costs 5 character points, 2nd level an additional 10, and 3rd level an additional 15. This produces a game with lots of characters having low and mid level special effects, but very few with high level access.

Innate Abilities

Cludge characters can buy the special abilities of any normal **d20 System** character class as innate abilities by spending character points. All innate ability purchases must be approved by the game's GM. A GM may wish to double the cost of innate abilities taken from more than one standard **d20 System** character class ($\times 2$ cost for a second class, $\times 3$ for a third, and so on), depending on the style of the campaign.

Abilities that automatically increase in power as you go up in level (such as animal companions, familiars, a monk's armor class bonus and bardic knowledge) but are not special effects (see above) have a cost of 6 +1 per level of effect (to a maximum of the game's Power Rank). Thus a character who wanted the animal companion ability of a 6th-level druid would spend 12 character points.

A character may have a 0-level special effect as a special ability 3 times per day for 5 points. A 1st-level spell three times a day costs 10 points, and a 2nd level 20. These are cast at the character's spellcasting level. A character's spellcasting level for a single special effect bought as an innate ability may be increased for 2 character points per +1.

Other abilities from standard **d20 System** game classes not already covered by previous Cludge rules may be bought piecemeal. The cost is the level a class gains the ability $\times 2$. If the ability is an extension of a lower level ability, you must buy the lower level ability first. Normally a character may not buy an ability gained at a level higher than the

Cludge game's Power Rank, though a GM may make an exception. Characters are also limited to no more than one of these innate abilities per Power rank.

Racial Traits

It costs nothing to be a member of a standard **d20 System** race with no ECL adjustment. Most racial traits (special powers granted to a race) may be purchased by members of other races for 10 character points. Races with ECL shifts cost 15 character points per ECL value to play. A character cannot normally change his race after character creation, though such special effects as polymorph spells, shapeshifting, cybernetics, and nanites may allow for such a thing in some Cludge games.

Gear

Cludge doesn't have independent equipment rules. The GM of a Cludge game must select a base set of **d20 System** game rules and use them. Assuming the rules selected have equipment amounts defined by level, Cludge characters receive the starting equipment of a character the same level as the campaign's Power Rank. A character may increase his starting equipment by one level for 15 character points, and may increase it by 2 levels for 50. (If the GM wants money to be usually useful increase these costs; if it's less effective lower them).

Minor special items (things that could be bought at the character's normal equipment level, but are not commonly available) cost 5 character points each. Medium special items (things that could be bought with an equipment level one or two higher than the character's) cost 15 points each. Major special items (things the character couldn't possibly afford but the GM is willing to allow in his campaign, such as steam-punk submersibles with crews, and secret bases in the Alps) cost 20 character points.

Peerage/Memberships

Rather than spend character points to be a member of a group, a GM should set prerequisites required for membership. A GM may decide to restrict a character from buying the abilities of a prestige class unless the character meets prerequisites appropriate to the class.

Experience

Cludge uses a much smaller scale for experience, as it translates directly to Character Points, and can be used to increase a character's Attributes. As a basic rule, give characters 1 experience point for a typical four-hour game session. If a game is particularly long or particularly difficult, give 2 experience points. A game that is both long and difficult is worth 3 experience points. Additionally if players stay in character, do excellent roleplaying and come up with interesting and entertaining ideas, grant 1 (or rarely 2) bonus experience points.

A GM may want to increase a game's Power Rank after a long running campaign has gone on for an extensive period. As a rule of thumb, every 75 Experience Points you can increase the game's PR by 1. Characters gain an additional 4 Attribute points and 20 Character Points, and re-figure anything based on the campaign's PR (such as max ranks for skills and skill points from Int).

Some **d20 System** games have feats or spells that cost experience points to use. Rather than spend the much rarer Cludge experience directly, characters should be allowed to buy "pools" of experience for item creation and spellcasting. For each experience point spent, the character gains a pool of Power Rank $\times 2$ "experience points" to be spent on item creation and spells.

Pyramid Pick

Testament: Roleplaying In The Biblical Era (for d20 System)

Published by [Green Ronin Publishing](#)

Written by Scott Bennie

Edited by Spike Y. Jones

Cover by Sam Wood

Interior Illustrations by Ilya Astrakhan, Kent Burles, Toren "Macbin" Atkinson, Chris Keefe, Mike May, Josh Parker, Chris Martinez, & James Smith

Cartography by Todd Gamble

240-page black & white perfect bound softback; \$32.95

The first release in Green Ronin Publishing's "Mythic Vistas" line has the potential to offend a large segment of the community, and unfortunately were they to become aware of it, quite possibly will. Yet having read through *Testament: Roleplaying In The Biblical Era*, there is relatively little here to cause such offense. One might be the chronological dating system it employs, another the proofreading errors that are really silly mistakes, but the first is to be found on the back cover of the book. The all too bold strap line, "You've Read The Book, Now Play The Game!" really is dreadfully awful in its triteness. Although that said, the publishers deserve something for having the chutzpah to use it.

Part of the real reason that *Testament* should not be cause for offense is that it is *not* just another Christian-themed roleplaying game, even arguably, a Christian-themed roleplaying game at all. This is because it is set firmly in the Mythic Ages described by the *Old Testament*, and it consciously strives to be religiously neutral. For example, the dating system is denoted as BCE and CE -- Before Common Era and Common Era -- rather than Western society's BC and AD, but even this is cause for offense to some. Yet religion is still important and central to *Testament*, not just that of the Israelites, but also that of the Canaanites, Egyptians, and Mesopotamians. Plus their geography, culture, history and culture receive equal treatment, though the bulk of this supplement is given over to the Israelites. This isn't a surprise, given their particular prominence within the source material.

Testament: Roleplaying In The Biblical Era is also set across 3,000 years of history, through many different eras, each slightly different from the last and all available to game within. They begin in the Antediluvian Era, approximately 3000 BCE; Pre-Egypt, approximately 2000 to 1800 BCE, the time of Abraham to Joseph and the founding of the Twelve Tribes; the Exodus from Egypt, 1274 to 1234 BCE; the Time of the Judges, 1234 to 1028 BCE when the tribes moved into Canaan; the Early Kingdom of Saul, David, and Solomon, 1028 to 924 BCE; the Two Kingdoms, 924 to 587 BCE; the Exile of Israel's elite throughout the Assyrian Empire, 587 to 539 BCE; the Return from Exile in Assyria, 539 to 323 BCE; and the time of the Maccabees and the threat of the Seleucid Empire, 323 to 135 BCE.

This wide range of eras also makes *Testament* both a Bronze and an Iron Age RPG . . . which isn't to say somewhere

in between, as the latter metal appears and supplants the former. The scope is equally wide for characters. There are not just Israelite Levite Priests, Psalmists, Judges, or Champions of Israel, but also Canaanite Idol-Makers, or Qedeshots; Babylonian Magi of the Starry Host and Royal Astrologers; and Egyptian Khery-Hebs, Master Charioteers, or Ren-Hakaus. Even though the focus of the Testament is upon the Israelites and their history, the inclusion of these other peoples and their classes makes this supplement something more akin to a Bronze/Iron Age RPG set within the Middle East.

As this is a game based on the *Old Testament*, it has both an epic and a mythic quality to it, for which the heroism of ***Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition*** -- sans Elves, Dwarves, *et al* -- is well-suited. Thus Samson has a Strength score of 20, Solomon is literally filled with the Wisdom of the Lord (possessing a Wisdom of 30 a Will save bonus of +25), and both Angels and Devils are powerful beings that -- for the most part -- remain hidden from the eyes of men. This is neither due to invisibility nor ethereality, but rather to a state of divine or infernal grace. This is a world, in which deities -- *all* deities -- are real, for ***Testament*** makes no claim that one or more are in fact false. Instead, each god is real to their faithful, and characters may interact with them and other great beings, and in doing so may forge the destiny of their nation and people.

Once a GM has decided upon the Era for his game, players create their characters as is normal for almost any ***d20 System*** game. Characters can only be Humans, and choice of race is limited to Egyptian; Israelite; and Canaanite, which may be native Canaanites, Phoenicians, or Philistines depending upon the Era; or Babylonian, which may be Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian or Assyrian, again depending upon Era. The choice of Era will also determine the range of languages known to the characters, while Race does the same for available classes. These can come from the ***Player's Handbook*** or be one of the 14 new classes given in ***Testament***.

For those wanting a more Biblical flavor to their game, the Levite Priest replaces the Cleric class for Israelites, and is a far less showy spellcaster. To refresh a cast spell, a Levite Priest must perform sacrifices to God and may find some spells difficult to cast anyway, including the *Summon Monster* series, *Find Traps*, and *Flame Strike*. At higher levels, they can speak with serpents, cause plagues with ease, and even Turn or Rebuke Dragons, which in this setting are Sin Dragons. The Psalmist replaces Bard, and sings inspiring and powerful songs praising the God of Israel, which is particularly useful on the battlefield. Judges help settle disputes, but times can also be military leaders and prophets, while the actual Prophet Prestige Class maintains close ties with the God of Israel, often warning the Israelites of their transgressions. Of course, the Champion of Israel Prestige Class has a far more martial bent.

Since the Israelites view the use of sorcery as blasphemous, they have no classes that use Arcane magic. Indeed, all of the Israelite spell casting classes are Divine in nature. Further, ***Testament*** suggests that the alignment system of ***D&D3e*** be replaced with a Piety score, which measures how attuned a character is with what a moral person is regarded as being by his culture. The more attuned that he is, and the higher his Piety score is, the better a character's chance of asking his deity for a boon. This might be a temporary increase of his hit points, the temporary improvement of Saving Throws and Skill Checks, the smiting of evil, and the seeking of divine inspiration. Piety can be gained by observing his faith's strictures, which the rules cover as any reduction in Piety from sins committed or becoming Unclean. Both loss of Piety and being Unclean can cause a character a loss of class abilities. Piety can also be given out as awards for completing missions for both a character's nation and his deity.

The other races also have their own classes. For Egyptians, the Khery-Heb or "Reader of Scrolls" replaces the Wizard class, but they also possess divine qualities as well. They can cast spells that fall within their god's domain read from scrolls that they write, can create charms *and* later on, can enhance their scrolls with metamagic feats. The Ren-Hakau is an Egyptian Prestige Class, a devout worshipper of Thoth, and masters of the magic of names, words and particularly, True Names. The Magus of the Starry Host is the Babylonian equivalent to the Khery-Heb, but draw their spells from the worship and study of the stars and the heavens, even having to go on pilgrimages to view particular stars in order to gain new spells. Though branded as prostitutes by Biblical Prophets, the Qedeshot is an important figure in Canaanite fertility religion, a cross between the Bard and Cleric classes with elements of the "Houri" class from *White Dwarf* magazine. Her powers come spells, dances and kisses, with her devotions ensuring the fertility of the Canaanite people and lands. ***Testament's*** only general class is the Spy, but there are several general Prestige Classes also. These include the Desert Hermit, the Idol-Maker of personnel idols and those intended for religious purposes; the Master Charioteer and the Royal Astrologer, this last a subset of the Cleric, the Magus of the Starry Host

and the Khery-Heb.

Characters must also take a Flaw as part of the creation process, which represents the struggle with weakness that every person has. These should be unacceptable to the native society of the character, thereby being a source of trouble for the character and roleplaying for the player. The long list includes Boaster, Bully, Deceitful, Drunkard, Proud, Profane, Tragic, and Vain. The many characters written up in the history section of **Testament** all include one or more of these flaws.

The many classes are backed up with a wide range of feats, the majority of which fall into the Divine, Battlefield, or General categories. Some of the General feats are even more particular, such as Mountain Born, which is innate to Canaanite or Israelite characters and improves their Climb and Wilderness Lore checks and eases their movement rates through hills and mountains. The feats move a step up in potency to tie in with the setting's mythic aspect with several Mythic Feats. **Testament** suggests that a character take just one of these, but even then, possession of any of the Mythic feats would indicate a great hero. They include Celestial Charioteer, able to drive the very vehicles of the gods; Friend of Beasts, whom no animal will attack; God Spell, enabling a spellcaster to interchange between Divine and Arcane spell slots; and Slaughter Ground Champion, which makes a warrior adept at fighting amidst a sea of foes.

This last feat falls into the Battlefield category and ties in with the rules provided to handle the Biblical Battlefield, which encompass three types of battle: the Realistic, the Heroic, and the Mythic. In some ways, the Biblical Battlefield Resolution System is quite simple; for example, the rules for terrain not unreasonably assume that battles of the age took place on relatively flat ground. Troops come in three qualities: Green, Veteran, or Legendary and are organized into wings that simply face their enemy across the battlefield, with battles run pretty much as personal combat would be, treating each wing or unit as a character. This is fairly standard to most mass combat systems for the **d20 System**, but the Biblical Battlefield Resolution System allows for a great deal of player input -- not just tactics, but taking the roles of captains who can command wings or fight their enemy counterparts to influence the outcome of the battle. Better still, the rules come with a very detailed example that makes learning the system very easy.

Testament: Roleplaying In The Biblical Era is similar to the **King Arthur Pendragon RPG** in that the players are encouraged to build and involve themselves in a community, taking wives, fathering a dynasty, and so on. Where **Pendragon** is set in the romantic feudalism of Arthurian Britain, **Testament** is of course set in the Bronze Age of the Middle East and is a far dryer milieu, both in terms of game and climate. The rules for Community Management cover the survival of a community and provide a variety of random events that can beset such community, around which a GM could easily build a campaign. They go hand in hand with the guidelines for goods, services and trade, which work not on the payment of gold or some other form of money, but through barter, which again could very easily be the source for an adventure.

A lengthy chapter contains all of the new spells for the setting and the many new classes, as well as the new domains of Desert, Heaven, Fertility, Pestilence, and Thunder. There are new special abilities for magical weapons and armor. Weapons can be consecrated and inflict extra damage on holy ground; be capable of multiplying criticals, requiring further attack rolls to increase the weapon's critical multipliers; and even be thorny to the touch. Armor can be Holy or Unholy, and with the Virtue quality can transfer its protection value to another person -- very useful to bodyguards. The actual magic items run from simple incenses and charms right up to major artifacts; yes, this does include the Ark of the Covenant and its contents!

The new creatures are organized much as the rest of the **Testament**, into their cultures, interpreting them as the Israelites, Canaanites, Egyptians, and Mesopotamians would have viewed them. Thus the Angels of the Israelites are not categorized into their Medieval Hierarchies of benign servants of the Lord, but come as four simple types: Cherubim or Storm Angels, Malachim or Messenger Angels, Mazzalim or Guardian Angels, and Seraphim or Fire Angels. Evil is represented by a number of demons and also by the new Sin Dragon and the Leviathan; and in games set in the Antediluvian Era, GMs will want to make use of the giant Nephilim, being the offspring of Angels and men, as well as the Half-Nephilim template.

Almost half of **Testament** is devoted to the history, geography, culture, religion, and magic of each society. And of this half itself, half of that is completely given over to the Israelites and their long history as chronicled in the *Old*

Testament. Proceeding Era by Era, the events of the period and an approximate timeline are given, along with notes and statistics for some of its major and important figures. Thus for the Exodus, there are write-ups for Moses and his brother Aaron, a note that the effects of the 10 plagues that beset Egypt are the province of God or gods and not the player characters, along with a discussion as to when the Exodus *might* have happened. At the end of every Era, there are notes on possible roleplaying campaigns set within the period. These only run to a few paragraphs, and therein lays the main problem with this supplement.

It is not that the advice is bad, nor is it useless; it is in fact worthy of the material it supports. Rather, it is that there is not enough of it, as it gets lost in the swathes of background detail that the author gives. A seasoned GM will have no problem in extracting ideas from said background, but playing a game or campaign of *Testament* is another matter. Of course, it is only the Israelites that would suffer from this problem, but then they are the main focus of this book.

The actual level of detail and information given in *Testament* is staggering, clearly having been most thoroughly researched by both the author and the book's editor and developer, Spike Y. Jones (also the editor of *GURPS Egypt*), which is backed up by an extensive bibliography of books, games and websites at the back of this book. In fact, there is so much information that Green Ronin has had to reduce the size of the body text to eight-point type so that they could get everything in. Even then, it feels as if there was still more that the author wanted and could have included much more material. The result of this is that the book has a very tight layout, with not a single space having gone to waste. Initially, the font size, laid out over a gray background, does make *Testament* a daunting prospect to read and is likely to put off quite a few potential purchasers, but this is countered by the author's direct and engaging style, and of course the information itself.

There are, however, one or two typographical errors that may raise the ire of some. Most notably are the misquotations of two of the Ten Commandments. The 9th Commandment is given as, "You shall bear false witness against your neighbor," while the 10th includes " . . . You shall not cover your neighbor's wife . . ." Well, these do twist the meanings of these strictures and really, this is a daft kind of error. So perhaps in a project as big as this book has been, it is also forgivable one.

Although not a Christian roleplaying game as such, there is nothing to prevent *Testament* from being run as a campaign that focuses upon the founding of the Judean-Christian faith. Given the Israelite focus within the book, *Testament* would very much support this kind of game, but perhaps this would be to miss out on the more Mythic aspects of the setting and of the four very different other cultures presented within its pages, as they clash with each other across the region. It would not negate their use as protagonists and the like, of course.

Testament: Roleplaying In The Biblical Era is a staggeringly ambitious project, one that very successfully presents a toolkit for running a game or campaign across three millennia of both history and mythology. It contains a very thorough treatment of Israelite culture, and a credible one for each of the Canaanites, Egyptians, and Mesopotamians as well. Certainly these are the best (and very probably the first) such treatments of the Canaanite and Mesopotamian civilizations, and indeed there is enough information here to run games based in their societies and that of the Egyptians using the *d20 System*. This supplement is a superb start to Green Ronin's Mythic Vistas line and if the rest are as good as *Testament: Roleplaying In The Biblical Era*, then they are well worth their weight and page count.

On a more personal note, as a nominal but non-practicing Christian and agnostic, I would never have considered playing in any of the previously published Christian-themed RPGs. That stance has changed after having read through *Testament*, and a Biblically set mythic game is far more enticing prospect.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Mystery of the Abbey

Published by [Days of Wonder](#)

Designed by Bruno Faidutti and Serge Laget

Illustrations by Julien Delval and Emmanuel Roudier

Graphic Design by Cyrille Daujean

Boxed Set Board Game for 3-6 Players; \$44.95

Students of board and card games recognize that nearly every new game they encounter falls into one of several rough categories defined by a particular game mechanic or type of player interaction. Even the most unique or revelatory of the European board games, for instance, will have discernible roots in a classic game or genre. The venerable ***Settlers of Catan*** owes at least a portion of its engaging gameplay to the classic trading game ***Pit***. Territorial wargames are frequently nothing more than souped-up ***Risk***. Numerous card games adapt trick-taking mechanics from Bridge and Hearts. Despite the pervasiveness of this gaming vocabulary even in the hobby's most distant and distinctive corners, it is still occasionally surprising to discover where today's game designers will garner their inspiration; it's even more surprising to see how the most talented designers expand on and improve the games we thought we'd tapped out long ago. ***Mystery of the Abbey*** takes its cues from a rarely emulated classic: ***Clue***. And for gamers who thought the mystery of ***Clue*** was done to death in their pre-adolescent years, ***Mystery of the Abbey*** proves that there's more than one way to commit this delicious kind of crime.

The abbey of the title is just the first, and most superficial, of the improvements the designers have made to ***Clue's*** universally recognized formula. It has the tone and atmosphere of Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* -- perhaps a less familiar, but also less timeworn, setting for a tale of murder. The victim is Brother Adelmo, his body found dashed on the rocks at the bottom of the abbey's sea cliffs. The suspects: 24 monks, any of whom might have helped Adelmo to his grisly demise. Unlike ***Clue's*** "in the Kitchen with the Rope" solution, the only piece in this puzzle is the single monk card removed secretly from the Suspect Deck at the beginning of the game.

To track down the killer, players (traveling monks, the only residents that could be innocent of the crime) use a set of traits that define every monk -- each is fat or thin, bearded or clean-shaven, each has a title and belongs to one of three orders. A sheet showing all the suspects, with easy-to-read symbols and colors representing the traits, is given to each player for taking notes and marking off those proven innocent. That's assuming the players can stand to mar these beautifully drawn and printed pages; a pad of 50 is provided, but they're so colorful and appealing you'll feel a pang of guilt for using five or six for a game.

More lush illustrations grace the cards and the spectacularly attractive board. ***Clue's*** rectangular mansion is transformed into a circular -- but hardly symmetrical -- cluster of chambers, courtyards, and chapels. Besides being prettier, the environment is also more interactive and vital to play than ***Clue's***. Most rooms trigger special actions, providing extra suspect cards, library books (from a deck containing a plethora of entertaining effects), and even the opportunity to rummage through another player's room to take a card from their hand. Just don't get caught, or you're sent to the chapel for penance and lose a turn.

Moving around the board, interrogating monks in the Parlatorium -- that's the cafeteria, for those who don't speak Latin (all the room names are in the ecclesiastical language, a sparkling touch which braces the theme) -- and dusting

off old books is engaging in itself, especially on the first play. But the meat of the game, as in **Clue**, is questioning other players about their list of suspects. Here **Mystery of the Abbey** once again transcends the old classic, audaciously allowing nearly any question the player wishes to ask. "Have you eliminated Father Sergio as a suspect?" "How many Benedictines have you seen?" "Did you just receive Brother Cyrille from Joe?" You can even ask, "Are you going to the Scriptorium next turn?" All players have taken a vow of honesty; they must speak the truth (and stick to any future moves they have presaged). There is always the option, when asked a question, to take a vow of silence. But by answering the current player's question, you get to ask him one in return and he cannot take silence as an option.

Like **Clue**, paying close attention to both what has been requested and the subtext of those requests is the key to advanced play. Logic and deduction are the way to get ahead, which does mean that those who lack the skill or perspicacity required can lag behind. Still, this game does much to even the playing field. Cards are passed every few turns -- when mass is called in the Chapel -- meaning all players automatically get to see new cards as the game progresses. This card movement, also caused by certain book cards from the library, can stymie even the cleverest logician and most thorough note-taker. In addition, as players start narrowing in on the culprit, they can make "revelations," guessing, when the statistical odds are good, at one trait of the killer -- that he's a Franciscan, or fat, or a Novice. Correct revelations gain the gutsy player two points at the end of the game. Correctly identifying the murderer is worth four points. Incorrect revelations or accusations deduct points. Victory goes to the player with the most points, not always the shrewd detective who first identifies the killer himself.

If anything, the weakness of the game is that it is randomized enough to frustrate those who wish to play a pure match of wits and logic, while still disadvantaging those who don't have the clarity of mind -- or desire to expend the energy -- to discern the meaning behind every question and answer. Many gaming groups will discover in **Mystery of the Abbey** the perfect balance between these two styles of play, but approaching the game with expectations of finding purely one or the other could lead to disappointment. And speaking of disappointment, don't be fooled by the Days of Wonder "Web Card" in the game's box. Sure, you can use the access code on it to play free versions of the publisher's games, but **Mystery of the Abbey** isn't one of them.

Still, I'm not sure you'd want to play **Mystery of the Abbey** online, where the first-rate components (including a little metal bell for calling mass) and beautiful artwork would be reduced to flat and pixilated imitations. And it's not just the visuals that would suffer a disservice on a computer. The immersive atmosphere and delightful interaction between players would be the most mourned victim of moving the murder online. As it is, **Mystery of the Abbey** is a broadly appealing game: gorgeous, engaging, and, yes, derivative. In the best sense of the word.

--Christopher Floyd

Steven's Self-Indulgent And Easy-To-Write Dragon*Con Report

There was a demand and interest for a [Dragon*Con](#) report by thousands of *Pyramid* readers. Well, Bob Portnell, at any rate. So if you don't like this column, don't blame me; blame society . . . as embodied by Bob Portnell.

Anyway, although Dragon*Con didn't officially start until Friday, my trip actually began on Wednesday. I had firm plans to travel to Atlanta and crash at my friend Michael's place Wednesday, so that I wouldn't need to rush on Thursday and be stressed out. All I had to do first was finish up *Pyramid* and get on the road; my plans had me leaving no later than noon.

As I left my parking lot and began driving at 9:30 PM, I reflected that my sense of timing may not be what it could.

Anyway, I navigated the evening drive to Atlanta with nary a hitch; in addition, I was pleasantly surprised when I crossed the Florida/Georgia border, and gasoline prices dropped from \$918.67⁹ a nanoliter to more reasonable levels. I also realized that any fears I had about navigating complex downtown Atlanta traffic were mitigated somewhat by the fact that I was doing so at three in the morning.

Thursday we got our hotel rooms, and the rest of the seven-person gathering assembled. We went and signed in with the convention.

The previous day, about three hours into the drive to Atlanta, my mind wandered back to my refrigerator back home, and the vital "do not forget to take this registration postcard" postcard tucked safely under the 1999 FSU schedule pizza magnet. Filled with shame, I went to the Guest Registration area: "You know that vital postcard that we're not supposed to forget?"

"What's your name?" the stern-looking woman asked.

"Steven Marsh," I replied.

"Sign here," she said, smiling as she handing me the three-ring binder.

I signed in, collected my badge and special guest folder, and departed.

As I did so, I realized that there was absolutely no effort made to verify who I was. And I considered that, seeing as how the Guest Registration took about seven seconds versus the serpentine wrapped-to-infinity lines of the regular registration, there was room to be very evil here.

"Hello; I'm Steven Marsh, and I'm here to register as a guest. These three people are my friends, and they're also here to sign in; these are . . . umm . . . Andy Vetromile . . . errr, Jim Steranko . . . and the gal on the end is Lou Ferrigno. Uhhh . . . It's short for Louise."

Fortunately I resisted the siren's call of convenient evil, and the next morning the rest of us registered; it only took half an hour to do so. (When my friends asked why I bothered waiting with them, I said it was intriguing to watch how the little people experienced the convention. I was, justifiably, smacked for that comment.)

Sadly, I was not scheduled for any panels, meetings, or anything else interesting; should anyone have had any interest in finding me, they would have had little recourse save wandering aimlessly and hoping to bump into me. And, frankly, the odds of that are pretty slim.

Two days later, as I was wandering aimlessly, I bumped into the *real* Andy Vetromile. He, too, was not scheduled for any panels or discussions. For some reason I considered how many of us there were, signed up as guests but not

scheduled to *be* anywhere; I wondered if we could crash in vacant exhibit rooms and put up signs like, "Will Host Professional Game Editing Panel For Food." Friday also saw a [repeat](#) of my entry into the "Whose Line Is It, Anyway?" competition. And this shall be the first and last time I mention that fiasc^D^D^D^D^Devent.

Saturday I began my new con obsession in earnest - getting my sketchbook sketched. See, many years ago I started formulating a philosophy about buying stuff at conventions: Only buy things at a con that you can't get elsewhere. I figure, what's the point of buying, say, a normal game or standard in-print graphic novel at a convention when I can order them at home through my FLGS, save some money, *and* not worry about lugging it around a convention? So I generally only buy stuff at cons that is rare, cheap, or otherwise exclusive to the con.

I figured original art from artists whose work I appreciate - in the form of sketchbook sketches - was the pinnacle of my "can't get it elsewhere" philosophy, and it gave me a chance to chat with them, too. (As an added bonus, as I continue to add to it I'll eventually have a book I've dumped hundreds of dollars into . . . so that I can forget the book somewhere and lose it all in one fell swoop!) The sketchbook was a personal success, and I look forward to continuing it.

Saturday I also roamed around aimlessly some more (Dragon*Con is great for that), and found myself in the super-secret Guest Hospitality Suite. There where I mingled briefly with the super-nice George Takei, all the while struggling to keep from dipping into übergeek mode and asking him to sign something.

Saturday night I was wound up, and so I found myself reading a book in the hotel hallway, lest I disturb my slumbering roommates. I think I discovered an interesting phenomenon at science fiction-fantasy/gaming/comic conventions: Reading a book that is not part of one of those genres at such a con - for example, a normal novel like, say, Dan Brown's *The DaVinci Code* - will get you the *exact* same perplexed, bewildered, and mildly disapproving looks that reading something from one of those genres - such as a *Spycraft* supplement - will get you in the real world. (Of course, the hotel passersby may have merely been disapproving of the fact that I was in my boxers . . .)

Sunday was my last full day at the con, so I took the opportunity to introduce and reintroduce myself to various folks. I finally got to meet Ryan Dancey, after somehow missing him at last year's con; since he's one of the foremost thinkers on the subject of the business of gaming, it was great to finally place a face to the online presence. I got to meet some of the folks from [Green Ronin Publishing](#), and was doubly struck at 1) how much really interesting stuff they were producing that 2) my FLGS was utterly failing to stock. I can only imagine that the delight of possibilities open to *d20 System* gamers is offset by the agony of game shop managers who need to decide what to order. Anyway, I got to drool over about a dozen of their products, some of which I dumbly chatted about in conversations along the lines of, "Oh, sure; we ran a review of this about three weeks ago . . . not that I've ever *seen* a copy, mind you . . ."

I spent some time with the Looneys over at [Looney Labs](#); it's always nice to see companies at a convention that seem genuinely delighted to be there, and I got to learn a couple of new *Icehouse* game variants. And, finally, I got to meet Phil Brucato, whose new *Deliria* RPG from [Laughing Pan](#) is a beautiful-looking book that I hope to review within the next couple of weeks.

(Sadly, [White Wolf](#)'s Justin Achilli has eluded me for the second year in a row; I've yet to get a chance to thank him in person for joining our *Iron Ref* competition back in '01.)

Sunday night ended with me and a friend attending a secret party hosted by [Holistic Design, Inc.](#), makers of personal favorite RPG *Fading Suns*. I got to chat with the nice and cool Holistic folks, including Andrew Greenberg and Chris Wiese (with whom I joked that I didn't know whether to offer congratulations or condolences for his recently winning the GAMA presidency). It was a great party, involving tasty snacks, chocolate fondue, a full bar that made tasty margaritas, and . . . hmm . . . I'm not remembering much after the margaritas, except a vague memory of a gossamer angel and leather-clad demons, doing some kind of interpretive dance about the new *d20 System* edition of *Rapture: The Second Coming*. (Earlier on Saturday I'd asked Andrew Greenberg whether that would make it the third coming. Apparently I only missed being the one millionth person to make that joke by six people.)

Monday began with the logistics of sorting out seven people, mass transit, and three cars parked in three different places. I also learned that, hypothetically speaking, accidentally leaving one's dome light on in one's car - like, say,

when you're driving bleary-eyed while following strange directions to Atlanta at 3 AM - is an effective way to utterly kill your battery after a five-day vacation.

And that's about it. I didn't get to play in any games (although I was tempted to rejoin the continuing ***Vampire: Dark Ages*** LARP I was a part of in New Jersey last February, but evening plans with friends prevented me). I got to shop, hang out with cool people, and generally satisfy my short attention span at a con that successfully manages to meld three of my interests.

And I'm already making plans to attend next year; hopefully I'll actually get to meet Louise Ferrigno.

--*Steven Marsh*

Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Fantasy Cosmology

When the Stars Are Just Lights

by David Morgan-Mar

In a previous article -- ["Fantasy Astrology: When the Stars Are Right"](#) -- the applications of astrology to fantasy gaming were discussed. Although possibilities such as additional moons and planets were covered, the basic assumption was that the physical universe was much the same as our own, with planets orbiting stars and the sun being a star. This article discusses possibilities for other, fantastical cosmologies, and their impacts on a fantasy campaign.

Why Do We Need To Know This Anyway?

Most fantasy campaigns don't concern themselves with what the stars are made of, so long as they are there at night as expected. This is fine, but thinking about such questions can bring about new possibilities for adventure.

A simple assumption used in many campaigns is that swords or armor forged from the iron in meteorites are either capable of holding vast enchantments or are innately capable of slaying powerful monsters. When we use this information in our campaign universe, the question arises: Why is meteoric iron different to earthly iron? Is it because it's purer, because it's descended from the heavens and has been touched by gods, or because it's actually a different substance not otherwise found on earth?

Is it possible, using magic or some other means, to travel into the sky and find meteoric iron? Where, exactly, might one find it?

In real life, medieval astronomers were convinced that comets were atmospheric phenomena, because the heavens were perfect and unchanging. What if this is true? Can a bird collide with a comet? What if people could reach a comet, and destroy it or change its course? The implications on astrology -- and potentially the fate of kingdoms -- might hang in the balance.

And finally, what happens if a mage levitates ever higher into the atmosphere, or if a ship is enchanted to do so, carrying a crew? What do they find beyond the earthly realm: the killing vacuum of space and planets millions of miles distant, or new territories to colonize and conquer?

With the right assumptions, a fantasy campaign can benefit from a unique cosmology, either simply by explaining a few salient facts about iron, or by opening up new locations for adventure.

New Physical Laws

The first thing to realize when designing a fantasy cosmology is that our familiar laws of physics will probably need to be bent, if not completely broken. In a world in which magic exists, this should not be any great conceptual problem, although it does help enormously if there are *new* "physical laws" that can be codified and work in a consistent manner. They don't need to be realistic, just consistently applied. If this is too difficult, some handwaving can always come to the rescue, though too many special exemptions and contradictions can make the setting feel chaotic.

New laws can be based on concepts familiar to the players, such as the laws of sympathy and contagion of magic, or the posited reality of the four Aristotelian elements. Or they might be something entirely original.

Elements that might be considered for changing include:

Gravity

In the real world, gravity dominates the structure of the universe on scales from asteroid-sized upward. If gravity works the way it does in our universe, then things will be pretty familiar to us -- huge stars orbited by planets, at vast distances from one another amidst the vacuum of space. If a fantasy campaign is to venture to the planets or the stars in such a universe, travel is likely to be either by teleportation or the use of gates that transfer matter from one place to another. Fantasy technology is unlikely to be up to building a vehicle in which people can venture into the void between worlds.

By changing the way gravity works, a GM can construct a universe where travel between the planets can be done physically, because planets can be much closer together. They can be smaller too; a campaign world might only be large enough to contain an area the size of medieval Europe, with no change in gravity.

To the medieval mind, gravity was not a force that fell off as the inverse square of the distance between masses. Things fell to earth because that was where they were meant to be. (Similarly, fire reached upward because its natural place was above the air.) With this form of logic we can construct a more convenient form of gravity for a fantasy world. Objects fall to, well, wherever they should be according to common sense, and at the familiar rate people are used to. Planets of any size have the same gravity, and ships that travel between them will probably have a convenient gravity too. For variety, the natural locations of the elements can be jumbled up. Imagine a world with a core of air, surrounded by a bubble of water, on which solid objects float. Fire might collect at the center of the bubble, or also float on the water.

The original game of fantasy space travel -- TSR's *Spelljammer* -- postulated that gravity is either present at its normal strength, or absent entirely. Ships traveling through space have a gravitational plane running through them, so that gravity works "as expected" on the upper decks. Below the plane, gravity is reversed. An arrangement like this is convenient, dramatically useful, and has an internal logic of its own.

Vacuum

Nature abhors a vacuum -- or so thought early scholars. In a fantasy game this could be true. The space between worlds may be full of air. This facilitates "space" travel, since there are no concerns about taking along an air supply. The air between worlds might be thin, like it is on high mountains, making exertion difficult, but otherwise not causing any harm.

Space might instead be full of a luminiferous ether, through which light travels. This is really an industrial revolution concept, but could be adapted to fantasy use with new jargon. Such an ether does not interact with physical matter at all, so may not be noticed. It may, however, be the basis of an alternate "ethereal plane" of existence, which can be penetrated by magical means and navigated by beings in ethereal form. This may be the method of traveling between the planets -- traversing the intervening vacuum in an ethereal state.

Spirits may inhabit the ether; the ethereal plane is a prime candidate for a spirit realm. These can include autonomous spirit entities, who may be able to travel between worlds across the void at will, and ghosts. The first spacefarers may find themselves besieged by spirits of the dead, turning a space jaunt into a horror adventure.

If space is full of air, why not have other things out there too? There might be rivers of water flowing between worlds, or bridges of earth that can be traveled simply by walking across them from one world to another.

Earth

"Earth" is the central world where people live; it might have a different name in your campaign. Our Earth is an enormous sphere of rock and metals. In a fantasy cosmology, the variant options are limitless.

Other solid shapes will produce interesting effects. An ellipsoidal earth will have varying horizon distances, depending on your location. If the atmosphere remains spherical, parts of the ellipsoid will have thin air or stick into the vacuum

of space. On a toroidal (donut-shaped) earth you can see parts of the world curving away up into the sky. A fantasy earth might even exist on a ringworld like that envisioned by author Larry Niven, or on the interior surface of a Dyson sphere.

Shapes with edges introduce another feature. A cubic earth will look like a flat world to its inhabitants, until one falls over the "edge" and finds gravity turned through 90 degrees and a whole new expanse of territory to explore. The faces might also be linked via underground cavern systems.

Earths might actually *be* flat too. Terry Pratchett's Discworld is an example -- a flat circular disc carried through space on the back of four great elephants, who stand astride a planet-sized turtle. What happens to objects that fall off the edge of such a world depends on the nature of gravity and the presence or absence of air in space. If objects are lost, some sort of magical or physical process will be needed to replenish any lost water, lest the world inevitably become a desert. The "bottom" side of a flat world may house similar terrain (and inhabitants) to the top side. Travel from one side to the other could be by simply stepping over the edge, through tunnels, or by magical means only.

A flat earth may be *infinite* -- stretching forever without end. This naturally creates an infinite amount of territory, but perhaps civilisation is restricted to an island continent in an endless sea. Using some tricks from modern geometry, it's possible that an apparently flat earth "wraps around" on itself, so that a traveler heading north eventually reaches his starting point, coming from the south. If nothing else, this makes creating a GM's map easy -- simply assume each edge wraps around to its opposite edge.

Planets

In our universe, planets are large spheres of rock and metals similar to Earth, or balls of gas or frozen volatiles. The non-earth planets in a fantasy cosmology may follow suit, or they might all be similar worlds to earth, at distances that make them look like bright spots in the night sky. This makes them ideal for visiting and colonizing, or conquering if they are already inhabited!

Or planets could be something different. They may be small discs or simply glowing lights -- not something on which you could walk around. They may be made of very different material. Europeans who believed in the four Aristotelian elements of earth, water, air, and fire also believed that objects in the heavens could not be made of these elements. They postulated the existence of a fifth element, or "quintessence," which made up everything in the heavens, and whose nature was to move in endless circles about the earth. If quintessence is real, it surely must be a powerful magical ingredient. Planets might be mined for it, or stolen in toto, if only they can be reached.

The Sun

Our sun is a huge sphere of hydrogen and helium, generating energy through nuclear fusion. Ancient theories of the sun ranged from a ball of fire, to the brilliant shield of a god, to a hole in the sky through which the radiance of heaven shone. Any of these possibilities might be literally true in a fantasy cosmology.

If the sun is a ball of fire, what is it burning? Perhaps it is the forge of the gods, stoked by a divine blacksmith (whose hammer blows presumably cause thunder and lightning). Maybe it burns the souls of sinners, giving people a glimpse of hell every day. Or it might be a life-giving hearth, tended by a benevolent creator god.

Another possibility, raised by the *Spelljammer* game, is that the sun is a ball of pure elemental essence of fire. As such, it needs no fuel or air to burn. Such a sun might be the location of the fabled City of Brass, the home of the djinn. Fire taken from the sun might retain its essential nature, burning indefinitely without fuel.

Visiting a ball of fire might be possible, if the campaign includes magic capable of protecting intrepid explorers. The sun might only be a few miles up in the atmosphere and easily reached, or it could involve a long expedition on a spaceworthy vessel. Once they get there, things might get hot in other ways! If the sun is controlled by the gods, they are unlikely to take kindly to sightseeing mortals. If it is purely a physical phenomenon there might be adventures to be had, collecting meteoric iron from molten pools on the surface, or dealing with the djinn or other creatures who live

there.

If the sun is actually a divine artifact or a gateway to heaven, then it is likely to be guarded. Supernaturally large and vicious monsters make good guardians. If adventurers can overcome such obstacles, they may be able to steal the sun! This could cause an extended night on earth, but may grant the wielder immense power -- for a touch of irony the valiant hero brazen enough to steal the sun might become the new sun god . . . and be removed from play to serve as an NPC. Finally, if the sun is a hole in the sky, it may be the pathway to recovering the soul of a departed loved one; a quest worthy of any fantasy Orpheus.

Stars and Celestial Spheres

We know that stars are other suns, extremely far away, each potentially with its own set of planets. This could be the case in a fantasy universe too, although if the sun is a ball of fire only a mile across then the stars will be fairly close by and perhaps easily visited.

A much more common theory in ancient times was that the stars were simply small lights fixed to the inside of a great sphere which enclosed the earth. This is appropriate if the sun is a unique object or a hole in the enclosing sphere. The nature of the lights depends on other factors: they may be smaller holes in the sphere, lanterns tended by gods to light their way across the heavens, shining souls of ascended heroes, or the glow of cities.

Spelljammer calls such enclosing spheres *crystal spheres*, and uses them to separate different planetary systems from one another. An infinite number of "crystal spheres," each containing a set of planets, drift in a void. This terminology is historically inaccurate (as explained in the next section) -- such spheres are better termed *celestial spheres*.

What is beyond a celestial sphere is a matter for speculation. There could be other celestial spheres as in **Spelljammer**, there might be nothing at all, there might be the realm of the gods, or there might be some enormous clockwork mechanisms that keep the universe turning as it is supposed to.

Crystal Spheres

The name "crystal spheres" derives from the work of Eudoxus and Aristotle, who believed that the sun and planets were each attached to a transparent sphere centered on earth and rotating about it. If this is true, then any space voyagers beyond the nearest planet will need to deal with the problem of penetrating the spheres -- hopefully without causing any damage that might disrupt the workings of the heavens! In medieval cosmology, the crystal spheres were the homes of different types of angels -- beings who might not take kindly to earthly intruders.

Comets and Novae

Depending how you have designed the rest of your fantasy cosmology, these objects may have a natural explanation, may require some thought, or may be totally inconsistent with your universe. Atmospheric comets should be possible in most campaigns; whether you want such objects in your world's atmosphere is another question. If they exist and adventurers can travel to them, they will need physical properties. They might simply be tricks of light, similar to rainbows. Or they could be giant flaming swords, placed in the sky by gods as an omen; retrieving such a sword could be a glorious adventure, and may bring untold power, or ill-fortune, to whomever steals it.

Novae are literally "new stars" -- stars that appear where none were before. In our universe, these are either faint stars that flare into visible brightness, or stars that explode. In a fantasy cosmology, there are almost certainly different explanations. Novae might be temporary lanterns placed by traveling gods, or the campfires of celestial nomads gathering in a festival. Or if stars are other suns, novae may really be newly formed stars, complete with new worlds to explore.

Ley Lines

If your fantasy world has ley lines along which mystical energy is concentrated or channeled, they need not end on earth. Ley lines might crisscross the void between the planets. This could produce regions of space where magic is easier to perform, or it might only be possible to perform magic on the ley lines. If space travel relies on magical propulsion or protection, then ley lines could demarcate the only passable "roads" through space.

Traveling to Other Worlds

Once you've established the overall structure of your campaign universe, it's time to think about how it can come into play. The most direct method is to use the universe as an extended location for adventure. There are various ways for bold adventurers to span the stars:

Teleportation

Magical teleportation may be able to send people to other worlds. If spells are not powerful enough, an enchanted item might be needed. Gates are permanently emplaced magic items or areas that allow a person to step through them and emerge elsewhere. These could be used to set up convenient pathways between worlds.

One problem with teleportation is that it bypasses all of the intervening space and other bodies between the departure and destination points. This is not conducive to establishing an atmosphere of traveling vast distances to places in the sky. Locations may as well be on opposite sides of an ocean or mountain chain for all the characters experience. This is, however, a good way to strand a group of heroes far from home. There is *no way* they can get home without finding a way to teleport back -- all the walking in the world or even building a ship won't help. For sweet irony, strand a group of characters on the celestial sphere, able to look up and see their homes above them, but unable to reach them.

Extraplanar Travel

If the void is suffused by an ethereal plane, and it is possible to phase one's body into it, then this may be usable as a method of transport between worlds. Spirit creatures such as djinn are probably adept at this, enabling them to traverse the distance between a solar City of Brass and the earth.

Other planes may also be passages to the stars. An astral plane is likely to reach beyond the confines of earth, and characters in astral form may be able to wander anywhere in the universe. Alternate physical planes may provide connections between worlds that can be traveled across by conventional means, making a trip to another planet into a sea voyage across an alternate plane for example. There may also be conduits between worlds through caverns via an elemental plane of earth, or from the heart of a volcano to the sun via a plane of elemental fire.

Magical Propulsion

One strong attraction of building a fantasy cosmology is designing methods of traveling between worlds. For a classic high fantasy feel, travel could be done in space vessels that are built along the lines of sailing ships. Some might actually *be* sailing ships, which can simply lift off and sail through space if adequately empowered. For a different feel, people may travel through space in wagons, houses built on loose foundations, or with no kind of vehicle at all.

In most cases enormous speeds are required to propel a ship between worlds. Some form of spell, ritual, or magical item might be required to achieve this. A spell can usually be taught to other mages, so this method produces the most freely available space travel. Any ship with a wizard who knows the spell of spaceflight can travel through space.

A ritual is more demanding. It may require the constant chanting of a group of monks while in space, or the sacrifice of animals (or humans), or any other esoteric ceremony imaginable. If extra speed is needed, perhaps spare crew could join in for a while, or more gemstones can be crushed.

Magical items are the rarest forms of space propulsion. There may only be a few such items in existence. An artifact that allows a ship to sail into space might be small and portable, tempting thieves at every port of call, or it might be

the entire ship. If such items cannot be created, they will be jealously guarded, whereas if they can, then enchanters will be trying to turn them out rapidly, perhaps producing items with subtle but dangerous flaws.

Physical Propulsion

An alternative to using magic to travel through space is to use the laws of physics. With different physics, all sorts of things become possible.

Getting off the ground is probably the hardest part of space travel. Hot air balloons can help, and can be constructed with ancient technology once the principle is understood. Perhaps in your universe objects get lighter as they ascend, so trekking to the top of a mountain is a natural start to a space journey -- get high enough and you might even drift off without help. On flat worlds, getting into space might be as simple as falling off the edge. People or ships can be carried aloft by giant birds or other creatures. Or maybe there is a special type of substance -- a wood that only grows deep in elven forests, or an ore that only dwarves can refine -- that floats in air. Build your ship out of such a material, weighed down with an appropriate amount of ballast, and you have a flying vessel.

Once in space, traversing the distances between worlds could be done in several ways. If there is air in space, there should be winds that can be caught by sails. Wind currents could blow ships around at great speeds, making interplanetary journeys tolerably short. If the winds don't take you where you want to go, airscrews, oars, or harnessed birds might do the trick. If rivers of water run through space, a ship might drift with the current or use oars to head "upstream."

Without air, other means of propulsion must be found. Currents in a pervading ether might be forced to interact with sails made of some special material. Ethereal spirits might be employed (or enslaved) to haul a ship around. Or, if Newton's laws still hold some relevance, simple rocket propulsion could be used by firing cannon from the rear of the ship.

Astrology

As discussed in "Fantasy Astrology: When the Stars Are Right," the appearances of stars and planets in the sky can be mapped out and interpreted to determine their possible influences on earthly life. If your fantasy cosmology results in a different appearance of the night sky, then your astrological symbology needs to be adjusted to suit.

If people can actually visit the planets and stars, that may change how astrology is perceived. Progressive types may denounce astrology as superstitious nonsense, while some will probably try to incorporate any new knowledge into the astrological correspondences. Or there may be no effect at all -- many people in our world believe astrology still works even after probes have visited every planet except Pluto.

For a weird campaign, not only does astrology work, but it is reactive. If people travel to the celestial sphere and move some stars around, the fates of people on earth will change! Who knows what will happen if someone manages to steal the sun or destroy a planet . . .

Legends

With a variant cosmology, the legends of your campaign world may be altered in subtle ways. If stars are the campfires of heavenly nomads, they may all move from night to night. The resulting changes in constellations are sure to be worked into myths. In many cultures there are legends of heroes ascending to the heavens and forming a constellation. This might be literally true, with great heroes traveling to the celestial sphere and setting up stars in patterns designed by themselves.

Then there are legends of beings from the sky coming to earth. Seen either as gods, angels, or demons, such beings may be actual visitors from other worlds. Once your campaign world attains the ability to travel through space, adventurers may be surprised to find that the old legends are true, and the celestial beings can be visited, traded with,

or conquered.

Campaign and Adventure Seeds

Pirates of Space

A swashbuckling campaign can be constructed by using small planets near one another, a "convenient" gravity, space full of air, and wind or water currents for space propulsion. Pirate ships built for the seas can take off with magical aid and sail into the sky. Asteroids serve as islands and brave adventurers make their fortunes by raiding commercial fleets carrying diamonds mined from jungle worlds or gold from the sun. When ships meet in space, they can fire broadsides before closing for boarding actions in best piratical style.

The Celestial Heresy

A traveler has returned from a long voyage. He claims to have reached the edge of the world and seen the sphere to which the stars are affixed. Furthermore, he says he found a cave that leads to the other side of the celestial sphere, but he's not telling what he found there. He's now trying to raise equipment and men for a return journey. Several different religious factions have taken an interest in the man's claims. Some want him burnt as a heretic, others are keen to send representatives to visit what they believe will be the home of the gods. More materialistic people think he's found some untold treasure and would kill for the man's map. Can the PCs join the man's quest, protect him from harm, and discover the secrets of the universe?

Army of the Comet

A great comet appears in the night sky, forewarning of disaster for a peaceful kingdom. Two nights later, it is gone. The next week, news reaches the capital of an army massing on the borders. Within days it lays waste to several villages and advances on the capital. Scouts report the army's leader is a giant of a man, wielding a flaming sword. The court astrologer declares the sword is the comet, stolen from the heavens, and that only a similarly divine protective device can prevent the fall of the kingdom. The king's new balloon sits in the courtyard, and everyone knows the moon is the glowing shield of the kingdom's patron goddess . . .

Hauling Iron

More meteoric iron is needed on earth to fight a war against the fae races. The only known deposit is on a world two weeks' travel across the ether. To get there, ships must be pulled by enslaved spirits, past other worlds populated by hostile races and monsters. Each mission must run a gauntlet of encounters, from warships and space creatures to passing groups of djinn who try to free the spirit slaves. The fae may have their own space vessels too, and fight running battles against the iron supply lines.

Further Reading

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* * *

Thanks to Anthony Jackson for proofreading and suggestions.

Mark English and Mrs. English

for Over the Edge

by Michael Anguiano

Thomasville, Alabama, appears on road maps mostly by default, simply because mapmakers don't like to have large blank areas. Despite its size, Thomasville is still the largest cluster of population in a rural, underdeveloped part of the state. A stone's throw northward along lightly paved roads is the unincorporated town of Constantinople, where joking questions about changing the name to Istanbul are met with blank stares. Rural postal delivery is handled mostly by the easygoing, friendly Mark English, practically a local landmark in his aged green truck. Life has changed little in Constantinople, despite Mark's rather spectacular achievements as an occult engineer of international merit.

Aside from having a social security number and an indifferent record of service with the U.S. Postal Service, Mark doesn't really have anything else of note in any national databases. He is caucasian, fifty-eight years old, married for forty-three years. He has no college, criminal, or military record. He has a valid driver's license, but has not had any points on it for eighteen years. He has traveled abroad on several occasions but not in the past ten years. Any investigation will find that he is well known and well regarded in Constantinople, with a reputation for being reliable, clever, neighborly, and damn good with his hands.

Of course, Mark English is all of those things, but the locals won't tell outsiders that he's also known as a bit of a nut. Mark has volunteered so many repairs for so many people that it would be unthinkable to speak poorly of him. In recent years, he's fixed the furnace for the local Baptist church, overhauled vehicles for emergency services, rewired the local market's freezer, repaired generators for the hospital down in Thomasville, ran wire to supply electricity to a dozen or so of the county's poorest families, and got the local AM station back on the air after a storm had knocked out its antenna. Aside from a few drinks of lemonade, sweet iced tea, or beer (depending on the time of day and who's offering), Mark refuses any payment but instead directs people to some worthy local cause that needs support.

Mrs. English has even less on file than her husband. Their marriage license lists the couple as being the same age. This detail constitutes the entire official record for Mrs. English. The license fails to even list her first name or maiden name. Mrs. English was born and raised in Constantinople, and her people have lived here since before the war. A few of the older folk might remember that she was born a Caskinette, but the rest of her family has long since passed on or moved away, so she's been known simply as Mrs. English for the last forty years. Of course, all of the local residents treasure Mrs. English for her friendship, her voluble cheerfulness, her seemingly indomitable good spirits, and her tireless devotion to community and church. Mark may be well regarded, but his wife is beloved.

Outsiders will hear nothing but good about Mark and Mrs. English. Mark may be considered eccentric, but the locals protect their own. Indeed, outsiders will be hard-pressed to even find where the couple lives. Directions will be consistently vague and contradictory, usually identifying landmarks only with "You'll know it when you see it" and "You can't miss it." Meantime, somebody or other will call up to the English place to let them know that someone's wandering around, looking for them.

The English place is a small, two-story pink house on a sizable piece of wooded land, where Mrs. English keeps a few livestock and grows vegetables. Mark has turned the garage into a workshop, since Mrs. English won't let him bring any of it into the house. His library occupies roughly half of the second floor, with the rest taken up by the master bedroom and a water closet. The first floor is a standard arrangement of living room, kitchen, etc. The cellar is mostly used for storage. A rusted length of barbed wire, nailed to half-rotted posts, marks the outlying edge of the property. Fourteen inches below the surface, the same route is followed by a braided cable of assorted metals, which forms a barrier ward against occult and mystical energies.

The front yard is littered with vehicles, a few of which Mark is repairing for neighbors and the rest are slowly being cannibalized for assorted parts. A small tree has grown through the rusted hulk of an ancient, formerly white Chevy

Impala, which serves as an anchor for a feline spirit. It was run over the Impala and caught in the engine, a grisly death that tied its spectral essence to the machine. Mrs. English says that Kitty is really a very sweet cat; it's just upset about being run over. If Kitty's former owner were still alive, however, he'd tell you that it was always like that and death hasn't done anything to change it. Kitty was one of Mark's early projects, found in a salvage yard over in Tuscaloosa. Mark tried to develop it into a powerful guardian spirit, but Kitty proved immune to any training, even when compelled by occult means. It adored Mrs. English, though, so she persuaded Mark to just power Kitty back down instead of destroying it entirely. Now Kitty mostly sleeps in the Impala's glove compartment, emerging occasionally to chase the ghosts of birds and squirrels. It will respond if Mrs. English calls it, but anyone else will be met with indifference or outright hostility.

Mark has mostly given up on guardian spirits, having more luck with barriers and wards which he can anchor with mechanical means. The perimeter barrier is one example. Another is the pentagrammatic array of stainless steel rods, driven into the earth in a seventy-eight foot range encompassing the house and front yard; each 20" rod is inscribed with a mix of Hebraic characters and Aztec hieroglyphs. The wiring of the house itself creates a third barrier, intended to absorb rather than deflect. This barrier is active only in the absence of electricity, draining mystical energies into a modified battery array in the cellar (next to the stack of empty mason jars). Since the house is hooked up to the local power grid, Mark figured that a cut in power would probably be accompanied by an attack of some sort. He later uses the absorbed power to run equipment for his experiments, so that he doesn't have to worry about causing power outages with an unexpected drain.

Thanks to his job with the Postal Service, Mark has managed to accumulate a surprising amount of occult paraphernalia without attracting undue attention. He has established mail drops in five other places, under assumed names, and has their contents forwarded to fictional addresses in and around Constantinople. Each of the fictional addresses is on his delivery route, so Mark simply collects that mail from the rest of his deliveries. He developed this system about 25 years ago, once he'd started work on his system of techno-occult transnotation and decided he needed to acquire significant research materials. He has since accumulated one of the more significant occult libraries on this continent.

The library contains a mix of occult materials and technical manuals. Mark's collection is notable not for its size but rather its focus on efficacy. For example, he sold his copy of the *Necronomicon* (Wormius edition) back in the 1970s, deciding that it was unsuitable for his purposes and generally overrated. He also has a filing cabinet with extensive notes on the various books, which he used to compile his manual on techno-occult transnotation. He keeps the manual itself in the back of one of the cabinets, behind a sheaf of letters from the Church of Latter Day Saints.

A small legion of undead spiders protects the library from minor threats like pests, fire, intruders, or excessive humidity. The spiders also serve to absorb ambient traces of evil, so that certain volumes with a radiant effect will not affect the rest of the library. Once a spider has reached saturation, it lays eggs and is subsequently devoured by the hatchlings. This works much better than Mark's previous system, which involved simply wedging Jack Chick comics between the particular volumes. If the spiders are overtaxed, Mark has left an illegible folio from the Revelations of Glaaki behind the filing cabinet, which serves as hatching grounds and fodder to nourish additional generations of spiders.

Mark has rigged a variety of other defenses for the house and grounds, but he is constantly modifying or replacing those as he fiddles with new projects. Only the more permanent systems have been mentioned here.

Mark is in regular correspondence with various occult organizations, using pseudonyms and his forwarding services to avoid becoming an obvious target. He has, on two occasions, hosted a small convocation for the purpose of demonstrating some of his results and developing useful applications. Only a small number of attendees were present, given Mark's then-lack of reputation, but he deeply impressed all of them. Word about Mark has only nominally filtered out to the occult community, since the attendees are reluctant to share the benefits of Mark's insights.

One of his principal correspondents has been *The Blue Line*, a Paris-based glossy fringe magazine that serves as a front for an occult research organization. *The Blue Line* is particularly interested in his transnotation studies but has worked to discredit him with other occult groups. Once Mark became aware of this, he began feeding them disinformation and

has pursued his more serious inquiries elsewhere. *The Blue Line* is currently contemplating more direct action to acquire Mark's findings.

Mark is also in regular contact with assorted extraplanar entities, but he knows to distrust most of their assertions. Although encouraged by the success of his various projects, he continues to proceed with extreme caution. Most recently, he has been able to establish a stable portal for direct regular communication with some of his contacts. He has refused to establish a transit point, instead limiting the portal to communication only.

While the depth of his occult studies would drive most men to the brink of sanity and beyond, Mark English has a philosophical view of life and a mechanistic perception of the universe(s). He has no illusions about the unlikely survival of humanity or the purposelessness of life. Mrs. English, conversely, is a deeply religious woman whose extraordinarily durable faith will see her through any crisis. She's been married to Mark for too long to unquestioningly accept scripture as concrete fact, but nevertheless believes in an Almighty God who has simply created more levels to reality than He let be said in the Bible. She continues to attend church every Sunday, to wear a crucifix next to her heart, and to live her life by the teachings of Christ. Mark, frankly, thinks she's nuts, but he loves her anyway. Mrs. English, of course, feels the same way.

Mark English, Technoccultist

Improvisational Engineer/Mechanic -- 4

If it's mechanical or electrical, Mark can fix it or maybe make a new one. He'll use improvised parts as necessary, sometimes sending someone to collect a bizarre list of needed items (sardine tins, a glow-in-the-dark yo-yo, two hardboiled duck eggs, the hubcap from a Ford truck, etc.). Sign: belt with assorted multi-tools and gadgets.

Techno-Occult Transnotation -- 4 (technical, narrow)

Mark has conjoined his occult knowledge with his technical expertise, distilling years of research into a handwritten manual on techno-occult transnotation. Using materials from Radio Shack, Home Depot, assorted electronics catalogs, and eBay, Mark can modify or even replace substantial elements from occult rituals. Just off the top of his head, he can safely substitute a technical simulacrum for a typical single element of any spell, but multiple elements or combinations of elements usually require him to consult his manual and work out the appropriate calculations for a (reasonably) safe reformulation. Sign: ink-stained fingers, library of occult books and technical manuals.

Robust -- 3

Despite smoking a pack a day, drinking regularly, and a lifelong diet of starches and fried food, Mark is hale and healthy. Sign: spring in his step, energetic.

Flaw -- Country. Very, very country. This is not a problem in Constantinople or any other small town in the Deep South, but elsewhere it elicits presumptions of ignorance and credulity. Sign: looks and sounds like extra from "Hee-Haw".

Hit Points -- 21 (health and vigor)

Motivation -- to explore and understand the universe(s), to map the nature of reality

Languages -- English, Latin, Greek; some French, German, Arabic; read-only Aramaic, Kanji

Mrs. English, Wife of Mark English

Country Wife -- 4

She can cook, clean, sew, and handle various parts of a small farm like she was born to it (which she was). Sign: always wears apron, sweet and friendly manner.

.45 Colt Revolver -- 4 (narrow)

She's a crack shot with the .45 Colt Peacemaker that she keeps in one of the front pockets of her apron. Sign: always has a .45 Colt Peacemaker in one of the front pockets of her apron.

Protective Charm -- 6

This is a small engraved steel disc that Mrs. English wears around her neck. This was Mark's gift to her on their 25th wedding anniversary. It took him several years of solid work and a significant outlay of resources, but the charm has proven to be well worth the effort. This charm protects Mrs. English from virtually anything, including the loss of the charm. Sign: the charm, on a thin silver chain.

Flaws -- none. She's an incredibly sweet woman, and anyone who says otherwise is a very bad person.

Hit Points -- 14 (clean living and good health)

Motivation -- to be a good wife and a good Christian

Languages -- English

Using English(es)

Mark and Mrs. English provide a stark contrast to the stereotypical trappings of the occult. The two of them are provided as background characters for ***Over The Edge***, but may be easily adapted to any contemporary game with supernatural elements (modern ***Call Of Cthulhu***, ***GURPS Horror***, etc.). Mark English may be used as a resource by the PCs or as a plot device by the GM. Mrs. English mostly serves as a foil to PCs who are overly aggressive or who might equate folksiness with stupidity.

Aside from his practical repair skills, Mark English can provide PCs with information, analysis, and advice on a wide variety of arcane objects, supernatural entities, mystical phenomena, occult organizations, etc., as well as where to look for further information. His techno-occult transnotation system also gives him a unique ability to analyze and possibly circumvent some of the practical limitations on the use of arcane objects or ritual magic.

A GM can use Mark and Mrs. English as a plot device to introduce the PCs to a particular object or organization. The PCs could be invited to one of Mark's convocations (possibly by accident), Mark might be one of the few known custodians of a particular book, or the PCs could be hired to purchase (or steal) some book or trinket from Mark. Alternately, Mark could hire the PCs to recover a manuscript which was stolen, to find a rare occult element that he can't circumvent with transnotation, or to safeguard a book in transit to (or from) a purchaser.

Urban Legends: The Rockhouse

A d20 Modern Campaign Resource

by Daniel Bronson

Hattori knew the teenagers were going to be a problem the instant they swaggered in, their loud laughs and horseplay invading the quiet sanctity of the store.

"Can I help you, young sirs?" he asked, resolved to see them out the door as quickly as possible.

This induced a fit of snickering among the boys. One stepped forward as the other two began to nonchalantly wander through the store. "Yeah, Pop. We were just, uh, wondering where the bathroom was."

"They are around the back," Hattori replied, his eyes on the pair. They had made their way to the beer cooler.

"Got a key for it or anything?"

"No, there is no key. They should be open." They were into the cooler now, rummaging through its contents.

"Well, it's locked right now, man," the boy said, tapping his fingers on the counter. "Could you go open it?"

Worry clouded Hattori's features. "I thought you did not know where they were," he said, then louder: "Excuse me, sirs, but unless you have valid ID showing that you are of age, I cannot sell you alcohol."

The two boys glanced back at Hattori, grabbed some beers, and ran for the door.

"Oh, no, no, no . . ."

"See ya, Pop!"

"No, come back! You do not know what you are doing!" Hattori cried out, watching the trio flee from the store, but as the wave of hatred coursed over him he knew it was too late . . .

* * *

Three hundred years ago, native tribes would stop here to make camp on their way to other lands. Two hundred years ago, pioneers would stop here to rest overnight on their way to the frontier. One hundred years ago, vacationers would stop here for a picnic on their way to their country homes. Today, travelers stop here for a couple of minutes on their way to the next city.

"Here," in this case, is a scenic pull-out where people can park, get out of their cars, and take a break from the road. Forest land surrounds the area, an open field of long green grass with a rushing stream that runs down one side of the forest-field border before vanishing back into the trees. A cool breeze is often felt that brings with it the clean smells of the earth and plants, reminding visitors of a world away from the hustle and bustle of the city. Should the travelers need something more than beautiful scenery and a quick walk around the parking lot, however, they can visit the Rockhouse.

There may have been a time when nomadic peoples left a pile of stones here as a make-shift shrine in hopes of having a safe journey. If so, that pile is long gone. In its place stands a small country store with walls built from rocks picked up around the area. It is a squat building, solidly constructed but definitely rustic in appearance. There are three thick wood doors, one in the front and two in the back, that -- judging by the numerous scratches and stains -- have been there for many, many years.

Inside, the Rockhouse is dimly lit. Some natural light manages to fight its way through the dirt, grime, and spider webs on the windows, but most of what illumination there is comes from three pairs of hanging fluorescent lights. Of these, at least one of the bulbs is always out and another flickers randomly. The quiet buzz of the lights mixes with the musty aroma of the store, much as the dust kicked up by prospective customers gently swirls into the air. The moth-eaten head of an eight-point buck is mounted in a place of honor above the front door, a tribute to the skills and luck of some long-forgotten hunter. Other smaller trophy heads decorate the top of the back wall: two deer, a very young bear, and something that might be a mountain lion.

Along the side walls are several black-and-white photographs of the surrounding area. One depicts some men widening the then-dirt road going by the Rockhouse, another shows the stream outside running over its banks and nearly reaching the building, and a third is of a pair of older men holding up a good-sized fish they presumably caught. Each one is framed with a glass cover, though most of the covers are cracked and all of them are filthy, and each has a little white label with faded handwriting on it. Most are unreadable but the labels for the three photographs mentioned above are "Road work -- 1942," "The big flood -- 1965," and "Mitch & Morry -- 1957," respectively.

Cold drinks and frozen treats are kept in glass-top coolers and a wide variety of cookies, pretzels, chips, candy, and other snacks hang from racks throughout the store. One of the short aisles also has a small selection of toiletries, groceries, and medications, presumably for the people who live in the area. For those willing to wait a few extra minutes, there is additionally a well-used gas stove back behind the counter that the owner, Katsutoshi Hattori, can put to good use cooking up an excellent burger.

It was nearly a decade ago that Hattori purchased the Rockhouse, leaving everything just the way it was. Some might claim this is because he is too lazy to clean the place out. Hattori's reply is that the store has done good business so far; why try to fix something that isn't broken? This is not, however, his real reason for leaving things alone. His real reason is that he does not wish to upset the Presence.

Hattori became aware of the Presence shortly after acquiring the Rockhouse. From time to time he felt as if there was another person in the room with him, someone watching and waiting, but no matter how hard he looked there was nothing to be seen. During the day, when people stop by and buy things, a different feeling emerges. It is one of being calmly pleased, a sense that all is right with the world. It only lightly brushes against the edge of the mind, never intruding and almost never being consciously recognized. Hattori is certain this is why people continue to stop at the Rockhouse. They may claim all sorts of reasons, but in the end they know, on some unconscious level, that it will make them feel good to do so.

Hattori also knows, though, that there is a dark side to the Presence. The first time he didn't even realize what happened, he simply felt a surge of caustic hatred wash over him as a family left the store. In retrospect, Hattori figures that the child of that family must have shoplifted something because the second time he felt that hatred was when a teenager held him at gun-point and emptied the register before taking off on a motorcycle. Hattori found out afterwards that the robber had an accident only a mile down the road where he hit some loose gravel and slid into the path of an oncoming car. The car swerved but it not only still hit the boy and motorcycle it also slammed into a tree. The robber and the two people in the car were all pronounced dead at the scene.

Dramatis Personae

Katsutoshi Hattori

"Thank you for your patronage. Please come again."

Charismatic Ordinary 2: CR 1; Medium-size humanoid; HD 2d6-2; hp 5; Mas 8; Init +1; Spd 30 ft; Defense 12, touch 12, flat-footed 11 (+1 Dex, +1 class); BAB +1; Grap +1; Atk +1 melee (1d3 nonlethal, unarmed strike); Full Atk +1 melee (1d3 nonlethal, unarmed strike) or +2 ranged; FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL good, Billie Shantca, the Presence; SV Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +3; AP 0; Rep +2; Str 10, Dex 12, Con 8, Int 14, Wis 13, Cha 15.

Occupation: White Collar (bonus class skills: Knowledge [business], Diplomacy)

Skills: Craft (structural) +4, Diplomacy +10, Gather Information +9, Knowledge (business) +8, Knowledge (current events) +7, Listen +3, Perform (stringed instruments) +6, Perform (sing) +4, Profession +6, Read/Write English, Read/Write Japanese, Repair +4, Speak English, Speak Japanese, Spot +5.

Feats: Alertness, Iron Will, Simple Weapons Proficiency, Trustworthy.

Possessions: Personal possessions.

After a failed attempt in his late teens to be a country music star, Katsutoshi Hattori decided to leave Japan and travel to the United States. Once there he spent several years working in various restaurants as a line cook and putting himself through school, finally receiving his MBA. Then, following graduation, he found a job as the manager of a small chain of convenience stores. Being single and living cheaply he saved up enough to finally purchase a store of his own, one that was away from cities: the Rockhouse.

Despite his discovery of the Presence, Katsutoshi has remained at the Rockhouse for several reasons. First, he generally hasn't felt threatened by the Presence. The few disturbing episodes with thieves have left him somewhat shaken, but he realizes that he is not the target of the anger. If anything, the Presence reminds him of some of the fairy tales his mother used to tell him when he was younger, stories about good spirits that helped those close to them. Second, he really likes the area and it took most of his life's savings to buy the Rockhouse. He refuses to simply leave it all behind after working so hard to get here, even if there are some difficulties involved.

One of Katsutoshi's current difficulties is in dealing with a sheriff's deputy, Tommy Shoe. Tommy feels it is one of his perks as member of the local law enforcement to help himself to some snacks now and again, free of charge. Katsutoshi is pretty sure the Presence would react badly to that and has made it a strict policy that no one gets anything for free. In an attempt to find a compromise, Katsutoshi has tried offering Tommy a discount but the deputy still thinks Katsutoshi is deliberately holding out on him.

Deputy Tommy Shoe

"I think I'm gonna call that resisting arrest, boy."

Strong Ordinary 3/Dedicated Ordinary 1: CR 3; Medium-size humanoid; HD 3d8+9 plus 1d6+3; hp 29; Mas 16; Init +1; Spd 25 ft; Defense 16, touch 14, flat-footed 15 (+1 Dex, +3 class, +2 concealable vest); BAB +3; Grap +5; Atk +5 melee (1d3+2 nonlethal, unarmed strike); Full Atk +5 melee (1d3+2 nonlethal, unarmed strike), or +6 melee (1d6+2 bludgeoning, rifle butt), or +4 ranged (2d8, Mossberg); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL sheriff's department; SV Fort +6, Ref +2, Will +2; AP 0; Rep +1; Str 14, Dex 13, Con 16, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 8.

Occupation: Law Enforcement (bonus class skills: Drive, Intimidate)

Skills: Climb +2*, Drive +10, Gamble +3, Intimidate +8, Investigate +2, Jump +2*, Listen +2, Profession +4, Read/Write English, Speak English, Spot +2.

* Includes -3 armor penalty for concealable vest.

Feats: Confident, Run, Personal Firearms Proficiency, Simple Weapons Proficiency, Vehicle Expert, Weapon Focus (rifle butt).

Possessions: Mossberg (12-gauge shotgun), 20 12-gauge shotgun rounds, Beretta 92F (9mm autoloader), 50 rounds of 9mm ammunition, tonfa, concealable vest, various other pieces of law enforcement gear, and personal possessions.

Contrary to popular belief, Tommy Shoe isn't a "dirty cop." He's just a petty, insensitive, and occasionally violent one. Under normal circumstances it is very likely that Tommy would have long since been removed from duty as a sheriff's deputy. Unfortunately, several factors -- including the intervention of his higher-ranking father and older brother and the department's status of being severely undermanned -- have conspired to keep Tommy behind the badge.

When he was younger, Tommy admired his father's dedication to law enforcement and knew that he wanted to be a sheriff's deputy as well, and maybe even the sheriff. His father was pleased by this and often complemented Tommy on his career goals. Then, as Tommy was finishing up high school, his older brother announced that instead of being a lawyer -- a choice his father never particularly cared for -- he was going to follow in his father's footsteps as well. Tommy's hopes of at long last excelling beyond his brother were crushed. He went ahead and followed through with his plan, becoming a deputy, but his heart was no longer in it.

Tommy realizes he isn't the world's greatest law enforcement agent. Point of fact, he knows he's not even a pretty good one . . . but he really doesn't care any more. He is certain that everyone is constantly comparing him to his father and brother, a mindset that makes him bitter. He consequently finds joy in making himself feel superior to anyone he can by belittling others and proving that he can make their lives a little more difficult if he so desires. This is particularly true when it comes to taking down suspects.

Billie Shantca / Jamie Kurt

"It's a reasonable plan, but there are three things you haven't considered . . . "

Smart Ordinary 2/Dedicated Ordinary 2: CR 3; Medium-size humanoid; HD 2d6+2 plus 2d6+2; hp 18; Mas 12; Init +1; Spd 30 ft; Defense 14, touch 14, flat-footed 13 (+1 Dex, +3 class); BAB +2; Grap +1; Atk +1 melee (1d3-1 nonlethal, unarmed strike); Full Atk +1 melee (1d3-1 nonlethal, unarmed strike) or +3 ranged; FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL chaotic, good; SV Fort +3, Ref +1, Will +6; AP 0; Rep +2; Str 8, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 16, Wis 14, Cha 10.

Occupation: Criminal (bonus class skills: Disable Device, Sleight of Hand).

Skills: Craft (writing) +10, Disable Device +10, Escape Artist +3, Forgery +11, Gather Information +3, Investigate +7, Knowledge (behavioral sciences) +11, Knowledge (civics) +5, Knowledge (streetwise) +7, Listen +4, Read/Write Armenian, Read/Write English, Read/Write Latin, Read/Write Latvian, Read/Write Romanian, Research +8, Search +12, Sense Motive +4, Sleight of Hand +10, Speak Armenian, Speak English, Speak Latin, Speak Latvian, Speak Romanian, Spot +10.

Feats: Alertness, Attentive, Educated (Knowledge[behavioral sciences] and Knowledge [civics]), Meticulous, Nimble, Personal Firearms Proficiency, Simple Weapons Proficiency.

Possessions: pen, graph-paper notebook, a silver dollar, and personal possessions.

Billie Shantca has always been a planner. When she was 10 she came up with a way to get her brother and herself into R-rated movies. When she was 13 she came up with a way the gang she was in could take over more territory. When she was 15 she came up with a way that same gang could set up a chop-shop without getting caught. And when she was 18 she came up with a way to steal nearly \$3 million dollars worth of diamonds, sapphires, and other gems. It all worked, too, with the exception of one thing she had only partially planned for: betrayal by associates who fingered her as the brains behind the operation. It was thanks to that partial plan, however, that she went to prison knowing her so-called friends would never find the loot.

When Billie was 19 she came up with a way to escape from prison, a way to re-acquire the hidden gems, a way to fake her own death, and a way to live happily ever after far away from anyone who might recognize her. Now, 33 years later, she resides in a nice cabin in the woods near the Rockhouse. She has re-created herself as "Jamie Kurt," a mystery writer of some note. Much of her published work is on Internet literary sites; some of her better efforts are available in bookstores. She enjoys incorporating aspects of her "past life" into her stories but she is always careful to avoid being too obvious.

Billie, who always goes by Jamie these days, can often be found at the Rockhouse playing chess with Hattori. The game helps her take her mind off of whatever writing project might be giving her trouble, not to mention that over the years the two have become close friends. She has never revealed her true past to Hattori and feels a little guilty about that sometimes, but never enough to bring the topic up. When down at the Rockhouse Billie also has fun amusing the children that come by with a wide variety of coin tricks.

Creature Cast

The Presence

The Presence is the result of ages of belief that this place is a special one for travelers; belief made real by the forces of Shadow leaking into this world. For the past several decades the Presence has considered the Rockhouse to be its shrine, a place of worship for those who desire its blessing. Its take on humanity is quite simple. Anyone who

purchases an item in the store is viewed as paying homage and is rewarded. On the other hand, anyone who steals from the store has committed a most vile transgression and is punished. The Presence rewards and punishes these actions by placing its blessing or curse upon the person, respectively. Those who do neither are simply ignored. If at any time the two effects are in contention, the curse overrides the blessing.

To those who can detect the invisible, the Presence appears as a blanket of gray fog that stands about 20 feet tall and stretches nearly 100 yards out in every direction from the Rockhouse. The incorporeal fog is thinner at the edges and thickest in the store itself. It shifts slowly, passing right through anything within its boundaries, but cannot stray from its location.

Effectively attacking the Presence is pretty difficult, though anyone who manages to do so will discover that the only response they elicit is that they get hit with the Curse of the Presence. The Presence cannot fight back in any other way; the beliefs that brought it into existence didn't account for that. If push comes to shove, however, the Presence can try to communicate the problem to an individual it has chosen as its "keeper" in hopes that they can handle it. The current keeper is Katsutoshi Hattori.

Should anyone wish to eliminate the Presence, there are two options. The first requires a major incantation -- such as *cast into Shadow* -- focused on the Rockhouse. The second is to destroy the Rockhouse and prevent anyone from ever "worshipping" the Presence again. Under those conditions it should dissipate in a few decades.

Abilities:

The Presence has the following abilities:

- **Blindsight (Ex):** The Presence lacks eyes but it is aware of everything that happens within the area it covers.
- **Damage Reduction 20/+2 (Ex):** The Presence ignores the first 20 points of damage dealt by weapons of less than +2 enchantment.
- **Fast Healing 15 (Ex):** The Presence heals 15 points of damage each round so long as it has not been reduced to -10 or fewer hit points.
- **Immunities (Ex):** The Presence is immune to acid, disease, paralysis, petrification, poison, sleep, stunning, and mind-affecting effects. It is also not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage, ability drain, energy drain, or effects of massive damage.
- **Mindlink (Sp):** The Presence can cast forced mindlink three times per day as if a level 10 Telepath. It rarely uses this ability, but when it does it generally only targets its chosen keeper and it prefers to wait until the individual is falling asleep or just waking up. The messages it relays in this manner tend to be vague.
- **Natural Invisibility (Su):** The Presence is always invisible.
- **The Blessing of the Presence (Sp):** The Presence can place its Blessing at will as if a level 10 Acolyte; the blessing lasts 12 hours. The blessed individual critically succeeds their next travel-affiliated check** and gains a +1 luck bonus to all further travel-affiliated checks during the remainder of the blessing's duration. The target also unconsciously feels a degree of contentment for the duration of the blessing. A Will saving throw (DC 21) negates the Blessing and spell resistance applies.
- **The Curse of the Presence (Sp):** The Presence can place its Curse at will as if a level 10 Acolyte; the curse lasts 12 hours. The cursed individual critically fails their next travel-affiliated check** and suffers a -1 luck penalty to all further travel-affiliated checks during the remainder of the curse's duration. When the curse is placed, the keeper feels a brief surge of anger from the Presence. A Will saving throw (DC 21) negates the Curse and spell resistance applies.

** Travel-affiliated checks can involve several different skills, depending on the situation. Drive, Pilot, and Ride are the obvious ones, but checks such as Navigation or travel-affecting Survival checks could also qualify.

The Presence: CR 15; Colossal outsider; HD 60d8; hp 240; Mas -; Init -2; Spd fly 10 ft. (good); Defense 0, touch 0, flat-footed 0 (-8 size, -2 Dex); BAB -; Grap -; Atk -; Full Atk -; Reach 15 ft.; SQ blindsight, damage reduction 20/+2, fast healing 15, immunities, natural invisibility, spell-like abilities; AL itself, its shrine, its keeper; SV Fort +12, Ref -10, Will +15; AP 0; Rep +0; Str -, Dex 6, Con -, Int 12, Wis 12, Cha 15.

- **Skills:** None.
- **Feats:** None.

Adventure Seeds

- As the heroes are driving up to the Rockhouse, a man and a woman come running out of the store carrying cases of beer, jump in a car, and take off down the road. A very distraught Katsutoshi runs out of the store after them, yelling for them to stop, but this does no good. If the heroes ask him what happened he will explain that the two stole the beer, and consequently they have put themselves and those around them in grave danger. Katsutoshi will avoid saying too much about the Presence because he doesn't want the heroes to think he's crazy, but in his agitated state he will let some information slip . . . enough that the heroes should realize there are strange forces at work here and that if the thieves are not stopped then people may die.
- One of the trophy heads mounted on the wall looks like a mountain lion to most people, but to those who take a closer look it looks stranger than a normal mountain lion. And yet, if it is a creature of Shadow, why didn't its head vanish when the thing died? Is it actually a mountain lion but the taxidermist spiced it up a bit? Is it the head of a cross-breed, a mix of a normal mountain lion and something of Shadow? If so, how did the cross-breed come to be? Was it the creation of a magic wielder, the work of modern science, or simply the result of nature running its course? This head has been here a long time, but are there others of this species still around?
- When the heroes stop at the Rockhouse they find the front door locked, which is odd since a) the store hours shown on the door indicate the store should be open and b) the sign in the window is turned to read "OPEN." Interestingly, the sign just under it looks like it once said "HELP WANTED," but someone folded it so that now it just says "HELP."
 - The situation: a trio of young men have taken over the store. They are armed with guns and have Katsutoshi and Billie as hostages. They locked the doors to keep other people out, but they aren't the brightest of individuals so they didn't think to turn the sign to "CLOSED." They also didn't catch Billie quickly adjusting the "HELP WANTED" sign when they first walked in. While they have helped themselves to the cash register and some snacks, the men still want one more thing: Tommy Shoe. Tommy caught the three with drugs a while back, beat them up, and then helped send them to jail. Now they want revenge. They have already had Katsutoshi call the sheriff's station and ask them to send Tommy over, though without relaying what was really going on. Consequently, the deputy will be by after he finishes taking care of some reports. It will still be about 45 minutes before he arrives.
 - If they peer through the windows, the heroes will be able to get a pretty good idea of the situation inside the store. They can try to reach the authorities if they want, but a) most cell phones don't have very good reception out here and b) there is no 911 service. When Tommy arrives he will be set to walk right into the store. On his own he will probably get killed, though he'll manage to take out at least one of the men there, and the hostages will be in danger. If the heroes try to warn him or offer to help he will reject their assistance with threats of locking them up for obstructing an officer of the law. (He doesn't like people telling him how to do his job or suggesting he might need help.)
- Katsutoshi needs someone, or better yet a group, to transport an item of value for him. He asks the heroes to do this because the Presence told him they were right for the job.
 - The item in question is a fist-sized rock that carries within it the essence of the Presence, which needs to leave the Rockhouse because "something dangerous to it is coming." The implication is that the heroes will need to hide the Presence and keep it safe. In reality, however, once the Presence has chosen one of the heroes as its new keeper it will be passing along suggestions that actually lead the heroes toward the danger. After all, why hide when you have a group of bodyguards that can fight for you?
 - The "opposing force" is a motorcycle gang, the leader of which rides a Harley Davidson V-Rod that has been possessed by a demon that likes to feed on things like the Presence.

Map

Map of The Rockhouse



1. **Katsutoshi's bedroom:** A wood desk sits along the north wall with a matching stool. A bed is in the southwest corner and a dresser is against the east wall. A stereo and several CDs of old country music are on top of the dresser and a nice guitar rests on the bed. The various papers on the desk -- bills, letters, some musical scores, etc. -- are neatly stacked.
2. **Katsutoshi's living room:** A television sits in the northwest corner, facing a coffee table and a big, cushioned chair. The coffee table is covered by a cheesecake cookbook and some gardening magazines. Similar reading material can be found on the bookshelf along the north wall. A refrigerator and a sink are in the southeast corner of the room.
3. **Katsutoshi's bathroom:** A pot of water with five bamboo stalks growing out of it sits on the counter next to the sink. Next to the pot is a scented candle; it smells like chocolate chip cookies.
4. **Women's bathroom:** The bathroom is fairly typical and quite clean.
5. **Men's bathroom:** The bathroom is fairly typical and quite clean.
6. **Storage room:** Piles of goods fill most of the shelves in this room, with the exception of the shelves against the north wall. Lacking a closet for himself, Katsutoshi has used these shelves instead, filling them with boxes of out-of-season clothing, some pots and pans, and other items he doesn't need on a regular basis. He has also set up an old shower curtain rod across the north shelves so that he has a place to hang his clean shirts.
7. **Checkout counter / Kitchen:** Across the north wall of this area is a refrigerator, a stove, and some counter space. During business hours, Katsutoshi cooks up burgers here. After hours he uses it as his own kitchen. The checkout counter that sections this area off from the rest of the store is covered with a hodgepodge of pickle jars, jerky canisters, and racks of chip bags, as well as the cash register and a couple boxes of lottery tickets.
8. **The store:** The store shelves all kinds of goods, from magazines and canned sardines to aspirin and chocolate bars. Some animal heads are mounted across the west wall, and that of an impressive buck has been placed just over the entry door on the east wall. Old black-and-white photographs hang along the north and south walls.
9. **Coolers / Freezers:** Two freezers sit up against the west wall, filled with ice cream bars, popsicles, and other frozen treats. The west-most cooler on south wall holds beer and the other two carry a wide variety of carbonated beverages and other drinks.

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



A Singularity of Unicorns

*"Now I will believe
That there are unicorns, that in Arabia
There is one tree, the phoenix' throne, one phoenix
At this hour reigning there."
-- William Shakespeare, The Tempest, III:iii:25-28*

We see the unicorn so clearly. A horse with a spiraling horn, milky white, its head in the lap of its maidenly captor. But if we look closer, we see that the horse may be anything but, the whiteness the pallor of the sepulcher, and the horn a venomous fang. And the maiden? She may not be there at all. We hunt the unicorn even though we know it cannot be caught -- let's follow its trail, and discover if it can even be seen. Tally ho!

*"There are in India certain wild asses which are as large as horses, and larger. Their bodies are white, their heads dark red, and their eyes dark blue. They have a horn on the forehead that is about a foot and a half in length . . . The base of this horn, for some two hands'-breadth above the brow, is pure white; the upper part is sharp and of a vivid crimson; and the remainder, or middle portion, is black. Those who drink out of these horns, made into drinking vessels, are not subject, they say, to convulsions or to the holy disease. Indeed, they are immune even to poisons if, either before or after swallowing such, they drink wine, water, or anything else from these beakers. . . . The animal is exceedingly swift and powerful, so that no creature, neither the horse nor any other, can overtake it."
-- Ctesias of Cnidos, Indica (398 B.C.)*

And with those words, we get the first notice of the unicorn -- single-horned, poison-controlling, aloof, and impossible to hunt. Ctesias was followed by Megasthenes, and then by Aelian in the 3rd century A.D. This worthy adds spirals to the horn and notes that the unicorn becomes tame only when with a female, albeit still, at this early date, a female unicorn. (Roughly contemporaneously with the foregoing, we begin to hear about the qilin, the mystical unicorn of China, which appears only at times of utter peace, or for the coming of a great sage.) It is with the Christian bestiaries, starting with "Physiologus" in the 5th century, that we learn how to trap the unicorn by luring it into sleep with a maiden (or, as later, more Christian still, bestiaries insist, a virgin). The unicorn becomes smaller, less wild, and its horn becomes white rather than the solid black of Aelian.

Belief in the unicorn was buttressed by its uncompromising appearance in the Bible, especially in the Book of Job, in which God asks "Canst thou bind the unicorn with his band in the furrow?" The Biblical unicorn, the *re'em*, is a ferocious, mighty creature to be compared with mountains and even the Lord Himself ("God hath, as it were, the strength of a unicorn"); it also has the essential wildness that paradoxically defines (and hence tames) the unicorn. Pious witnesses from the Jesuit missionary Jeronimo Lobo (who saw a horse-like unicorn in Ethiopia in 1630 or so) to a Major Latter (who chased similar unicorns through Tibet in the 1820s) vouched for the unicorn's existence. Benard de la Harpe stumbled upon an Indian tribe roasting a unicorn over a fire in Louisiana in 1719, and there was a brief vogue of unicorn hunting in the South African forests in the early 19th century.

*"Similarly, there may have been a primitive unicorn, a unicorn almost divine, of which the rhinoceros and the oryx were only the unworthy avatars, so nobly conceived that every object and creature that called it to mind -- separate horns, single-horned sports, cattle with twisted horns, bas-reliefs that suggested one-horned animals -- aroused a kind of awe, so holy that it gave rise to a Persian myth."
-- Odell Shepard, The Lore of the Unicorn (1930)*

However, eventually even Biblical authority had to wane, as the various candidates from the orongo of Sinkiang, to the gemsbok of Namibia, all turned out to have two horns after all. The oryx, which often appeared in single-horned profile on Persian palaces, may have given the Biblical chroniclers ideas, or perhaps they always meant *re'em* to mean wild bison, or aurochs, or even rhinoceros. (Marco Polo quite pettishly describes the rhinoceros in his travels, saying it was "not in the least like that which our stories tell.") Ctesias' description of the unicorn does seem to match a confused jumble of the Indian onager and the Indian rhinoceros, and the superstitious Chinese belief in rhino horns' supernatural efficacy has nearly extirpated the poor animals even in our enlightened 21st century. The trade in narwhal

teeth, which was quite lucrative in medieval times (the fictive horns being worth 10 or even 20 times their weight in gold), didn't quite manage the same devastation. European relative poverty, and the difficulty of narwhal hunting without a compass, probably limited the supply even as suspicious rationalists like Ambrose Paré and Olaus Wormius were identifying magical "alicorn" as a mundane narwhal's tooth and doing their share to stanch the demand.

"To this day, it is said, malicious animals poison this water after sundown, so that none can therupon drink any longer from the stream. But early in the morning, as soon as the sun rises, a Unicorn comes out of the ocean, dips his horn into the stream and drives out the venom from it so that the other animals may drink thereof during the day. This, as I describe it, I saw with my own eyes."

-- Johann von Hesse, *Itinerarium ad Hierusalem* (1389)

The demand swelled as the legendary powers of the unicorn's horn (the "alicorn") expanded from Ctesias' beginnings. Not only did cups of unicorn horn cure poison and plague, touching anything with a unicorn horn decontaminated it. Eventually, merely placing a unicorn horn on the table purified the meal all around as the horn "sweated" in the presence of poison. Although most opinions held that the alicorn had a natural antipathy to poison, some (on the homeopathic model) believed that the unicorn horn drew all poisons into itself. Various savants from Albertus Magnus to Girolamo Cardan all recommended testing putative unicorn horns to ensure their authenticity, by poisoning animals and using the alicorn to cure them. Arabic scholars held that the true alicorn, split lengthwise, showed the "images of trees and beasts and birds," a veritable microcosm of the mundane. Enough of these tests must have come up trumps to keep the bishops, kings, and popes buying unicorn horns well into the 17th century. (Queen Elizabeth bought a unicorn horn brought back by one of John Dee's polar expeditions in 1577.) And none of these alchemists ever seemed to notice that the alicorns they had were ivory narwhal's teeth rather than unicorn horn -- bringers of lies, rather than truth, in the Homeric formula. Perhaps, then, they weren't. Ivory or horn; pure or poisonous? This bisociative uncertainty may have translated itself into the alchemical lexicon; the unicorn becomes a symbol for the hermaphrodite calcination, the albedo, the White Mercury. The famous "unicorn tapestries" of the La Rochefoucauld family (now in the Cloisters) may well reference this alchemical saga, as the unicorn is both wild and tamed, both alive and dead, by the end of it.

*"The Lion and the Unicorn
Were fighting for the crown;
The Lion beat the Unicorn
All about the town."*

-- anonymous rhyme first printed in *Tommy Thumb's Pretty Song-Book* (1744)

This ambiguity extends into the relations between unicorns and snakes. Although some bestiarists assured us that the unicorn, like the stag, could not suffer a snake to touch its hoof, the majority seemed to hold that the unicorn actually feasted on snakes, and on poisonous creatures of all kinds. (Phallic symbols have to stick together, I guess.) The legend of the cerastes, or "horned serpent," seems almost like an attempt to meld the two: its horns were reputed poison cures, it lived in the same countries as the unicorn, and both it and the unicorn could be caught by means of a [mirror](#). (The unicorn is trapped by its vanity; the cerastes frozen by its own gaze.) More straightforward is the rivalry between unicorns and lions -- in the letter of [Prester John](#) we hear that unicorns and lions are mortal enemies. The unicorn attempts to impale the lion; the lion, dodging, causes the unicorn's horn to be stuck fast in a tree trunk. Then, the lion turns and ravages the unicorn without mercy. This motif goes surprisingly far back; appearing on Babylonian cylinder-seals, Persian bas-reliefs, Egyptian papyri, and Scythian medallions, as well as in the famous Mother Goose rhyme. This latter is often taken to refer to the contest of Hanover and Stuart for the throne of Britain, lions being the Plantagenet (English) symbol, and unicorns that of the (Scottish) Stuarts. It's interesting in that context that Queen Elizabeth's unicorn horns (including the one John Dee procured from Hyperborea) vanished from the Tower of London during the English Civil War. Were those unicorn horns, which cured poison and upheld the lives of kings, somehow important, or at stake, in that struggle?

*"We caught the beast called Unicorn
That knows and loves a maiden best
And falls asleep upon her breast;
We took from beneath his horn*

*The splendid male carbuncle stone
Sparkling against the white skull-bone."*
-- Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, IX:482-483

And what, if anything, does that tell us about the magical stone found in the unicorn's skull according to Wolfram's *Parzival*? If the unicorn's stone is the Grail, then the medieval parallel of Christ and the unicorn makes sense -- but if the unicorn is, rather, the forces of sin and chaos (which must be tamed by a pure Virgin, hint hint), then this [crystalline skull](#) stone might be a much darker thing. Perhaps, like Lucifer, this is the [Stone Fallen From Heaven](#), contained in the unicorn's uncatchable, indefinable, constantly shifting form. Magical stones show up in the skulls of other beasts as well: toads, serpents, dragons, basilisks, and so forth -- all of them poisonous creatures. In *Parzival*, Trevrizent applies the unicorn stone to the wound of the Fisher King without result, except to note that the wound seems "envenomed." Is the "male carbuncle stone" a kind of profane or sterile Grail, or perhaps an aborted Grail kept underneath the sharp Spear of the unicorn -- from whose dolorous blow no beast can recover. Perhaps the unknown horseman from Persia whose "poisoned spear engraved with the name of the Grail" struck down the Fisher King was, in fact, the unicorn.

*"Nobody sees much of unicorns anymore. . . . In an attempt to solve the problem, the American ecologist Lamont Cole . . . opened a book called **A Million Random Digits**, which used to be put out by the RAND Corporation, and picked an arbitrary place to begin. Then, counting from this point, he selected a series of 8,760 numbers at regular intervals. Let these, he said, represent the level of metabolic activity of a unicorn at the end of each hour in a normal year. There should, of course, be no relationship among the numbers and no cyclic pattern. But what Cole found, to his astonishment, was that unicorns were apparently most active at three o'clock in the morning! Which accounts for the lack of recent sightings . . . And we are left with some awkward questions about random tables."*
-- Lyall Watson, *The Dreams of Dragons* (1987)

The unicorn, after all, is the enemy of the royal lion in the West and of the royal elephant in the East. The Arabic unicorn, the karkadann, has a horn ten feet long, and is the only beast that will attack the elephant (another legendary serpent enemy). According to one of the Alexander Romances, Alexander the Great's horse Bucephalus ("ox-head") was a karkadann presented to him by Queen Candace of the South (either an [Amazon](#) or the [Queen of Sheba](#) -- and a maiden who can tame a unicorn). Alexander, of course, may have been poisoned, and his kingdom, like that of the Fisher King, fell into waste. The unicorns bear within them some form of poisonous chaos, a kind of panic insanity. As the Alexander Romance assures us: "No man yet of woman born Endures the terror of his horn." The karkadann is enormous, of unnatural size, recalling the giant bred on unicorn-milk in another Arthurian romance, *Le Chevalier du Papegau*. Again the Biblical *re'em* looms up, tameable only by God; Talmudic tradition holds that the unicorn was the size of Mount Tabor, and its horn "reached up to the sky." Mount Tabor, like Mount Sinai (where the monk Felix Fabri saw a unicorn in 1483) is one of the points where the mundane world touches the divine, the supermundane realm, and the unicorn's horn ends where reality and unreality touch. The unicorn is a chaotic pocket, containing images of a dark world (the reality of the Amazons? the [griffins](#)? the [sphinxes](#)?) held together by a singularity -- a point, at the end of its spiraling horn. There, the wave front collapses, there the worlds meet in poison and pain, opening a road for the energies of death to flow from a king's banquet or into the side of reality itself. Only by trapping the unicorn in the trunk of the world-tree, or in an insulated (pure? virgin?) mathematical space, can its poison be drawn, and the cosmos made safe -- until the next unicorn is sighted, over the hills and far away.

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Pyramid Review

Burn Rate: The dot-com card game

Published by [Cool Studio, LLC](#)

Written by Rich Koehler

Illustrated by Jim Massey

156-card deck; \$15.95

Games with a business theme usually require the players to make the most money in order to win, like the classic *Monopoly*. Others focus on corporate culture, such as the Hip Pocket title [Cube Farm](#) or the Origins Award nominated [Management Material: General Office Edition](#) from Zipwhaa, Inc. Certainly, ***Burn Rate: The dot-com card game*** differs from *Monopoly* in that the aim is not to make the most money, but be the company that loses the least and survives with *any* money after all of the other companies have gone bankrupt. The reason for this is that ***Burn Rate*** is a card game about the dot-com boom, and more particularly, the dot-com crash. Either way, both *Monopoly* and ***Burn Rate*** are inspired by financial crashes . . .

Designed for two to four players aged 13 and over, each takes the role of a CEO, with a staff of overworked employees, the most incompetent vice-presidents imaginable, and a bundle of start-up capital all tied into one or more really, *really* bad ideas. In fact, ***Burn Rate*** includes 20 of the worst ideas that have brought dot-com start-ups to their knees, flat on their back, and finally six feet under! These range from "Make Postage Stamps Online" and "Free Music" to "Online Pet Store" and "Dot-Com Card Game." This all adds up to one big, bad thing -- your dot-com start-up is hemorrhaging money like there is no tomorrow. And actually, for most dot-com companies, there isn't . . .

Burn Rate: The dot-com card game comes as a 156-card deck, divided into 55 red-backed cards and 101 blue-backed cards; plus a 3½ by 5-inch ten-page foldout rules pamphlet. A notepad or piece of scrap paper is required to keep track of each company's funds as they lose round-by-round. The red-backed cards represent the various employee cards, further broken down into four departments, each denoted by border color on their fronts; these are tan for the Sales department, red for Development, blue for Human Resources (HR), and green for Finance. Each employee is marked with a skill factor from 0 to 3 -- the more numbers the better, so a skill factor of 0-1-2-3 is better than 0-1 or 0-1-2; a salary rating from 1 to 3 -- the lower the better; and individualized with a face and name. The Development personnel also include Engineers, which only possess a salary rating and not a skill factor . . . as do the Contractors (marked with gray-bordered fronts) whose salary ratings are triple that of any Engineer.

The blue-backed Play cards represent the actions that the players can take; they can be either Offensive, indicated by an arrowed top to the card's border, or Defensive, which have a square top to their border instead. In addition to describing whatever effects are particular to a card, Play cards are marked with a skill factor requirement, which must match one of the skill levels given on an employee card in order to be used.

At the beginning of the game, each player receives 100 units of funding as their start-up capital, or 80 if there are four players participating. The employee cards are separated into piles for each department, and the top one turned over ready for the process of First Hire. The players take turns to pick one of the face-up employees until they have hired a total of four, preferably one for each of the four departments: Sales, Development, Human Resources (HR), and Finance. This is not absolutely necessary, but having an employee in each department enables a player to use both Offensive and Defensive Play cards associated with *that* department.

Hired employees have to be arranged into their departments with the *best* employee -- possessing either the highest

skill rating or lowest salary -- placed on top. This employee becomes a company's department head. Some employee cards are marked with the letters "VP" for Vice President and they are always the head of department, are very difficult to poach or fire, and are invariably *bad* at their job!

In a turn a player can either play or discard up to four Play cards, but not both. To play a Defensive card, one of its skill numbers must match the skill level of a company's associated department head. Conversely, one of the skill numbers on an Offensive card must match that of a rival company's department head. If a department currently has no staff, a card marked with a skill level of zero can still be played on it.

Offensively, a player can play Bad Ideas on their opponents; force them to pick up a really bad employee with Bad Hire (they have no choice as to which employee); force them to fire a VP with Out To Pasture; force them to pay double their salary on their next turn with New Business Plan; and steal an employee from them with Poach. Defensively, Release allows a player to get rid of a Bad Idea; Hire lets you pick up a new employee of your choice from the labor pool, while Fire does the opposite; Funding adds a set amount to a company's current funds, and Layoffs lets a company get rid of any number of employees bar a pair of VPs.

Once all cards have been played or discarded, a CEO has to deal with any Bad Ideas that they accumulated since their last turn. A Bad idea can occupy the time and effort of up to four engineers, as marked on each Bad Idea card. If a CEO does not have enough engineers, they must hire Contractors until all of their Bad Ideas are being tended to. Unlike other employees, Contractors cannot be fired, but can be let go once a Release card has been played on a Bad Idea or enough Engineers have been hired.

A CEO must also pay all of their employee's salaries, and this is worked up by adding up all of the salary figures on their employee cards. The total is deducted from a company's current capital and is also known as a company's "Burn Rate," or the rate at which a new company spends its start-up capital before it begins generating positive cash flow from its operations. Simply put, a company's "Burn Rate" is a measure of negative cash flow! Should a company's current funds fall below zero, it has gone bankrupt, and the player is knocked out of the game. A company can even survive with a bank balance of zero, though not for long. A player's hand is then refreshed back up to six cards. Play continues until all but one company has been driven bankrupt!

The basic tactic to **Burn Rate** is to play cards: Play more cards to gain better effects and draw better cards for the next turn, and hit a company with as many Bad Ideas as possible, forcing them to get more Contractors in and drive up their Burn Rate. Given that up to four cards can be played each turn, it is also possible to play cards in combinations; for example, playing a Poach card to steal a company's engineers when they are dealing with Bad Ideas and thus force them to hire more Contractors. Another good time to play Bad Ideas is after having played a Poach on a company's only Sales employee, thus leaving them open to the new Bad Ideas!

As a game **Burn Rate** possesses both simple play and tactics that are easy to grasp, and the players are given plenty to do in their turns, being able to deal out attacks on rivals and with attacks made by those rivals. Yet despite this, it got a mixed response from our review test sessions. One player did not like having to keep track of the funds separate to the game, even though adding any form of money to the game would add to its costs and make it more fiddly. We also found the rules less than clear on the first read through, although the game's website does come with a decent FAQ. Further, the game feels very dry in its theme and there seems to be little room for the players to inject their own color, which would make it even more enjoyable.

Yet despite this, **Burn Rate: The dot-com card game** is both well-designed and appointed with good quality cards. Pleasingly, blank cards are also available for those players that want to design their own -- the publisher's website already includes several of these fan-created designs. **Burn Rate** also does a good job of emulating its theme, which is no surprise given that the creator, Rich Koehler, worked as a software engineer for a Seattle-area dot-com and survived two rounds of layoffs until he was finally let go in a third, in October of 2001.

--Matthew Pook

Strange Bedfellows Expanded

An Adventure in Two Parts Part Two: The Adventure Concludes

by Elizabeth McCoy

When we left off [last week](#), the PCs were in transit in their van, heading for where Ziba holed up. If they thought of using the Song of Affinity and triangulation, they'll be on an Ofanite-straight course. If not, it will be more winding.

Ollie, Ollie, Oxenfree

Eventually, the group will get to the warehouse where Ziba has holed up. Here, the primary threat is Ziba himself, until the group can prove their identities! Unfortunately, Ziba has fortified the place . . .

Goal: Get to Ziba without getting caught by a deathtrap, nailed by friendly fire from Ziba (under the assumption that the group are demons), or causing too much Symphonic disturbance.

Possible Solutions: Send someone celestial and ignore the disturbance. Sneak through the deathtraps in a dungeon-crawl. Get a message to Ziba somehow.

Complications

Ziba's had over a week to fortify his position as only an attuned Cherub Vassal of War can. He started with a three-part warehouse in an L-shape, with the "I" of it 300×90 feet, and the "stem" of it 270×50 feet. (The division is at the corner, 90×50; and the stem has been rented out already.) The large doors to the dock for semi-trucks is in the inner part of the L, and are about five to six feet above the ground.

The first level of security includes locks on all the doors, with a burglar alarm that alerts the police. This is all that's in section A -- the bottom of the L -- which is rented out. (The GM may find amusement by having it full of pallets of gaming material, such as the group's favorite Most Notorious RPG. If so, the kid Ziba's babysitting (Erica) will likely have gotten some copies to read . . .) The security here is lax enough that Ziba's managed to rig the crates into defensive "lines of fire" and even has a deadfall or two that can be triggered with a good, ST 16/Strength 8 shove. So far, no one's noticed, and recently Ziba appropriated some crates to rig deadfalls in Section B.

The corner of the L, section B, is primarily offices on the second floor, with much less storage space than the other two wings of the building. Section C, the upper part of the L, has a loft on the near end with office-space there, and Section A has its offices in a loft, and on the bottom of the side nearest the corner.

Since it has more rooms, Section B is where Ziba initially set up shop. A bit of "surgery" to one of the walls added a "secret door" into the loft-office in Section C. The offices have windows to the outside -- which Ziba has covered with "mirrored glass" film. (This keeps it cooler inside, too.)

The second tier of trap is tripwires -- baling wire at ankle height on some doors, and head height at others. There are also a few tripwires at various heights, anchored in corners and around pillars, in the large, empty areas of the

A Different Approach

In a police campaign, such as **GURPS Cops**, humans could be involved when a report of a murder/kidnapping comes in. Anna Kelley's body was found on the scene; lots of blood from at least two other people was there as well, and there are reports of unmarked cars being driven off. The Kelley car is reported at a hotel on the outskirts of town, with a girl and a woman in it. In this version, celestial complications are one to three angels on Ziba's trail (probably Sophie, Minni, and Parnach), and two to four demons (mostly lower-powered ones) likewise.

warehouse. Many of these have metal scrap and/or paper cups tied to them at the anchor points (where it won't reveal their location too much), so that the rattling will alert Ziba. In Section B, some of the crates from Section A are stacked so that anyone who trips the wire will get a crate on the head. After that, extension cords have been taken, stripped at the ends, and the bare wires wrapped around doorknobs. There are small spy-holes cut in walls and floors at angles appropriate for rifle usage, too.

Unfortunately, Ziba has to keep a fairly close watch on things, so that he can disengage the deathtraps if someone shows up to rent Section B or C. Fortunately, his charge is relatively sensible and doesn't go wandering about in the death-trapped area.

The head-height wires will do no damage unless someone runs into one, at which point it does 1d6/2 Body hits of damage. The deadfalls will do (1d6 minus the check digit of a successful Dodge) × 10 Body hits! The electrocution doorknobs require a Strength roll from the person grasping the knob; a success does 7 - check digit Body hits, while a failure is 7 + check digit hits.

Ziba will likely detect the group if they approach from the front driveway, since he's watching the windows. (The inner part of the L has no windows or easily accessed walls for drilling, so he must trust in his tripwires.) Ziba has left waysigns (*Superiors 1*, p. 121) around the warehouse, indicating, "Attuned Cherub; fortified position." If the War-angels are alert for waysigns, they'll notice them and, hopefully, not walk into the deathtraps.

Crashing the Party

Once Ziba has been contacted, and the situation with the kid has been explained -- or at least dragged out of him -- things get more interesting from a combat point of view.

Whoever is standing guard (there are Michaelites in the group; *someone* should stand guard) should notice a car coming up the drive. (If it's night, the car will have its lights off, and require a Perception roll to notice, with penalties if there are lights on in the same room as the lookout.) It's moving fast, heading for the access road around the warehouse, to the truck dock. The sequence of events is as follows (until the PCs interfere, that is):

- The car drives up and screeches to a halt in front of the dock. The door opens and a woman falls out, power-crawling for the stairs up to the ramp. Clearly, one of her legs is broken and bloody, unusable. Also clearly, she's not human, from the way she's ignoring this. Ziba, if there, can identify her as "Lee," the Lilim who geased him. (Since there are no windows here, slow PCs may not get to see this part.) As soon as she gets to a door, she enters (if it's unlocked) or bangs on it frantically.
- Two SUVs enter the front parking lot, headlights on. One stops in the driveway, sideways to block it, while the other heads for the back lot.
- The stopped one disgorges two humanoids -- carrying rifles (Enoch and Gareb). The driver (Gether) remains at the wheel, and one other (Chidon) also stays inside.
- The second one stops, smashing into the woman's car. Two people (Eshek and Cabul) climb out of this one, too -- one is the driver -- while someone else (Bizjothjah) takes the wheel. Again, there are others (Elam and Gaal) left in the back seat. The two Calabim track the blood trail of the woman into the building.
- The goal of the Lilim's pursuers is to seize her and drag her back to Hell, and either kill or capture the child who calls her Daddy. (Kill, if they think the girl's a human. Capture, if they realize she's celestial.) They're perfectly willing to try to convince the angels to hand Leshem (and kid) over by telling them what crimes she's committed -- of which, only "treason to Hell" is likely to stick. If talking won't help, the battle will be joined. For the demons' stats, see *Characters* below. (Duplicate the Impudites or Habbalah as needed to challenge the characters sufficiently; an additional SUV of demons can arrive "belatedly" if the PCs aren't breaking a sweat, but such an obvious fudge should be avoided if possible.)
- Once the shooting starts, Chidon, Enoch, and Gareb may attack the front of the building, while the Calabim, Bizzy, Elam, and Gaal take the back. (Note that the Sword of Judgment can *definitely* be used on Eshek; Bizjothjah will be more than happy to order him to retreat, and he'll try to tell his troupes to fall back and regroup before he flees to Hell.)

Princess on Deck!

This element, though useful for "It Just Keeps Getting worse" effects, is purely optional. If the players show signs of wanting to wrap things up with a brawling bang, don't use this last scene. (Instead, try to let the Lilim escape, as a "The End(?)" or "I Thought *You* Were Watching Them!" finale.)

Either when the PCs are losing the battle, when they're in the middle of winning, or after they've mostly wrapped things up -- someone strolls through the middle of the battlefield. The someone is about five feet tall, dark-haired, medium-dark skinned, female . . . and a Superior, after one gets a clear look at her. Fortunately, Lilith is in a non-hostile mood; accidental and deliberate attacks will be deflected by a Corporeal Song of Shields, and otherwise coolly and elegantly ignored.

If there are any captive demons, Lilith asks them what their freedom is worth to them, then asks the angels if they'd like to make a counter-offer. (She'll go back and forth till someone stands pat -- sensible angels won't get involved in the bidding war in the first place.) If there are captive angels, Lilith simply frees them, smiling enigmatically while the demons mutter ineffectively. Now the PCs can worry about what they owe her.

What Lilith is really there for, though, is her Daughter, Leshem. The discussion will be entirely in Helltongue, permitting the GM to avoid "talking to himself," winding up with Leshem getting some Essence to heal herself (if still wounded). Depending on how obnoxious the angels have been to her, Leshem will explain a few details of the mission her Mother has just given her. (See her character sheet for details.)

By now, Lilith has slipped away -- only to be discovered curled up on some pillows on the floor, reading storybooks (in Helltongue) with Erica. Upon discovery, she looks up and asks, "What, haven't you ever seen someone reading to her granddaughter?"

And that's probably a good place for the GM to snap books closed and announce, "The end."

Non-Player Characters

(All **GURPS** characters have the Basic Celestial Template, p. IN9. ***In Nomine*** characters have target numbers in square-brackets, for ease of reference.)

ZIBA

Cherub of War

GURPS Character Sheet

ST 18; **DX** 17; **IQ** 12; **HT** 18

Advantages: Alertness +4, Combat Reflexes, Distinction: Vassal of War, Essence Control 12, Extra Hit Points 10, Role 4 (Zachary Barns, Martial Arts instructor), Power Investiture (Corporeal 5, Ethereal 3, Celestial 4), Servitor Attunement (Howl), Strong Will +3, Vessel.

Disadvantages: Dissonance 1, Edgy, Geased Extremely Hazardous Duty (protect Erica), Overconfidence, Reduced

Hi, Boss!

If Lilith shows up, the PCs may invoke one of their Superiors: Michael, David, Laurence, or with the Celestial Song of Tongues, Dominic. *Michael* will have a short discussion with Ziba, Parnach, or one of the War-PCs, getting up to date on the situation as quickly as possible. (This may include temporary granting of the powers of the Vassal of War Distinction!) Then he'll go off to discuss the matter with Lilith and Leshem, over a drink. *David* will, well, stonewall. Eventually, barring great efforts by the PCs, he'll let Lilith take Leshem and Erica; they are, after all, Lilim. (He's mildly approving of the pair; they have faced hardship and have a strong relationship with each other.) *Laurence* will immediately snarl a demand for Lilith to surrender herself, duel honorably, or flee; she'll pick the latter, using Celestial Motion to grab Leshem first. If Erica's not right next to her "Daddy," she'll be left behind, and be vastly upset by this, accusing the angels of scaring off Grandma and Daddy and being meanies. (Laurence will be taken aback by a Lilim who thinks she's human and has human levels of selfishness.) *Dominic* will tell Lilith that she is summoned for trial, which will get roughly the same result as Laurence's ultimatums. He, too, will be nonplussed by Erica.

Manual Dexterity -1, Servitor of War, Stubbornness.

Skills: Acrobatics-14, Acting-10, Axe-15, Broadsword-18, Detect Lies-11, Driving (Car)-15, Fast Draw (Knife, Pistol, Rifle, Sword)-15, Fight Choreography-10, First Aid/TL7-12, Guns (Pistol, Rifle)/TL7-18, Judo-16, Karate-16, Knife-17, Lockpicking/TL7-11*, Mechanic (Small Gadgets)/TL7-11*, Piloting (Hang Glider)/TL7-15, Piloting (Manned Kite)/TL4-17, Riding (Horse)-15, Savoir Faire (Dojo)-14, Spear-15, Staff-13, Stealth-16, Tactics-14, Teaching-12, Throwing-14, Traps/TL7-13.

Songs: Form (Corporeal-12), Healing (Corporeal-11), Light (Corporeal-11), Motion (Ethereal-8), Shields (Celestial-11), Numinous Corpus: Wings-14.

* Reduced Manual Dexterity has been subtracted from these skills

In Nomine Character Sheet

12 Forces, Vassal of War

Corporeal Forces - 5	Strength 10	Agility 10
Ethereal Forces - 3	Intelligence 5	Precision 7
Celestial Forces - 4	Will 8	Perception 8

Vessel: Human/4 (Body Hits: 90)

Role: Zachary Barns, Martial Arts instructor/4, Status/3

Skills: Acrobatics/1 [11], Detect Lies/1 [9], Dodge/2 [12], Driving/1 [8], Emote/1 [9], Fighting/6 [21], Knowledge/3 (Teaching) [8], Large Weapon (Sword/4 [14], Axe/1 [11], Spear/1 [11]), Lockpicking/3 [10], Medicine/2 [9], Move Silently/2 [12], Ranged Weapon (Pistol/1, Rifle/1) [8], Savoir-Faire/4 (Martial Arts) [11], Small Weapon/2 (Knife) [9], Tactics/6 [11], Throwing/1 [11]

Songs: Form (Corporeal/4 [9]), Healing (Corporeal/3 [8]), Light (Corporeal/3 [8]), Motion (Ethereal/2 [5]), Shields (Celestial/5 [9]), Wings/6 [11]

Attunements and Distinctions: Cherub of War, Howl, Vassal of War

When Ziba answered the phone and heard an old Lilim acquaintance, his first plan was to get close enough to separate her head from her body with as little fuss as possible. Then she explained that she needed a child protected, and negotiations went much more peacefully than Ziba had planned.

Now Ziba's working on protecting the "imp," Erica, while trying to convince her that she needs to redeem. As if this approach to demon-management weren't hard enough for an old War-horse like Ziba, Erica doesn't even know she's a demon. It's very perplexing. However, by now he's willing to accept some help -- and if he didn't go looking for it, he's not against the terms of the Geas. (He'll even resist the temptation to smack around Judgmenters and try claiming it was due to being geased -- though he'll think about it.)

He's honestly sorry that he was missed in Heaven, and holding a note of dissonance for not telling anyone where he was (betraying the trust of his Boss and fellow Servitors), but he's also as proud of Erica, the "redeemable imp," as if he'd hatched her himself. When Leshem shows up, he'll defend her -- if only to get her to let him take Erica to a Heaven-Tether for more protection. (Once she's given that permission -- which she quickly will -- he'll focus more on defending Erica, possibly to the extent of attempting to commandeer a car from the demons out front. They'll resist this.)

Since Ziba is a Vassal of War, he is very combat-capable, and is likely to overshadow PCs. The GM can moderate this by keeping him busy defending Erica and possibly Leshem, and by restricting his access to weaponry and/or ammunition. If necessary, a lucky shot to the leg or gut might even cripple him sufficiently to keep him from defending PCs. (Or the Habbalah could afflict him with depression -- his attunement to Erica would keep that defense up, but everything else would be Too Much Trouble.)

LESHEM

Free Lilim

GURPS Character Sheet

ST 17; DX 18; IQ 16; HT 16

Advantages: Band Attunement (Lilim of the War), Combat Reflexes, Essence Control 11, Patron (Lilith), Power Investiture (Corporeal 4, Ethereal 4, Celestial 3), Servitor Attunement (Passage), Vessel (Attractive, Role 4: Artist), Vessel (Beautiful, Zeroed).

Disadvantages: Disfavored (Renegade), Geas (2 years, to Lilith), Geas (various, other Lilim, -5), On the Edge, Reduced Alertness -2, Sense of Duty (Family), Stubbornness, Weak Will.

Skills: Acrobatics-15, Acting-17, Artist-16, Axe/Mace (Club)-16, Climbing-13, Computer Operation/TL7-16, Cooking-12, Detect Lies-14, Driving (Car)-16, Electronics (Security Systems)/TL7-13, Escape-15, Fast Draw (Knife)-18, Fast-Talk-15, First Aid/TL7-15, Guns (Pistol)/TL7-19, History-13, Hobby Skill (d20)-14, Holdout-14, Judo-15, Karate-20, Knife-19, Language: Japanese-14, Lockpicking/TL7-14, Merchant-14, Pickpocket-15, Riding (Horse)-16, Running-13, Savoir-Faire-15, Scrounging-15, Sex Appeal-15, Singing-15, Stealth-19, Streetwise-14.

Songs: Affinity (Celestial-13), Attraction (Ethereal-13), Form (Ethereal-13), Healing (Corporeal-12), Light (Celestial-12), Shields (Celestial-13), Tongues (Corporeal-12), Numinous Corpus (Acid-16, Claws-12)

In Nomine Character Sheet

11 Forces

Corporeal Forces - 4	Strength 8	Agility 8
Ethereal Forces - 4	Intelligence 7	Precision 9
Celestial Forces - 3	Will 6	Perception 6

Vessel: Human Male/1 (Sex Appeal +1, Body Hits 40; currently mortally wounded); Human Female/3 (Charisma +1, Sex Appeal +2, Body Hits 56; currently suffering from a broken leg, treat as a Crippled/4 Discord)

Role: Lee Shen, Artist/4, Status/3

Skills: Acrobatics/1 [9], Artistry/4 (Painting) [10], Computer Operation/2 [9], Detect Lies/2 [8], Dodge/3 [11], Driving/1 [10], Electronics/1 [10], Emote/2 [8], Escape/1 [10], Fast-Talk/2 [8], Fighting/6 [18], Language/1 (Japanese) [8], Large Weapon/1 (Club) [9], Lockpicking/1 [10], Lying/2 [9], Medicine/1 [10], Move Silently/4 [12], Ranged Weapon/1 (Pistol), Running/1 [9], Savoir-Faire/1 [10], Seduction/2 [8], Singing/1 [7], Small Weapon/3 (Knife) [12]

Songs: Affinity (Celestial/3 [6]), Attraction (Ethereal/2 [6]), Form (Ethereal/2 [6]), Healing (Corporeal/1 [5]), Light (Celestial/2 [5]), Shields (Celestial/3 [6]), Tongues (Corporeal/1 [5]), Acid/6 [10], Claws/1 [5]

Attunements: Lilim of the War, Passage (from Theft)

Leshem is an older Lilim, and quite powerful, with many Songs and attunements from Valefor and Baal. (She's unlikely to overshadow the PCs, though, because she's currently wounded and out of Essence.) Leshem "recently" settled down in his Role of Lee Shen Kelley (he took Anna's last name), Japanese-American artist. With mighty Geases to Lilith, he and Anna had a child: Erica.

Unfortunately, Leshem was suspected of treason -- selling Baalite secrets -- and evidence (circumstantial or otherwise) was sufficient that the Game and the War attempted to take him into custody. He dodged them, but they showed up at his house before he did. Anna was killed, and Leshem's male vessel seriously wounded, but he got Erica away and changed into his more powerful female vessel. Then she got in touch with Ziba, and ran off to talk to contacts and find out why the Game and War were after her, and if she could get any allies.

She's found out why they're after her, but wasn't able to find any affordable allies before they caught up with her again, crippling *this* vessel, too. She's not sure how much longer Ziba's going to be willing to babysit, and is on her way back to tell him to get Erica to safety -- even an angel-Tether. (Previously, she hadn't given permission for him to take Erica to one.) Then she's planning to use her last Essence to change to her mortally wounded male vessel and perish, entering Limbo. Leshem hopes that Ziba will send his friends back to ambush any demons lying in wait for her to get

out of Limbo. She is, alas, unarmed -- though she might use the Song of Acid with her last Essence instead, once she sees the PC reinforcements.

The Little Favor that Lilith is going to ask of Leshem involves breaking into a Tether (Leshem doesn't know whose it is, angelic or demonic) and retrieving an artifact sword with a pearl set into the hilt. Considering that Lilith's offered to exchange everything Leshem owes for Erica's creation for this relic, it's important and the Tether's going to be a tough nut to crack.

Leshem cared for Anna, and cares for Erica. Her current state is close to human averages of selfishness and selflessness, though there are a few atrocities in her past. (And she's not inclined to dwell upon those to the extent of repenting.) Her worst sin, though, was being unable to save Anna, and she's been relatively heroic, trying to protect Erica. She's not likely to drive Malakim nuts immediately, till her unwillingness to repent and consider redemption comes up. (She also believes the Hell party line that Lilim fry in Heaven, and will want to protect Erica from *that*, if not from mild "indoctrination in angel-think.")

ERICA

Lilim Child

GURPS Character Sheet

ST 6; DX 7; IQ 8; HT 7

Advantages: Alertness +8, Charisma +1, Essence Control 7, Extra Hit Points +5, Luck, Patron (Leshem; almost all the time), Power Investiture (Corporeal 1, Ethereal 2, Celestial 4), Secret Advantage: Patron (Lilith, very rarely), Strong Will +8, Vessel (Attractive, Role 6: Schoolgirl)

Disadvantages: Curious, Fear of Spiders (mild), Shyness (mild), Stubbornness, Youth (age 8).

Skills: Acting-6, Computer Operation/TL7-8, Bicycling-10, Fast-Talk-6, Games (Cards: Go Fish, Crazy Eights, etc.)-11, History-6, Hobby Skill (d20)-7, Kite Flying-8, Literature-6, Mathematics-6, Musical Composition-7, Musical Instrument (Violin)-8, Musical Notation-8, Needlecraft-6, Poetry-6, Scrounging-8, Singing-6, Stealth-6.

Songs: Light (Ethereal-5), Tongues (Celestial-6)

In Nomine Character Sheet

7 Forces

Corporeal Forces - 1	Strength 2	Agility 2
Ethereal Forces - 2	Intelligence 3	Precision 5
Celestial Forces - 4	Will 8	Perception 8

Vessel: Human/6, Charisma +2 (Body Hits: 14)

Role: Schoolkid/6, Status/1

Skills: Computer Operation/2 [5], Dodge/1 [3], Emote/1 [9], Fast-Talk/1 [9], Move Silently/4 [2], Singing/1 [9]

Songs: Light (Ethereal/2 [4]), Tongues (Celestial/1 [5])

Erica Kelley's origins are shrouded in mystery. Leshem doesn't want to talk about it much, and even Seraphim of Judgment are not likely to get much beyond the shrouding of Lilith's involvement. In essence, Erica is the celestial child of Leshem (as "Lee Shen") and Anna Kelley -- and Leshem believes Anna was human. (Indeed, there was disturbance at Anna's death.) Don't ask if Anna donated a Force to Erica, or darker components, because Leshem won't talk and Erica doesn't know. Erica herself is cute, half-Asian, half-Black, and -- even at only 7 Forces -- all Lilim. She doesn't know anything about Hell, or demons, or angels, save what's in popular culture. She has some rudimentary concept that there's an afterlife, and reincarnation, but calls her Songs "maaaaagic." She knows that mean people killed Mommy and hurt Daddy real bad and Daddy's now a girl, who said that Ziba would protect her. She misses her friends. She doesn't sleep. She displays -- and feels -- real grief about the recent tragedy, but is slightly more distractible than a human child might be, if presented with diversion. Since she's unaware of her Band and hasn't made

any comments about Ziba's needs, he's decided that she's an imp and he's trying to get the concept of "redemption" across despite Erica's ignorance of celestial matters.

(If Erica's life is put into serious danger, she might spontaneously go celestial to escape -- and is much tougher that way! If things go very badly for the PCs and/or Erica, the GM might have her call for her Grandmother, unwittingly Invoking Lilith.)

CABUL

Calabite of Fire

GURPS Character Sheet

ST 18; DX 17; IQ 8; HT 18

Advantages: Alertness +1, Band Attunements (Balseraph and Calabite of Fire), Combat Reflexes, Essence Control 9, Extra Hit Points +3, Power Investiture (Corporeal 4, Ethereal 2, Celestial 3), Strong Will +8, Vessel (Zeroed, Unattractive).

Disadvantages: Discord (Corporeal 4: Total Klutz)*, Servitor of Belial

Skills: Brawling-18, Driving (Car)-15, Guns (Rifle)/TL7-16, Throwing-17.

Songs: Numinous Corpus (Feet-11, Horns-12).

*Cabul has Klutz without the normal DX requirements; it's a Discord

In Nomine Character Sheet

9 Forces

Corporeal Forces - 4	Strength 9	Agility 7
Ethereal Forces - 2	Intelligence 3	Precision 5
Celestial Forces - 3	Will 8	Perception 4

Vessel: Human/3, Charisma -1 (Body Hits: 63)

Skills: Dodge/1 [8], Driving/4 [9], Fighting/3 [16], Ranged Weapon/2 (Rifle) [7], Throwing/4 [11]

Songs: Feet/4 [8], Horns/5 [9]

Discord: Twitchy/4

Attunements: Calabite of Fire, Balseraph of Fire

Cabul is on this mission because he was hanging around in the right place at the right time, and Bizjothjah and Eshek both believe in the theory of "expendable front-line troops." Cabul alternately admires Eshek for his brutality, and sneers at him for his "softness" regarding humans. Cabul himself would cheerfully pull the wings off flies, and otherwise torment other living beings, just to get reactions. He's not up on more subtle torments (Bizjothjah's the one for psychological torture), but vaguely understands that these are potent and would like to learn -- even from an annoyingly snooty Balseraph. He thinks of the lesser Baalites as cowardly and cannon fodder, while he is *obviously* showing them what true warrior spirit is! (In truth, his combat tactics are simplistic: find enemy, shoot rifle at enemy till out of bullets, throw anything available, use resonance on enemy till enemy resists, use Balseraph of Fire attunement to make enemy drop metal things, Sing Horns and Feet, close with enemy and pound enemy into dirt. Find another enemy. Repeat.)

Note that wooden weapons or hafts are immune to the Balseraph of Fire attunement. Note further that Parnach has a certain antipathy toward Calabim of Fire. (This is a way to get Parnach out of the brawl, if he overextends himself in an attack and gets severely injured, or just fixates on fighting with Cabul.)

GETHER

Djinn of the Game

GURPS Character Sheet

ST 16; DX 12; IQ 10; HT 15

Advantages: Alertness +1, Combat Reflexes, Essence Control 9, Power Investiture (Corporeal 3, Ethereal 2, Celestial 4), Servitor of the Game, Strong Will +10, Vessel (Role 6, Enforcer Thug).

Disadvantage: Laziness.

Quirk: Self-Defense Only, Unless Ordered (because he Can't Be Bothered).

Skills: Acting-9, Brawling-14, Detect Lies-10, Driving (Car)-12, Escape-12, Holdout-10, Intimidation-11, Lockpicking/TL7-10, Savoir-Faire (Servant)-10, Shadowing-10, Stealth-12, Tactics-10, Tracking-9, Traps/TL7-8.

Songs: Attraction (Corporeal-6, Ethereal-6, Celestial-8)

In Nomine Character Sheet

9 Forces

Corporeal Forces - 3	Strength 7	Agility 5
Ethereal Forces - 2	Intelligence 4	Precision 4
Celestial Forces - 4	Will 10	Perception 6

Vessel: Human/1 (Body Hits: 28)

Role: "Jeff," Thug Enforcer/6, Status/2

Skills: Detect Lies/2 [8], Dodge/3 [8], Driving/4 [8], Emote/1 [7], Escape/4 [9], Fighting/2 [12], Lockpicking/3 [7], Lying/1 [7], Move Silently/3 [8], Savoir-Faire/3 [7], Tactics/4 [8], Tracking/1 [7]

Songs: Attraction (Corporeal/2 [5], Ethereal/3 [5], Celestial/3 [7])

Attunement: Djinn of the Game

Gether attuned to Leshen during the fight where Leshen's human spouse was killed, and is still a bit battered from being unable to fight back when Leshen reacted violently. (Thus, it took a while for the Game to catch up -- Gether had to recover.) So long as it's only Leshen in danger, Gether's hoping to sit in the car. He'll be last into any brawl, considering it his job to keep Leshen from getting away again. Indeed, he'll quietly drive away if the angels take control of combat dramatically enough.

BIZJOTHJAH

Balseraph of the Game

GURPS Character Sheet

ST 16; DX 12; IQ 17; HT 14

Advantages: Essence Control 11, Extra Hit Points +3, Power Investiture (Corporeal 3, Ethereal 4, Celestial 4), Role 4 (PI), Servitor of the Game, Strong Will +2, Vessel (Handsome).

Disadvantages: Overconfidence, Reduced Alertness -4, Sadism.

Skills: Acting-16, Computer Operation/TL7-16, Criminology/TL7-15, Detect Lies-14, Disguise-15, Driving (Car)-12, Electronics Operation (Security System)/TL7-15, Escape-9, Fast-Talk-15, First Aid/TL7-16, Games (Chess)-16, Guns (Pistol)/TL7-13, Interrogation-15, Musical Instrument (Violin)-14, Psychology-14, Physiology/TL7-13, Research-15, Running-11, Savoir-Faire-16, Sex Appeal-12, Shadowing-16, Singing-13, Stealth-12, Streetwise-15, Tactics-14, Tracking-16, Traps/TL7-15.

Songs: Attraction (Ethereal-13), Harmony (Ethereal-13), Tongues (Corporeal-13), Numinous Corpus: Wings-15

In Nomine Character Sheet

11 Forces

Corporeal Forces - 3	Strength 7	Agility 5
Ethereal Forces - 4	Intelligence 9	Precision 7
Celestial Forces - 4	Will 10	Perception 6

Vessel: Human/1, Sex Appeal +2 (Body Hits: 28)

Role: "Benedict Joseph Jamesson," Private Investigator/4, Status/3

Skills: Computer Operation/1 [10], Detect Lies/1 [7], Dodge/1 [6], Driving/1 [8], Emote/2 [8], Escape/1 [8], Fast-Talk/1 [11], Knowledge/2 (Torture) [11], Lockpicking/1 [8], Medicine/1 [8], Move Silently/2 [7], Ranged Weapon/1 (Pistol) [8], Running/1 [8], Savoir-Faire/1 [10], Seduction/1 [11], Singing/1 [7], Tactics/1 [10], Tracking/3 [9]

Songs: Attraction (Ethereal/1 [5]), Harmony (Ethereal/1 [5]), Tongues (Corporeal/2 [5]), Wings/6 [9]

Attunements: Balseraph of the Game, Dissonance Binding

Known as "Bizzy," behind his back, Bizjothjah is technically in charge of the Asmodean-Baalite mission. Being a Balseraph, it's unclear how much *he* knows about why they're after Leshem, since he'll invent any number of plausible reasons why Baal and Asmodeus want Leshem captured. He has no orders about Erica, but will tie up loose ends by killing her in front of Leshem (if he thinks Erica's human) or capturing her as well (if he realizes she's celestial). All in all, he's a thoroughly sadistic specimen of Balseraph which any Malakite would delight in smiting.

He'll order nearby demons to capture the weakest-looking angel(s) (i.e., one or more of the PCs) so that he can exchange hostages for Leshem and Erica. He'll be happy to torture any hostages in front of Ziba to convince him to relinquish Leshem. (If he gets Leshem, he won't try too hard for Erica, unless he discovers she's not human.)

ESHEK

Calabite of the War

GURPS Character Sheet

ST 18; DX 18; IQ 14; HT 17

Advantages: Artifact (Fiery Sword)*, Essence Control 10, Extra Hit Points +5, Power Investiture (Corporeal 4, Ethereal 3, Celestial 3), Strong Will +2, Vessel (Unattractive).

Disadvantages: Bad Temper (Discord 3), Reduced Alertness -2, Reduced Manual Dexterity -2, Servitor of the War.

Skills: Brawling-18, Broadsword-21, Detect Lies-12, Driving (Car)-16, Fast Draw (Pistol, Sword)-17, Guns (Rifle)/TL7-19, Intimidation-16, Leadership-14, Tactics-14, Throwing-15.

Song: Numinous Corpus: Tail-12

In Nomine Character Sheet

10 Forces

Corporeal Forces - 4	Strength 8	Agility 8
Ethereal Forces - 3	Intelligence 6	Precision 6
Celestial Forces - 3	Will 7	Perception 5

Vessel: Human/4, Charisma -1 (Body Hits: 64)

Skills: Detect Lies/2 [7], Dodge/2 [10], Driving/1 [7], Emote/3 [8], Fighting/2 [14], Large Weapon/6 (Broadsword) [14], Tactics/4 [10], Throwing/1 [9]

Artifact: Fiery Sword/3*

Discord: Angry/3

* Eshek captured it from an angel, and uses it against angels at every opportunity

Eshek was placed under Bizjothjah's command by his immediate superior, and is somewhat grumpy about it -- but obedient. He's the one who killed Leshem's wife, and the only point in his favor is that he did it quickly because he

(unlike Cabul and Bizjothjah) doesn't hold with hostages and torture, thinking them decadent and unbecoming to demons. Further, aside from deeming torture to be beneath him -- "that's for Habbalite morons" -- Eshek fancies himself a "surgical strike" commander, and doesn't like the disturbance associated with damaging and killing humans. He's a violent commander with demons, though, prone to breaking bones for minor disobedience, and all his underlings are afraid of his wrath.

He'll quickly figure out that Ziba is focused on defending the child, and delegate the nearest demon or two to harry Ziba -- but stay out of range -- while Eshek himself heads for the target: Leshem. If Ziba is protecting both, he'll try a forked attack to focus Ziba on the child. (In the "heat of battle," he's likely to over-rule Bizzy in this matter -- though it'll be hard to communicate *his* will in the middle of a brawl.)

ENOCH and GAREB

Habbalah of the War

GURPS Character Sheet

ST 15; DX 12; IQ 10; HT 15

Advantages: Alertness +2, Combat Reflexes, Essence Control 8, Extra Hit Points +5, Power Investiture (Corporeal 3, Ethereal 2, Celestial 3), Strong Will +6, Vessel (Zeroed, Attractive).

Disadvantages: Overconfidence, Reduced Manual Dexterity -1, Servitors of the War.

Skills: Axe/Mace-14, Brawling-15, Climbing-11, Driving (Car)-11, Escape-9, First Aid/TL7-9, Guns (Rifle)/TL7-14, Intimidation-10, Running-13, Sex Appeal*-12, Stealth-11, Tactics-7, Theology-8, Throwing-10.

Songs: Healing (Corporeal-7), Numinous Corpus-10 (Tail for Enoch, Claws for Gareb).

*They are good at dramatic poses which show off their attractive vessels, thus default Sex Appeal

In Nomine Character Sheet

8 Forces

Corporeal Forces - 3	Strength 7	Agility 5
Ethereal Forces - 2	Intelligence 4	Precision 4
Celestial Forces - 3	Will 7	Perception 5

Vessel: Human/2, Sex Appeal +1 (Body Hits: 35)

Skills: Climbing/2 [7], Dodge/2 [7], Driving/1 [5], Escape/1 [6], Fighting/4 [14], Large Weapon/3 (Club) [10], Medicine/1 [5], Move Silently/2 [7], Ranged Weapon/3 (Rifle) [7], Running/1 [8], Tactics/1 [5], Throwing/2 [7]

Songs: Healing/2 [5], Numinous Corpus/4 [7] (Enoch has Tail; Gareb has Claws)

Enoch and Gareb are essentially Eshek's second in commands -- if only because they're able to beat up the Impudites and Leshan killed his previous one (a Balseraph) during the first attack. Somewhat surprisingly for Habbalah, they have matching explanations for why they're "angels doing God's work in Hell" and nominally working for Baal. (They're there to prove to demons that angels are better, so that Heaven will win Armageddon; they fight against "Heaven's wimps" to strengthen Heaven.) As the closest things to "friends" that Punishers have, they'll cooperate surprisingly well with each other, and even help each other out if they get ganged up on. ("Honestly overpowered" isn't "weak.") They're a bit overconfident, sure that they're the equal of "wimpy" Heavenly angels, but due to their delusion, they won't *soul*-kill a worthy angelic opponent (i.e., one who fights back), even if they get a chance in celestial combat, unless it's entirely self-defense. (Worthy ones should be vessel-killed and sent back to Heaven to train, you see . . .) They look down on the other demons, but respect the stronger ones' ability to pound on them, and don't intend to "break cover" by revealing they're *really* on Heaven's side in the end.

CHIDON, GAAL, and ELAM

Impudites of the War

GURPS Character Sheet

ST 14; DX 14; IQ 8; HT 14

Advantages: Combat Reflexes, Essence Control (7 Essence), Extra Hit Points +4, Power Investiture (Corporeal 3, Ethereal 2, Celestial 2), Strong Will +4, Vessel (Zeroed).

Disadvantage: Servitors of Baal.

Skills: Brawling-16, Guns (Rifle)/TL7-16, Running-11, Scrounging-7, Stealth-15, and one of Axe-15 or Shortsword-15.*

Songs: Form (Corporeal-7, Ethereal-6).

(Gaal uses Axe for his hatchet; Chidon uses Shortsword for his baseball bat.)

In Nomine Character Sheet

7 Forces

Corporeal Forces - 3	Strength 6	Agility 6
Ethereal Forces - 2	Intelligence 3	Precision 5
Celestial Forces - 2	Will 5	Perception 3

Vessel: Human/2 (Body Hits: 30)

Role: none

Skills: Dodge/3 [9], Fighting/3 [12], Small Weapon/3* [8], Move Silently/1 [7], Ranged Weapon/3 (Rifle) [7], Running/1 [7]

Songs: Form (Corporeal/4 [7], Ethereal/4 [6])

* Chidon uses a baseball bat (club); Gaal has a hatchet; Elam actually has a shortsword, and is envied by his fellows.

Chidon, Gaal, and Elam are a matched trio of junior Baalites. They get ordered around by everyone, yelled at because they're so bad at sucking Essence (to give to their superiors), beaten up in the guise of training, and generally have bad attitudes. They're afraid of Cabul, Eshek and the Habbalah, and are wary of the Gamesters. If any of them get an Excellent reaction/positive reaction roll with a check digit of 6, there is a chance they'll be so impressed by angelic teamwork that they'd be interested in defecting from Hell. Whether they're actual redemption potential, though, is problematic.

Being a Pirate Means Never Needing To Say You're Sorrrrrrrrr-y

Why do we like evil-doers, while at the same time finding evil distasteful?

I've been struggling with this recently because of today (Friday the 19th), which is the second annual "Talk Like a Pirate" day, as reported in [Daily Illuminators](#) everywhere. This, too, follows closely on the continued success of the *Pirates of the Caribbean* motion picture, itself based on a family-oriented ride that extols the virtues of being a pirate.

Mull that over for a minute. For those who know their history, pirates are generally not considered terribly savory; pillaging, plundering, looting, and burning are generally activities we try to ensure our kids *avoid*, yet most of us wouldn't bat an eye if our youngster wanted to dress up like a pirate for Halloween.

Likewise, having returned from Dragon*Con a few weeks ago, I note that there are an *awful* lot of folks dressing up like Darth Vaders, Boba Fetts, Stormtroopers, orcs, vampires, Borg, and insurance salesmen (although the latter may have been the result of an ill-timed concurrent convention).

In contrast, I'm pretty sure I've never seen someone dressed for fun as, say, an Aztec priest, a Nazi, a terrorist, a child molester, or anything like that.

And in thinking it over, I've come to the conclusion that people like the idea of "evil-doers" that don't actually do any evil.

Consider most of your *Star Wars* antagonists; outside of opposing the actions of the protagonists, they actually don't do much that's actually *evil* . . . certainly not on-camera. Darth Vader struts around, killing henchmen (who are, presumably, evil themselves), flies his cool advanced Imperial spaceship that *wasn't* made of papier-mâché, and acts directly against the Good Guys, which makes him by definition the Bad Guy. Boba Fett mutters something about Han Solo being no use to him dead, stands around, and eventually trips and falls into the Sarlacc Pit. And the poor Stormtroopers . . . well, they're generally no more menacing than your typical office temp.

Now, obviously a moment's thought shows this isn't the case; the countless worlds of the Empire didn't join because the Stormtroopers brought punch and pie. One does not become a bounty hunter like Boba Fett without . . . well, killing people for money. And Darth Vader, even if he wasn't directly responsible for the Death Star, certainly had culpability with its construction and deployment on Alderaan.

Which brings us back to pirates. My weathered Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary has a definition of "piracy" as "robbery on the high seas." Robbery is, of course, taking someone else's stuff through violence or threat of violence. Beyond the plundering, I understand that rape played an important part in many pirates' lives as well, and there was often a fair bit of incidental murder involved. Despite this, dressing up and pretending you're a pirate holds a much broader appeal than pretending you're a robber, rapist, or murderer.

Why is this, and what on Gaia's green earth does it have to do with gaming?

I suspect it's because there is an appeal to being a badass, not because of anything you've done, but because of some inherent quality that *makes* you a badass. This reaffirming loop enables you to think of yourself as bad, without doing anything evil. In fact, you can even pretend that you *aren't* evil; after all, other pirates may violate and murder, but not me. I just wear a cool hat and get to sail the high seas. Oh, and I'm bad.

In the gaming world, I've noticed a similar trend; people like to play characters that are bad, without actually *doing* anything wrong. For example, in *Vampire* LARPs I usually try to drive home what being a vampire means by trying to work with the player how they feed on human blood (which is a pretty big part of the whole vampire experience). Almost invariably, the players who are playing the most immoral, sinister characters are the ones who don't like

roleplaying what they're doing:

"I kill homeless people and drink their blood. If anyone sees me, I kill 'em."

"Okay; how do you find them? What do you do with the bodies? What if one starts screaming? How do you handle it if more than one person sees you and they run in different directions?"

"Uhhhh . . . I don't know. I just deal with it."

Now, if I insinuate that the players may not want to play such antisocial characters, they bluster and demand to be able to do so. And several of these same players were unable to handle it when I was graphic about their actions and consequences when they tried carrying out evil acts in the game.

Of course, I'm certain there are a bunch of players out there that do revel in being utter fiends. But I have a more grandiose theory as to why many people embrace playing "bad" characters, while at the same time finding being "bad" distasteful.

Because being "bad," by definition, obviates one from the obligations of being "good."

Consider that being bad is not a full-time calling; no one would ever say something like, "What's up with Vader? He didn't pimp-slap that Imperial technician for no good reason! Are you *sure* he's evil?" No, if you're bad, you can pretty much act however you'd like.

Being good, on the other hand, is a full-time mission; society just won't buy it if Luke Skywalker got liquored up and lopped off someone's arms for snoring too loud, and still claim to be "good."

But, paradoxically, you can be "evil" and *still do good*. In fact, a nigh-infinite number of stories have been written about characters defined as evil that have listened to their conscience, or done something that was good (or seemed to be good). Even discounting the power of the redemption story - a literary staple from Biblical tales all the way up to *VH-1's Behind the Music* - it's usually trivial to wave away any seemingly good acts as being selfish: "I saved that whelp from the slavers because she was making too much noise with her screams." It's much more difficult to justify a seemingly selfish act as serving good: "If I hadn'ta lopped off his arms, they prolly woulda fallen off eventually anyway <blaaarrgh> . . ." (In ***Dungeons & Dragons*** terms, I suspect most GMs would call for immediate alignment loss if a Lawful Good character burned down a village for fun, but I doubt they would call for the same alignment loss if a Chaotic Evil character saved someone from a burning village for no good reason.)

Which brings us back to pirates. By embracing the mindset of a pirate, I suspect that many of us like the freedom that entails, while finding the evil distasteful. And while it's trivial to envision a pirate who is noble and just - or could *become* noble and just some day - it's much more difficult to embrace that possibility with, say, terrorists, Aztec priests, or child molesters.

So to tie it all to gaming, I'd point out that in a game that presents characters with amoral or immoral choices, it's imperative for everyone to be on the same page in terms of how they are going to deal with that . . . *or* to agree that certain thresholds won't be crossed. It's entirely possible to play a reticent vampire who has so lost touch with humanity that he thinks nothing about slaughtering innocents, without the game descending into an hourly gorefest; simply agree that the camera fades to black when those actions take place. (I'm personally uncomfortable with that style of GMing, but I recognize it as a valid option.) Likewise it's possible to play a game - like, say, a *Star Wars* Dark Side game - where everyone is "bad," without anyone ever doing anything particularly bad (outside of attacking Good Guys, that is). It's even possible to dispense with those designations altogether, and simply have characters act however they want; good and evil is not an absolute, and characters muddle through their lives however they can.

Regardless, know what is acceptable and expected of the players before hand, and what will be shown and discussed. This will keep those awkward moments where one party envisioned "bad" to mean "graphic destroyer of lives," while another was more looking forward to being "a trash-talking pirate."

A pirate who, no doubt, would eagerly look forward to the annual "Talk Like an Insurance Salesmen" day.

Pyramid Review

The Dice of Wrath (A Knights of the Dinner Table Dice Game)

Published by [Flying Buffalo, Inc.](#)

Designed by Rick Loomis

Five Dice, pad of 40 score sheets, rule sheet; \$14.95

Dice are available singly for \$2.00 apiece

They've been comic book characters, as have their alter egos. They've been figurines, card games, and battle books, and their favored RPG system has gone from fictional to Game of the Year. That leaves clicky bases and dice, and Flying Buffalo, Inc. has the dice thing covered now that the *Knights of the Dinner Table* are featured on ***The Dice of Wrath***.

Jolly Blackburn's popular gamers' comic strip about the misadventures of B.A. and his motley cast of roleplayers pokes fun at the gaming hobby. In this tabletop incarnation, their in-game alter egos -- the Untouchable Trio plus One -- have finished another dungeon crawl, and the time has come for the group to divvy up the loot. Players (three to five of them) take on the role of one of the strip's characters: B.A. the GM, his cousin Sara, bloodthirsty Bob, dizzy Dave, or rules lawyer Brian. There are 11 items up for grabs, each worth a certain number of points.

The game provides a pad of 40 score sheets, which list the characters, the treasures, and the point values. Everyone gets a copy of the sheet. There are five six-sided dice, each with pictures of the five personalities on the die faces; the sixth side is the wild Hoody-Hoo side. If that comes up, it counts as any character you want it to.

On his turn a player rolls these dice, and ideally his character's picture comes up on a lot of them. If not, the player may pick up any unsatisfactory die results and reroll them, and do it once more after that. Those are the results he's stuck with. The record sheets show six boxes next to each of the 11 items, and each die result must be placed into one of those boxes.

If your die rolls don't net you a lot of your own character, all is not lost. Since who gets what at the end of the game depends on how everyone voted, smart players will make a deal with another player -- vote for them to get an item they'll like and ask that they do the same for you. If that person won't cut the deal you want, you can put your votes in a box next to a less valuable item -- or one that takes away points.

Some items are generic things like the Ring of Invisibility, worth points to anyone. Others are more valuable to certain characters -- if you're playing Brian, you would love to have the Ring of Fireballs, while Bob's player scores more points if he gains the Crossbow of Slaying. Still other artifacts depend on another item -- the Crossbow Bolts are worth points to anyone who ends up with the Crossbow of Slaying, but the bolts lose you points if you don't have the weapon, too -- strive to get those bolts at your peril, especially since Bob will be fighting you tooth and nail for both of them. Cursed items can lower your score, and there are a couple more curveball devices that can randomly change your point totals or alter your die rolling.

All but the last round of play is done openly -- your votes and any deals you want to make must be done publicly. When everyone's had three goes with the dice (yes, that's three rounds of three dice throws each), everyone adds up what they have in the boxes next to each item. Whoever got the most votes (no matter who cast them) gets the item (B.A. gets all tied-score artifacts). Add up the point values of these items to determine the winner.

The game is a portable item, good for pulling out most anywhere. The pictures (Urbanic renditions of the Knights,

apparently, whose version of the Knights is still as good as anyone's) are melded into the dice, so it doesn't look like they'll wear off any time soon. They range from face shots to full body poses, but in spite of the small size they're still nice. They also serve as regular dice. The score sheets make a good graphic presentation, though at least one of them ought to be saved for photocopying later.

What looks (and plays) like a simple variation on **Yahtzee** is actually a carefully interwoven series of counterbalancing tactics. Pushing here may mean something pulling loose there, and if you don't make and stick to a plan of attack you'd better be a good negotiator. The market has a lot of games that play fast these days, but that holds doubly true for **The Dice of Wrath**. With rules that are easy to absorb and play time as short as five minutes, it's a small miracle Flying Buffalo managed to jam as much strategy and player interaction into such a compact package.

--Andy Vetromile

The First Room

by Stephen McKenzie

Terror! Suspense! And a darn good reason to be as quiet as you can! Its all here in this Adventure Pizza, designed for characters as fresh and tasty as possible.

Ingredients: A Recipe for Suspense

1) Journey to Stonestrow Canyon

In the upper reaches of a remote mountain range are a series of limestone caves in ravine, known to the residents of the lowland valleys as Stonestrow Canyon. The canyon is five days travel by horse from the nearest settlement, and a full two weeks from any sizeable town. Giants once lived here, long ago, but the most recent residents were a band of renegade human clerics, members of an evil sect banned in the main cities of the realm. It was to these remote caves that they fled, 100 years ago, looking for a secret place to perform their despicable rites of blood sacrifice. Using the caves as a base, they raided the lower valleys looking for sacrifices. For 15 years they terrorized the countryside, until finally, the king's men located the secret cave base and killed every member of the cult they could find. Stonestrow Canyon was searched and cleansed, and then abandoned. No one has set foot in the area since.

A recent discovery has revealed that an important wizard named Fullbright may have been one of the sect's last victims. Fullbright disappeared about one year before the evil sect was flushed out (in other words, 86 years ago). He went missing while on a mission to hide an artifact of great value, in the most remote location he could find. Members of another magic sect, enemies of Fullbright's order, were trying to steal this item and it was considered too risky to hold on to it. Because his mission was a secret, no one except the head of the order (whose name was Burwick) knew where Fullbright was going. Burwick was killed in a battle with the enemy sect before he could tell anyone where Fullbright was planning to hide the artifact. (It does not mater what the artifact is. Use any one from your campaign).

The recent interest in Fullbright's fate has come about because of the exhumation of Burwick's body by some enterprising clerics who are allied with his order. When they realized that the danger from the rival sect was over, they used divination magic in order to speak with Burwick beyond the grave, and have found out the area that Fullbright was intending to hide the artifact: in the mountain wilderness near Stonestrow Canyon. The clerics quickly put two and two together and realize why Fullbright never came back. He was captured by the evil priests, and was probably made a sacrifice! A further search of Stonestrow Canyon is now desired, to locate Fullbright's body, speak with his spirit about the location of the artifact and recover it. It's a long shot, but it just might work.

There are a number of options for involving the PCs. It does not matter what the artifact is, what kind of order the wizards belong to, what the enemy magic sect was like, or why they ceased to be a threat. The most important ingredient is that a low-level party undertakes the quest for Fullbright's body. Additionally, one member of the party must have some mechanism that enables them to speak with dead people (noting that this must be done more than once).

Once you have provided your party with the background, start the action with the party entering a large limestone cave (the first in the system) and prepare to perform an extensive search. But the very first thing they see inside is the body of an enormous dragon asleep on the floor, in the middle of the chamber . . .

2) The Sleeping Dragon

Here are some sample lines to introduce the dragon to your players, in rough chronological order:

"You clamber down the slope on to the cave floor. It's a pretty large cave, you can't see the

other end and you can't see the ceiling. But you can hear a low, regular rumbling sound coming from somewhere deeper into the cave in front of you . . ."

"Now that you mention it, a very large creature breathing is exactly what it sounds like . . ."

"Now you've moved a bit closer, your torchlight shines off the part of the creature closest to you. Whatever it is, it's huge, and its covered in scales like a lizard . . ."

"No, it still hasn't moved, and its breathing is still the same . . ."

"Yes, it probably is asleep. Just as well, otherwise you'd all be dead by now."

"Yes, that's right; there's a huge dragon in the first room of the dungeon. So what are you gong to do about it?"

The dragon, whose name is Kos, reached maturity about 400 years ago and for a long time ruled over a wide swathe of the northern mountains that are his ancestral home. Other dragons in the area did his bidding or stayed out of his way, and the local inhabitants were suitably terrified of him, and paid whatever homage he required. For a while, everything was rosy. However, Kos is one of particular family of dragons (the Rodosi dragons) that are badly affected by senility. Once such a dragon reaches a particular age, his mind starts to go, and in most cases he is ejected from power by younger dragons. And that is what happened to Kos 50 years ago, when his younger brother Amorgos threw him out of his caves in the north and banished him from the kingdom.

Kos traveled south, looking for refuge. His magic abilities were now beyond him, having escaped his crumbling memory, and a deep depression came over him. He did not seek a new place to establish dominion over humans or other dragons. Instead, he sought a place far from anywhere, where he could hunt wild game and sleep out the rest of his days. And the main cave in Stonestrow Canyon was the best place he could find.

Kos can get in and out of the main cavern by two entrances (a third is too narrow for him). He cannot access any of the smaller caves that lie below the first chamber, and nor does he wish to (see section 3 and 4, below). He spends nearly all of his time asleep on the floor of the main cave, and wakes up about once every eight weeks to go hunting. His hunts last for several days, during which he dines on the wild goats and sheep that are plentiful on the mountainsides. Then he returns to his slumber. Such is the life of the ancient and senile dragon.

The players, of course, know none of this. All they know is that a large and powerful dragon is in the first room of the cave complex, and that the rest of the adventure will have to involve tiptoeing around his sleeping form. They do not know when he will wake up, how powerful he is, whether he has any treasure (which he does not) or if there are any other dragons in the area. Play on this fear, curiosity and doubt as much as possible. It does not matter what kind of dragon the GM chooses. Sketch out the basic statistics for a large powerful dragon with no spell-casting ability, and add in additional details according to what kind of dragon he is. If you decide that Kos is a normal fire-breathing dragon, you might want to describe the stench of sulfur and the blackened marks around the main cave, and so on.

Ideally, this is one of the heroes' first adventures, and they are hoping for a nice easy job to cut their teeth on. The presence of the dragon will terrify them, but he is not intended to be an actual monster to be faced during the adventure. If combat with him occurs, the PCs will be lucky to manage an escape, and will surely die if they try to confront him. Instead, Kos' function in the plot will be similar to an invisible timer for a very large bomb. The players never know when he might wake up, or what might awaken him, and every moment in the caves beneath his lair will be spent with half an ear out for his movements above.

Assume that Kos has only just begun one of his eight-week naps when he is discovered. In normal circumstances, Kos would sleep soundly for this period and would only have a small chance of awakening beforehand. However, his keen senses are still functioning in his sleep (even despite his senile condition), and noise, light or smells nearby will cumulatively increase his chance of waking up, as his subconscious slowly pieces together the fact that someone is in his cave. Work out Kos's normal awakening date, eight weeks from the day he is discovered. Then, begin with a very low chance (1%) that Kos will awaken prior to that date, of his own accord, on any given day. This roll can be made at

the start of each day, and should not increase cumulatively per day. Add 1% on to the chance every time an event occurs that might disturb him, such as:

- A loud noise occurs in the caves below
- Someone makes noise of any velocity in the main cave
- Someone carries a light within range of his head
- Someone carries a lit torch, food items, or anything else with a noticeable smell within 60 feet of him (this includes characters who have not washed themselves in the last two days, or washed their clothes in the last four days).

Roll to see if Kos wakes up when the disturbance occurs, as well as rolling against the newly adjusted total at the beginning of each day from then on. Particularly loud noises, or bright lights very close by him, should add +2 to the chance instead of +1. Once a modifier has been added onto the daily total, it cannot be removed, so that Kos will be increasingly likely to wake up as adventuring occurs in the cave nearby him. In any case, he will always awaken after eight weeks, so there is a definite limit on the time the party has to complete the rest of the scenario.

The players should see the GM making rolls every time the explorers go anywhere near Kos, and they will quickly get the idea that this will increase the likelihood of waking him up. The party should need no encouragement to use the "sneaking" game rules to their fullest potential. However, the GM shouldn't tell them too much about exactly what will trigger the dragon's senses. Most players will quickly realize that light and noise are to be avoided, but the GM might want to reward the player who realizes that taking a regular dip in the nearby stream is a good idea, while carrying that salted lamb under the dragon's nose is not.

3) The Main Cave

As you may have guessed, all movement in and out of the cave system must be done by going past the dragon. Sketch out a basic limestone cave system according to the following specifications:

The main cave is essentially a tube, 400 feet in length and about 80 feet wide in most places. There are three entrances from outside. The first two are holes at either end. One of these is an old river course, and a landslide caused the other one. Both main entrances are about 40 feet by 40 feet and both allow easy access to the floor of the cave. Kos can fit through both of them. The third entrance is a five-foot by five-foot hole in the ceiling immediately above where Kos sleeps, 80 feet in the air. His breath weapon is effective through this hole.

The ceiling is about 80 feet high on average (out of sight in most places). There is a noticeable depression (15 foot deep, 5-10 feet wide) running through the room where a river used to flow, but other than that the floor is generally even (with five-foot irregularities here and there, but no ravines or major slopes). The giants cleared obstructions and leveled parts of the floor to make access easier. In addition, Kos has barged flowstone and other formations out of the way in order to clear even more access, so limestone debris litters the floor. Bats, insects, lizards and other small creatures live in the cave, and there are tree roots dangling down from the ceiling.

The main cave was the area in which the giants lived, many hundreds of years ago. They did not penetrate to the lower levels, which are not on a gigantic scale. Remains of gigantic habitation found in the main cave can include:

- Huge statues (free carved), or 'Rushmore-style' heads in the cave wall (10-15 feet high).
- A huge stone slab acting as a bridge over the river depression
- A large pile of sharpened boulders (ammunition).
- A huge cooking fire surrounded by boulders, with whole dead trees nearby.
- Several giant skeletons (limed over and imbedded in the river depression).
- Piles of moldering furs and skins in various locations

Allow the gigantic remains to act as a distraction, encouraging the PCs to loiter in the main cave for longer than they should.

4) The Lower Levels

Use the following outline when designing the lower cave areas.

There are (at least) three lower areas. Position the entranceways to these lower areas according to how close you want the party to get to the dragon. In the most obvious scenario, the entrance leading to the area containing Fullbright's body is about 20 feet from Kos's head.

The lower levels are a combination of natural caves, together with small rooms and connecting passageways dug by the clerical sect. Access from the main cave is by quite narrow cave tunnels, which have been altered or extended by the clerical sect to allow for human movement. These are a sloping tunnel, a rough-hewn staircase, and a sinkhole where the river once descended. In the case of the sinkhole, the ladder used by the clerics is now gone and the party must climb down into the lower area.

The lower levels are only accessible from the main cave. The GM should think carefully before placing any secret entrances leading from the lower levels to the outside; any that might exist should be difficult to find or hard to access (a lengthy underwater swim might be in order). Further, each of the lower levels has only one entrance from the main cave, and they are not connected to each other. This will mean that the party is obliged to travel back and forth through the main cave in order to explore the dungeon.

The lower levels were the main areas in which the clerical sect lived. The clerics moved through the main cave in an unobtrusive fashion, and made secret entrances to hide the passageways down to the lower levels (so that anyone searching the main cave would not realize they were living down below). These doors were discovered when the place was raided 85 years ago. Remember that the sect had only been present for 15 years, so all their building accomplishments must have been feasible in that time span. There will be nothing of any value in the lower levels; it was all taken during the raid. Materials prone to decomposition (paper, bone, wood, cloth, etc.) will be in poor condition after 85 years but still essentially intact.

Give each one of the lower levels a particular function in the daily lives of the clerical sect and design them accordingly. Some suggestions for the three main lower areas are:

- **Area 1:** Sleeping and eating areas, a refuse pit, a cooking area (possibly underneath the sink hole or another entrance).
- **Area 2:** A military area, training area, weapons store, prison, and the chambers of some important clerics.
- **Area 3:** Religious area, temple, graveyard.

The important thing is that Fullbright's body could be in any of these lower areas. He could be one of the skeletons chained up and left to die in the prison. Or he could have been one of the bodies that were dumped unceremoniously into the garbage pit. Finally, perhaps he was buried in the pit grave in the temple graveyard. It doesn't matter which one you choose, so long as there are skeletons present in each of the lower sections, prompting the PCs to stop and search for Fullbright's body in a number of places.

Cooking Tips (with Extra Spice)

1) Finding Fullbright's Body

The GM might decide to give Fullbright's body an identifying feature (such as a helmet, or a weapon) so that it might be easier to trace him. Otherwise, the party will need to talk to a range of dead people until they find the body they are looking for. The GM should take on the personas of some of the following as the party begins talking to corpses:

- Another captive, who was sacrificed by the clerics years before and knows that sacrifices were performed in the temple (near the graveyard).
- A slave of the clerical sect, who knows that captives who were not sacrificed were simply thrown into the

- garbage pit (especially if they had been wounded in combat and were unworthy sacrifices).
- One of the clerics, who will lie to the PCs about where the body was buried.
- A young child, who died of an illness that apparently killed many people in the caves (the child does not know what year she died).
- One of the king's soldiers, who can remember the battle.
- Another cleric who tells the party (truthfully) that Fullbright was captured and interrogated in the prisons because he was thought to be a spy. The cleric does not know his eventual fate.

Once Fullbright's body is finally uncovered, he will immediately tell the party of his fate, as well as the location of the artifact (if they mention that the danger of it being stolen has passed). In the easiest case, Fullbright is still carrying the artifact (perhaps he swallowed it shortly before capture). GMs with a sadistic sense of humor might decide that it is actually back in the city the party came from, having been taken from Fullbright by the clerics and then captured by the king's soldiers, who did not know what it was. The most obvious answer is that he hid it somewhere in the mountains shortly before he was captured.

Extra Spice

- The party speaks to a particularly powerful cleric who curses them from beyond the grave.
- Fullbright buried the artifact in the main cave, near or under the dragon's resting place (and the clerics discovered him doing so). The PCs will have to lure the dragon out so they can get to it.
- The dragon wakes up shortly after the PCs find out where the artifact is buried. They must be alert to his presence in the skies as they dig it up.

2) Monsters, Traps and Treasure

Fitting other monsters into this scenario isn't difficult, provided they are not sentient, and would not smell like food to the dragon. If you decide that one of the lower areas has a river or other moisture in it, populate it with creatures made of slime or fungus. Giant spiders or other insects will also work well, as will any non-sentient creature that hides among rocks and normally preys on bats or other small cave creatures. Minor undead may also populate the graveyard area. Any traps made by the clerics would have been found and deactivated when the place was raided; likewise, all normal treasure would have been found.

Extra Spice

- Use any pain resistance, shock, or willpower rules in your game to see if the players can undergo the ordeal of combat while remaining quiet. A shout of horror as a slime monster falls from above will add +1 onto Kos's chances of awakening, and prompt a "wake up" roll.
- Add in a lower level that was not discovered in the raid (with the secret door from the main cave still intact). Now you can add in traps, guardian monsters such as golems, and some of the cleric's treasure. Be sure to put Fullbright's body (and perhaps the artifact) in here. Also be sure to make traps and monsters in this level as noisy as possible.
- In their final days the clerical sect attempted to dig a tunnel between two of the underground levels, thereby removing the need to visit the main cave. This tunnel might be completed by the PCs -- but is always at risk of collapsing, stranding them in one of the lower areas and leaving them with a lot of quite noisy digging to do.

3) When the Dragon Wakes

It would almost be anticlimactic not to have Kos regain consciousness by the end of the scenario. However, a successful awakening roll need not spell instant death for the party. Kos will be slow to wake up properly (about a minute before he will begin to move around in the cave), and this will give characters that are in the main cave enough time to flee from the immediate range of his breath weapon. Movement or even a change in his breathing will be immediately noticeable to all those in the main cave, and his movements will be heard by those in the lower levels who successfully manage to listen. If the heroes have any sense, they will keep an ear out for his movements at all times,

especially if they have made any noise below.

A likely occurrence is that the party becomes trapped in one of the lower levels. Kos will attempt to breathe down the tunnels leading into the lower area that the players are in, and any caught in the area of effect will suffer the consequences. The party may need to survive down there for several days, sending up scouts to see what the dragon's movements are, and trying to judge the best moment to flee.

Another likely occurrence is that the dragon will end up chasing the party through the mountains after they have fled from his cave. In this situation, Kos will forget that the PCs are human and think he is hunting them as though they were sheep or goats. Despite his senility, he is a keen hunter and knows the mountains well. He will attempt to skewer the PCs on his claws after diving out of the air, and can also use his breath weapon to burn out areas where the PCs may be hiding, but he will try to avoid incinerating or otherwise totally disintegrating them, as that would ruin the taste.

Extra Spice

- Rather than waking up, the dragon dies (of old age). It may take the players some while to realize that he is dead. His hide alone will be worth a small fortune. Clever characters may want to increase their prestige by plunging a sword into him and then claiming that his death was their handiwork.
- The dragon has lost his nerve in his old age. He wakes up and decides to flee rather than risking combat with the party (wrongly assuming that they must be extremely powerful).
- It turns out that Kos does have treasure, but such a pitiful amount that he completely obscures it when he's lying on top of it. Allow the PCs a glimpse of the traditional pile of coins with magic weapons jutting out here and there, and they might be back, trying to figure out ways to lure him out of the cave.

Side Salad: Information on Kos the Dragon and his Kin

1) Killing or Trapping the Dragon

The opportunity to kill or capture a large and ancient dragon will prove too tempting for some players, and the focus will shift from finding the artifact onto the dragon himself. However, killing or subduing Kos will be almost impossible unless the attack is carefully planned out. The GM may need to work with the PCs to make sure that their plan of attack is not a suicide mission. Here are two feasible ways of bringing the dragon down:

- **Poison.** Kos may be tricked into digesting large doses of lethal poison, if these are placed in sealed capsules and pout in or on the body of a sheep, which is left near the cave. The players will need to know that Kos eats sheep before attempting this. There may also be some doubt as to whether he would eat a dead one (in fact, he would). Other attempts to poison the dragon (such as firing poisoned arrows at him while he sleeps) will probably be less successful.
- **Landslides.** A bit of digging and some carefully placed explosives will cause landslides sufficient to block both of the cave entrances. This will require the input of a character with a considerable knowledge of geology, mining and explosives (who might be hired from the township). Of course, the party does not know that Kos has no spells with which to extract himself.

2) Dragon Lore

The players may want answers to any of the following questions, and probably more besides: How long is he likely to remain asleep? What is his breath weapon going to be like? Why does he have no treasure? Why hasn't he terrorized the area? How long has he been here? Does anyone else know he is here? What kind of dragon is he? Are there likely to be other dragons in the area? And so on.

The GM should decide on the standard lore relating to dragons, which adventurers in your campaign might know. It is

suggested that the following pieces of information are not common knowledge:

- "Rodosi" dragons are prone to senility.
- "Rodosi" dragons have a political structure based on families, in which the old are usually ostracized due to senility.

Clever and curious PCs will want to know something more about dragons than common knowledge allows, and may visit a library or seek the aid of a sage in the town. Here, it will be possible to find out about the nature of Rodosi dragons. It will also be discovered there that Kos is certainly not part of local lore (no one had any idea he was there). Information may also come out about the sleeping and eating habits of Rodosi dragons, although that information will come from a sage and be quite hard to acquire.

3) Proving It

Initially, it may be difficult to convince the townsfolk that the dragon is real and that the party are not simply trying to attract attention to themselves. The local magic order that the party works for may wish to send a more high-powered NPC back with the character to verify that the dragon is real, and help the party find the artifact. But a really spicy addition to the scenario might be if the party is equipped with an imaging device of some sort (a magical camera, or possibly even a device that makes moving images) so that they can get footage of the mighty beast and prove that their tale is true. "Pose for the trophy shot, guys, and then run like hell . . ."

Deacon Paul

Bioroid Rights Activist for *Transhuman Space*

by Royce Easton Day

Background

"Deacon Paul" (as he's popularly known) was born Paul Isiah Richards in his parents farmhouse outside of Macon, Georgia, July 4th, 1890. The first fifteen years of his life were bitter ones. His family were poor African-American sharecroppers, and they lived in the mocking shadow of segregation that was the Deep South in the period between the Civil War and the 1960s. Young Paul saw little difference between his family's life then and the tales of growing up a slave that his grandmother told him.

His grandmother died when he was ten, and five years later his family finally managed to save up enough money to move north to New York City, where they found freedom and acceptance in the thriving culture of Harlem. There Paul applied himself to his studies with vigor, determined to learn enough to support his family and never find himself again at the mercy of white plantation owners. He graduated with honors and a degree in chemistry from Howard University in 1922.

By the 1950s Paul was the head of his own company, a chemical firm making a tidy profit selling fertilizer nationwide (the irony of possibly taking money from the same white farmers who had oppressed his family wasn't lost on him.) He was an active member of his church, and with his commanding voice and natural charisma he quickly became a leading deacon. In the 1960s he was a local leader in New York's civil rights movement, fighting the hard fight against racial inequality that, while not as blatant as in the South, was as deeply entrenched.

Deacon Paul died in 1980, 90 years to the day after he was born. In his will he ordered his body be cryogenically frozen, and a trust fund set up to revive him whenever it was technologically possible. As he put it, "I have helped create a bright future for my children, and their grandchildren. I wish to see what they will accomplish in it." In 2095, after several decades of internal wrangling, the law firm overseeing Deacon Paul's trust fund ordered that his brain be scanned in order to create a ghost emulation, and the ghost be transferred to a bioshell based off of his DNA.

After his successful awakening and several months of therapy to deal with the typical amnesia from creating a ghost from a cryogenic patient, Deacon Paul began a closer examination of the United States of 2095, eager to see a world where the color of one's skin no longer mattered.

What he found horrified him. The status of bioroids in the United States, born to their jobs and programmed to look towards no farther horizon than their duties, struck at the center of Deacon Paul's soul. As he put it, "In my grandmother's day, at least a slave could *dream* of escaping their fate. Thanks to memetic programming, even that is beyond most of these children of technology."

Today Deacon Paul is one of the leading activists for bioroid rights in the United States. He has parlayed his initial status as one of the "Five Oldest Living Memories" (Euronews Profiles, September 15, 2096) into a platform advocating full legal status to bioroids. To popular audiences he uses his grandmother's tales of living in slavery to illustrate the inequity of bioroid status. On the political front he's used the considerable income of his trust fund to mount attacks in court against the "legal guardian" status of corporations and government agencies that use bioroid laborers and soldiers. To date he hasn't had much success, but he is at least succeeding in keeping bioroid rights issues in the public view.

Quotes

"The US Army decants bioroids and calls them minors. Then they put guns in the hands of these children and tell them to play war. Does no one see this as inherently *wrong*?"

"When a man holds another man in bondage, whether they were born or 'constructed,' whether it is legal or not, it is an *offense against God*. To deny that truth is to work the Devil's will."

"If they are children, young and naïve, you must treat them as children, with love and charity. If they are adults, able to work and fight, then you must treat them as adults, with respect and dignity."

"No, we are *not* going to move along, Officer."

Campaign Uses

Deacon Paul is an activist, but not a violent one. He still believes strongly in the use of passive resistance and peaceful confrontation to draw attention to inequities, rather than rioting and terrorism. Nevertheless, he is an annoying thorn in the side of the status quo, and he rarely lets himself be intimidated in a confrontation. If a GM wants to run a politically oriented campaign, Deacon Paul would make an excellent NPC for player characters to meet.

Player characters can be easily drawn into an adventure involving Deacon Paul, particularly if they're of a political bent. Memetic engineers might be hired by him to help promote his cause, or by his opposition to discredit him. Security personnel will have to keep him safe from retaliation by disgruntled corporations or anti-bioroid terrorist groups. And of course any free bioroid who finds himself living in the United States will certainly have sympathy for Deacon Paul's cause.

As a Patron, Deacon Paul will have limited utility. He's still developing his own network of contacts, and won't be able to provide much information or support to player characters. But if an unfortunate PC finds himself in jail after protesting for the bioroid cause, Deacon Paul won't hesitate to bail them out.

Description: 5'11", 200 lbs. A heavy-set African-American man with a shaved head and a commanding voice, appearing to be in his mid-thirties. Usually wears a conservative suit in public.

Statistics: ST 10 [0]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 13 [30]; HT 12 [20].

Advantages: Ghost Mind Emulation [17], Bioshell Template [64], Reputation [Bioroid rights activist] +2, large class of people [Bioroid supporters] [5], Charisma +3 [15], Common Sense [10], Empathy [15], Strong Will +3 [12], Voice [10], Wealth [Very Wealthy] [30], Independent Income [5].

Disadvantages: Custom Bioroid Body [no Mistaken Identity or Social Stigma] [-8], Honesty [-50% limitation] [-5]*, Pacifism [Self-Defense Only] [-15], Reputation 2, Bioroid Rights Activist, [among government officials and corporate executives, small class], recognized sometimes 10-, [-1]

* Deacon Paul's Honesty doesn't prevent him from breaking the law. In situations involving protest and passive resistance it is often difficult *not* to break the law. He recognizes, however, that his actions are often considered to be illegal, and is perfectly prepared to face the consequences when confronted.

Quirks: Prays before every meal [-1], Reads a chapter from the Bible every evening [-1], Equates bioroid "guardianship" with slavery [-1], Questions authority [-1]

Skills: Swimming-10 [1], Chess-13 [1], Performance/Ritual 13 [2], Spanish-13 [2], Agronomy/TL 7-12 [1], Chemistry/TL 7-14 [6], Economics-11 [1], Oral Literature-13 [4], Theology [Baptist]-18 [4], Administration-13 [2], Bard-18 [2], Diplomacy-14 [1], Leadership-18 [4], Memetics/TL9-10 [1], Merchant-14 [2], Politics-16 [2], Teaching-14 [2], Savoir-Faire-18 [2]

Dodge 5; Parry 5; Block 3; Will 16.

Point Total: 230

Spicing Up Animals

New Templates for the *d20 System*

by Owen K.C. Stephens

Fantasy games present numerous monsters for heroes to fight, tame, hunt, befriend, and fear. Most of these are truly fantastic creatures that cannot be explained away without resorting to magic. Creatures in the real world, however, have an amazing array of natural defenses and attacks that can easily be adapted to new animals, creating "monsters" that do not depend on mystic explanations.

Presented below are two "fantastic" creatures created by adding real-world attack mechanisms to creatures that don't normally have them. Templates for adding these attack types to other creatures are presented at the end of the article.

Cinder Wolf

Medium Animal

Hit Dice: 2d8+4 (17 hp)

Initiative: +2

Speed: 50 ft. (10 squares)

Armor Class: 16 (+2 Dex, +4 natural), touch 12, flat-footed 14

Base Attack/Grapple: +1/+2

Attack: Bite +4 melee (1d6+3 plus poison)

Full Attack: Bite +4 melee (1d6+3 plus poison)

Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Trip

Special Qualities: Low-light vision, scent

Saves: Fort +7, Ref +5, Will +1

Abilities: Str 15, Dex 15, Con 19, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 8

Skills: Hide +2, Listen +3, Move Silently +3, Spot +3, Survival +1*

Feats: TrackB, Weapon Focus (bite)

Environment: Temperate forests

Organization: Solitary, pair, or pack (7-16)

Challenge Rating: 2

Advancement: 3 HD (Medium); 4-6 HD (Large)

Though at first glance this creature seems to be nothing more than a powerfully built wolf, a closer look reveals it is dark red in color rather than brown, and has even darker stripes of fur in tiger-like patterns. Its jaws glisten with saliva as it bares its fangs.

Cinder wolves are canine pack animals very similar to wolves, but with poisonous venom that is easily delivered by their powerful bite attacks. The red coloration and striped patterns common in cinder wolves serve as warning to other animals, which learn not to bother the poisonous predators. A slight difference exists in the patterns of males and females, allowing someone very familiar with the breed to distinguish them at a glance.

Cinder wolf packs are migratory, ranging after large herds of grazing animals, which are their preferred prey. A pack is run by the two or three largest females (generally 5 or 6 HD cinder wolves), which are often sisters. Males are slightly smaller than females but more aggressive. When hunting, the females select a point of ambush and allow the males to herd animals towards it. If bringing down a large prey that cannot be driven, it is the males who attack it from the front, while females move to attack from the flank or rear.

Young cinder wolves are born only in the early spring during which time the pack settles into a temporary den. By the time the cubs are 3 months old they must care for themselves, as the pack moves on. If the pack is low on member or food is plentiful cubs may be allowed to join, but more commonly they must strike out on their own to form new packs.

Cinder wolves stats are created by adding the venomous template to normal wolves. Related breeds could be created by adding it to dire wolves or worgs.

Combat

Cinder wolves often use traditional "wolf-pack" tactics, sending a few individuals against a foe's front while the rest of the pack circles and attacks from the flanks or rear. They also often employ hit-and-run attacks, where they bite a foe once or twice, then retreat to allow their poison time to work. A series of lightning attacks by a pack can easily bring down a creature much larger and more powerful than any two or three wolves could defeat in a stand-up fight.

Poison(Ex): A cinder wolf's poison causes a burning sensation that travels from the bite wound throughout the target's body. It deals primary damage of 1d12 hp and secondary damage of 1d6 Con, with a Fort save DC of 15.

Trip (Ex): A cinder wolf that hits with a bite attack can attempt to trip the opponent (+1 check modifier) as a free action without making a touch attack or provoking an attack of opportunity. If the attempt fails, the opponent cannot react to trip the cinder wolf.

Skills:* Cinder wolves have a +4 racial bonus on Survival checks when tracking by scent.

Vampire Ape

Large Animal

Hit Dice: 4d8+23 (41 hp)

Initiative: +2

Speed: 30 ft. (6 squares), climb 30 ft.

Armor Class: 15 (-1 size, +2 Dex, +4 natural), touch 11, flat-footed 13

Base Attack/Grapple: +3/+13

Attack: Bite +8 melee (1d8+9)

Full Attack: Bite +8 melee (1d8+9) and 2 claws +6 melee (1d6+6)

Space/Reach: 10 ft./10 ft.

Special Attacks: Attach

Special Qualities: Low-light vision, scent

Saves: Fort +9, Ref +6, Will +2

Abilities: Str 23, Dex 15, Con 20, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 7

Skills: Climb +14, Listen +6, Spot +6

Feats: Alertness, MultiattackB, Toughness

Environment: Warm forests

Organization: Solitary, pair, or company (3-5)

Challenge Rating: 2

Advancement: 5-8 HD (Large)

This massive brute is an are-like creature, though it's head is unusually elongated, and full of sharp fangs. It's long arms are visibly corded with muscles and end in hands tipped with long talons.

Vampire apes resemble their common omnivore cousins but are dedicated predators. They prefer to hunt Medium and Small prey they can easily immobilize. Once a vampire ape has latched its teeth into a foe it drinks the blood that flows from the wound until it has gorged itself. A vampire ape will not willingly release a target, preferring to die while drinking than flee.

Vampire apes grow to be as much as 8 feet tall, and a bull male can weigh 700 pounds. Young apes are raised in a company, which is ruled by the largest and most powerful male. The ruling male is easily identified by the chevron-shaped pattern of silvery hair that grows in on his back and chest. The ruling male drives off all young males and some females when they hit puberty. These young adults may travel in pairs for a time, but eventually become loners or join another company. Vampire apes are extremely protective of very young members of the species, and respond to an infant ape's cry even if it is not part of their own company.

If a ruling male grows too old, he may be challenged and driven off by a younger male from outside the company. Such a male loses the chevrons on his chest, but not those on his back. Such a deposed ruler is known as a rogue male, and is extremely aggressive and fearless. A rogue male often tries to build a new company, but most times is unable to defend it from younger males.

Vampire apes stats are created by adding the bloodsucking template to apes. Similar creatures could be created by adding the template to baboons or monkeys.

Combat

Vampire apes hunting alone almost always restrict themselves to targets smaller than themselves, though a rogue male may attack anything. Companies are much more likely to attack bigger prey, with three or four apes able to bring down even an elephant. Younger members of a company often do not bite larger foes until they are dead, instead helping older apes by clawing at a particularly dangerous target until it falls.

Attach (Ex): If a vampire ape hits with a bite attack, it uses its powerful jaws to latch onto the opponent's body and automatically deals bite damage each round it remains attached. An attached vampire ape loses its Dexterity bonus to Armor Class and has an AC of 13. An attached vampire ape can be struck with a weapon or grappled itself. To remove an attached vampire ape through grappling, the opponent must achieve a pin against the creature.

Skills: Vampire apes have a +8 racial bonus on Climb checks and can always choose to take 10 on Climb checks, even if rushed or threatened.

Bloodsucking Template

Bloodsucking creatures feed by attaching themselves to a target and drawing out its blood. Some creatures were believed to be bloodsuckers when they simply had a tendency to attach themselves to a foe with a bite, and this template can be used for them as well. Weasels and leeches are common examples of these creatures, but the feeding mechanism could have developed in any predatory or verminous creature.

Creating A Bloodsucking Creature

"Bloodsucking" is a racial template designed to create sub-species, and can be added to any living, corporeal creature (referred to hereafter as the base creature).

A bloodsucking creature uses all the base creature's statistics and special abilities except as noted here.

Armor Class: Natural armor improves by +1.

Attacks: A bloodsucking creature retains all the special attacks of the base creature. Additionally it gains a bite attack if it didn't already have one, with damage based on the creature's size (See table below). (If the bite attack granted on the chart is better than the base creature's bite attack, use the attack from the chart.) The creature adds 1½ its Str modifier to its bite damage if its modifier is positive. A bloodsucking creature's bite attack is always its primary attack.

Size	Bite
Fine	1 pt.

<i>Diminutive</i>	1d2
<i>Tiny</i>	1d3
<i>Small</i>	1d4
<i>Medium</i>	1d6
<i>Large</i>	1d8
<i>Huge</i>	2d6
<i>Gargantuan</i>	3d6
<i>Colossal</i>	4d6

Special Attacks: A bloodsucking creature retains all the special attacks of the base creature. Additionally it gains the Attach special attack. If the creature successfully hits with a bite attack it automatically attaches to its foe and does bite damage automatically each round. The attached creature loses its Dex bonus to AC, and cannot be removed with being grappled and pinned.

Abilities: Increase from the base creature as follows: Str +2, Con +6.

Feats: If the bloodsucking creature's Dex modifier is greater than its Str modifier, the creature gains the Weapon Finesse feat as a bonus feat. If the base creature has non-bite attacks, the bloodsucking creature receives the Multiattack feat as a bonus feat.

Challenge Rating: Same as the base creature + 1.

Level Adjustment: Same as base creature +1.

Venomous Template

Many types of creatures have both venomous and non-venomous species. Though in our world this is most common with snakes, frogs and many bugs, there's no reason why other worlds could not have poisonous birds, wolves, or even humans.

Creating a Venomous Creature

"Venomous" is a racial template designed to create sub-species, and can be added to any living, corporeal creature (referred to hereafter as the base creature).

A venomous creature uses all the base creature's statistics and special abilities except as noted here.

Armor Class: Natural armor improves by +2.

Special Attacks: A venomous creature retains all the special attacks of the base creature. Additionally, one of its normal attack types has poison damage added to it. A creature may add poison damage to its grapple, representing a poisonous skin (in which case the poison is applied any time the venomous creature makes a grapple check, even if another creature started the grapple).

A venomous creature delivers one of the poison types outlined below, selected when the template is added. The poison does primary and secondary damage based on it's original CR, as defined in the table below. Successful Fort saves (DC 10 + $\frac{1}{2}$ creature's HD + creature's Con modifier) negate the primary and secondary poison damage. A particularly powerful venomous creature may deliver more than one kind of poison, though this increases the creature's CR.

Poison	Damage
<i>Fevered</i>	Primary 1d6 Int/3 CR; secondary 1d6 Int/3 CR
<i>Hallucinogenic</i>	Primary 1 pt Wis/4 CR; secondary 1d6 Wis/2 CR
<i>Lethal</i>	Primary 1d12 hp/2 CR; secondary 1d6 Con/3 CR
<i>Narcotic</i>	Primary 1d6 Str/4 CR; secondary unconsciousness (1d6 hours)

<i>Paralyzing</i>	Primary 1d6 Dex/4 CR; secondary paralysis (1d6 minutes/4 CR)
<i>Relaxant</i>	Primary 1d6 Str/3 CR; secondary 1d6 Str/2 CR

Special Qualities: A venomous creature may be immune to its own poison at the GM's option.

Abilities: Increase from the base creature as follows: Str +2, Con +4, Cha +2.

Challenge Rating: Same as the base creature + 1 (minimum 3); +1 per additional poison type.

Level Adjustment: Same as Challenge Rating adjustment +1.

Pyramid Review

The Book of Archetypes (for All Flesh Must Be Eaten)

Published by [Eden Studios, Inc.](#)

Written by Evin Ager, Colin Chapman, Set Danielson, Mark Kinney, Mauice Lefebure, Thom Marrion, John McMullen, Charlie Payne, Charles Plemons, Tom Redding, Robert Michael Russel, and Derek A. Stoelting

Cover by Carlos Samuel Araya

Interior Illustrations by Travis Ingram

48-page 7½ by 9½-inch saddle stitched softback; \$15.00

In comparison with recent releases for [All Flesh Must Be Eaten](#), the genre books [Enter the Zombie](#), [Pulp Zombies](#), and [Fistful o' Zombies](#), the very latest title is an exceedingly simple affair. *The Book of Archetypes* is literally just that, a collection of character types that can be used as a source of instantaneously ready-to-play player characters, NPCs or even as a potential source of ideas.

The Book of Archetypes contains some 40 or so entries, many of which have been written by fans of the game. Arranged in alphabetical order, the layout for each archetype is exactly the same as those found out in both the *All Flesh Must Be Eaten* core book and the three genre books. This includes statistics, Qualities and Drawbacks, skills, and gear on the left-hand side of the page, with the personality and a quote on the right, separated by a fetching illustration by Travis Ingram. Both his art and the layout give this book a nicely uniform look.

Breaking the archetypes down by power level, the 41 are made up of 25 Norms, 14 Survivors, and 2 Inspired. There is only one instance of duplication between the entries: the Survivor-level Fire Fighter and its Norm counterpart, the Fireman. The other Norms include the Archaeologist, the recently (zombie) Bitten Housewife, the Circus Knife Thrower, the Crazy Teen, the Distinguished Gentleman, the Ex-Goth Gal (complete with Neil Gaiman collection and Random Abandoned Animal -- "Oh look! A stray kitty!"), the Fatalistic Corp Executive, the Gamemaster, the Good Ol' Boy, the Government Agent, the Grizzled General, the Gun Store Owner, the Ham Radio Jammer, the Necrophiliac, the Obnoxious Lady and her dependant toddler, the Paramedic, the Paramilitary Geek, the Porn Producer, the Stripper, the Target Shooter, the Lebanese ex-racing Taxi Driver, the Tormented Grade School Student (the only child in this collection), the Vigilante, and -- for the post-post apocalypse game -- the Zombie Rights Activist (Zombies are people too, y'know!). The Survivors include the Bounty Hunter, the Courier, the Drill Sergeant, the Ex-Spy, the aforementioned Fire Fighter, the Great White Hunter, the High Class Thief, the Hispanic Gang Member, the Industrialite, the Kendo Master, the Porn Star, the Sanitation Specialist (who specializes in cleaning up the undead menace), the Survivalist College Student, and then comes up to date with the Terrorist. The two Inspired characters are the Crusading Preacher and the Ishtar priestess.

Including this last archetype, the collection does contain a rather unhealthy dose of sex in its designs. The Ishtar Priestess, gifted with the Blessing and Visions miracles, along with the Stripper are fairly benign in this regard, but the others are nothing short of vile. The Necrophiliac undertaker's son with the Bound Zombie Girl in his Gear and the quote, "WHOA! Don't shoot that one. I'll, uhm, take care of her." is fairly obvious in its vileness, while the Porn Producer and the Porn Star are not. The Porn Producer's illustration looks suspiciously like a certain overweight porn star and actor, and is peddling post-snuff flicks, his quote being, "This is a business that thrives on fresh meat. You

with me or not?" His Porn Star counterpart looks a little too much like Britney Spears, right down to the school uniform.

The book also has a dig at our own with the Gamemaster archetype, as overweight, balding, bearded and bespectacled (though oddly dressed in a featureless plain grey sweatshirt), sword in hand and clutching a manual of monsters! It also makes use of "Gamer," a new variable cost Quality/Drawback. For example, the "Burned Out" gamer has finally succumbed to years of caffeine abuse and sleep deprivation, and really needs his full eight hours. This is a one-point Drawback, while a gamer with the one-point Quality "Razor's Edge" can go for a whole day without the need for sleep; and "Godlike Endurance" Quality both doubles the cost and length the gamer can go without sleep.

Other new Drawbacks to be found in the final pages of ***The Book of Archetypes*** include Absent Minded, Flashbacks, Narcolepsy, and Physical Disability (Overweight); the last one is used particularly for the Obnoxious Lady archetype. The only new Quality in addition to Gamer is Quick Learner. This section also includes a selection of new gear -- a Briefcase Gun, the Fire Engine Hose (with rules for when it flails, though there is no whip included for use with the Archaeologist), the shovel, and the Hotfoot. The latter is an improvised weapon, an aluminum baseball bat with alcohol-soaked flaming rags tied around its tip. More deadly still is the "Boom Stick" Assault Rifle, an M-16 with its attached M-203 Grenade Launcher modified to fire 20mm cannon shells! Other new gear is tied into particular archetypes -- the fireman's protective equipment and fire engine, the Kendo Master's armor, and the Grizzled General's Command APC.

Although the contents of ***The Book of Archetypes*** are intended for use with ***All Flesh Must Be Eaten***, they could easily be used in other games. Not just those from Eden Studios -- [***Terra Primate RPG***](#), [***Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game***](#), and the forthcoming ***Angel RPG*** -- but also those from other publishers, such as Atlas Games' [***Over The Edge***](#) and ***Feng Shui RPG***, FanPro's ***Shadowrun RPG***, as well as almost any modern set RPG. Of course, some conversion work will be required to get these archetypes into other games.

The fact that the contents of ***The Book of Archetypes*** is suited to any modern or near-future-set RPG also acts as a slight limitation. Essentially none of these characters are suited for use with ***Fistful o' Zombies***, and only a few are suited for use with ***Pulp Zombies***. This is not so much of a problem with ***Enter the Zombie***. Some of the archetypes can also be used to inspire adventures in themselves, such as the filming of post-snuff movies by the Porn Producer could also be turned into a dark trip into the valleys of Los Angeles for an ***Angel RPG*** scenario.

If there is a downside to this supplement, it is in the cost, which is a little high for a book this size and of this length. Yet when you consider that there is a piece of art on almost every page, this cost is understandable. Putting that gripe aside, ***The Book of Archetypes*** does exactly what it sets out to do and it does so in a pleasingly simple, handy, fun but vile way.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Monsters of the Mind (for d20 System)

Published by [Green Ronin Publishing](#)

Designed by Kevin Brennan, James Maliszewski, Morgan Peer, Tracey Peer

Edited, developed by Penny Williams

Proofing, additional development by Chris Pramas

Cover by Todd Lockwood

Interior illustration by Toren "Macbin" Atkinson, Drew Baker, Kent Burles, Kevin Crossley, Dennis Detwiller, Todd Lockwood, James Ryman

64-page b&w softcover; \$14.95

If you're bold enough to let psionic characters into your *d20 System* game, you're probably going to need more psionic counterbalances for them than the *Monster Manual* offers. It's Green Ronin Publishing to the rescue with *Monsters of the Mind*, a bestiary full of mental menaces and psychic folk to populate your world.

The default setting for the things that go bump in this book is Naranjan, one of Green Ronin's Mythic Vistas books. Aside from a brief primer at the beginning designed to give those not in possession of the *Mindshadows* book an overview of that island nation, the book is entirely about monsters, beings, and humanoids with a hefty helping of psionic abilities. Those who don't have *Mindshadows* and don't want to use the setting can still get use out of the book. The monsters are given a place in the societies or ecology of the campaign island, but nothing is so married to the setting that it can't be lifted for another time and place.

There's no table of contents, but there is a listing of the entries by Challenge Rating and you can look them up alphabetically from there. The critters provided run the gamut. There are teeny-tiny ones and really enormous ones. Some walk, some fly, some swim. Some are pulsating with psionic potential, while others lack the intelligence to use their abilities as anything more than instinctual survival traits.

With some 50+ beasts to choose from, the GM should be able to find something that will suit his needs. There are angelic and demonic beings seeking man's salvation or damnation. Psionic plants use illusions to resemble the surrounding plant life while they absorb people, or they ward off humanoids who seek them out for their valuable, deadly, or hallucinogenic substances. Psis see their bodies split from their minds, and while each is deadly on its own, the rejoined demihusk is more monstrous still. Mental fey can plague your PCs, and if they wander near the shore it seems every waterway has some sort of fish, dragon, or soulless baby ready to drag you under the waves (it is an island, after all).

A large chunk of the book is given over to thoughtforms, creatures that embody the six psionic disciplines. The muscular ego thoughtform controls psychometabolism abilities, the boney savant possesses psychokinesis powers, and the telepath thoughtform has -- of course -- telepathy powers to the nth degree.

Thankfully, not everything here is looking to suck out our heroes' brains. There are mysterious strangers who have achieved great power and come back to assist others in making the transcendental journey. The couatl is a wise old bird who might lend a hand to adventurers of a decent stripe, and the young spotted naga is considered a boon protector to a village -- until it unwittingly sheds its old personality like a used skin. And some of these things simply want to be left alone, but the people of Naranjan just keep seeking them out to kill or enslave them.

The artists got some really good notes from the editors, because their illustrations are spot-on. The artwork is almost exclusively done in pencil, giving the book a "naturalist's sketchpad" feel. More than a few of the things listed are disturbing beings, and their depictions can be outright creepy. The type is small, but the real problem with the graphic presentation is the type font used for the creature names and subsection titles. Probably stylized to match the feel of the ethnic groups of Mindshadows, picking out the names (which are already hard to spell out or pronounce in many cases) often entails looking into the entry to see how it's (legibly) spelled there.

Monsters of the Mind presents several original creatures, though few are so original that GMs will find that moment of "wow" that has them building entire adventures around some cool tidbit from the descriptions. It seems to be hard coming up with really exciting uses for a psionic monster, and this is reflected in a number of the entries. Many creatures "eat" psionics or their psionic energies, for example, and a number of things are hunted to near extinction by the fearful islanders.

They are all sound concepts, and most have a believable ecological niche to fill so they don't come off sounding like DM punishment for psionic characters. The writing style is talented and colorful; while there's not as much to "ooo" and "ahh" at, at least the entries don't sound like the cookie-cutter critters some assembly-line monster compilations foist off on customers. While a little short on the juicy adventure ideas, this collection is still the result of a lot of thought, and GMs now have a full resource for finding the right **Monsters of the Mind**.

Monsters of the Mind Open Game Content: Proper names of people and places are exempted; everything else is open content. This means the monsters (save those Green Ronin borrowed from Wizards of the Coast) and their stats can be used freely, but details about Naranjan are off-limits.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

H.P. Lovecraft's Arkham (for Call of Cthulhu & Call of Cthulhu d20)

Published by [Chaosium](#)

Written by Keith Herber, Mark Morrison, Richard Watts, & Mervyn Boyd

Illustrated by Louis Cortes Real

Cover by Lee Gibbons

248-page b&w softcover; \$28.95

It's easy to think of Chaosium as stuck in an "old-school" publishing regimen and its latest release, ***H.P. Lovecraft's Arkham***, at first appears to be only more evidence. In form, it's an anachronism, sporting the kind of low-level, detail-happy setting material that hasn't been seen in a major RPG supplement in years, plus four ready-to-run "scenarios" (as they were called back in the old days). On one hand, the outdated appearance isn't a surprise; a vast majority of the book's text could be found in ***Arkham Unveiled***, published in 1990. What is surprising, then, is that this material can serve a GM today as well as it did 13 years ago, something that certainly can't be said of many RPG supplements from those days before vampires started masquerading and a d20 was a piece of plastic, not a marketing phenomenon.

Chaosium hasn't been totally unaffected by the zeitgeist. It has littered ***H.P. Lovecraft's Arkham*** with ***d20 System*** conversions for every rules passage and NPC statistic listing. But the cursory (though adequate) nature of these conversions -- not to mention the puzzlingly out-of-place collection of ***d20 System*** character "backgrounds," including the modern-day "Hacker" and "Crime Scene Investigator" -- put to rest the idea that it is up-to-date rules systems that are keeping the material fresh and useful. A more telling clue to the book's secret of longevity can be found in another new addition: the 16-page short story, "The Dreams in the Witch House," a canonical Lovecraft tale set in Arkham, reprinted in its entirety.

Besides being more readable than the preponderance of RPG fiction, the story also serves a purpose for gamers, and it elucidates how Chaosium can get away with bringing 13-year-old gaming supplements back to market. Lovecraft's words set the tone of what's to follow, both on the page and in a gaming session that utilizes the Arkham supplement. While most game publishers would use these pages and the 110 later pages of scenarios for rules updates, new character classes, special powers, or equipment lists, ***Call of Cthulhu*** -- still running with essentially the same stripped-down rules they had 13 years ago -- focuses on narrative concerns. Customers of many game lines pay primarily for balanced and effective rule sets and for books that feed their appetite for new frontiers of character advancement. Chaosium has established a different pact with its fans. It provides stories and the components of story: character sketches, atmospherics, and story hooks, including entry points into Lovecraft's own works. Starting out with "Witch House" is a signal to the Cthulhu audience that Chaosium is about to hold up its end of the bargain in generous fashion.

The 100 pages of campaign setting material that follow the short story might, on first reading, appear to tarnish the promise of narrative focus. In this nearly house-by-house catalog of locations in Lovecraft's "legend-haunted city," players are given information about local politics, social clubs, geography, and day-to-day facts like when school starts each year, where the cheapest meal can be found, and what plays have been performed by the local theater company. An attentive GM, however, will notice that a healthy number of these locations are also miniature stories in

themselves. From gang battles to red-herring rituals of college fraternities to the unusual coffin-shaped clock on the wall at the watchmaker's shop, story threads are woven throughout the otherwise dry listings of facilities and residents. GMs needing inspiration for their next one-shot mystery will be just as pleased with the material as those looking for fertile ground to start their new 1920s campaign. Arkham, in these pages, feels both like a replica of Lovecraft's haunted township, seething with dark secrets, and also like a livable community of aristocrats, professionals, and rural folk, going about their daily lives. An impressive foldout map in the back binding (unfortunately scaled-down from previous editions to accommodate an illustrated frame of questionable quality) is the final stamp of authenticity.

If there's a weakness to these pages, it's that a few opportunities have been missed; the one-sentence school listings, for example, seem ripe for a story hook or two and the Miskatonic University listings get so hung up in telling you which professors appear in which Lovecraft stories that they fail to give you any current events for players to muck about in. There's also the organizational oversight that places the details for the Arkham Historical Society in the middle of one of the later scenarios, instead of here in the setting material where it belongs, without even so much as a "see page 174." And, of course, there's the pesky fact that if you've been collecting *Call of Cthulhu* supplements faithfully over the years, you already own every word in this setting section (excepting the *d20 System* rules conversions). Entries have been reordered, but never expanded or cut down. The only real perk for those who own *Arkham Unveiled* is seeing the old liney character portraits transformed into much more evocative computer-assisted versions at the hands of Louis Cortes Real. Real does an especially good job with the weathered faces of high society grand dames, grimy dockworkers, and undying cultists.

Four well-developed adventures follow the setting material, taking up the final half of the book.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The first scenario is the only new addition, replacing a shallow Reanimator retread from *Arkham Unveiled*. "The Books of Uncle Silas" drops a motherlode of eldritch tomes into the players' hands after manufacturing an uncle's inheritance for any character who might (cross your fingers, GMs!) happen to be an orphan. *Call of Cthulhu* often depends on such contrivances to get an adventure going, but here the results don't justify it: another mad uncle arrives on the scene to retrieve the dread volumes and while the scenario gives lots of ideas for how he could pester the players, it fails to outline any kind of satisfying denouement for the story. Luckily, the scenarios get much better after this one.

"The Hills Rise Wild" is a vicious and tightly woven little vignette in which the search for a meteorite in Arkham's rural outskirts leads characters into the hands of a disarmingly helpful, but ultimately deceitful, serial killer named Levi Stone. Played effectively, characters should slowly get the unnerving feeling that they're being hunted by a predator on his own territory. The killer's wife and son, emotionally quashed and conflicted, provide a fascinating psychological element and can be flexible tools for GMs striving to maintain the perfect threat level. The supernatural has only a chance of making an appearance, depending on how the players proceed, although after seeing Real's fearsome rendering of Levi's carved idol, GMs may not be able to restrain themselves from unleashing the beast upon their parties. The only disappointment here is that the meteorite turns out to have nothing to do with anything. While it could become a story hook for a later investigation, it's a hook that, within these pages, has no barb.

Following this hillbilly fun is "The Condemned," a masterfully conceived race against time that brings Arkham's witch-haunted past to the streets, homes, and hideaways of Arkham's present. An immortal wizard, trapped for a century in a stone bridge support, escapes on a fluke and plots revenge on the descendants of his captors. Step one of his plan is the sparkling twist that makes the mystery so extraordinary: the wizard magically swaps bodies with an unsuspecting college student camping along the Miskatonic River. Digging up the wizard's shriveled but still-living body -- host to a shattered mind that doesn't belong -- buried along with the murdered corpse of the student's friend, makes for one of the more memorable opening scenes players are likely to experience. The rest of the story admirably fulfills the promise of this beginning, with a series of grisly murders, numerous intriguing historical handouts, and an appearance by Quachil Uttaus, one of the creepiest and most neglected Great Old Ones.

If "The Condemned" is the quintessential Mythos mystery story, "The Dead of Night" ratchets things down into a more personal mode, exchanging the serial murder of society's most esteemed members for the scattered miscreant actions

of three zombie children -- the product of a misguided father's love. While having all the components of a classic chilling campfire story, the scenario has its share of misfires. The unidentified body that sparks the investigation is quickly sidelined by the horrible truth about the undead children. Meanwhile an unnecessary NPC from out of town mucks about behind the scenes of the story where characters have little chance to encounter him or learn what he's up to. These two ill-fitting plot elements tie into a general voodoo theme that feels unsuited to Arkham and more appropriate for a New Orleans sourcebook. Still, a GM who maintains the focus on wrangling the vicious cannibal children from their individual dens will likely have more than a couple creeped out players by the end of the night.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

The final calculation of the worth of ***H.P. Lovecraft's Arkham*** hinges on how long you've been collecting Cthulhu supplements. If you have ***Arkham Unveiled***, \$28.95 is a steep price to pay for a short story published elsewhere, a lame scenario, and some snazzy new artwork. Anyone who is making his first visit to Arkham, on the other hand -- whether he's pulling into the station on the ***d20 System*** line or took the reliable old BRP connection -- will find that 13 years can't even begin to sully a bunch of great stories like these. Chaosium shouldn't be chided for bringing them back from the grave. It should be thanked.

--Christopher Floyd

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Sugar-Coated Serial Characters

A few years ago I had an idea for a movie that I figured, once I was an internationally renowned scriptwriter, would make me a kajillion dollars. Sadly, it seems those dreams are a ways off in the future, and possibly an alternate universe or three over. But I figured I'd share it with you, on the theory that if one of you all turns it into a film, I can haul you to court. Oh, and then I'll tie it into gaming, I guess, since that seems to be what you kids are all into today.

Anyway, I'm a closet James Bond fan. (Actually, I'm a fan of the idea of James Bond, and don't care for many of the movies; I'm like that about a lot of things.) And I was trying to figure out some of the inconsistencies about the movies, ranging from the profound (how can he have so many adventures and not be a hundred years old?) to the nitpicky (why don't Bond and Blofeld recognize each other in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, despite the fact they met in *You Only Live Twice*?) But the question that boggled me most was, if you're an internationally known secret agent/spy named James Bond, and part of the definition of "secret agent" and "spy" incorporates some aspect of secrecy, then why on Gaia's green would you go around announcing yourself as "Bond, James Bond" to anyone who will listen?

That's when I realized: James Bond isn't a man . . . it's a *position*.

In this idea, Her Majesty's Secret Service realized long ago the power of symbolism and icons, and so they created this superspy who was omnipresent, all-competent, completely unafraid, and unkillable.

How could Bond have so many adventures yet remain roughly the same age? Once a Bond gets too old and retires (or gets killed), he's simply replaced with someone else in the position.

Why don't Bond and Blofeld recognize each other? This Bond isn't the same guy who met Blofeld before. (As an aside, I contemplated the possibility that Blofeld was a position, too.)

And why doesn't Bond remain secretive? Because he's not *supposed* to; he's worth more to the world if people know who he is, and if he seems to be an omnipresent, unstoppable agent.

Mind you, the whole point of this idea was to be able to bring back *other* Bonds (in other words, other actors who played Bond), in a *really* big adventure where one Bond wasn't enough, in a *Doctor Who* "[N>1] Doctors" kinda way.

Anyway, to tie it all back to RPGs, I realized that one of the great joys of a lot of gaming is to have a character that is one-of-a-kind: mankind's last, best hope; the Keeper of the Secrets of Ecivedtolp; the Angel of Atlanta. But one-of-a-kind characters are also fairly stressful; many times GMs are discouraged from making adventures too difficult, because the stakes are so high. After all, how can the campaign go on if the Keeper of the Sacred Isotope is eaten by geese?

So as a radical concept or a change of pace, why not have gamers play not a specific character, but a position? That way, the stakes can be as high as you'd like; if the person filling the position is killed, incapacitated, or wants to quit, the player can simply have a new character fill that position.

This concept is actually somewhat common in the comic world; some characters have gear - such as Green Lantern's power ring, or Starman's cosmic rod - that is passed from generation to generation. Others have a mantle or a title that is passed on, perhaps because of genetics or a similarly powered person reusing a name (such as the Flash).

But the concept can actually be applied to a number of games. For example, a Space Opera player could play the "Leader of Puce Squadron, the Rebellion's most vital group of maverick pilots." Then, if that character's Schwa-Wing Fighter gets blown to pieces, the player can still play the same concept.

Now, I'm sure many games are already done this way; it's not uncommon for someone to play, say, the child of a fallen hero, or someone else who has been tangentially tied to the game world. But if the game world is specifically

built around the possibility of roles instead of individuals, then a number of possibilities open. Games can be more lethal, as has been already mentioned. Alternatively, they can allow for games with quick turnover. For example, the Marvel Universe has a cosmic energy force that bestows random individuals with super-powers for a short period of time; in a gaming world, it's easy to envision the player "character" as this series of individuals. (And, of course, an idea of this sort can be translated to a number of genres; for example, a pulp character could be the possessor of the "Shade Force," which seeks out worthy persons to bestow with its power for one year at a time.)

And, in perhaps the best side effect of this arrangement, the period of "inexperience" and lower power level - which many people consider to be the most fun part of a character - can be extended almost indefinitely.

Should you decide to give this concept a shot, here are some ideas to make it work.

Figure out the limitations of the position. Perhaps the biggest obstacle is coming up with a justification why more than one of the characters can't be "on camera" at a time. If the Secret Service *does* have a half-dozen people with Bond-level training ready to fill his shoes, why don't they unleash them all at once? A little thought will usually make an answer apparent. In our Bond case, they *are* in the field already; when the time comes, someone is promoted to 007 status (with the resultant government-issued tuxedo and perhaps some plastic surgery). Likewise in our Puce Squadron example, the other pilots serve as the pool from which the new Puce Leader will arise.

The other thing to figure out is why the new character would continue adventuring with the party (or otherwise be tied to the other PCs). This is usually straightforward (if our superspy character is ordered by the government to do so, for example), but it can require some finagling if only a specific member of the position got involved with the PCs. If a player has created the position of the "High Priest of Mahna Mahna," and the first member of that position he plays joins the PCs, maybe that character has some unfinished business when he dies/leaves/whatever; then the next person in that position will have reason to fulfill his predecessor's goals even though he doesn't know the other heroes.

Figure out the limitations of memory. Since a character of this sort is a series of similarly powered characters, it can be useful to figure out how much he knows about the others in his line. To steal from White Wolf's five-point scale, here is a range of possibilities.

- 0 Each character iteration is a blank slate; he perhaps knows the name of the position, but that's about it. "I'm the Chosen Catchchild? Great! . . . What does *that* mean?"
- The character knows the broad outline of his position; he knows what his abilities and limitations are, and what is expected of him: "I'm the Keeper of the Word of Lovers, so I'm supposed to help anyone I see who's in love or falling in love; is that it?" Any specifics of past deeds, however, are unknown.
- • The character knows the specifics of himself and his post, and a number of specific past events that his predecessors have done: "Ah, yes; Mr. Gutman. I've heard about him . . . something involving a statue of a black bird in Istanbul, right?" He may have even met his immediate predecessor once or twice.
- • • The character knows a great deal about the position and his predecessors; he has read reports, studied journals, and perhaps gotten to know the previous position holder(s) personally. "Man; why didn't the Bloodefender *index* any of the stuff in this cave?"
- • • • The character knows almost as much as can be known by normal means; there is extensive paperwork, databases of actions, extensive meetings with others who have held and will hold the position, and so on. "Computer: Access Überdatabase for all previous references to 'Destiny Pathogen.'"
- • • • • The character knows everything about the previous iterations of the position-holder, down to deeds, private thoughts, and the like. It may even *be* the same character, albeit with, say, the thoughts of a new host or experience of an alternate body to differentiate him. "Curious; in this cycle I seem to have an appendage on my posterior that gyrates when I'm pleased."

Mind you, this hasn't been playtested, but it gives a nice range of possibilities that should hopefully give you all some ideas.

As a final tip, make sure you have a cache of replacement characters ready to go in the queue. Figure out what would be fun and different while remaining true to the position concept. Thus the original Corporate Field Manager for the Iron-y Enterprises might have field-tested his company's cyberwear out of a desire to produce the most efficient equipment, while the elderly man who replaced him does so to protect his predecessor's reputation and dealings, while the third hotheaded woman who replaced him is out there for the thrill of adventure.

In all, the idea of position-as-PC opens up a lot of possibilities, and should provide for some radically different adventures and campaigns, which are not rendered powerless by the fear of a character leaving, but instead invigorated by that happening.

Oh, and if I ever see a movie trailer that begins, "Bonds are back!," someone's gonna get sued.

--*Steven Marsh*

Designer's Notes: GURPS Faerie

Once Upon A Time

by Graeme Davis

It was a mild Austin evening in March 1991.

I hadn't been a freelancer for very long. In fact, I was delivering the manuscript of my first freelance effort, **GURPS Vikings**. My fiancée and I were visiting her brother, who lived in Austin, and I took the opportunity to deliver the manuscript to SJ Games in person.

I met Steve, along with Loyd Blankenship, who was, if memory serves, the Managing Editor at the time. I handed over the first draft of **GURPS Vikings**, and we went for a meal.

Conversation naturally turned to future projects. We talked a little about the idea that would later become **GURPS Middle Ages 1**, and I asked if SJ Games had any interest in a folklore-based product. I had been using British and European faerie lore for years as a source for my own roleplaying campaigns, and I had even managed to sneak a few bits and pieces into my work for Games Workshop on **Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay**. Why invent something new when you can steal something that has already stood the test of time?

Steve mentioned that he had been considering a companion book to **GURPS Fantasy Folk**, with the working title of **Faerie Folk**. They had been talking to Steffan O'Sullivan, then a **GURPS** regular with Fudge years in the future, but he was not happy with giving faeries that kind of treatment. I said I'd think about it.

We went on to a couple of other places for beers, and that's all I will admit to remembering about that evening. Except that I came home with copies of **GURPS Fantasy Folk** and several other useful bits of swag.

GURPS Middle Ages came and went, along with a few projects for other folks. Freelancing wasn't working out too well for me financially, and I got a succession of jobs in the computer games industry. I was still doing little bits of freelancing here and there, but nothing major.

Then I ran into Sean Punch at GenCon a couple of years ago. We talked a little, and I got some freelance editing work. This led to second editions of **GURPS Vikings** and **GURPS Middle Ages 1**. One day, I was avoiding work by mooching around the SJ Games web site, and found that **GURPS Faeries** was still there on the wish list. So I put together an outline, and got the contract to write it.

I suppose I really should have known better. Now I'm not saying what caused it, but something got into my computer and messed with all my header formats. I had checked all the files and made sure they were good, but when they printed out at the SJ Games end, the headers were all over the place. Then my email crashed, obliterating my inbox just as I was looking for some emails I'd received about the correct way to credit playtesters and other such vital things. Sean kindly resent the emails, but the next day, there was my inbox, completely untouched. I started leaving small offerings of milk and cookies beside my computer at night. You can't be too careful.

Still, how else could I have taken time out to research faerie beliefs and folklore from around the world? There's something very satisfying about reading books on Inuit and Australian aboriginal traditions, alien abductions, 19th century Irish murders, classical Greek literature, and Scottish witchcraft trials, and calling it work. The people in the library began to whisper and point when they thought I wasn't looking.

Also very satisfying was the mountain of feedback I received from the playtest group. They had ideas and information that hadn't crossed my radar at all, and quite a few of them had insights into their own local traditions that I couldn't have found without going on a fieldtrip the size of Drake's circumnavigation. Thank you all, folks; even if your name

didn't make it into the book, you were an immense help. Many thanks, as well, to Gene Seabolt, Bill Stoddard, Phil Masters, and the other veteran **GURPS** writers who helped me out with faerie-related material from their own projects. There are so many books now, not to mention those in development, and trying to tie together all the faerie-related information in the **GURPS** canon is a job I could not even have attempted without a lot of help.

As with all **GURPS** books, there was more material that would fit. One particular campaign outline ran way overlength. I guess I just got so into the idea that I kept on writing and writing. It also came too close to a recent blockbuster movie for comfort, although I maintain that was just the convergence of ideas. Honestly.

Anyway, if you ever wondered what would happen if the faeries were cast as the forces of evil in a dark, future world that was sort of like cyberpunk but without so much emphasis on technology (and let's be honest, who hasn't?), here is one possibility. I call it:

Gaia In Darkness

What if the near future of humanity lay, not with technology, but with magic and the resurgence of the Old Ways? Or perhaps technology actually enabled the return of the Old Ways? After all, who hasn't looked up a horoscope or done an I Ching reading online?

While accepted as a useful tool, technology is not the be-all of human existence and striving. Therefore, while more advanced than it is today, it has not advanced at the same rate, or in the same directions, as it has in a conventional cyberpunk setting. In particular, implants of any kind are seen as a pollution of the human body, rather than an enhancement. The human body may not be perfect, but it was designed by Mother Nature, who is generally thought to be smarter than most human inventors.

Likewise, genetic engineering and other biotech endeavors have become socially unacceptable -- and indeed unnecessary. By working in harmony with nature -- and with the faeries -- crop yields can easily support the world's population, even in spite of (or perhaps because of) a global switch to organic farming practices.

Instead, technology focuses on communication and empathy. While a few humans have been born with telepathy and other psionic gifts, almost all the rest rely on some form of Mechanical Telepathy (p. CI27) which combines the functions of phone and internet. Scientists have begun to predict the formation of a human group mind: an organic internet which in time will fuse with the consciousness of Gaia to create a truly living planet. Some are looking forward to that day, but many fear that it will result in the annihilation of their individuality.

In some parts of the world, experimental communities -- dubbed "ant farms" by their detractors -- have already achieved perfect mind linking on a small scale. In others, madness and even death have been the result as the dark side of an individual's psyche spreads throughout the group.

Stringent mental health checks are now required before participating in such experiments, and despite the sworn goal of egalitarianism, a new hierarchy of society is forming, based upon natural psychic ability vs. psi-technology and mental health vs. mental illness. The Master Race of this new world is already beginning to emerge in the Gifted, an overclass of natural telepaths with "perfect" minds. Some have even begun to speak of the next phase of human evolution.

Where do the faeries fit into all this? They are Gaia's intermediaries and messengers, teaching her mortal children to live in harmony with each other and with the planet. At least, that is what they say -- but they could have several agendas of their own.

One might be the harnessing of human psychic potential to create mana so that the faeries can continue to survive and thrive. Another might be the reshaping of human society in the faeries' image -- or rather, in their self-image. Human history is full of instances where a technologically superior culture has taken it upon itself to "improve" a less technological one and remake it in its own image, and the result has nearly always benefited the colonial power much more than the natives. Perhaps the faeries are doing this to the humans, using a façade of communion with Gaia.

History teaches that colonialism is frequently accompanied by the rape of natural resources and the reduction of the colonized people to the status of second-class citizens. What might mortals have that faeries want? Many folklore sources would point to souls -- either literally, as in the case of the Teind (the tribute of souls traditionally paid by the faeries to Hell in exchange for their independence), or figuratively, as in stories of faerie abductions of mortals to care for (or replace) frail faerie newborns.

Perhaps the faeries are grooming the Gifted -- for a rigid class system is, in its own way, a form of selective breeding program -- to the point where they will be deemed fit to interbreed, revitalizing the faerie race without polluting its blood unduly. Or perhaps the Gifted are unwitting seed-beds for faerie or hybrid genetic material which will be transplanted back into sickly and dying faeries to keep them alive. Meanwhile, the rest of humanity labors to sustain both itself and the Gifted, being slowly reduced to a worker caste.

Of course, not all faeries in this setting are necessarily evil. However, it may well be the case that the more closely they fit the "noble faerie" stereotype, the less they can be trusted. Turning conventional faerie lore on its head, the ugly ones may be the honest ones.

Be that as it may, there will be some faeries who are opposed to this enslavement of mortals, and are fighting to change the situation. In such a seemingly idyllic world, it will be easy for the establishment to paint these dissenters as dangerous anarchists, sworn to drag both faeries and mortals down into the mire. They are frightened, establishment sources will say, of the potential of the next stage of human evolution, and wish to keep faerie power in the hands of faeries, and keep mortals in their place.

The scene is set, then, for a conflict where no one can be quite sure which side is good and which is evil. The oppression wrought by the "noble faeries" is so subtle, and so well-propagandized by emotion control in the developing web of human consciousness, that the vast majority see it as not only right but the fulfillment of human destiny. On the other hand, the work of the opposition in undermining and sabotaging the process is widely regarded as anti-human, faerie-supremacist aggression. Not even many faeries know (or believe) the truth about the Gifted.

Player Characters

The PCs may begin the campaign as humans who somehow become convinced that the faeries do not have their best interests -- or the best interests of the planet -- at heart. Or, they may begin as faeries who have realized what is really going on, and set out to save the mortals from the scheme, and from themselves.

For mortals, a necessary first step in joining the resistance is detaching themselves from the psychic and technopsychic communication web, so that they cannot be used to monitor resistance activities. This will be a traumatic experience for many -- they will be alone in their heads for the first time in their lives, and the sudden silence will be unnerving. This "deafness," as it has become known, is almost impossible to conceal from the "hearing," so the mortal rebel must drop out of society and disappear. The Deaf Who Will Not Hear are hunted down by the faerie elite and their mortal servants, because their minds are easier to probe, once they are captured, than those of their faerie counterparts.

While faeries have had the ability of psychic communication for millennia, they have mostly learned to compartmentalize their minds, screening some thoughts from general accessibility. They would say that this is similar to a mortal thinking something rather than saying it aloud. Therefore they are better able to conceal their true thoughts, and can operate within the mainstream of society even if their sympathies lie with the resistance. They are able to teach some simple mind-masking techniques to their human protégés, but these are not always effective.

Starting the Campaign

The campaign can start at any point along the story arc, and each stage has its advantages and disadvantages.

The story begins when mortals become aware of the faeries, and begin working with them to solve the world's

problems. The setting might be contemporary or near-future -- books on contact with faeries and working with them to save the environment are already on the shelves in our world -- or it might be a dark future-cyberpunk setting, where corporate greed has run its logical course.

In either case, faerie PCs could be ambassadors to the mortals, or they might be troubleshooters sent out to keep the mortals from completely destroying the world. They could also be renegades, ignoring faerie prohibitions on contact with mortals because they see that the only survivable future is one where the two races work together.

Mortal PCs can be any kind of character, since anyone could potentially be caught up in the tide of events. Environmental lobbyists and New Age mystics are logical first points of contact for faerie intermediaries, but corporate employees, construction and refinery workers, and other kinds of mortals have a good chance of being contacted -- or sabotaged -- drawing them into the story. Even private eyes and mercenaries might find that their objectives, and their clients, are not what they appear. Investigators might be hired to find evidence against a corporate executive whom the faeries want to remove, while mercenary groups might be hired to sabotage or destroy industrial installations or drive developers or prospectors away from an area.

Starting at the beginning of the story arc also gives players a world which is familiar, while starting in the middle, with human-faerie co-operation well established and radical changes in society as a result, give the players more work to do in becoming as familiar with the world as they would expect their characters to be.

However, starting in the middle of the story allows players to see the world as it has become, and to experience a world very different from the one they inhabit in real life.

When creating a mortal PC with ties to the resistance, the player and GM must pay particular attention to how the character broke from the communication web, or cover this in the first few sessions of play. The character's backstory - how he experienced the world before the campaign began, and what events set him outside the mainstream of the world to become a PC rather than an NPC -- is of critical importance.

For example, if he is one of the Gifted who has turned against the faeries, what happened to make him give up his favored life? Was it a developing social conscience, seeing the plight of lesser mortals growing steadily worse? Was it a bad psychic experience at an ant farm? Did he somehow discover that the faeries' goals and motives were not as altruistic as they claim? Another important question is how the hero is masking his rebel activities from the communications web -- has a sympathetic faerie mentor taught him to block his thoughts? Has he developed this ability spontaneously? Or has he not yet learned to do so -- meaning that he is on the run and must stay one step ahead of the faerie "Thought Police?"

Faerie characters are easier to create, but should also have a detailed personal backstory to explain how they came to be PCs rather than NPCs. If they are with the resistance, this needs to cover how and why they broke with the faerie establishment, and what events contributed to their present attitudes and goals. If they are with the establishment, their personal backstory needs to cover their career up until the start of the campaign, explaining how they came to be where they are today, and giving some context for their views and motivations.

How To Run A Mystery Adventure

by Matt B. Carter

Mystery has its place in every genre, from the sleek dark world of *Cyberpunk* to the grim period horror of *Call of Cthulhu*. Whether it is blue-collar crime or grisly murder, the disappearance of a politician or the poisoning of a village's water supply, behind every story is the potential for a mystery. This article explains the essential techniques involved in running a mystery adventure for your group, whatever the system or the setting.

Creating The Plot

To begin with, put yourself in the villain's shoes. Decide on your hook, your crime, or your mystery; the result that your perpetrator is looking to achieve; and then work backwards from that ending. Consider all the angles and plan the crime as though it was you who set out to commit the deed. It could be a robbery, a murder, a kidnapping, or any number of activities related to the particular game you are playing. Take into account any special abilities the villain might have and how they would be applied to the task.

Now work out what could go wrong. Something has to go awry in order for your players to be able to solve the mystery; there is no point in letting your villain pull off the perfect crime. There must be a hole in the plan somewhere, and a plausible one too. Don't make it too blatant; nothing screams "plot device" like a smoking gun (unless, of course, it's a red herring, and even then it can be too obvious). It must be something that your villain can conceivably have missed or that is outside of his or her capacity to prevent. The latter is usually the best option, as it does not rely on the villain's incompetence.

Perhaps an associate betrayed him? Clues could be left deliberately by somebody wishing to expose the villain, like an undercover agent or a double-crossing partner. Or perhaps there was an unknown entity involved in the crime, something about which the villain could not possibly have known that ended up leaving a mark behind. This is especially appropriate with games that use magic or other unpredictable fantasy elements. In any case, choose this first clue carefully, for this is what will draw your players into the adventure from the start and give the story a base from which to develop.

Once you've picked the hook, the rest of the plot should fall into place more easily. At this point you should start to work through a list of things that your players can discover and the sources from which they can do so. Mystery adventures are not often linear; usually they consist of a collection of characters and locations, each of which holds information. Your job is simply to provide enough of these that the players can follow the plot through to some kind of confrontation. If you've presented the hook properly then they should have some idea of where to start their investigation, and from there you can lead them through branches of plot as they discover more clues.

For example, your hook is that the players -- members of a law enforcement or investigation agency, for the sake of the example -- find the corpse of an immigrant from Hong Kong in a hotel room in New York. He was stabbed, but before he died he wrote "Freedom" in his own blood on the carpet. He has only been dead for a few hours. According to his identification he worked in a restaurant in Chinatown. From here you can place important information in two obvious places: with the clerk at the front desk of the hotel, and with the owner of the restaurant.

Let's say the players talk to the hotel clerk first. He tells them that the room was rented by a woman, a Miss Sayers. She mentioned that she worked for an antiques dealer in Manhattan whose name he can't recall, but it began with an "M." The clerk knows nothing about the murder victim, except that he was discovered exactly the way the players found him. Traveling to the restaurant, the players interview the manager and discover that the murdered man has not been into work for over a week and that he stole a framed photograph of the Statue of Liberty from the restaurant manager's office. He writes down the address of the murdered man for them. From here, the obvious avenues for the players to investigate are either the antiques dealer or the home of the murdered man.

This kind of branching system is elementary to the construction of a mystery adventure. You can introduce elements one at a time or simultaneously, depending on how complicated you wish to make the plot. Avoid using too many twists and turns, though. You need surprisingly few plot twists in order to make a good adventure story, and the overuse of red herrings and deception, unless handled expertly, will simply confuse the players and have an adverse effect on the pace of the game. The players' investigations and dialogue will, if all goes to plan, fill out the plot for you and make the story seem much more gripping and detailed than it did on paper. Don't try to make the mystery more complicated than it needs to be, or you'll end up introducing too many elements and losing control.

When writing the adventure, bear in mind that the driving goal should always be apparent to the players. In the above example, the goal is to find out who murdered the man in the hotel room. Once they've done so, if they haven't uncovered another, larger crime, then the adventure is over. If you want them to keep investigating after they've solved the murder and stopped the culprit, then give them a reason to investigate. Perhaps a key witness in the murder case disappears or turns up dead, leaving another clue behind. Always make sure the players have a clear goal ahead of them, and be careful about stringing a plot out for too long.

It is vitally important that before you start to play you should research everything and check every single one of your facts, however minor or irrelevant you might think it is. The reason for this is that if your plot relies on any kind of science or logistics it can be very embarrassing if one of your players should know of a scientific reason that it wouldn't work. This is even more embarrassing if more than one of your players should spot it, and crippling so if they all do. Also make sure that the proper research channels are in place for the players so that it does not seem like you are overly steering them. You should prepare NPC professionals who are experts in the relevant fields, libraries and other physical databases, and any other kind of media the players might require. It is not necessary to actually have statistics or information available for all of these, but if you do not then you should have a plausible reason for the information not to be available.

Running The Game

It's all very well having planned the adventure, but when it comes down to actually playing the game it can all go horribly wrong. Preparation is not the only science involved in running a good mystery scenario, and even the best referee can fall over if he or she doesn't keep in mind a few important principles while playing.

First, and perhaps most importantly, you must maintain a very careful pace. Moving the adventure along too fast by feeding the players too much information can throw them off the scent, and if they haven't yet caught up with the plot the way you planned then you can lose them entirely. This is very easy to do, and will ruin a mystery scenario faster than anything else. Conversely, if the adventure is too slow then the players will get bored and lose interest in the plot regardless of what else is going on. Pacing is the most important element of running a mystery adventure. Getting it right can take several attempts, and this is another good reason to keep your mysteries simple to begin with.

It can also be important to maintain a poker face when out of character. If you smile at the wrong moment, or look as though the players are on the right track when they're not certain, it can essentially amount to out-of-character information. This is not so important if your clues are relatively easy and are really little more than tools to advance the plot, but if the game is supposed to be a tightly-wound mystery that taxes the players' brains then it is vital that you do not give anything away.

Finally, as with all games, you must have at least a loose set of contingency plans prepared. If the players get stuck and can't work out what their next move should be, especially if they've overlooked a clue or are missing vital knowledge, then you need a way of dropping hints smoothly and subtly before they start to get frustrated. Have an NPC or two prepared who can turn up with an important piece of information, or maybe a news broadcast that contains the missing clue. Remember, it's much better to insert new information using events than it is to use characters. It's a lot smoother, and if it looks like a scripted event then the players will feel like they've figured it out for themselves. But, as long as it fits the story and happens logically, you should be able to get away with any kind of exposition even if the players realize you're feeding them clues. Just don't let an NPC solve the mystery for them.

Likewise it is possible that the players will figure out what's going on more quickly than you anticipated, or that you

accidentally give away a piece of information too early. You need to be prepared to insert the ending to your adventure sooner than you had planned to and yet maintain the consistency of the story. If the villain was supposed to have stolen the ruby and boarded the train by the time of the final confrontation, and the players have managed to uncover the plot and hide the ruby before the villain can get to it, then again you need a contingency plan. If you manage to seamlessly slip in a dramatic alternative to the ending you had planned, or if you manage to insert the ending you had planned while missing out the part of the plot that you have accidentally skipped, then the players will love it and you will have pulled off a major coup. They'll have outdone themselves, and so will you. They'll have solved the mystery before they even had all the clues, and you will have provided a dramatic climax despite them pulling the rug out from under you.

There are only two near-foolproof ways of doing this. The first is to have a climax that cannot easily be avoided. For example, the ending you have planned could be a showdown with the villain in his penthouse apartment. The only way this will come about is if the players find out that he was behind the whole thing and confront him. It doesn't really matter if they work out that he did it any earlier on in the game than you planned; just have him waiting there for them when they arrive. As long as the scene does not require excessive timing, or for the players to behave in a very specific way based on later plot elements, this can be done with relative ease. The other way is to have a set of endings prepared, a collection of "if/then" conditions based on the players' activities and successes. This is much harder but, if you pull it off, can make for a very memorable adventure.

And that's about it. Remember, start out with something simple. Place a clue, work out the branches of investigation, and have a few back-up plans prepared in case it doesn't go as planned. If you prepare carefully, and know your plot well enough, you have nothing to fear. Above all, remember the first rule of gaming: everybody is there to have fun.

Mog the Half Orc's Pit Fighting Circle

for *GURPS Fantasy*

by Royce E. Day

It's ugly, it's not talked about, but below a certain social level in the city of Megalos you can't deny it's there. Every once in a while a high-minded priest makes a demand of the Megalos Guard and burns the place down, but it always shows up again in a day or so in a new spot, and with crowds just as large as before. Mog himself hasn't been caught yet, though there's a fair reward (\$200) for his capture on the charge of "creating a public disturbance" (rioting is a regular event at the Circle).

The design of the place is pretty simple. The inner circle consists of a sand-lined pit nine feet deep and about 20 feet wide, surrounded by rough benches except for two wooden gates on opposite sides where the fighters enter. Outside this area are a couple small buildings (sheds, really) where combatants and their trainers/owners can have some privacy before the fight begins, and the usual array of itinerate merchants hawking souvenirs of questionable quality and food of even more questionable origins. There are also, inevitably, bookies in the area. Though none of them have a clear franchise from Mog, occasionally one manages to beat off his competitors and gain exclusive business for all bets on the Circle's fights. Chaotic systems being what they are, it's usually an open market again in 24 hours (or less, depending on how fast the bodies can be disposed of).

Events in the Circle occur every day (including Sundays, much to the aforementioned righteous priests' disgust) usually starting early in the afternoon, and proceeding until sunset. There's no particular set schedule otherwise, audiences for Circle fights appearing about five minutes after the crier Mog hired starts announcing the day's card. Once enough of a paying audience shows up to fill the seats (\$1.00 a head), the fights begin.

Events vary, sharing only in their utter brutality. Be it gladiators, cock fights, bear-baiting, or worse, every fight in the Circle sticks to a few very basic rules.

- **Rule 1:** Contestants enter from opposite sides of the Circle at the sound of the gong.
- **Rule 2:** No magic.
- **Rule 3:** Last one standing wins the purse.

The purse is generally 10% of Mog's take at the entry gate (\$50 to \$100, usually). Humanoid combatants are permitted to tap out during a fight, though the audience much prefers it if they're either crippled, unconscious, or dead. Animals generally fight to the death. If the audience isn't happy with the fight's outcome, they aren't afraid to show their disapproval by either flinging whatever they have at hand into the Circle, or sometimes physically entering it themselves to attack one of the fighters. Mog allows this, mostly because it makes for a better show, and encourages fighters to play to the crowd.

At the end of the fight the winner is helped out of the Circle to collect his purse, and the loser is pulled out and thrown into the street. Medical aid after the fight is the responsibility of the combatants.

There are generally four or five events a day. Mog pays out to the winning fighters/owners at the end of the day, and in that one respect is generally honest. The mix is generally one or two humanoid fights (there aren't *that* many wannabe gladiators in the city) and the rest animal events. If there's one odd thing about Mog's whole operation, it does seem like he somehow has unusually steady access to exotic animals to stick into his pit, like lions, tigers, and things locals have never heard of.

The most popular event is humanoid on humanoid combat, of course. Armor more substantial than heavy leather is frowned upon by Mog, though any sort of non-ranged weapon is welcome, the more exotic the better. Given the confined area of the Circle, it's usually one-on-one, though pairs also make an occasional appearance. Most of the

regular fighters that appear are human of course, though for some reason Mog offers a double purse to any half-elf vs. half-elf fights. Despite having kept his Circle operating for at least two years now, no regular fighters have made a name for themselves yet. For one reason or another they tend to drop out once they get a reputation going, probably because they sensibly figure once they've earned a good amount of coin, they can move on to a safer occupation.

Secrets

The biggest one behind this whole operation is that Mog the Half Orc isn't one.

Mog's name is really Cai Evertree, and he's no half-breed creature, he's a full-blooded Dark Elf. His family has been in the business of organizing bloodsports for almost a thousand years now, and he's just on a business holiday to help expand operations. He came over to Megalos about three years ago, on a mission to find new fighters and exotic animals to sate the jaded tastes of Dark Elf crowds. The family's extensive stable of slave warriors and animals were becoming a bit stale, and to pump up business some new bloodlines had to be found. So far he's been having the time of his life.

The simple fact is that he finds it absolutely hilarious that humans and other creatures brought by the Banestorm are so utterly desperate for a pittance of coin that they're willing to throw themselves into a grotty, pathetic excuse for an arena and risk their lives for a purse that would be spat on by even a novice Elven warrior. Even better, many of them are disgusting, mongrel half-elves, who die in the Circle and leave the world before they can produce any more perversions of nature.

But there is a practical side to the whole thing. Promising fighters in the Circle are sometimes kidnapped by Cai or his associates, to be transported back to the secret Dark Elf strongholds and finish their lives serving in arenas that will properly show off their talents. He takes care when he picks his target(usually someone who is new to the capitol and has no immediate family or friends nearby), and is careful to leave no evidence of his crime. Within an hour of catching his quarry, the person finds themselves in the cells underneath Cai's family's estates, ready to start his *real* training and become a slave warrior.

Mog/Cai carries only two magic items on his person: a pair of rings which supplement his spellcasting abilities, and a logbook of his operations which is carefully hidden in the house he owns in Megalos proper (getting into the city is relatively easy when he's in his Elven form). In the city he maintains the identity of an Elven sage researching the recreation of the Church's hierarchy during the chaos of humanity's initial appearance on Yrth.

The first ring has an Illusion Disguise spell, which permits him to maintain his Mog identity for up to 24-hours without draining his personal mana, or if he needs to quickly escape the attention of the authorities. The second has a Scryguard permanently enchanted on it to keep him clear of the magical eyes of prying mages.

If he is discovered, Cai would first attempt to cast a normal Teleport spell to a preset bolt hole well away from Megalos, and then Gate straight home. Given his origins, he knows he'd undoubtedly be executed for his activities in Megalos. The henchmen he hires under the guise of Mog to kidnap fighters know nothing of his true identity, and figure their employer just likes to occasionally have someone to casually torture/murder.

Adventure Seeds

- **The Old "NPC Goes Missing" Plot:** A friend of the heroes, one that is well known as a competent soldier and who was also a little down on his luck, has disappeared after participating in a fight in the Circle. Questioning Mog directly will lead to a wall of indifference. "What do I care where somebody goes once 'dey take 'dere purse?" he'll say. But there's a witness who swears he saw their friend enter one of the outbuildings to collect his winnings, and never came out again.
- **Backtracking:** The PC's find clues about Mog's operation from the other end, during a mission that takes them to a secret dark elf city hidden deep in the wastes of the Nomad Territories. The local arena appears to have an unusual number of foreign fighters, most of whom prove to have had their minds blanked when they entered

their life of slavery. Will they be willing to follow the leads all the way back to Megalos?

Mog the Half Orc (aka Cai Evertree)

109 1/2 points

Age 130; 5'11"; 150 lbs.

ST: 9 [0]; **IQ:** 15 [45]; **DX:** 11 [0]; **HT:** 10 [0]

Speed: 5.25 **Move:** 5

Dodge: 5 **Parry:** 5

Advantages: *Dark Elf (Radical)* -- Racial ST -1 [-10]; Racial DX +1 [10]; Racial IQ +1 [10]; Appearance (Attractive) [5] (Reaction: +1); Combat Reflexes [15]; Magery 3 [35]; Musical Ability +2 [2]; Unaging [15]; Racial Skill Bonus +2 (MA): Bard [2]; Racial Skill Bonus +2 (ME): Savoir-Faire [1]; Code of Honor [-10]; Social Stigma 3 [-15]; Sense of Duty [-15]; Literacy [10]; Alternate Identity [15].

Disadvantages: Callous [-6]; Secret [-20].

Quirks: Always pays double to watch half-elves kill each other; Never cheats winners of their purse, even if he kidnaps them later. [-2]

Skills: Bow-11 [4]; Shortsword-11 [2] Riding (Horse)-10 [1]; Fast-Talk-12 [1]; Acting-13 [2]; Intimidation-13 [1/2].

Spells: Detect Magic-16; Seek Magic-16; Seek Gate-16; Control Gate-16; Apportation-16; Levitation-16; Flight-15; Hawk Flight-15; Teleport-15; Create Gate-15; Sense Life-16; Test Food-16; Lend Strength-16; Light-16; Foolishness-16; Simple Illusion-16; Illusion Disguise-16.

The Hand You're Dealt

New Hexes for *Deadlands d20*

by Michael Suileabhain-Wilson

During the playtest for ***GURPS Deadlands: Hexes***, several playtesters observed that, while the hexes created for the book were written up for ***GURPS Deadlands*** and original ***Deadlands***, there were no guidelines for using them in a ***Deadlands d20*** campaign. At the time, there was nothing to be done: the proposal for the book hadn't considered the possibility of ***d20 System*** conversions, and license issues would have made it difficult to add such a thing anyway.

Still, a good idea is a good idea, and so here we present eight of the hexes from ***GURPS Deadlands: Hexes***, adapted for ***Deadlands d20***. Not all the new hexes from *Hexes* were able to be converted, but the assortment that has been runs the full gamut from powerful divinations through enchantments to hexes that make your arm try to kill you. They may even be useful to groups running ***d20 System*** campaigns in other settings, though some hexes may be less appropriate - and less balanced -- outside the *Deadlands* setting.

The Rock Springs Society for Games of Chance and Skill

The Rock Springs Society for Games of Chance and Skill operated in Wyoming from 1867 to 1869. To the world at large, it was a prettied-up opportunity for the biggest scoundrels in six states to get together and hone their skills by trying to pull their best scams on one another. That's true as far as it goes, but like so many things in post-Reckoning America, there was more to the Society than met the eye. Four of the Society's seven members were hucksters, and damn good ones at that. Besides meeting to exchange their mundane innovations, they exchanged hexes and other occult lore at their get-togethers until that cold February day when the Agency adjourned the Society for the last time.

The Society's *Proceedings*, published in 1867 and 1868, are avidly searched after, by ordinary swindlers as much as by hucksters. Only a dozen copies of each volume were ever printed (and several of those have been captured by the Agency), but the demand for them is great enough to have inspired several unauthorized reprints. On the face of it, the book is merely a record of what games the Society played, how the games went, and who was there. If you look closely, however, the attentive reader will notice a variety of swindles and cheats leaving their traces on the record. Many readers hope to learn some new shenanigans by poring over its pages. For those with the eyes to look even closer, however, the *Proceedings* contains potent hexes committed to code by the members of the Society.

Some aficionados of the *Proceedings* claim that there existed a draft of the 1869 *Proceedings* which includes an extremely deadly hex by the legendary "Red" York; the search for that manuscript has become many a huckster's obsession. Skeptics note that if "York's Last Hex" did exist, it wasn't enough to keep the Agency from gunning him down in the bathtub.

Blink

Transmutation

Level: Hck 2

Components: S

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

Target: You

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

Blink is the more common name for the hex that Jim Hannigan poetically termed the Adulterer's Best Friend. It

instantly transports the caster to any location within the hex's range, as long as no person or obstacle is occupying the space he wishes to "blink" into. Casting *blink* does not trigger an attack of opportunity for casting a spell.

Burning Death

Evocation [Fire]

Level: Hck 4

Components: S

Casting Time: 1 round

Range: Touch

Target: Creature touched

Duration: 1 round/level, to a maximum of 10 rounds

Saving Throw: Fortitude half (see text)

Spell Resistance: Yes

Burning death, the hex that made "Red" York's reputation, causes the target to burn from within with a supernaturally accelerated case of rock fever. Each round until the hex expires, the target takes 1d8 points of fire damage; a successful Fortitude save reduces this damage by half. If the target dies from this damage, his body explodes into flame and is rapidly reduced to a pile of ash with a fist-sized lump of ghost rock in it. While the hex is in effect, the target also suffers a -4 penalty to all attack rolls, skill checks, and ability checks from the unbearable pain; this penalty is reduced to -2 if the initial Fortitude save is successful.

Ecstasy

Enchantment (Compulsion) [Mind-Affecting]

Level: Hck 3

Components: S

Casting Time: 1 round

Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

Target: One creature

Duration: 2 rounds

Saving Throw: Will negates

Spell Resistance: Yes

Ecstasy, York's least destructive creation, overwhelms its victim with pleasure. While under the hex's effects, the subject is so smitten with pure pleasure that he may take no action until the end of the hex. While under the hex's effects, the subject is overwhelmed with pleasure and may take no action until the end of the hex; he is not stunned, however, and keeps his Dexterity modifier to AC. This hex may be addictive (rumor has it that the Agency was able to get the drop on York because he was blissed out on his own hex). If *ecstasy* is successfully cast upon the subject three times within 10 days, he must make a Will save to resist becoming addicted to the hex. This addiction is equivalent to a *lesser geas* compelling him to seek out more opportunities to experience the hex's pleasures. If he manages to get *ecstasy* cast on him again, it ends the *lesser geas*, but he must also make another Will save to avoid becoming addicted afresh. The addiction may be lifted by any of the spells that will lift a *lesser geas*, as well as *remove disease*.

Hell's Arsenal

Transmutation

Level: Hck 2

Components: S

Casting Time: 1 round

Range: Touch

Target: One weapon

Duration: 1 minute/level

Saving Throw: Will negates (harmless, object)

Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless, object)

Bathes the target weapon in a halo of flame. This flame will not harm the weapon or its wielder, but anyone struck by

the weapon takes an additional 1d6 points of fire damage. A missile weapon under the effects of this hex will confer the flame bonus on its projectiles. A weapon under the effect of *hell's arsenal* can ignite normal combustible materials, and can harm any creature harmed by magical fire.

Hidey-Hole

Conjuration (Summoning)

Level: Hck 1

Components: S

Casting Time: 2 rounds

Range: Touch

Target: One object

Duration: One hour

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

Removes a non-living object to the Hunting Grounds for the duration of the hex. While in the Hunting Grounds, the target cannot be detected by any means limited to the normal world. Jim Hannigan was fond of using this hex in support of his nasty pilferage habit. Some maintain that he knew a more lasting version of it, and caches of Hannigan's treasure are just waiting in the Hunting Grounds for some enterprising huckster to riddle out how to get at it.

I Want Answers!

Divination

Level: Hck 3-9

Components: S

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self

Duration: Instant

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

Paul Montenev was known in his day as the best hand with a manitou in all the Weird West, largely due to his mastery of this hex, which permits a huckster to get up in a manitou's face in a fashion not usually permitted by the stylized game of hexslinging. *I want answers!* compels the manitou called to answer one question about the Reckoning and topics with which manitous and their allies are involved -- critters, hexes, mad science, abominations, black magic, etc. This spell may be cast at any level the caster has access to; casting at higher levels calls a more powerful manitou, with more knowledge about the details of the Reckoners' plans. The results are usually cryptic; the power of the hex compels the manitou to answer, but most manitous really don't know much, and they aren't forthcoming with what they do know. Hence, only a clearly worded and relatively simple question, like "What was that thing that just tried to eat us?" is likely to get a clear answer. Questions about a unique abomination, or about any specific project of the Reckoners', is far less likely to get a meaningful answer; only a greater manitou is likely to know, and they're rare and difficult to control.

When *I want answers!* is cast, the Marshal makes a Knowledge roll on behalf of the manitou. The manitou's Knowledge skill is based on the level at which the hex was cast (see sidebar). The sidebar gives the *total* bonus to the manitou's roll, including Intelligence bonus. A spectacular success on the spell roll adds one level to the effective spell level. The DC for the roll depends on the question asked (see sidebar). A manitou's Knowledge skill and Intelligence cannot be enhanced by spells or items; the bonus given in the table is the maximum bonus possible. If the roll succeeds, the manitou knows the answer and must tell it, but may be cryptic and misleading. The more powerful the manitou, the cleverer it is in its misdirection.

Even if a huckster manages to browbeat a manitou into telling the truth and nothing but, the knowledge may be a two-edged sword. If a huckster intimidates a manitou into telling him how to kill a glom, that's no big deal, and the manitou will want to keep to himself the fact that he got slapped around by a mortal. If that same huckster had his luckiest day ever and managed to extort the truth about Reverend Grimme, a manitou wouldn't dare to hush that up.

That huckster may find himself the object of a little attention from los diablos any day now.

This hex may be unbalancing, and GMs should feel free to disallow it if they prefer to keep secrets out of player hands.

Knowledge DCs

10	Names of common critters, names of hexes
13	Abilities of common critters, specific properties of hexes
17	Names of abominations
20	Abilities of abominations
23	Names of unique abominations
27	Story behind a minor completed plot (famine in Charleston)
30	Abilities of unique abominations
33	Story behind a major completed plot (the Great Quake)
37	Story behind a minor ongoing plot (Simone LaCroix's zombies)
40	Story behind a major ongoing plot (the Church of Lost Angels, ghost rock)
45	Major secrets of the Reckoning (who are the Reckoners, what do they want, etc.)

Manitou Knowledge Skill

Spell Level Skill Bonus

3rd	0
4th	+3
5th	+7
6th	+10
7th	+13
8th	+17
9th	+20
10th*	+25

*10th-level hexes are, of course, usually impossible. However, because a spectacular success produces results as if the hex were cast one level higher, a 9th-level casting of *I want answers!* will summon a manitou that would be summoned by a "normal" 10th-level casting.

Phantom Amputation

Enchantment (Compulsion)

Level: Hck 3

Components: S

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Target: One limb

Duration: 5 minutes/level

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell causes a manitou to pass into the limb touched by the caster. For the duration of the hex, the target cannot use the affected limb. Furthermore, the resident manitou may, at moments of stress, attempt to turn the afflicted limb to acts of mischief. This attempt is resolved like a normal Dominion check for a Harrowed, except that the manitou can, at worst, take over the limb. If the manitou wins a Dominion check, it can control the limb for 2 rounds, during which time it will cause trouble any way it can -- hitting or kicking allies or innocents, throwing away equipment, or even attacking the target. If, through grave misfortune, the manitou succeeds in winning Total Dominion, it gains control over the arm for the duration of the hex. Note that the manitou will not necessarily act in the best interests of the caster. A character who has been the subject of Phantom Amputation gets a +1 bonus to the roll to become Harrowed.

Rabbit Foot

Transmutation

Level: Hck 3**Components:** S**Casting Time:** 1 action**Range:** 10 yards/ level**Target:** Self**Duration:** Instantaneous**Saving Throw:** No**Spell Resistance:** No

Rabbit foot was Lucky Sanderson's signature hex. It jiggers the odds at the last second, snatching victory from the jaws of defeat. An attempt that by all rights should have failed may be successful with the aid of this hex. This hex allows the caster to re-roll any one failed skill, attack, or save roll when cast immediately following the failed roll. The results of the second roll are binding. *Rabbit foot* can be cast with an instant gesture, as a free action; using it in this manner counts toward the normal limit of one quickened spell per round.

Shift Wounds

Conjuration (Healing)

Level: Hck 1**Components:** S**Casting Time:** 1 minute**Range:** Touch**Target:** Living creature touched**Duration:** Instantaneous**Saving Throw:** No**Spell Resistance:** No

Ordinarily, it's difficult persuading a manitou to do something constructive, like healing someone. In order to seal the deal, a huckster has to offer an incentive: in exchange for healing the subject, the manitou gets to inflict equally dire wounds on the caster. *Shift wounds* heals 2d8 points of damage, while doing an equal amount of damage to the caster.

Homeland: Kralori

Eternal Peace, Peerless Tranquility and Bounteous Prosperity be upon you, for even unwashed and brutish barbarians have their own mean and unrewarding place in the Great Order of the Cosmic Dragon!

by Mark Galeotti

Kralorela teems with inhabitants, crammed into tiny huts clustering upon the sides of the much-irrigated rivers or the stone, brick and rice-paper tenements of the teeming cities. Temples stand on sacred places, monasteries and dojos among them. Government towns link villages to huge cities that swarm with official business, internal trade and religious administration. Atop it all the Imperial Dragon oversees peace, safety and serenity, through his huge and ubiquitous bureaucracy, dominated by coteries of palace eunuchs and courtiers, the mighty lieutenants known as exarchs and the countless mandarins and aristocrats across this huge land.

Kralorela occupies the eastern portion of Genertela. Colonies of Kralori are often found in cities overseas in Melib, Teshnos and much of the Eastern Isles.

Kralorela Homeland Keyword

Occupations Available: Entertainer (Dancer, Musician, Shadow-Puppeteer, Singer), Farmer, Foot Soldier (Spearman, Swordsman, Crossbowman), Healer, Hunter, Merchant, Petty Noble, Sailor, Scholar, Thief, Warrior.

Native Abilities: Enduring, Geography of [Home Province], Know Place in Society, Kralori Customs, Peace with Dragons, Speak Kralorelan.

Typical Personality Traits: Conservative, Nationalist, Obsequious to higher authority, Pious, Polite.

Typical Relationships: to Ancestors; to Family.

Magic: Common magic, Kralori Pantheon (theism).

Native Flaws: All abilities relating to Outside World 6. This indicates the extreme isolationist attitude of the common Kralori people.

Common Names: Names are a very significant indicator of social status. Commoners will generally have a single name reflecting their birth, such as Hong ("Farmer") or Kao ("Soldier"), as well as a nickname to distinguish them from all the other people in their village with the same name. Two names denote someone born or appointed to a petty office, such as Hong Ba ("Farmer Elder-Brother," a village headman) or Hong Zhang ("Farmer Protector," the head of the village militia). Three names are the sign of an aristocrat or hero, and four of the mightiest mandarins and generals and their families -- such people typically use only their more esteemed names. Thus, Duzhe Shu Chuan Jian ("Reader Clerk Boat-Master"), the fabled designer of the Kralori turtle-

This homeland was originally written for **HeroQuest**, but was cut due to space constraints. It will be used as the basis for the final version that will eventually appear in the first of the Kralorela books. I will be following this article up in the next few weeks with at least two more, including "Kralori Navies" and "The Two-Times Unfortunate Encyclopedists of Barbaric Deviltry," a hero band that was cut from the forthcoming **Masters of Luck and Death** because the hero band was cut from **HeroQuest**.

Kralorela is very much Glorantha's equivalent to ancient China, albeit one where dragons really do manifest themselves and the emperor and his closest lieutenants (the exarchs) and bodyguards are dragons or can take their form. However, the packed and noisy cities, the rolling paddy fields and the huge and impressive public works (instead of a Great Wall, Kralorela has huge bridges between islands and iron forts), as well as the presumption of absolute superiority over all foreigners is strongly reminiscent of imperial China at the height of its power -- as strong as during the Han dynasty, albeit without the same level of social and technological change.

barges, is universally known only as Chuan Jian. Women will generally have one fewer name than equivalent menfolk (and it is not unknown for peasant women to be known purely by a nickname or as "Hong the Unfortunate's Second Daughter" until marriage confers the name "Hong the Drooplip's Second Wife" or the like), but exceptions, while a minority, are not rare.

Origin

Kralorela is the Kingdom of Splendor, and all Kralori know it is where all wisdom, virtue and enlightenment reside. Since the shattering of the original Divine Solar Empire of HeenMaroun in order to recreate the world, Kralorela has been progressive and unchanging in its virtue, notwithstanding brief and transitory emergencies such as the tyranny of Sekever and the 352-year reign of ShangHsa-may-his-name-be-cursed.

Common Religions

The Little Mandarins

The most widely-practiced common magic among the Kralori is centered around the so-called "Little Mandarins," local village totems and ancient ancestors. This is magic of the peasantry, and it would be inappropriate and undignified for anyone of higher rank to practice or even affect to notice it.

Charms -- Escape Foreman's Attention, Frighten Bandit, Know Way Home, Light Fire Quickly, Move Quickly Through Mud, Pacifying Kowtow.

Two-Jade Ring

The two-named Kralori represent a very varied social order, ranging from the most important peasants to lesser bureaucrats. They include many who are not following in their parents' footsteps so much as trying to exceed their ancestors' achievements, and their optimistic, aspirational and ambitious views are at once a useful engine of progress within Kralorela and at the same time viewed with mistrust by commoners and aristocrats alike. This is also reflected in their relative lack of ancestor magic: how can you revere a figure whose path you are no longer willing to tread? Many have turned to the Two-Jade Ring, a philosophical movement which uses as its symbol and focus a ring made of the very cheapest kind of jade (co-called "gray foreigners' jade") given a rim of the best variety the individual can afford (which is thus replaced if and when he has prospered and can buy better), representing the transition from base roots and constant reinvention. The increasing political militancy of several members of the Ring has begun to displease the authorities, especially since the Great Defenestration of Laonan Tao, but only in Puchai Province are members required to register on the Roll of Disharmonious Souls.

Charms -- Resist Tradition, Think Different Thoughts.

Feats -- I Know My Worth, Locate Own Property.

Six-Sixes-Passed-On

Noble houses pay strict attention to their lineages, and it is regarded as a matter of pride to be able to chart "six-sixes" (a doubly harmonious number) of mandarin ancestors. These are all carefully noted in gold leaf on the Ledgers of Passed-On Excellency in the house's inner sanctum. Many also carve these genealogies into stones which are then worked into ornamental gardens. Through contemplation in these gardens, Kralori may attain a near-mystic understanding of their ancestors' virtues, and from this understanding derive common magic.

Feats -- Beat the Rebellious, Elegant Gesture, Ignore Foreigner, Know Relative's Age, Remember Family History.

Spells -- Grow Nails, Harmonious Blossom, Locate Appropriate Stone, Shame Underling.

Specialized Religion-Kralori Pantheon

The dominant religion of Kralorela is founded upon the great dragons, from whom everything else flowed. The ultimate goal of Kralori mysteries is to become a dragon, but for most this is an abstract concept, and instead the center of their faith is Right Action and observance of their just and proper place in the world. The Kralori religion is inextricably tied to the political system. The Emperor is both just and enlightened despot and also himself a dragon, albeit in human form. All Kralori practice the Imperial Adorations, channeling their worship and reverence towards the Emperor, through the officials known as exarchs, who rule provinces, marshal armies and dispense justice in his name. They also worship powers appropriate to their rank and profession, whether peasants calling upon their ancestors for help and comfort or mandarins learning to emulate former Dragon-Emperors.

The dragons of Kralorela do not recognize distinctions in otherworlds, seeing a more fundamental and significant division between Right and Wrong Action. Kralori may mix magics freely without penalty, so long as it is appropriate to their social rank and role. Thus, a mandarin could practice common magic deriving from the Six-Sixes-Passed-On, including spells, even if a devotee of Vashanti. However, this would not apply if he also used spirits of the commoners' Little Mandarins tradition.

Kralori Pantheon Keyword

Abilities: Know Kralori Pantheon Myths, Talk to Dragons, Worship Kralori Pantheon.

Virtues: Philosophical, Revere Dragons.

Magic: Divine aid.

Other Side: Worshippers travel to the somber court of the Udam Bagur, Archexarch of Hell. There, they are judged: those who have practices Right Action travel to the Excellent Palace of Pleasant Reward to await the Passing On of His Supereminence the Dragon Emperor, at which time their souls will accompany him to the next stage of existence. The rest face appropriate and measured terms being tortured by devils to purify their souls until they are deemed worth of appointment to menial positions within the Excellent Place or, worse yet, rebirth as a barbarian or other animal.

Sample Deities of the Kralori Pantheon

Entertainer: Sav Hual, the Great Harmony

Affinity -- Dance.

Grimoire -- *Divine Movements Classified* (sample spells: Know The Next Step, Many Moving as One, One Moving Like Many, Perfect Tone).

Farmer: Ebe and Okerio Tradition

Spirits -- Ancestor, Farming, Rice.

Foot Soldier: Imolo Wen the Swordsman.

Affinities -- Discipline, Know Your Place, Soldierly.

Healer: Serelaloon.

Serelaloon is a total pacifist goddess.

Affinities -- Absolution, Compassion, Healing.

Hunter: Hunters will generally be members of the Ebe and Okerio ancestor worship tradition, although the particular ancestral spirits they contact will often be hunters themselves.

Merchant: Tun Dai, the Factor.

Affinities -- Merchant, Organize.

Petty Noble: Han Majang, the First Minister.

Affinities -- Administration, Authority, Politics.

Sailor: Thrunhin Da, the Blue Dragon of the Deep

Affinities -- Appease Sea Dragon, Shiphandling.

Scholar: Vashanti, Emperor of Sacred Nine

Affinities -- Administration, Literacy, Precedent.

Thief: Chuman Kalasak [Sedsaru]

Affinities -- Escape, Hide.

Warrior: Heseroon Marn, Faithful Dragon Fighting School

"Warrior" in Kralorela indicates a dojo-trained martial artist. Heseroon Marn is worshipped as a common religion, as well as a source of the skill of Dragon-Style unarmed combat (although he also encourages other schools).

Feats -- Block and Riposte, Bone-Shattering Kick, Soaring Sky Leap, Sudden Raking Blow, Twist and Strike.

Reasons to Have Left Home

Kralorela is rigidly caste oriented and anyone not content with their father's lot in life risks being branded a troublemaker and disgrace to the family. Such people are often driven out through violence or being ignored or leave voluntarily out of hope or desperation. Sometimes soldiers and others learn there is more to life and get wanderlust. Many people roam about as monks or seeking training in martial arts.

True Paths to Perfection: the Four Yesses and the Four Nos

Truly, it is written, that the Kralori are the finest of all people: respectful, virtuous, diligent and happy in our reverence for Godunya, our Divine Dragon Emperor, and his perfect and just rule. While immeasurably superior to the unfortunate souls not blessed by Kralori birth, we must nonetheless always heed the Four Yesses and Four Nos.

Yes to Reverence, No to Novelty. Reverence is a step backwards into our eternal future. We have much to revere. First and last are the dragons. Second and there are the Emperors, now dragons themselves. Third and everywhere are our ancestors, who lovingly scorn our failures that we may improve and defend us from spirits and devils who would steal our hearts and livers in the night. Fourth and ever are our traditions, which show us Right Action that we may serve the Emperor after our deaths in the Excellent Palace of Pleasant Reward. Bodkartu the Hidden Death protect us from forbidden lore, Bei Feng the Muter chastise the unruly mind!

Yes to Obedience, No to Disorder. Just as Ebe the Wild Man was tamed by Okerio, and from his lusts and passions came Aptanace the Sage, the father of the civilized arts, so too we must curb our disorderly natures and kowtow to the heavenly order of fate. Of course, there is impious novelty and there is an acceptance of our destiny -- if we appear to make something new that works for the good of Kralorela, then this must mean that we were guided by draconic inspiration, and all is as it should be.

Yes to Pride, No to Uncertainty. The humblest Kralori ox-driver is nonetheless greater than a king of the barbarian outsiders, for they are so corrupt that they have become devils, even if they do not know it. This is a blessed land, and it is not right or fitting for us to doubt that or be curious about the ways of the barbarians. Even our mariners prefer to sail the Harmonious Waves, the waters which wash our shores. That way they remain within ear-shot of the great brass Presence Bells which dot our coastline and can remind them of their homeland even when becalmed in the fogs of the Kahar Sea.

Yes to Manners, No to Impertinence. Know your place -- give appropriate respect to those placed above you in the

Eighty-Nine Rungs of Precedence, whether bowing to your local Block Warden or Village Elder or performing the Three-Heron Kowtow to an exarch. Even foreigners are to be pitied, not mocked for their stunted souls, false gods and distressing standards of personal hygiene. If they are possessed of the appropriate chop to travel in our blessed land, then do not call them "barbarian devils" or nail them up in the ox-sty without good reason.

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Pyramid Review

Quest for the DragonLords

Published by [DragonLords Inc.](#)

Designed by Robert Johannessen

Graphic design by Jarmo Kaski

Illustrated by Sam Yip, Peter Wolf

boxed set, full-color mounted game board, 4 reference cards, 12 quest cards, 24 scroll cards, 9 dice of varying sizes plus a special crystal die, 60 gold and silver counters (kings, wizards, equipment, magic items, etc.), 24 pegs, plastic storage tray, 75 plastic disks in three colors (to represent stacks and denominations of units), 160 plastic figures for four armies, 4 DragonLord figures, 8 ships, 12 sails, cloth bag full of gold nuggets, CD-ROM with game rules; \$59.99

From the outset, the DragonLords Inc. game *Quest for the DragonLords* is an impressive and daunting-looking item. The box is a deep black with shiny, red-foil inlays, thick as a brick, and just begging for a coffee table upon which to show itself off. The quality extends to the pieces inside, but the proof is in the play.

The object of the game is to control the world, eliminating your opponents by capturing their Kingdoms or killing their kings.

Players begin by selecting one of four armies (Elves, Dwarves, Barbarians, or Orcs), some equipment for traveling in the Wastelands, a scroll card (a one-shot spell), a ship, and three counters for your King and Wizard (the third is a decoy to prevent players from knowing where your regent is).

In turn, players choose some land. There are six realms in the game (areas surrounded by a colored dotted line), each with a capital city space called a Kingdom. Once you claim a Kingdom, you take turns placing additional units until the other territories are filled. Choosing adjacent spaces makes reinforcement easier, but there are other valuable sites like the teleports (spaces from which Wizards can drag armies about the board), gold spaces, and mines.

A player starts by buying units to be placed at turn's end. The Orcs have the advantage here, being able to buy multiple units at a discount. Then comes movement: Units at sea claim island territories, armies reinforce or attack desirable property, and quest parties travel the Wastelands. Winning is easiest with a DragonLord, a powerful master of those beasts with devastating combat effectiveness, hence journeying into those areas that were laid low in a bygone age by those warriors.

You may have multiple parties in the Wastelands, but may only activate one in each of the two Wasteland sections on your turn. There you roll for movement along a simple track, traveling to villages for equipment (you only get one set at the start of the game), shrines for talismans and additional scrolls, and witches' dens for potions, elixirs, new spells, and DragonOrbs (useful when you stumble across a dragon in need of charming).

The Draw Quest Card spaces require you to follow the instructions on a Quest card. Some require specific equipment like a pickaxe just to attempt them. You must roll the crystal die to see if the gods bless, curse, or ignore you. These

results aren't always what you might think. Blessings usually net you something, but you may end up empty-handed. If the gods ignore you, it's not a neutral result -- you could still be attacked. And curses, typically bad, may let you break even or even offer a benefit.

Next comes combat, fought to take territory or waylay competing quest parties. Fights can happen when opposing units meet in the Wastelands, at sea, and on land. A standard combat involves the attacker rolling a die for each unit he has -- every 3 or less (4 or less for the Barbarians) is a hit. The races roll six-siders because they all have a Defense of 6. If you're fighting some of the weird creatures of the Wastelands, some of them have higher Defense scores like 8 or 10, requiring bigger dice and making it harder to roll a 3.

The defender rolls a counterattack the same way. Combat is usually simultaneous, so all casualties are removed at the end of a round. Some exceptions exist. Notably, the Elves have the ability to sneak attack their enemies: Success denies them a counterattack, but failing to remove all the units forces them to retreat without taking the land. Certain spells can also take out units precipitously.

Naval combat is similar, only once joined the attackers cannot choose to retreat (Wizards and DragonLords can still teleport out of combats). No DragonLords are allowed into the Wastelands, so they cannot take part in fights there. They can't remain in naval spaces either, so they must leave during the Transfer phase, but in the meantime they tear through fleets and units like cardboard with their fiery breath.

The chance to hit, called the Total Attack Strength (T.A.S.), can go up or down for the imposing presence of a King, an attack on the well-defended Kingdom itself, and various spells that bolster your troops or demoralize your enemies. Whoever is left after the battle may man any ships now lacking crews, and is in control of the territory in a land battle.

Transfer phase allows you to shift units to adjacent territories to account for losses, or to replace troops who have moved into other spaces. Once you know how much land you've taken, you get income. During the Income phase, you reap rewards for all the land you took, unless you've lost your Kingdom space somewhere along the line. If this happens, whoever took it takes all the money that was on that spot (if you possess multiple Kingdom territories, you can split up your coffers to be on the safe side), and you can't get income until you get back a Kingdom. It will also cost you in the Reinforcement phase. Ordinary territories are worth one gold, while gold-colored spaces are worth five. Those gold spaces with a mine are worth 10 if you're the Dwarves.

Finally, it's time to replace losses in the Reinforcement phase. You can pump new units into the territories in a realm where you hold the Kingdom (so you can't dump them into a realm where you just established a foothold unless you were good enough to take the capital).

Quest for the DragonLords is nothing if not ambitious, and with a price tag to prove it. Not that you don't get your money's worth; the components are a gamer's dream. The plastic troop figures are different for each race, and you could nick them for any of several other games. They aren't gorgeously sculpted -- they have a half-melted-at-the-edges look that befits only the Orcs and makes the DragonLords look like Deep Ones astride their mount -- but someone went to more than a little trouble to work them. The cloth bag full of little gold nuggets is a mixed . . . uhm . . . bag. A clever idea, you're supposed to use the bigger pieces as 5s and the smaller bits as 1s, but there's no standardization. These really are irregular bits of lumpy metal, and too many of the pieces are exceedingly small. Whatever the process used to render them, some are smaller than a sesame seed, which means a lot of them are going to get lost in short order (and given the coloration of the board spaces and the fact that funds are supposed to sit on the board itself, it's a recipe for aggravation).

The board, a six-section foldout, is gorgeous, and the thumbnail bits painted onto the Wastelands spaces can look positively medieval. It also has its troubles. The dotted lines (and occasional mountain ranges and rivers) that are supposed to delineate the different realms and territories use colors that hardly leap out at you. It's pretty clear what's supposed to be where, so you won't spend the whole game squinting, but be prepared to do double-takes throughout the game to ensure you're making legal moves.

The reference cards are thorough, listing available magic items and spells, action sequences, your race's costs and stats, a key to the Wasteland, and a spell track for up to three Wizards. These have holes in them into which you place

plastic pegs so you know which Wizard has which spell(s), but not all the pegs and holes are a good match.

The rulebook is a fancy thing, big, with big type and full-color illustrated examples of play. It's hard to say this was an unnecessary expense, but for all the bright and spacious pages you still have to consider the three pages of credits, needless back-cover designs, and, inexplicably, "Notes." Add to this that there are some big incidental pieces of art in the manual and you have a lot more rulebook than you have rules, which is worse when you read them and see just how quickly the rules lawyers will tear into it. Worse yet, the included CD-ROM has the rules on it -- not everyone will have a computer, but there's an enormous amount of redundancy. (There's also an animated sequence on the disc - fine work for a small press item.)

The counters are all pretty nice, but cards might have done the same job more simply. They're supposed to stack with the units in the game (this would take up less space, and now you know which quest party owns what stack of equipment counters), but they really only stack with other equipment counters. Units don't fit snugly with the small poker-chip style counters used to indicate multi-unit groups, and those don't fit with the counters, and . . .

Something of a cross between *Talisman* and *Risk*, the game is staggered between the game play in the Wastelands and the larger game of conquest. It seems awfully easy to get hold of a DragonLord and pretty darn hard to do away with one. The challenges of the Wastelands lie entirely in the Quest cards (of which there are only 12, detailing the strangely well-populated and green "barrens"), and some of them are brutal. There's not much chance for skill to carry the day. It all boils down to die rolls, the results of which don't always make sense. The larger, strategic game is the better part of the set, but there's not much here to make even the novice war gamer sit up and take notice. The attack and defense procedures and mix of forces do little to enhance rules that have been in use since *Axis & Allies* hit the shelves.

But you do have to take the game as a whole, and while the bits don't always come together as smoothly as you'd like them to, it's not a bad game. It's just not terribly original, borrowing as it seems to from several sources. It's faster than many, and the DragonLords -- plus the fact that the mystic elements of the game prevent it from degenerating into seeing who can break through the other man's heavily fortified borders first -- can put the kibosh on drawn-out military excursions into enemy territory.

Given the cost, problems, and lack of direction in *Quest for the DragonLords*, the value of the decent game underneath it all is, sadly, a dilemma most easily solved by putting your money elsewhere.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Ruins of Rathess (for Exalted)

Published by [White Wolf Publishing](#)

Written by James Maliszewski and John Snead

Illustrated by Ed Bouelle, Leanne Buckley, Ross Campbell, Shane Coppage & UDON

Cover by Kevin Lao & UDON

96-page b&w softcover; \$16.95

Ruins of Rathess is the newest supplement for White Wolf Publishing's RPG set before the World of Darkness and after the First Age, in the Age of Sorrows, [Exalted](#). It bears similarities with the previously released ***Time of Tumult***, but is not an anthology of adventures. Instead it terms itself, "A Deadly Adventure Locale," detailing as it does the crumbling city of Rathess, capital of the Dragon Kings and once prime city of the First Age, the capital of Creation. As an adventure locale, no plot or actual scenario is given in ***Ruins of Rathess***, but rather the authors give us a treatment of the city's history, its surroundings, important buildings and utilities, denizens and foes, plus its dangers and rewards. All of which can be used as a place to loot, a place to hide, a place to explore, or even as a place in which to find allies and restore . . . Which of course, will attract the attention of more Solar Exalted and the unwanted attention of the Terrestrial Exalted.

The book is up to White Wolf's usual production standards, and is both well written and engaging. It does open with several pages of history, which like the first few pages of the core book is not as interesting and easy to read as the rest of the supplement. That said, it at least serves to establish the place of the Dragon-Kings, their history and their capital within Creation. The supplement's artwork is a little variable in quality, with the anime style of Shane Coppage being the best of the illustrations. Conversely, the cartography is all uniformly good, though it is a shame that there is not more of it. It should also be pointed out that while the blurb on the back cover describes ***Ruins of Rathess*** as both, " . . . [A]n adventure reference for Storytellers and a setting resource for players," there is no way in which any player should be allowed near its contents. There are too many secrets contained within.

Located halfway between the Elemental Poles of Wood and Fire, Rathess lies deep in thick, perilous and hungry jungle. Before the foundation of Meru, the new home to the Solar Deliberative, Rathess was the capital of the Old Realm and bulwark in the war against the Primordials. It is also the capital of the Dragon-Kings, saurian worshippers of the Unconquered Sun and allies of the Solar Exalted. These long-lived beasts -- over three centuries -- turned inwards to dwell on their own affairs after the move of the Solar Deliberative, and less on the defense of the Realm. This involved gladiatorial events and festivals, then sectarian violence and dark sorcery, including the summoning of demons. Their attention wandered from the gods granted for worship by the Unconquered Sun as a reward in the war against the Primordials and more to local spirits and deities. This included Han-Tha, the Ghoulish King, whose cult preached the consumption of the flesh of the dead to gain their power, and who aimed to bring about such an orgy of violence, death and feasting that he could be raised up and recognized as a true god under Heaven.

The Dragon Kings declined further and shut themselves off from Creation, their intelligence dimming further as they did so. Without their attention of their granted gods, and their own inattention to their young, there were fewer and fewer Dragon Kings to spend the decades necessary to raise their young from their natural-born savage state. Until the

Great Contagion struck, Rathess was a protectorate of the Dragon-Blooded, but since, its reputation has been that of the treasure trove of the Southeast. Now it has been picked bare, but still contains secrets within its towers, to be explored and uncovered, not just by those brave enough to endure the dangers of the jungle around it, but by the servants of the Ghoul King, who still seeks to elevate his status.

Though mentioned in previous *Exalted* supplements, *Ruins of Rathess* provides the first real treatment of the Dragon Kings. The first of the Primordials' experiments at creating sentient, thinking beings, Dragon Kings are not Exalted, but upon death, their spirits are reborn into a new egg; eventually, the young Dragon King can be civilized enough to recall memories of their prior lives. Though they can channel Essence, they cannot employ charms like the Exalted can, and instead follow 10 ordered Paths that teach them to shape their essence in order to transmute themselves and affect their surroundings. The supplement only details six powers across three of the 10 Paths of Pre-Human Mastery, which some may find to be a limitation to *Ruins of Rathess*, as may be the lack of creation rules for the Dragon Kings themselves. This would be an unfair criticism, because it perfectly models the situation within the city itself. There are relatively few of these creatures within the city, and even less who are partly civilized, and certainly almost none who are fully civilized. Thus their knowledge of the Paths of Pre-Human Mastery is also limited.

Getting to the city is difficult enough, as it lies several hundred miles from the nearest town in the midst of thick jungle, home to both deadly diseases and hungry beasts; *Creatures of the Wyld* details many of these creatures. It will take weeks of travel deep under the canopy and less time along the river, with the quickest route probably being via air, whether across the treetops or above. Once there, adventurers will discover a circular metropolis in the Mesoamerican mould, with wide boulevards, great step-pyramids, soaring towers of apartments, ports for the aerial vessels of the First Age, an undercity that extends down several levels, and outer edges severely overgrown by the surrounding jungle.

These actual locations include the Tombs of the Exalted, the great Arena of Atlakki, the Great Observatory, the Pyramid of the Sun, the Living Towers where the Dragon Kings once dwelled, the Flying Towers, and the Underway. Both their history and current status are given; more interestingly, there is also a solid guide to repairing some of the devices found therein. Doing so will not be a step taken lightly, as it will take great strength, men, time, and resources to undertake and complete. In some cases, the reward cannot be taken away, such as the orrery with which the future can be divined, while some such as the crashed airship will provide a circle of Exalted with great means of travel. The orrery and other items that cannot be removed, as well as several Manses, are covered in the chapter on rewards.

There are also allies and enemies to deal with in the city. Potential allies are the remaining semi-civilized Dragon Kings, particularly if the characters are Solar Exalted. Probable enemies are the followers of Han-Tha, lead by a corrupted Exalted known as the Goblin King, who commands a horde of goblins and other creatures, and who works to restore some of the city himself. Beyond the city, the Wyld has crept close and the Fair Folk will have to be dealt with should the restoration of Rathess be an aim. Where necessary, all of these NPCs are fully detailed, as well as several new gods particular to Rathess.

In terms of artifacts as rewards, Rathess offers up plenty . . . if the players are prepared to work for it. There are plenty of samples detailed, of both Dragon King and human manufacture. The former includes vegetative technology such Green Eyes (tiny plants that turn the wearer's eyes jade green and improves his eyesight), Vine Klaves that impale themselves onto the user's arm; crystal technology that is primarily mundane in the form of lights, air ducts, and lift tubes, but does include several weapons; and other artifacts. There are relatively few human items, but they include an intact warbird, once used by the air cavalry of the Old Realm.

Although no scenarios or plots are given within its pages, if there is a core story to explore in *Ruins of Rathess*, it is in its restoration by the player character Solar Exalted. There are suggestions for handling other celestials, particularly how the various inhabitants of the city will react to them, but the sense is that the emphasis is firmly upon the Solar. In fact, using it for any other purpose -- perhaps as a place to just loot or hide -- may well be a waste of its contents. To that end, there are plenty of hooks and story ideas contained within the writing.

If the *Ruins of Rathess* has any antecedents, it is in the " . . . *By Night*" series of supplements published by White Wolf for their *World of Darkness*, and in the *Parlainth: The Forgotten City* campaign setting published for FASA's

Earthdawn RPG. In comparison with the " . . . *By Night*" series, the situation in Rathess is far more static, with far less going on. This is due to its ruined nature and also in the concept core to the **Exalted** RPG -- that the player characters really can affect the world around them. This is not to say that events in Rathess will not progress, as other Solar Exalted will be attracted to the city and have the chance to further its storylines. Also about a ruined city, the **Parlainth: The Forgotten City** boxed set contained far more detail than given here, but again this is not really the purpose of **Ruin of Rathess**, as the **Exalted** Storyteller should be adapting its contents to their Circle of Exalted characters.

Ruins of Rathess very much plays up to the stock elements of pulp fantasy -- pre-civilized giant lizardmen, thick jungle, an ancient and fallen civilization, and a crumbling ruin awaiting the recovery and re-use of its wonders. None of this may be suitable for some **Exalted** campaigns, but Rathess has the potential to become the center of a whole campaign in itself, particularly if the players are interested in its restoration. If this is the case, this "locale" book gives a plethora of story hooks within its pages to fuel such a campaign, though more so for one that focuses upon Solar Exalted characters, as the remaining Dragon Kings will be prepared to ally with them over other Celestials.

--Matthew Pook

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Parts of the Plot Pig

I was watching the *CSI* Season Two DVD set the other day, and "enjoying" the alternate commentary track that was provided with a few episodes.

I'm a huge fan of DVDs; my video tape collection consisted of maybe a half-dozen tapes before the advent of DVD, but I jumped on the digital bandwagon after a stellar year at the movies (1999, for those of you playing the home game). Initially, one of the biggest appeals of this new format was the extra goodies that were only available on the DVD release: deleted or alternate scenes, featurettes, and alternate audio tracks with commentary from those who helped make the movie a reality.

Unfortunately, for the most part these commentary tracks have been disappointing for me; they usually aren't terribly insightful, interesting, or worthwhile. In fact, for we now present, for your reading pleasure, a do-it-yourself audio commentary track suitable for those DVDs that lack one:

Director: You know, you two were really great to work with.

Actor 1: Oh, it was easy; it was a dream to be on this shoot. A real dream.

Actor 2: Yeah.

Director: Now this shot was tough to get, but we got it.

Actor 1: Check out the look on that one guy's face! He's all like, "What?"

Actor 2: Yeah.

Director: What was your motivation in this scene?

Actor 1: I don't know. We got really wasted the night before; I don't remember that day at all. Man, that one gal was *hot*!

Actor 2: Yeah.

Actor 1: Really great to work with. Say, wasn't this shot the one where you had that really interesting story about the kerosene-soaked rattlesnake and the renegade cabbie?

Director: No, I don't think so . . . no, that wasn't this movie.

Actor 2: Yeah.

Just copy, cut, and paste as appropriate to make that transcript the proper length for *your* movie.

Anyway, I continue to endure commentary tracks every so often, for a few reasons. First, it lets me put in a DVD I've already watched too dang much already, and convince myself I've not yet descended into obsessive-compulsive disorder because this time the experience is *different*. More importantly, however, every so often I'll get a gem amid the mounds of refuse.

Such was the case with one of the commentaries on the *CSI* Season Two boxed set. (See? And I bet you thought I'd forgotten. Heck, in a minute I'll tie it into gaming, and then you'll *really* be impressed!) The episode in question had the crime scene investigators looking into the death of a woman, seemingly in a sauna, although she showed signs of asphyxiation. At one point the chief examiner is interrogating a hotel employee, and the examiner points out that the woman could have died elsewhere and been moved, perhaps by getting her hair caught in the hotel whirlpool. At this

point the writer comments that she regretted using that line because, at *CSI*, "They use all parts of the pig." In other words, just about any fact or piece of information can be turned into an episode, and so by using something like that as a throwaway line, it more or less excluded its immediate use as a plot (although she did confess that the audience shouldn't be surprised if an episode of *CSI*'s ninth season revolved around someone drowning by getting hair caught in a whirlpool).

Anyway, that statement sparked something in me that related to <ding!> gaming.

See, I realized that I have a tendency in my gaming to use throwaway ideas as "filler" to flesh out my *real* adventure. And each of those throwaway lines can contaminate other adventures, by making them impossible (or at least more difficult).

For example, let's say I have an adventure that revolves around the seeming assassination of the king. After some investigative leads, I have the heroes discover someone who can assume other peoples' forms, and the disappearance of the trusted vizier. I then lead the heroes into believing that the vizier was kidnapped, removed, or killed by the doppelganger, only it's a red herring; the vizier ran off for an entirely unrelated reason, the doppelganger was a benevolent observer sent by his people, and the king had faked his own death to root out a political rival. The heroes unravel everything, case closed.

And, frankly, I could turn this into a darn good adventure. The problem is, with this kind of story I've now "skimmed" the campaign pool of a lot of potentially useful plots. After the conclusion of this adventure, it's pretty much unacceptable for me to use a plot that involves:

- A royal assassination (or anything that resembles one)
- Someone running away
- Doppelgangers
- Someone faking their death

Any of those elements stand a real chance of immediately evoking the previous adventure.

Something similar often happens (at least for me) in established game worlds; I'll find myself dipping into as many pots as the books offer, revealing a dozen or so secrets or interesting plot pieces in an adventure. And, again, once you've revealed that the Emperor has an illegitimate son who might be a contender for the throne - and the PCs have *met* him - then that element can't be revealed again; if that story element was squandered, then it can inadvertently keep a number of different stories from being possible. And, depending on how long the campaign is going to be, you may find yourself in a bind looking for new possibilities.

Even as a player, I note that I have a tendency to create convoluted characters who tap into a lot of different elements: clergy pretending to be nobles, vampires that turn into mages, and the like. I'm not sure I would do anything differently - since I generally have a blast with my characters - but I think I've finally managed to put my finger on one reason why I have difficulties coming up with additional characters in a campaign once it's time to retire an old PC.

As I've GMed, I think I've realized that it can be useful to "keep it simple." Many of the greatest stories from literature and movies are pretty simple and straightforward. Players can be satisfied by all manner of adventures, and I've found that players tend to prefer simpler adventures that they fully "get" than more complicated ones they can't follow. And it is often possible to pare away the chaff, making an adventure tighter. (On the other hand, many tales are also richly complex and satisfying; don't be afraid to use story parts if it's useful and will make a riveting game.) So going back to our royal assassination plot, I note that we don't need to introduce actual shapeshifters; the same effect can be created by having someone in disguise, with him being a foreign diplomat with forged papers. And the vizier doesn't even need to run away; in fact, unless he's been established elsewhere, the vizier may not even be necessary for the plot at all.

Of course, it's often not too late to use every part of that plot pig. For example, if you decide later that you've found the perfect use for the Emperor's illegitimate son, then it's probably possible to reintroduce him (assuming he wasn't killed in his introductory adventure); in fact, that would be perhaps an ideal situation, since then the players know about it

beforehand, and it's [foreshadowing](#). The trick is not to do slash-and-burn plot development, so that elements can be reused in future stories.

After all, it only takes a few little things to make a pig adventure.

* * *

As an aside, I've gotten lots of e-mail and newsgroup posts over the past week about last week's column. In fact, I suspect more people have written to tell me about *Casino Royale* than have ever actually *seen* said movie.

Oh, well . . . at least I still have my can't-miss idea about the behind-the-scenes story of *Romeo & Juliet* with a romantic William Shakespeare as the lead; I *know* that hasn't been done.

--*Steven Marsh*

American Anabasis: Bisociating Lewis and Clark

"Of courage undaunted, possessing a firmness & perseverance of purpose which nothing but impossibilities could divert from its direction."

-- Thomas Jefferson on Meriwether Lewis, Aug. 18, 1813

Two centuries ago this month, Congress approved the Louisiana Purchase, more than doubling the size of the United States at the stroke of a pen. The voodoo capital of New Orleans, and the pyramids of Cahokia, fell into American hands with that ratification -- but what else? Thomas Jefferson, the contradictory, brooding spirit of the Revolution, was gripped with the desire to know. He commissioned his private secretary Meriwether Lewis, and Lewis' old commanding officer the frontiersman William Clark, to find out for him -- and 197 years ago this month they came back and told him what they found. On the way, they accomplished the impossible, and joined America to its second seacoast. "Nothing but impossibilities" would seem to be an apt summary of the obstacles facing Lewis and Clark. And deep in the unexplored blankness at the heart of the New World, nothing but impossibilities remained to be discovered.

"In a northerley derection from the Mouth of this Creek in an emence Plain a high Hill is Situated, and appears of a Conic form, and by the different nations of Indians in this quarter is Suppose to be the residence of Deavels."

-- journal of William Clark, Aug. 24, 1804

Once the Corps of Discovery vanished over the horizon from La Chouritte, Missouri Territory, on May 25, 1804, they entered a true "terra incognita." Although the Indian nations hunted and trapped across the expanse, many of them (such as the Sioux) were relative newcomers themselves, and in any case they felt solid definition of the earth to be unwholesome at best. Lewis and Clark's source maps ranged from the optimistic to the completely useless; entire rivers, mountain ranges, and lakes appeared and disappeared from them seemingly at random. Was there a "Great American Desert" that blocked further expansion? Was there an immense inland sea, a ghostly echo of [John Dee's](#) "Sea of Anian"? Even the fabulous cities of Cibola and Quivira -- North America's [El Dorado](#) -- clung in fugitive state to the margins of the charts.

Near Vermillion in modern South Dakota, Lewis and Clark encountered a conical mound, perhaps owing "its orrigin to the hand of man," or "the residence of some unusial Sperits" including a "large [assemblage of Birds](#)." Further upstream still, they encountered "white bears" (haltingly explained as grizzlies by modern writers) and a mysterious "tyger cat or fox" that still lacks identification. Lewis heard "unaccountable artillery" on July 4, 1805, near Great Falls -- where two great UFO flaps would later manifest, in 1950 and 1975. "I am at a loss to account for this phenomenon," Lewis recorded, but confidently added "I have no doubt but if I had leasure I could find from whence it issued." This spirit of the Enlightenment soon rode in harness with Indian "medicine," as the Freemasons Lewis and Clark began to brand and blazon trees "to prevent the Savages from disturbing" their boats and equipment. It seemed to work -- the Corps lost only one man (to appendicitis) and no boats, and fought no Indians on the entire voyage. Caches of priceless trade goods they left on the westward voyage they found undisturbed on their return. Lewis even traveled into the heart of the sacred Blackfoot "Badger-Two Medicine" district in early 1806, on a mysterious surveying mission seemingly unrelated to the return journey. Meanwhile, Clark named a sacred butte of the Crow people "Pompey's Pillar" on July 25, 1806 and carved his name into it where "the nativs have ingraved on the face of this rock the figures of animals." (A later voyager described the hieroglyphs as showing three horsemen and three warriors on foot -- our [mysterious triplicity](#) working again?) Perhaps it's only coincidence that the original Pompey's Pillar in Egypt (thought to contain a [magical head](#)) is the highest surviving point in Alexandria -- and that Clark named the butte on the Egyptian New Year.

"It is not improbable that this voyage of discovery will procure us further information of the Mammoth, & of the Megatherium also . . . There is surely space enough . . . for Mammoths and Megalonyxs that may exist there."

-- letter of Thomas Jefferson to Bernard, Comte de Lacépède, Feb. 24, 1803

Or perhaps it's more than that. Because Jefferson, the "American sphinx," sought all manner of signs and wonders in the "American Egypt," the territory he had conjured into the American West. In addition to old standards such as pillars of salt, "monuments" of antiquity, and so forth, Jefferson also asked Lewis to keep an eye out for Welsh Indians

--descendants of Prince Madoc's 12th century [expedition](#), as attested by none other than John Dee -- and "the remains or accounts of any [animals] which may be deemed rare or extinct." Jefferson had uncovered what he believed to be a huge lion, the "megalonyx," in his investigations of Virginia fossil beds, and was engaged in a bitter dispute with the French naturalist Buffon on the nature of American animals. Buffon believed that American animals were smaller and weaker than European ones -- Jefferson's megalonyx, and the increasing number of "incognitum" or "mammoth" bones he accumulated, proved different. Rather than a debased afterthought, America's enormous mammoths and megalonyxes rampaged through an ideal, even providential, landscape. Again, coincidentally or not, Lewis and Clark were sent in the direction of what Jefferson's best maps showed to be a pyramidal "height-of-land" at the center of the continent, where four rivers (the Rio Grande to the South, the Missouri to the East, the Columbia to the West, and the Saskatchewan to the North) flowed away in the four cardinal directions. This meshes scarily well with the Biblical description of the four-rivered Garden of Eden, even as its pyramidal center resonates backward to Egypt and forward to [Mount Shasta](#) or the [Big Rock Candy Mountain](#). Lewis and Clark, in other words, had been sent [up the River](#), into the [Waste Land](#) to discover the Axis Mundi -- the Mountain at the Center of the World, the Gateway to Heaven, surrounded by beasts untouched since primordial Creation.

"Nothing would be more useful than the apprehension of [Meriwether Lewis], and even though I realize it is not an easy undertaking, chance might proportion things in such a way that it might be successful . . ."

-- letter of Nemesio Salcedo, commander of the Provincia Internal, to Governor of New Mexico Fernando de Chacón, May 8, 1804

Is it any wonder, then, that the Spanish sent four successive Spanish expeditions to stop Lewis and Clark, by force if need be? Jefferson worked to mask their voyage with three other expeditions of "antiquarian research" in the Louisiana Territory, and he sent Zebulon Pike on a wild career through the Southwest that has never been satisfactorily explained. Either Pike was lost, he was dangerously aggressive (planting a fort deep in Spanish Texas on the Rio Grande River), or the still-undefined West simply kept moving around him. (Laurie Winn Carlson, however, postulates in her riveting book *Seduced by the West* that Jefferson intended both Pike's and Lewis' expeditions as sacrificial martyrs to spark a war with Spain that would bring Texas and Florida into the Union.) General of the Army (and Agent No. 13 of the Spanish secret service) James Wilkinson sent his own expedition out in 1805. Its goal was to travel up the Yellowstone River "called by the natives, [Unicorn](#) River . . . which my informants tell me is filled with wonders." Wilkinson was playing a triple game to grasp these chaotic world-bending wonders of America Incognita, manipulating the Spanish, Jefferson, and Vice-President Aaron Burr, who spent the Lewis and Clark years seemingly mounting his own quixotic coup attempt to detach the American Egypt as his treasonous empire.

"I received, my dear sir, with unspeakable joy your letter of Sep. 23 announcing the return of yourself, Captain Clarke, & your party in good health to St. Louis. The unknown scenes in which you were engaged & the length of time without hearing of you had begun to be felt awfully."

-- letter of Thomas Jefferson to Meriwether Lewis, Oct. 26, 1806

But Lewis and Clark soldiered on, taking their longitudes and writing down their observations, fixing America into Jeffersonian reality. Unless, of course, they didn't. Lewis skips 400 days of entries in his journals all told, and the journals themselves may not have been the day-books Jefferson claimed they were -- they were not published, after all, for a century after the expedition set out. The mysterious "red notebooks" that the editor Reuben Gold Thwaites used in 1904 (and upon which Nicholas Biddle supposedly based his 1814 *History of the Expedition*) show no signs of having been dragged across a continent, drowned in boating upsets, rained on through an Oregon winter, or rested on convenient tree stumps and rocks throughout. In short, aside from a few "elk skin books" of William Clark's (which somehow escaped a mysterious wave of destruction), we have practically no on-site documentation of the journey at all. Furthermore, an expedition of 33 members camped at some 600 sites during a 28-month journey to the Pacific -- but only one of those sites has ever been found. For all intents and purposes, Lewis and Clark's West remains as big a mystery to us now as it was to them in May of 1804. Such mysteries reverberate over the centuries: Why didn't their settlement in Oregon ever see a ship during the height of fur-trading season? Why did the ordinarily prolix Jefferson mute his reaction ("unspeakable joy" indeed) to Lewis' return? Who were the mysterious white men seen in the mountains by Indians of the time, who warned off the 1807 British Thompson expedition with peremptory letters by a mysterious "Captain Jeremy Pinch" (whose name appears in no official records) from a nonexistent "Fort Lewis"? The letters threatened "more powerful means of persuasion in our hands than we have hitherto used" -- had a secret force

of Jeffersonian geomancers moved into the True Pyramidal Eden to harness the power of the mammoth for Republican Democracy?

"It is with extreme pain that I have to inform you of the death of His Excellency, Meriwether Lewis, Governor of upper Louisiana who died on the morning of the 11th . . . and I am sorry to say by suicide. . . . Some days previous to the Governor's death he requested of me in case any accident happened to him, to send his trunks with the papers therein to the President, but I think it very probable he meant you . . ."

-- letter of James Neelly to Thomas Jefferson, Oct. 18, 1809

And if so -- perhaps Lewis became expendable. Or worse yet, dangerous. He had seen too much, out there in Sasquatch country; he had heard the "unaccountable artillery" from the invisible fortresses, and drawn the True Arch and Square across secret America. Rather than the high-profile position Lewis seemed to expect upon his return, Jefferson mired Lewis in distant St. Louis as Governor of the Missouri Territory, while Wilkinson undermined him from New Orleans. In a "state of derangement" at his ill-treatment, Lewis set out for Washington -- significantly while in possession of "the original papers relative to my voyage to the Pacific" -- in [1809](#) to make his case to the new president, James Madison. At Fort Pickering, Tennessee, Lewis suddenly changed his plans -- rather than continue south to Wilkinson's New Orleans base, he struck across country up the Natchez Trace, accompanied by his servant John Pernier and by the Chickasaw Indian Agent James Neelly. Neelly reported sending Lewis on to Grinder's Stand, and arriving too late to prevent Lewis' suicide. With single-shot pistols, Lewis had shot himself twice (once in the head and once in the stomach), then cut his throat, arms, and legs with a straight razor. Neelly was the only witness to the story; Ma Grinder had refused to come to Lewis' aid after hearing argument "like a lawyer" and the shots. (She much later -- after Jefferson was safely dead -- claimed to have seen [three men](#) on horseback ride up before the argument.) Lewis' money (\$120 -- no small sum in 1809) vanished; Neelly simply appropriated Lewis' dagger, horse, and pistols for himself. And sent Lewis' trunks and papers to Monticello, for Jefferson's eyes only. Whatever secret Lewis hoped he had kept from Jefferson was gone. Pernier also committed suicide (or was found conveniently dead, anyhow) in Washington in 1810. Neelly disappeared in 1812, the same year that Sacagawea died "of a putrid fever."

"Specimens of all such bones as I [thought] curious and worthy your inspection . . . were sent on from this Place the 11th of October to the Collector of the Port of New-Orleans with a request to forward them to you at the City of Washington; you will most probably receive them soon after this letter. The bones are divided into three boxes (see inclosed list) and sent in different Boats with directions not to be opened on any pretence whatever. I have taken the dementions of all such bones as I thought Material, which I have retained for fear of an accident, and have also deposited with My Brother at Clarksville such as were remaining Parts of Rib, back bones, leg bones, thigh, ham, hips, sholder blades, parts of the upper and lower Jaw, Teeth of the Mammoth and Elephant and parts of the Mammoth Tusk's which may hereafter be had if Necessary."

-- letter of William Clark to Thomas Jefferson, Nov. 10, 1807

Which left only William Clark. His final mission for Jefferson was to supervise the excavation of a massive mammoth-bone find near Big Bone Lick, Kentucky, in October of 1807. Two years to the day before Lewis' suicide, he sent three boxes of artifacts to Jefferson -- with a perhaps casual note that he had retained a few bones (and perhaps some other artifacts) in a safe place "for fear of an accident." Nothing happened to Clark. He never turned his eyes back to the blank spots on the map, to the pyramids and mammoths that Jefferson concealed in the Secret West. Only his name remained, carved into Pompey's Pillar as though to cement Clark himself into America's sacred geography. Content with his frontier obscurity in St. Louis, he lived a long, prosperous life as Superintendent of Indian Affairs. He adopted Sacagawea's surviving children and did what he could to mitigate the impact of white settlement on the Indian tribes. He died on the feast day of Osiris, 1838, in sight of the American Nile, and was buried with full Masonic honors, finally climbing the Mountain to Heaven that he had found in the heart of America 33 years before.

À Moi La Légion!

La Légion Étrangère in its Glory Days

by Volker Bach

Weapons by Hans-Christian Vortisch

Gary Cooper kissing Ingrid Bergman under a glorious sunset. Columns of exhausted men stoically marching on under the burning desert sun. Laurel and Hardy in the clutches of an evil bedouin prince. The words "Foreign Legion" conjure up romantic and adventurous images in our minds. No wonder it makes a great roleplaying background. But what was the reality behind the image? The Légion Étrangère has had a varied and fascinating history that can as easily be injected into a campaign as any Hollywood fantasy (which is not knocking "Beau Geste" -- you can do worse than to play the Légion cinematic).

Beginnings

On March 10th, 1831, the newly crowned king of France, Louis Philippe, ordered the creation of a legion of foreign volunteers to serve in the French army. The practice was hardly new -- "Legions" of foreigners had fought both for France and her enemies during the Napoleonic wars -- but his motivations were. Louis Philippe did not want for troops. He had a national military which supported him enthusiastically. The foreign legion of Louis Philippe was not intended to give him soldiers, it was meant to take an embarrassing number of refugees off his hands. After the revolution of 1830, France had become Europe's beacon of liberty and the failed revolutionaries of many less fortunate states took sanctuary within its borders. Paris in 1831 was full of Prussian, Austrian, Saxon, Polish, Spanish, and Italian political refugees all of which were more or less experienced fighters full of revolutionary fervor, but desperately poor and disappointed by the French unwillingness to support their causes. Creating a military unit to take in these men was a political masterstroke. Its military usefulness was widely considered questionable, though.

The army, not having asked for the Légion, wanted nothing to do with it. For the first months the unit did not even have barracks. French officers and NCOs were unwilling to serve there, which hampered transforming the motley assortment of men into soldiers. Eventually, the government decided to rid itself of this embarrassment by shipping it off to France's newest colonial possession, Algeria. There, the Légion found itself set to digging ditches and building roads, or sent to the least healthy garrisons to die in droves. Equipped for warfare in the traditional European fashion, they were unprepared for the guerilla war they found themselves in. After two years the Légion was presented, lock, stock, and barrel, to the Spanish queen Isabella to fight against rival pretender Carlos in 1834. It was only the continuous flow of refugees that prompted the decision to establish a "new Légion" for service in Algeria in 1837 and eventually take back the few survivors of the Spanish corps.

The Légion of the early days was probably the worst place in the French army. As it had not been intended as a "real" fighting force, its early recruitment standards were low. The biggest group of men was made up of foreign deserters (who brought vital military skills), university students with democratic leanings, and revolutionary proletarians. As they were allowed to enlist under assumed names (originally intended to protect those whose home governments still persecuted them), many of them may have taken the opportunity to escape prison or the workhouse. Often poorly supplied and scandalously badly paid (Légionnaires sometimes had to sell pieces of their uniform to buy food), they were subjected to brutal discipline, posted to the most dangerous garrisons, and put to hard, dirty work. Desertion was a permanent problem (between 1831 and 1845 it ran around 11% annually) and insubordination frequent.

The Algerian wars further molded the Légionnaires their image. The Foreign Legion was rarely used in traditional European warfare. It was a colonial unit in a war where quarter was neither asked nor given. The unofficial motto "March or Die" stems not least from the fact that anyone straggling behind the column in Algeria would suffer a slow, painful death at the hands of his native captors. Equipped as line infantry (and dressed in heavy wool jackets and coats

in the heat of North Africa), they often suffered heavily from sniping and ambushes. Unable to reply in kind, the Légionnaires took their accumulated frustration into battle, where they killed combatant and civilian alike without mercy. After a taste of this life, most men became thoroughly brutalized, slow to trust anyone outside their immediate circle of comrades, and skilled in the art of violence.

In the 1840s, the French strategy in Algeria changed from positional warfare carried out by large armies to long-range mobile warfare by light infantry columns. The Légion was a vital part of this new war of speed and endurance (although the theater commander, General Bugeaud, thought it unsuited to this kind of warfare and requested its abolition). During the arduous years of conquering the Algerian highlands, it adapted itself to the role it was to play for almost the next century: the Légion became France's finest colonial light infantry.

A Légion column in the Atlas or the Rif (the Sahara desert itself was not brought under French control until the 1900s) had to operate independent of supply wagons, with only a few baggage mules to the company. The soldiers themselves were expected to carry all their equipment and most of their rations on interminable marches at a killing pace. Food was always in short supply (new recruits sometimes finished eight days' rations in four, not accustomed to the Légion's frugal standards) and often of dubious quality and difficult to prepare adequately (Légionnaires occasionally ate ground coffee mixed with crumbled hardtack because they could not get enough drinking water). Soldiers quickly learned how to supplement their meager diet with local vegetables and fruit, and much of the looting reported on campaign had as its goal bread rather than gold. The men often returned from their expeditions looking more like starving refugees than victorious soldiers.

Tactics, too, changed shape. Instead of being drilled as line infantry, the Légion took part in raids, ambushes and night attacks. Without the support of heavy artillery they had to rely on their own ability to keep the enemy at bay with musketry or bayonet attacks. It was in this demanding school that the Légionnaires learned the skills that set them apart -- dealing with adverse terrain, withstanding hardship, and aggressively closing with the enemy wherever he showed himself.

The Légion of Fame

The Légion came into its own during the last years of the Second Empire, remaining one of France's most celebrated and active fighting forces until the 1960s. Its main battleground remained Africa, but it was also used in the Crimea, Italy, Mexico, Guinea, Indochina, Madagascar, and even in France itself during the Franco-Prussian War and in World War I. Wherever French troops went to carve out colonies, the Légion was used in the most dangerous missions.

A unit of foreigners proved a godsend to France's colonial policy. The French forces at the time were divided into the *Armée Métropolitaine*, consisting of conscript units, and the colonial forces, the largest of which was the *Armée d'Afrique*. This latter consisted mostly of natives, little trusted by the generals. The Légion was one of the few "white" units (along with *Zouaves* recruited mostly from local French settlers and the penal *Batallions d'Afrique*, where conscripts with criminal records served their time). As such, it was considered trustworthy while the fact that it was recruited from foreigners allowed its commanders to risk greater casualty rates than the public back home would have accepted in French units. In short, it was perfect for all unpleasant, difficult, and hazardous undertakings.

The men entering the Légion usually did not intend to fight heroically for France. Varying legends were built around their motives for enlistment, with detractors claiming that criminals and cutthroats used the *Anonymat* to escape prison sentences while romantics saw

Le Soldat Camèle

Along with his uniform and heavy greatcoat (an encumbrance during the day, but a necessity in cold desert nights), the Légionnaire's kit included a stiff leather pack containing rations of hardtack, rice, pasta, bacon, and dried onions (eight days' was the standard), spare boots, shirts and underwear, cutlery, sewing gear, weapon cleaning kit, 40 extra bullets (later increased to 144), soap, bootblack, usually a pipe, and whatever salt, sugar, or tobacco he needed. Fastened to the pack he carried a groundcloth and shelter half, a one-liter canteen (later two), a drinking cup and a small cooking pot. On his belt he had a cartridge case and bayonet. Firewood (hard to come by at times), extra food, smuggled alcohol and looted valuables were often added to this load and experienced men always carried a walking stick they used to support their pack during short rests (taking the weight off the shoulders without sitting

disinherited princes and dishonored gentlemen thronging its ranks. The truth was more prosaic. For many recruits, enlistment was a way of escaping poverty and despair. Passage to North Africa and the prospect of being given land to settle after their term ran out tempted some too poor to afford emigration to America or Australia. The French army also occasionally sent undesirables from other units to the Légion. Middle-class recruits, far rarer than legend made them out to be, usually tried to escape some insoluble predicament -- accountants who had been caught embezzling, officers dishonorably discharged, bankrupt craftsmen and professionals having lost their licenses. Among these, the occasional blueblood was found -- even a prince of the Danish royal family fought and died with the Légion -- but they were few and far between. About half of the Légionnaires were illiterate, and most of them dirt poor.

Many stories circulated of Légion recruiters getting likely recruits drunk or abducting them. In fact, the Légion never had to fall back on such dodgy tactics. Recruits came to its enlistment offices in France in sufficient numbers for it to be choosy (indeed, recruiters often told them to rethink their decision before signing on). Enlistment standards varied according to the need for men, but generally the requirement was for a man to be aged between 18 and 45, healthy, not visibly unfit, with no physical deformities or handicaps, and reasonably alert. In **GURPS** terms, assume Légion recruitment to require ST, DX and HT of 10+ and IQ 8+, with all serious physical Disadvantages being grounds for exclusion. No previous military training or even knowledge of French were required. Except between 1871 and 1880, when a fluke of history limited recruitment to men from Switzerland and Alsace-Lorraine, candidates from all European countries and the United States were accepted. The occasional non-white applicant succeeded, but on the whole the Légion remained a "white" unit into the 1970s and no Colonials were allowed to serve (though African-American recruits were generally welcome).

After enlistment, recruits were issued with rail tickets to Marseilles where they awaited shipment. From there they were sent to Oran, where they were divided up between the First and Second Regiments of the Légion. Training took place at the regiments' headquarters, Sidi-Bel-Abbès for the 1^{er} Régiment Étranger and Saida for the 2^{ème}. Both towns lay south of Oran in the Algerian highlands. The men were brought in by train, shepherded by NCOs, and received by a Légion band and detachment. Uniforms and gear were issued on arrival and the *bleus* (raw recruits) assigned quarters. Each man was handed over to a serving Légionnaire (preferably of his nationality) to be initiated into the practices of the service. Old soldiers often sought out new men from their home area to pump them for the latest news (or bum a drink off them). Here, they also had the chance to meet veterans passing through headquarters for reassignment -- though many of them were undesirables returned by field units and many officers complained that they were a bad influence on recruits.

Training could last anywhere from three to 15 weeks, depending on the need for reinforcements and the state of a given group of recruits. It began with basic drill and protocol. French commands were taught to

or lying down) and which served as a tentpole during the night.

Légionnaire Template [39 Points]

Légionnaire training did not end with being sent out to their field units. It was only after a year or so of Légion life that a soldier acquired the skills and fighting edge that made a Légionnaire. This template represents a realistic "good" Légionnaire with prospects of promotion. For a cinematic Légionnaire, both Attributes and Skill Levels should be higher.

Attributes: ST 11 [10]; DX 11 [10]; IQ 10 [0]; HT 12 [20]

Advantages: Fit [5] and a total of 15 points from higher ST, DX, IQ or HT [10], Alcohol Tolerance [5], Alertness [5/Level], Charisma [5/Level], Combat Reflexes [15], High Pain Threshold [10], Strong Will [4/Level], and Toughness I [10]

Disadvantages: Duty (to Légion, all the time, frequently hazardous) [-15]; Poor [-15] and -10 points from Addiction (tobacco) [-5], Alcoholism [-15], Bad Temper [-10], Illiteracy [-10], and, of course, Secret [varies]

(It is recommended to allow a Légionnaire character more than -40 points in Disadvantages, or not to count the Duty towards the limit)

Primary Skills: Brawling (P/E) DX [1]; Guns (Rifle) (P/E) DX+1 [2]; Soldier/TL (M/A) IQ [2]

Secondary Skills: Hiking (P/A) HT [2]; Spear (Bayonet) (P/A) DX [2] and two out of Survival (Desert) (M/A) IQ [2], Intimidation (M/A) IQ [2], Stealth (P/A) DX [2], or Wrestling (P/A) DX [2]

soldiers who understood little or nothing of the language, rifles cleaned and disassembled, kit washed and polished, and parade maneuvers trained. Légion training was light on theory, but placed high demands on the recruit's physical fitness. Running, gymnastics, and hard labor were near universal. By the third week, the soldiers began route marching. The troops were assembled before dawn and marched out, heading into the highlands or desert as far as their officers deemed fit (usually as far as they could be pushed at this stage -- occasionally farther). Sometimes marches took several days, with troops camping in the field. The army reckoned two liters (two quarts) of water sufficient per man and day, which the Légionnaire had to carry himself and from which enough had to be saved during the day to brew coffee and cook the ration of rice or noodles in camp. Rations were equally short. Once habit, pride and stubbornness made the men endure this without complaint they were considered Légionnaires.

Life in the Légion was dominated by poverty, hard labor, and violence. The unit had a reputation as "bad garrison troops" which led officers to keep them busy at all times lest they make trouble. Physical training, marches, and fatigues kept the schedule tight. Légionnaires were encouraged to volunteer for labor duties on farms and in workshops where they kept half their daily wages, the other half going into the Légion's coffers. Given their pitiful pay (5 centimes a day, which amounted to \$.01, a twenty-fifth of what a US or British soldier received), the chance of earning extra money was welcome. Few Légionnaires had other sources of money and army pay was just about enough to buy half a pint of cheap wine a day. When on guard duty in isolated outposts, they were put to work raising walls or digging ditches, sometimes to no purpose, and the colonial government frequently called on the Légion to build roads or railways in times of peace.

Légion NCOs were almost always promoted from the ranks of their own unit. As they were required to speak, read, and write French (which many Légionnaires never mastered), middle-class and French soldiers tended to be favored for promotion. Officers were exclusively French, usually graduates of the StCyr military academy, and often looking to make a name for themselves in action. They were, on the whole, of above-average quality. Communication was difficult and the men had to be led by example, or through fear. Most officers and NCOs were brave men, leading their men from the front, though many were also brutal and volatile. Légion discipline was fierce, with beatings commonplace and often administered ad hoc. Fighting among the men was equally endemic, and many soldiers (and occasionally NCOs) guilty of theft, bullying, or other infractions against the unwritten code of comradeship met with rough justice.

Formal discipline outside of basic training was lax by contemporary standards. Close-order battle evolutions, still favored in line units, were hardly taught at all. Training concentrated on the skills of the individual rifleman -- cover, marksmanship, and fieldcraft. Together with a largely informal education in hand-to-hand combat and the endurance and versatile skills gained on labor details and marches, this made the Légionnaire a formidable enemy. The absence of spit-and-polish also

Background Skills: A Total of 6 point chosen out of Animal Handling (M/H) IQ-2 [1], Fast Talk (M/A) IQ [2], First Aid/TL (M/E) IQ [1], Gunner (Light Field Gun or Machine Gun) (P/E) DX [1], Knife (P/E) DX+1 [2]; Masonry (P/E) DX [1], Packing (M/A) IQ [2], Riding (mule) (P/A) DX-1 [1], Teamster (mule team) (M/A) IQ-1 [1] or Woodworking (P/A) DX-1 [1]

Customization Notes: A Légionnaire may bring almost any Skill from an earlier civilian life.

Le Cafard

Légion troops in garrison quickly succumbed to a blend of boredom, melancholy, and hopelessness known as *cafard*. Some tried to combat it through alcoholic excess punctuated by maudlin singing, others through indiscipline or prankish horseplay, but the only thing that truly helped was the prospect of action. *Le cafard* may well have disguised (if that is the word) some true manic-depressive disorders, but on the whole it was a condition specific to the corps. This may go some way to explain why many Légionnaires were eager to go into battle, and more so why their officers were.

La Crapaudine and other Cruelties

Penalties in the Légion were harsh. Aside from blows by fist or cane, unruly men could find themselves put on fatigue duties or sentenced to carry sandbags or heavy logs for hours on end. More notorious still were such punishments as *le silo* or *la crapaudine*. The former meant burying the légionnaire to his neck in sand -- often

made them the worst garrison troops France had to offer -- Légionnaires took little pride in their uniform, conduct, or military bearing. Rather, they tended to indolence and drunkenness whenever they could get away with it, even selling parts of their uniform for alcohol. Punishment for such infractions was stoically accepted and, one suspects, administered without much enthusiasm or hope of lasting change.

The Légion of Legend

The Légion became legend even in its own time, ironically not least due to the efforts of its detractors. Particularly in Germany, traditionally a copious source of recruits, civic organizations orchestrated heavy-handed propaganda campaigns. Unfortunately, their pamphlets and novels added to exactly the image of adventure and ultimate challenge that drew desperate and bored men to the colors. By 1890, sensationalist accounts by ex- Légionnaires (real and fictitious) added to the stream of narrative that Hollywood was to immortalize.

As with most legends, that of the Légion was based on a sanitized and exaggerated reality. Where the real Légion occasionally served as a refuge for disgraced gentlemen, legend peoples the ranks with star-crossed Romeos, innocently sentenced escapees from the world's most notorious prisons, and the disowned denizens of Europe's royal houses. It is true that a number of such characters served -- among others, musician Cole Porter, writers Alan Seeger and Blaise Sendrars, future Soviet defense minister Malinowski, and Prince Aage of Denmark. Only in literature is a Légion unit filled with their ilk, however. Similarly, the legend of the Légion claims that a body of Légionnaires can do literally anything because someone will have the necessary skills. Commanders need but call out for circus artists to scale walls, sailors to man boats, miners to dig tunnels or classicists to translate inscriptions dug from the desert sands. Neither will the Légion ever want for competent leadership -- former officers from every army on earth are thick on the ground. This makes a Légion company a good place to start an adventure campaign -- PCs from all backgrounds can become firm friends here while acquiring necessary combat skills.

Similarly, the brutality of Légion discipline, savage enough in reality, takes on legendary proportions. Sadistic *sergeants* and *caporals* lash out for the slightest infraction, inflicting painful, humiliating, and often enough lethal punishments. The threat of the penal battalions, from which one man in four returns alive, always hangs over the heads of hapless soldiers. Officers, distant and bent on marching to glory over the corpses of Légionnaires, are little help, and frequently the only escape is to kill NCOs and disguise their deaths as enemy action. Brutality in the ranks -- fistfights, group beatings, extortion and personal feuds -- hardly need exaggerating, and the conflict with a bullying messmate is a staple of Légion fiction.

The most important feature of cinematic campaigning is combat, though. The colonial wars the Légion fought were often an interminable series of forced marches, brief, violent clashes, boredom,

for up to 72 hours. After such treatment all but the hardiest needed time in hospital to recover. *La crapaudine* (the toad) involved tying the victim's hands and feet together behind his back. After a few minutes, painful cramps would set in that could lead to unconsciousness (roll vs. HT every minute. On a failure, take 1d-2 Fatigue (on a critical failure, take it as damage). High Pain Threshold helps, but Toughness does not. Double-Jointed characters roll at +2). The worst offenders found themselves placed in the notorious penal battalion in Colomb-Béchar where such penalties were handed out even more liberally, and with less concern for the sufferer's permanent health.

Les Compagnies Montées

From 1881, the elite of the African Légionnaires were drafted into the mounted companies. In these units every two men shared a mule that they would ride taking turns. Each man spent one hour perched on the back of the pack animal while his comrade led it by the bridle, then changed places with him. Along with its rider, the mule carried the tent, blankets, rations, cooking gear, fodder, and an extra two liters of drinking water. Mounted companies could march for ten or fifteen hours a day, leaving the men to snatch what extra sleep they could in the saddle. They covered up to fifty miles a day through the most hostile stretches of desert. The toll in both mules and men was high, though, and few légionnaires lasted more than two years in these units.

Détachement Légère **Humping the Bush 1880s-style**

and disease. Its legendary battles usually involved only small units. A cinematic Légionnaire, on the other hand, will see action against barbaric and implacable foes almost continuously.

The Légion's Battlefields

North Africa -- Forge of a Legend

North Africa was the Légion's home and the permanent base of most of its men. It was also where most of its fighting took place as the French pushed the border of colonial rule south into the Sahara. Most conflict was local, pitting solitary garrisons and flying columns of the Légion and its native auxiliaries against Berber tribes of the coastal highlands, oasis dwellers of the El-Areg plain, or the nomads of the Hoggar and Sahara. Militarily, this was no contest, but the enemy refused battle, locking scattered garrisons into a circle of raid and counter-raid to bleed them to death by inches. Far from the precepts of civilized warfare, Légionnaires could expect little mercy from tribesmen who routinely tortured prisoners to death, and showed little in return. Ambushes and betrayals, looting, rape, and the indiscriminate slaughter of civilians were regular occurrences.

The true enemy of the Légion in north Africa was the land. While stereotypes of Légion warfare picture marching through interminable sand dunes, much of the actual fighting took place in the barren mountains of the Atlas and Hoggar where daytime temperatures in summer could reach 130° while at night they dropped below freezing. Especially in winter it could be bitterly cold (in February 1908, a mounted company of the 1ère Régiment Étranger was all but wiped out by a nine-day blizzard). Food and water were scarce, maps inaccurate, and most of the population hostile.

Indochina -- The Merciless Jungle

From 1884 onwards, Légion troops were embroiled in a war in Tonking. Nominally passing from Chinese to French control, the territory had to be wrested piecemeal from local warlords and Montagnard chiefs, among them the infamous "Black Flags" recruited from Chinese deserters, bandits, and headhunters. The Légionnaires were not to leave until the last French forces did. Indochina was a coveted posting since it earned extra colonial pay and, with favorable exchange rates and ridiculously low prices, allowed them to have servants care for their gear and keep native concubines. Disease was rife and the fighting dangerous, though.

As in North Africa, battles were rare. The conquest involved besieging and taking over fortified posts whose garrisons sometimes found themselves besieged in turn by Chinese or warlords troops (the siege of Tuyen Quang in early 1885 became especially famous). Much of the work "pacifying" the country rested on the shoulders of mobile columns. Accompanied by hundreds of native porters hauling their equipment and supplies, they snaked their way through jungle and mountains to accept the submission of Montagnard tribes, hunt down guerilla fighters, track robbers and warlords to their lairs, and collect tribute and taxes. A column would be led by native troops walking point, followed by the main force of légionnaires or Marines guiding the line of native porters hauling boxes and barrels, wounded on stretchers, camp furniture, and even light guns. Fighting, when it happened, was savage and merciless. The enemy often placed ambushes. Eventually, the French troops managed to end systematic resistance by capturing the strongholds of native leaders and placing their own garrisons there. Such posts, surrounded by hostile tribes and often engaged in raiding expeditions against Chinese troops only nominally at peace, then proceeded to break the native will to fight.

Indochina, away from the coast, was a country uncongenial to campaigning. Mountainous and covered in jungle, it had no roads worth speaking of and the climate was murderous for horses and men alike. The French military's solution to this dilemma was to recruit huge numbers of native porters and strip down the load of their soldiers to the absolute essentials.

A légionnaire on the march would carry a rolled-up tent half with a blanket, eating implements, rifle cleaning kit, 144 bullets, several days' rations and some personal possessions, a liter canteen, and his rifle and bayonet. This was considerably more than the native *tirailleurs* marching with them and a crushing load in tropical heat and humidity. On forced marches, soldiers collapsed from exhaustion and sometimes were shot by merciful comrades to spare them the horror of falling into enemy hands. Standing orders were not to leave any European weapons behind. No such concern was extended to légionnaires.

The Légion Armory

The Légion was armed like the French Metropolitan Army. These are some of the small arms used throughout the times.

Revolvers

MAS Chamelot-Delvigne Pistolet-Revolveur Modèle 1873 (1873): The standard double-action army revolver. The cases had to be ejected one-by-one through the loading gate (p. HT71). The Mle 1874 issued to officers had a fluted cylinder and other weight saving measures; Wt 2.6.

MAS Lebel Pistolet-Revolveur Modèle 1892 (1892): The first smokeless powder revolver, this popular double-action design would see service until the 1940s. It had a swing-out cylinder and hand-ejector (p. HT72). Also see p. W:RH38.

Rifles

All infantry rifles were issued with bayonets, which were typically 2 feet long and weighed 1.65 lbs. Treat as Spear (Dam thr+1, Reach 2).

MIS Fusil d'Infanterie Modèle 1857 (1857): This was a muzzle-loading black powder rifle firing a paper-and-linen cartridge with a Minié bullet (p. HT61). Some were still in use in the 1870s.

MIS Chassepot Fusil d'Infanterie Modèle 1866 (1867): A bolt-action, single-shot breechloader based on the Prussian Dreyse Zündnadelgewehr M.1841 needle-gun (p. HT63), firing a paper-and-brass cartridge.

MAS Lebel Fusil d'Infanterie Modèle 1886 (1886): This bolt-action magazine rifle was the first rifle to fire smokeless propellant rounds (p. HT27). Also see pp. HT114, W:RH38 for various versions used up until the 1940s.

Machine Guns

Hotchkiss Mitrailleur Modèle 1914 (1914): The standard medium machine gun, feeding from 30-round strips and mounted on a 60-lb. tripod. For more details, including its forerunners such as the Hotchkiss Mle 1900 and the MAS Mle 1907, see pp. HT118, W:RH38.

CSRG Chauchat Fusil-Mitrailleur Modèle 1915 (1915): A magazine-fed light machine gun, thoroughly despised by all who had to use it. Also see p. HT118.

Revolvers use Guns (Pistol) skill

Weapon	Malf	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt.	AWt.	RoF	Shots	ST	Rcl	Hold	Cost
Chamelot-Delvigne Mle 1873 11×16mmR	Crit.	1d+2+	11	2	150	1,500	3	0.3	3~	6	11	-2	-1	\$25
Lebel Mle 1892, 8×27mmR	Malf Crit.	2d	10	2	150	1,700	2	0.15	3~	6	9	-1	-1	\$50

Black Powder Rifles use Black Powder Weapon (Caplock) skill

Weapon	Malf	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt.	AWt.	RoF	Shots	ST	Rcl	Hold	Cost
MIS Mle 1857, 18.2mm BP	16	4d++	15	8	600	2,000	8	0.1	1/15	1	10	-2	-7	\$15

Rifles use Guns (Rifle) skill

Weapon	Malf	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt.	AWt.	RoF	Shots	ST	Rcl	Hold	Cost
Chassepot Mle 1866, 17.5×99mmR	16	3d-1++	15	8	700	2,100	9.1	0.06	1/4	1	10	-2	-7	\$20
Lebel Mle 1886, 8×50mmR	Crit.	6d+2	15	10	1,000	3,900	9.7	0.5	1/2	8+2	12	-3	-7	\$25

Machine Guns use Gunner (MG) resp. Guns (Light Auto) skill

Weapon	Malf	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt.	AWt.	RoF	Shots	ST	Rcl	Cost
Hotchkiss Mle 1914, 8×50mmR	Crit.	6d+2	20	14	1,000	3,900	58/118	2	8	30	29T	-1	\$500
Chauchat Mle 1915, 8×50mmR	14	6d+2	17	9	1,000	3,900	23	2.1	4*	20	13B	-2	\$50

Further Reading

Histories of the Légion are plentiful and often available in local libraries or second hand. The most insightful and even-handed book on the Légion in English is Douglas Porch's *The French Foreign Légion* which, while lengthy and harder to come by, is well worth the effort. The same author's "The Conquest of the Sahara" introduces the reader to the Légion's most celebrated battleground. Much recent scholarship and most primary sources are, unfortunately, in French.

The Légion of fiction is perhaps best encountered in P.C. Wren's classic "Beau Geste" (whose author served in the Légion himself) or its movie adaptations of 1939 (starring Gary Cooper) and 1966. A new (and far inferior) Légion movie called *The Legionary*, starring Jean-Claude Van Damme, might be more easily available. A brilliant early spoof on the legend, *Beau Hunks*, was made by Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy in 1940, proving that you can play even this setting as comedy.

Comic goes here.

Just a Little Place in the Country

by Brian Rogers

Comics cartographers get to have a lot of fun: they get to add little countries whenever a back-story calls for it, then lavishly detail on these artificial places whenever heroes visit. In Gaming, it's the closest a supers GM gets to the fantasy GM's joy of mapping out new realms. Given that most supers games take place in a "fairly close to our world" environment, by the early 21st century much of the exploration has been done, especially if the country is the homeland of one of the PCs. If they're not going to be tromping it with compass and maps, how should the Players respond to the this new State?

Since locales [develop a personality](#) of their own over time, why not treat these small states as NPCs? Here's how the standard NPCs categories can fit your new, small independent states, with ready-to-use examples. (Plus, since they have a limited effect on world politics, there's no reason why they can't be exotic locales for action heroes, mythos investigators or anyone else to visit.)

Country as Dependant NPC: Ruritania

"If love were the only thing I could follow you -- in rags of need be -- to the world's end . . ."

Accessible by train from Munich, this lovely country lies on the invisible line dividing Eastern and Western Europe and contains the best of both worlds. The people are friendly, the countryside idyllic and when left to itself it is fair, kind, generous and non-violent. The people of Ruritania would never consider aggression and find even a standing army a distasteful necessity.

Which is a shame, because it lies right in the geographic middle of the 20th century's violence. Before the shift to a parliamentary monarchy at the end of the 19th century there was some unfortunate royal infighting that put the country's future in peril, and while it all worked out for the best (the scandalous books on the subject ultimately gave Ruritania a profitable tourist trade) more challenges arose. The country was threatened by the Great War, was easily conquered by the Nazis in World War II, spent the latter half of the 20th century a potential target of Soviet aggression and the end of the 20th century a potential staging ground for the Balkan ethnic wars.

Like many a Dependant NPC the people of Ruritania are likable but not heroic. They are unafraid to face challenges but often lack the ability to overcome them. They have strong moral fiber but inevitably need outsiders to lead or protect them. One such hero led their army in the Great War; another protected them from threats in the pulp era. A third led their resistance to the Nazi occupation, and so on. If PCs have Ruritania as a DNPC expect the country to face threat after threat, and the heroes will defend them as they would defend their sweet Aunt Mary from robbers or swindlers -- except that the robbers are conquerors and the swindlers are spies.

If you need a more direct connection, the Ruritanian royal family has an unfortunate habit of falling in love with unattainable outsiders. There is the well know affair of Queen Flavia and the Englishman, but her offspring carried on the tradition. It is generally believed that the reigning Queen Anne's "24 Hour Illness" in Rome in 1953 was actually a secret holiday, and the changes to her character afterwards were caused by a brief, passionate, unconsummated love affair. Observers of the Ruritanian court suspect that her children will approach the world in the same fashion. Such a true, passionate love blocked by duty is a great hook for an individual PC, and by loving the princess, one, by extension, loves her country.

Ruritania is a template for countries that the characters love but aren't tied to -- probably an outsider, they are at most a citizen abroad. They shouldn't be able to call on the country for resources or support outside of visiting its embassies. The Heroes should start with no particular reputation, social rank or other advantages. It is not a Patron -- it is both an ideal and a loved one. It is the thing that must be protected. It is the place on the map being threatened by aliens, invading troops or Doc Marauder's latest genocidal scheme, whose loss would be more than a change in the map: it

would me more than the heroes can bear.

Country as Enemy: Costa Pacifica

"This building is our Embassy. Our Soil. You have no authority here. You may leave now."

Taking its name from its location, Costa Pacifica is a small Central American country with some stunning beaches, a warm climate, and two major resorts (Santa Clara and Santa Lucia) built to cater to the world's tourist trade. With calm, tranquil seas and skies for most of the year and some spectacular storms during the summer months, tourist agencies refer to the resorts as "where Angels would stay on their vacation."

And assuming those angels were of the fallen variety, they'd be right. Derogatorily called "Costa Muerte" by sidelined members of State Department, the real country is very different from the one on the TV or resort center streets. Costa Pacifica's genius was one smuggling cartel's ability to secretly take and keep control of the whole government in the 1920s. While this puppet government speaks all the right words in the ever present war -- be it on communism, drugs, or terror -- the real rulers enjoy near total control of the country and its populace. Quiet terror keeps the streets safe and the upper echelons jealously guard their absolute power over the life and death of their people. Fear is the order of the day, but the trains run on time, street crime is incredibly low, and everyone has a job . . . a job working the hidden coca fields with an unspoken threat of punishment for the slightest infraction, but a job nonetheless. Those that do fight use whatever weapons they can, and are branded terrorists as a result.

Like any good long term enemy, Costa Pacifica is resilient, cunning, and hides its corrupt heart beneath a charming veneer. Its people are too terrified to act for themselves and its leaders are hidden deep in the shadows. The public government is a US Ally: it was strong against communism in the cold war, cunningly diverts blame for most of its drug trade to other countries (while asking for funds to help fight it) and quickly became one of the Coalition of the Willing, citing their own "terrorist" problems. They are a major player in the international drug trade, dabble in the occasional other smuggling or weapons deal (sometimes taking weapons given to them by the US, marking them as destroyed and selling them back to US criminal organizations for use against pesky heroic types . . .). They are easy to hate but must be given a grudging respect for their use of the system.

Still, players can get frustrated dealing with a faceless enemy whose visible upper edges are protected by diplomatic immunity. To prevent this, introduce the ruling cartel early as possessors of some secret -- there's a mythos temple in the deep jungle, they're descended from aliens or a eugenics program -- that makes their members willing and able to take on individual heroes. This brings the conflict from the abstract to the personal: the PC can equate the country with "The Cartel" without losing the sense of fighting a whole country. Alternately, give the Cartel an overall leader. Perhaps he's vain enough to have himself elected president, but more likely he has a significant position in the government or as a major businessman. While this gives the country a single face, it changes the scenario from having a country to having the man who rules a country as an enemy, which isn't exactly the same thing.

Costa Pacifica is the template for anything where the PCs would want to take on a whole country. While this version has the people ruled by terror, they could also be fanatical nationalists who will willingly take arms against any meddling outsiders (which would make the heroes' job that much harder). Still, if the heroes do manage to eventually win by reforming the country or ousting its leadership, the sense of personal satisfaction would be great. Naturally this is constructed within the logic of Comic Books; it's unlikely that a such country could pull off its deception as long or as successfully in real life, and if the players ever engineer a victory the aftermath might be just as dangerous. Fortunately, we're dealing with Comic Book Logic.

Country as Rival: Henn

"I have this crisis under control. Thanks for coming out to help anyway . . . "

The small Pacific rim island of Henn is a stable, hard working, moderately prosperous country. Elevated by the Asian economic bubble, it parlayed its resources in offshore oil into high technology and conventional manufacturing. The

island has one of the highest per capita education levels in the world, and survived the collapse of the Asian bubble better than its neighbors. The sudden collapse from the model country of the future to just another struggling Asian country hit the country's self image hard and they have reacted in a rather odd way. If they can't show the world how to thrive by being an economic example, they would do so by being a heroic example!

Strange as this sounds on the surface, it does make a certain degree of sense. There are few ways for the people of Henn to return to their perceived prominence on the world stage: The weak markets keep them from reclaiming an economic position; they have neither the desire or capacity for fame via conquest; mere goodwill is the stuff of back page articles when they appear at all. But *Heroes* -- powerful, stalwart international heroes -- make international news all the time. They stop tidal waves, hold off alien invasions, prevent earthquakes. It is the goal of every Henn to see their country's name tied to such glory, and they'll sacrifice to achieve it. A chunk of Henn's high tech industry is dedicated to power-armor prototypes; the public voted for a DNA database to isolate superhuman potential; international agents investigate super-humans for clues to their origins; the terminally ill volunteer for power-inducing treatments. All to prove that their heroes are the equal of, or superior to, the greatest heroes on the planet. Like, say, the PCs.

As Rivals go, the country of Henn is a good one. They don't *hate* the PCs. They respect them. Admire them. They just want to do what the PCs do better than the PCs do it. They're out there pursuing the same goals, but for ever so slightly the wrong reasons. Henn heroes won't ever create disasters, but there might be the temptation to wait until someone can see them solve the problem. They would never get in another hero's way, but there's still the strong urge to prove they could do it on their own. They have a deep pride and nationalism combined with a struggle against inferiority that might make them hard to deal with on a hero to hero basis. If a major planetary crisis comes up, you can bet that any Henn heroes will be right there, willing to sacrifice themselves in an instant to save the world for their glory of their country. They're good people to have around, but frustrating for the Player Characters.

It would be easy for the Players to see themselves as being rivals with an individual hero from the country, and their discovery that it goes deeper than that should be an amusing one. Henn can even become a place to explore morality, about how far a country should go while doing the right thing, and what the effects of such a nationalistic supers society would be in a generation or two. If you want to keep things light, just have a Henn hero or hero team turn up whenever there's a natural disaster and try to upstage the heroes. A team of international heroes might find themselves strangely hurt if every time they respond to a disaster call someone else is handling it and getting the credit. Or it might give them a chance to go out on the town and let the Islanders take care of the world for a night.

This country is not so much a template as a gimmick. The circumstances that generate a country whose national identity puts it in a friendly rivalry with a single person are rare to the extreme. Plus, this obviously only works in a high-powered supers game, as no action hero, spy, or mythos investigator will ever reach the degree of prominence required. You can use this as the template for a cover story, using this friendly rivalry as the reason why a single small country is developing advanced weapons technology and inducible superhuman powers. What sinister forces are really controlling such a country, and why?

Country as Subjects

Finally, there is the most common use for a fictional country in a supers game: one of the major characters in the game rules it. Unlike the above examples, this is more complicated and more easily modeled. Once the hero (or villain) is in charge of the country it becomes another asset or source of power. Supers games model sources of power very well -- allies, status, wealth, organizational ties, henchmen and all the other things a national leader can draw upon are fairly simple. They can be very powerful, but in game terms they're not hard to design.

The nature of such supers-governed countries will be highly dependant on the nature of the hero. Just as cities designed for [Troupe Style Supers](#) should mirror and support the character's idiom, so too should the country they rule. If the hero is a technological wonder, his homeland is probably very high tech. If she is a naturalistic mystic, it's probably a very spiritual place. Some heroes merge these things, leading to strange high tech naturalistic spiritual cultures, but that can be cool too. The mirroring of the hero-ruler and his nation makes manifest the symbology of the king being the people, opening things up for mythic resonance. (For a twist, the hero-ruler may be the exact opposite of his

homeland, which may lead to resentment, plotting and other things that make the sovereign's head hang uneasily.)

Small exotic countries should be more than just contortions on a map and collections of Slavic-sounding syllables. They should be as interesting and engaging as the people your heroes love, hate and compete with every day. With plenty of nice scenery to blow up when a big fight erupts on your vacation.

With Murderous Intent

by Michael Brown

The adventurers finally get some time off at a secluded mountain cabin, unaware that forces are gathering that could not only ruin their vacation, but also threaten their very lives.

The "base" year for this adventure is the mid-1940s (TL6, in **GURPS** terms). It would only take some minor tweaking to use it in a different era, however.

Ingredients

As a result of a past job, a favor cashed in, or just because they have the right friends, the adventurers have been granted temporary use of a secluded mountain cabin. Now that they have some time between jobs to take a real vacation, the offer of R&R in picturesque surroundings is just too good to resist. The cabin owner supplies them with the keys and directions to get there. The only things he asks are that the group clean up afterward and have fun.

The unpredictable winds surrounding the mountain renders a quick trip by air useless, but the roads into the mountains are well maintained and have many strategically placed scenic overlooks. The trip up is uneventful and the cabin proves easy to find. It occupies a quiet stretch of woods a half-mile from the main road and overlooking a clear mountain lake downhill and a commanding view of the sunset. Every so often, a glimpse of wildlife off in the distance promises superb hunting.

Upon entering the cabin, however, the party will immediately notice that something is amiss. The interior of the cabin stinks; a dead body occupies the living room sofa, and has apparently been there for some time. The man's hands and face are bandaged in what looks to be an amateurish attempt at first aid. The condition of the skin under the bandages, although decayed, indicates that he suffered some sort of burns to those areas. It cannot be clear without an autopsy whether the injuries led to his demise. In the pockets of the man's rumpled suit are only a .38 caliber revolver and a pack of name-brand cigarettes. The only identification is a silver ID bracelet etched with the word "Clench."

A quick check of the rest of the cabin indicates recent habitation, although an effort was made to quickly set things in order before the users left. Observant party members will notice several bullet holes in the ceiling above the body; they do not appear to have been made by the dead man's gun.

A search outside the cabin may reveal several sets of footprints and intermittent tire tracks, which disappear once they reach the road. No one else is in the area; the nearest habitation is another unoccupied cabin ten miles away.

Cooking Tips

Clench, the dead man, was a member of a gang of criminals that had previously pulled off a huge robbery and later happened upon the cabin while searching for a place to hole up. Clench was burned by a steam discharge during the robbery and was left behind when the gang leader decided to move on. As they left, the leader quietly ordered another member of the gang to go back and silence Clench. In a moment of sympathy, however, the would-be assassin fired several rounds into the ceiling to make it sound like he had shot Clench to death, then quietly promised to come back and help his colleague. Unfortunately, Clench died of his wounds before his friend could return.

The gang leader has recently learned what actually occurred, and has ordered the deaths of both men. The assassin escaped his former leader's clutches and is headed back to the cabin in a vain attempt to spirit Clench away. The rest of the gang is also proceeding toward the cabin.

The gang currently numbers six, including the leader and his girlfriend. All are armed with Thompson submachine

guns ("Tommy guns") or handguns except the girl, who is carrying discreet protection in the form of a concealed snub pistol. All of the gang members are murderous desperadoes; the leader in particular is a vicious tyrant who rules through fear. He is bloodthirsty and is to date responsible for seven deaths. The gunmen follow his orders without question. (Extra Spice: All is not well in the gang; the boss's leadership methods have fostered deep resentment. There may be a plot brewing by several members to kill the boss and take over.)

The would-be assassin is the only member of the gang with a conscience. He is armed with a Colt 1911 .45, but only has eight bullets left. His goal is to retrieve his friend Clench and disappear. He does not yet know Clench is dead. (Extra Spice: He blames the PCs for Clench's death and will try to kill them all from hiding in revenge.)

It is up to the GM to decide who arrives at the cabin first. If the assassin arrives first, he will object to the group's presence but will not initiate hostilities; he just wants to get Clench and disappear. On an exceptionally good reaction roll, however, he may be persuaded to help the group against the other gangsters. If the gang arrives first, they will waste no time looking for Clench and their wayward companion. The PCs will be assumed to know where the men are and will be taken hostage and tortured unless they divulge their whereabouts. The assassin, once he realizes that the rest of the gang beat him to the cabin, will immediately take off again, leaving everyone else to his or her fate.

It is possible that the cops have a handle on the whereabouts of the gang and is either tracking them down or knows where they are going. In either case, they will be on their way to the cabin, and are inclined to simply haul everyone away and sort it all out later. (Extra Spice: Any PCs with shady backgrounds or wanted by the authorities will be closely scrutinized and/or jailed.)

To heighten the tension during the inevitable climax, the GM could make sure that the players' group gets separated from one another, sparking a deadly cat-and-mouse game in the deep woods as the gangsters try to find them and pick them off one by one.

(Extra Spice: What if the gun moll is the actual brain behind the outfit, using her feminine charms, among other things, to control the gang through the boss and allow him to think he is in charge? If there is existing unrest in the gang, as mentioned above, she will make her move during the battle at the cabin, dispose of her brutal lover and take the gang to parts unknown.)

Side Salad

The GM should remember that their presence is unexpected and unwelcome. A reaction penalty of -3 is reasonable from anyone arriving at the cabin.

Why should Clench be dead at all? Perhaps the group arrives at the cabin soon after he is left behind and is still alive as a result. He will of course lie about his presence there and try to dupe them into helping him escape or carrying out his revenge against his former boss.

Dessert

If the PCs take any of the gang alive, they will discover that there is a substantial reward for their capture; the leader is particularly valuable. Each surviving gangster is worth \$5,000; the leader is worth \$20,000. Of course, the group will have to see the cops in order to get their money . . .

Albert Hawkshaw, Steampunk Explorer

for *GURPS*

by Mark Gellis

Biography

Albert Hawkshaw was born in 1850, in Manchester, the son of a bookseller. He was always interested in science, especially geology and geography, and he was fortunate enough to his talent noticed by Robert Nicholson, an industrialist who frequented his father's shop. When Hawkshaw turned sixteen, Nicholson arranged for the young man to join one of his expeditions to India as an assistant geologist and surveyor. He knew there was money to be made in Asia and in Africa. He only needed the right men to get the job done.

Nicholson was impressed by Hawkshaw's performance. The young man endured hardship without complaint, did his job better than men twice his age, and had a knack for managing things and people. As the years went on, and Nicholson sent Hawkshaw on different missions around the world, it became clear that the young man also had a knack for languages and, surprisingly, for warfare. Hawkshaw was almost as keen a student of tactics and strategy as he was of geology and geography, talking with the men who led expeditions about how to conduct battles in the wilderness and reading anything and everything he could find on the subject. More than once, he had a chance to put what he had learned into practice, helping defend expeditions from bandits or hostile natives. By the time he had turned 30, he had proved his worth again and again, even saving Nicholson's life from mutinous native guides on one occasion.

His preferred weapons are the Adams .450 revolver and the Martini-Henry rifle (see *GURPS: High Tech*, pp. 109, 113, 124-125 for details).

By the mid-1880s, Hawkshaw has been working for Nicholson for 20 years, handling geological and mining surveys for him around the world, along with an occasional special job, with a significant degree of success. 40 years earlier, Nicholson had inherited the mine his father started in a small town about 10 miles from Manchester. Now, he owns and operates more than twenty mines on three continents. He owes a good bit of his success to Hawkshaw.

In spite of all this, it would probably be too much to say that the two men are friends. They do, however, understand and respect each other. Hawkshaw considers Nicholson a fair and reasonable employer; Nicholson considers Hawkshaw a valuable asset, a man who is both smart and dependable, so much so that he is willing to provide an unusual degree of support to help him complete certain assignments, including using his wealth and connections to put pressure on colonial administrators or to arrange for "assistance" from the British military. If Hawkshaw says he needs a hundred rifles and a couple of small cannon to get a certain valley surveyed so a certain mine can be built, Nicholson knows he would not ask for such things lightly and will do what he can to see that his geologist gets what he needs.

Nicholson is not mistaken about his geologist. Hawkshaw is a good administrator, a sound scientist, and a skilled mapmaker, more than capable of organizing and leading surveying and prospecting operations. He is also a capable mercenary, able to organize and lead an armed group. He is not much of a brawler or a swordsman (in fact, he has never had any real training in melee combat and would be at a disadvantage against anyone who is), but he is a very good shot with a rifle and with a pistol, and a man of above average willpower and personal courage, so men are willing to follow him into battle. On two occasions, Nicholson has asked Hawkshaw to handle what were effectively corporate assassinations, leading a small group of armed men to kill the leaders of a village responsible for stalling one of his mining operation. In both cases, Hawkshaw was able to plan and conduct the mission quickly and secretly, leaving no evidence that would embarrass his employer.

Hawkshaw has virtually no training in the biological sciences. He is not interested in gaining any such training. He has little interest in flora or fauna, current or prehistoric; his passion is for the Earth itself and for the mineral wealth that it contains. He has also never learned engineering. He enjoys studying the land and figuring things out about it, which he refers to as "squeezing out her secrets," but once he has squeezed out the secret of a particular place, he is not really interested in the mechanics of getting the goods out of the ground. That he leaves to other men.

Hawkshaw's parents are both dead by the 1880s. His elder brother, Philip, owns and runs the bookshop. The two men write to each other (Philip is proud of his younger brother and is always glad to hear from him and about his adventures), but are not especially close. He also has two sisters, both married to Manchester shopkeepers.

Hawkshaw is generally content with his life. He has certainly gone further than he would have sharing the family bookselling business with his brother. He has seen things most white men have never seen and will never see. But most of his work, while interesting, is really quite tame, aside from the risks and annoyances of working for weeks at a time in the wilderness. Mostly, what he does is travel to foreign and often exotic places, studies the land and the soil and the rock formations, surveys the countryside, makes maps, and helps manage the efforts of the engineers and technicians who will build and run mines, ports, railroads, and so on. At the same time, he has lived through his share of real adventures and he has seen his share of enemies crushed under his heel.

He is a loner by nature. He is not unfriendly, but he prefers solitude and does not have any genuinely close friends. If anyone asked him, he would have to admit that he has probably never been in love.

If Hawkshaw has one serious flaw, it is jealousy. The simple fact is that he is a good explorer, but not a great one, and he knows it. He feels overshadowed by people like Dr. David Livingstone and Sir Richard Burton. He likes working for Nicholson, but he fears that he will never do anything that will put his name in the history books. As a result, he is quite likely to feel jealous of anyone who appears to be competition with him and he is willing to sabotage such people. In addition, he is vindictive; once someone has crossed him, he will hold a grudge for a very long time. This makes him a useful but not entirely reliable ally and a potentially dangerous rival or adversary.

Using Hawkshaw In A Campaign

Hawkshaw can be used as a player character (or the basis of one) if one is running a campaign at the 150-point level.

Hawkshaw is designed for a campaign set in the 1880s, the height of the Steampunk era, but he could be used in an *Age of Napoleon*, *Old West*, late *Steampunk* (Edwardian era), *Cliffhanger*, *World War II*, *Atomic Horror*, or any modern era campaign with only a few changes. He could also be adapted for campaigns in other locations without difficulty; in most cases, all one would have to do is modify his biography and substitute a few of his current languages and skills (Riding, Area Knowledges, etc.) for more appropriate ones.

As an NPC, Hawkshaw can appear as an ally or an adversary. In general, he will be working for Nicholson, so whether the player characters are allied or in competition with Nicholson will determine whether they are allied or in competition with Hawkshaw. If someone had the right connections, however, it is possible that he or she might be able to convince Nicholson to "loan" Hawkshaw to a team of player characters for a special mission. He would be a useful scientific consultant for any venture involving mining, surveying, or other projects where large quantities of rock and soil might be involved. His combination of scientific, administrative, and tactical skills make him a valuable addition to any party operating in poorly explored and possibly hostile territory. And Hawkshaw would be particularly interested in joining an expedition exploring uncharted territory; it is here, after all, that he might earn a place in the annals of history.

Anyone meeting Hawkshaw will see a fairly ordinary looking man, memorable only for looking like he would be equally comfortable in the wilderness or in an office. He does not talk much, but if one can engage him in a conversation, they will soon learn that he is an intelligent man, quite knowledgeable about a variety of topics, but mostly about such subjects as geology and cartography. Someone who has a university education might suspect that he is mostly self-taught, but would see that this does not appear to have harmed him much. Anyone asking about him will probably be able to learn that he is attached to the Nicholson Mining Company as a surveyor, but that he often does a

lot more than just survey; a particularly good investigation might uncover some rumors that Hawkshaw has been involved in some pretty tight situations and handled himself well.

It is possible that someone who is skilled in areas Hawkshaw considers his "territory" might make him jealous, but the only sign will be that he brings the conversation to a close as soon as he can do so without being rude. Any future meetings will be civil, but Hawkshaw will not be very willing to provide the player characters with assistance or information. If someone really manages to annoy him, a GM should remember that he does tend to hold a grudge; it would not be unreasonable for him to become a recurring "enemy," showing up on occasion, when an opportunity presented itself, to frustrate the plans of the player characters.

One could use him in an adventure similar to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, replacing Kurtz with Hawkshaw. The story would begin with him going insane for some reason ("This is how I will make my mark on history!") and turning one of Nicholson's mines into his own petty kingdom. The gradual loss of profits combined with the total lack of communication from the mine would alert his employer that something was amiss and the player characters would be dispatched to investigate, but they would know very little about what they were getting into. Or, it might be some other agent of Nicholson's who has gone mad, and Hawkshaw is guiding the team of investigators. A particularly cruel GM might even assume that Hawkshaw and the other agent are both mad and are working together, with Hawkshaw leading the player characters into a trap (or, if this is not true, the GM might still drop false clues that it is).

Nicholson might also ask Hawkshaw to operate as an agent provocateur, a saboteur, a spy, or an enforcer, either to further his own ends or on behalf of the British government. The 1880s are a busy time for the British Empire. Hawkshaw could show up in India or almost any part of Africa. Nicholson may have "loaned" him to the British government to handle a special job (or he might be doing it on his own, having arranged a leave of absence, hoping to win some kind of fame). He might be observing foreign forces under the guise of doing a survey for Nicholson. A man who knows land and how armies do battle can gather a lot of useful information simply by looking around and writing down his observations. Perhaps he has been captured by bandits and the player characters need to retrieve him, and the information he now carries in his head. Or he might be asked to eliminate some threat to one of Nicholson's mines or British settlers. His target might be anything from villages of hostile natives to mercenaries hired by one of Nicholson's competitors. No matter what Hawkshaw is up to, the player characters might be working with him or protecting someone else from him.

Finally, Hawkshaw might be used as a red herring. His current business might not have anything to do with the player characters. Because he tends to be quiet, however, he may look suspicious. If he is involved in anything covert or if someone has done something to annoy him, he will be especially quiet. If players jump to conclusions about him based on too little evidence, a GM should remember that it is always his or her prerogative to take advantage of such situations.

Albert Hawkshaw In *GURPS*

Male; Age 35; 5'9", 150 lbs.; Hair: Light Brown, Eyes: Blue, Skin: White with Freckles

ST: 10 [0] **DX:** 11 [10] **IQ:** 12 [20] **HT:** 13 [30]
Speed: 6.00 Move: 6 Dodge: 6

Advantages: Absolute Direction [5]; Alertness +1 [5]; Patron (Nicholson) (9 or less) [10]; Very Fit [15] (HT: +2; Fatigue Loss: Half; Fatigue Recovery: Double Rate); Wealth (Comfortable) [10]

Disadvantages: Duty (to Nicholson) (6 or less) [-2]; Jealousy [-10]; Loner [-5]

Quirks: Attentive [-1]; Avid Reader [-1]; In conversations, tends to listen rather than talk [-1]; Vindictive [-1]; Wants to be famous [-1]

Skills: Administration-13 [4]; Area Knowledge (East Africa)-12 [1]; Area Knowledge (Egypt)-12 [1]; Area Knowledge (England)-12 [1]; Area Knowledge (India)-12 [1]; Area Knowledge (West Africa)-12 [1]; Boating-12 [4];

Cartography-13 [4]; Climbing-10 [1]; First Aid-11 [1/2]; Geology-13 [6]; Gunner (Cannon)-11 [1/2]; Guns (Pistol)-13 [1]; Guns (Rifle)-14 [2]; Hiking-14 [4]; Intelligence Analysis-9 [1]; Leadership-12 [2]; Mathematics-12 [4]; Riding (Horse)-12 [4]; Prospecting-13 [4]; Strategy (Land)-12 [4]; Surveying-13 [4]; Survival (Desert)-11 [1]; Survival (Jungle)-11 [1]; Survival (Mountains)-11 [1]; Survival (Plains)-11 [1]; Tactics (Guerrilla)-12 [4]; Tracking-10 [1/2]

Languages: English (Native)-12 [0]; Arabic-10 [1/2]; French-10 [1/2]; German-10 [1/2]; Hindi-10 [1/2]; Kongo-10 [1/2]*; Malinke-10 [1/2]*; Swahili-10 [1/2].

* Kongo is a language spoken in the region of the Congo river; Malinke is a language spoken in the region of Africa that will eventually become Senegal, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, and Ivory Coast.

Total Points: 150

An Interview with Magus, Alister

Modern Magics for the *d20 System*

by Owen K.C. Stephens

The *Interview with Magus, Alister* is an unusual "spellbook" designed for modern urban fantasy games using the **d20 System** rules. Rather than a book at all, it is a video tape of the type used in security cameras. The tape is battered and worn, with odd stains on the outside of the cassette. A yellowed label reads "Interview with Magus, Alister," but has no date or location listed. The cassette is surprisingly resilient (hardness 20, resistance 20 to all energy types, 30 hit points, and immune to being blanked or recorded over).

If watched, the tape appears to show a police interrogation of a middle-aged man of eastern European descent. The man is identified as "Alister Magus," and is questioned by two American police (one tall and thin, the other older and overweight) regarding his involvement in a ritualistic killing. Alister is handcuffed and shows signs of having been beaten.

Throughout the first half hour of the interview Alister Magus tries to explain he tried to stop the cult, but arrived too late to prevent them from summoning a powerful demon. He urgently warns that the demon will come after him, and neither he nor the police are safe. At the 32 minute mark, a strange "pop" can be heard on the tape, which Alister and the police can clearly hear. The police look at each other, then tell Alister to wait while they "check that out."

Once the two police leave, Alister looks directly at the screen. If it is the first time the tape has been watched by a group, he calls the character with the highest Int score by name, and says he must explain something quickly. He states that he has little time left, and cannot allow everything he knows to be lost. Over the course of the next hour Alister outlines the method for casting numerous spells, including those presented later in this article and *detect magic* and *obscure object*. Periodically a scream or splattering noise can be heard in the background. Alister admits that some of these spells seem unimportant, but assures the viewer each one has saved his life at least once. A modern mage must be able to operate below the radar of society he claims, and pretend to be things he isn't.

Alister is still explaining spells at the end of the hour, when the two cops return. They are clearly suffering wounds incompatible with life, and are moving in a stilted fashion. Alister yells at the tape's viewers to be on the look-out for the forces of evil, and to make allies to watch their backs. He struggles briefly with the two dead police, who kill and begin to eat him. One looks at the screen, and repeats the viewer's name Alister used earlier. The tape then ends.

For more modern magics and urban fantasy spellbooks, check out the Analects Arcane articles ["The Arcane-ist's Cookbook,"](#) ["The Technonomicon,"](#) and [The Tooninomicon](#).

1st Level Modern Spells

Conj

Arcane Teller Machine. Perform banking without going to a bank.

Ench

Karaoke. Perform a song well.

Trans

Nuke. Transform ingredients into a meal.

Pick-Me-Up. Caster staves off fatigue or exhaustion temporarily.

2nd Level Modern Spells

Conj

Unseen Assistant. Conjures a invisible, semi-intelligent force able to perform complex tasks and make judgement calls.

Ill

Security Risk. Masks one object from detection by indirect means.

Trans

Wardrobe. Change clothes to any touched, regardless of size.

3rd Level Modern Spells

Conj

John Q's Cardboard Box. Create a shelter that looks like a cardboard box.

Phantom Scooter. Conjures a quasi-real motorbike.

Trans

Redirect. Allows changes to existing recorded visual media.

4th Level Modern Spells

Conj

John Q's Hole in the Wall. Create a shelter from any door.

5th Level Modern Spells

Trans

Noneday. Caster gains one additional day of work.

Arcane Teller Machine

Conjuration

Level: Modern 1

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Personal

Target: Caster

Duration: Instantaneous (see text)

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

The *ATM* spell allows the caster to do banking without accessing a bank or electronic teller. The caster can do any of the things normally possible at a bank -- make a deposit or withdrawal, apply for a loan, check an account balance, or even make a payment to a third party. Up to one transaction per caster level can be made. If the caster makes a deposit or withdrawal, the money moves from his person to the bank's reserves or vice versa. All transactions made through the *ATM* spell leave normal banking records.

John Q's Cardboard Box

Evocation [Force]

Level: Modern 3

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

Effect: Box-shaped zone of force

Duration: 2 hours/level (D)

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

With this spell, the caster creates an unmoving, opaque box of force that closely resembles a large cardboard box (though it lacks any specific writings or markings). The box may be as much as 10 feet on a side, and covers the ground. The box appears dark and empty from one side, which may be faced any direction (even down). As many as six Medium creatures can fit into the box, freely passing into and out of the box (even through the sides or top) without harming it.

The temperature inside the hut is 70°F if the exterior temperature is between 0° and 100°F. An exterior temperature below 0° or above 100° lowers or raises the interior temperature on a one-degree-for-one basis. The box also provides protection against the elements, such as rain, dust, and sandstorms. The box withstands any wind of less than hurricane force, but a hurricane (75+ mph wind speed) or greater force destroys it.

You can illuminate the interior of the box dimly upon command or extinguish the light as desired. Although the field of force is opaque from the outside, it is transparent from within. Missiles, weapons, and most spell effects can pass through the box without affecting it, although the occupants cannot be seen from outside the box (they have total concealment).

Material Component: A cardboard box of any size.

John Q's Hole in the Wall

Conjuration (Creation)

Level: Modern 4

Components: V, S, M, F; see text

Casting Time: 10 minutes

Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

Effect: 20-ft.-square space

Duration: 2 hours/level (D)

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

You conjure an extra-dimensional space anchored to an existing door. The space appears to be a low-rent apartment. In all respects the lodging resembles a one-room efficiency, with a sturdy door, two shuttered windows, a small fireplace, a tiny bathroom with a shower and a kitchenette. The floor is level, clean, and dry, though the walls are slightly cracked and the ceiling shows signs of water damage.

The shelter has no heating or cooling source, taking the temperature of an interior space appropriate to conditions outside. Therefore, it must be heated as a normal dwelling, and extreme heat adversely affects it and its occupants. The dwelling does, however, provide considerable security otherwise; it exists in a pocket dimension that can only be accessed through the door used in the casting. The door resists flames and fire as if it were stone and is impervious to normal missiles (but not high explosives, cannons, or rocks thrown by giants).

The *hole in the wall* contains crude furnishings -- a queen sized bed, two sleeper sofas, a card table and six folding chairs, a writing desk, and a television (which only receives local broadcast stations, not cable).

Material Component: A house, apartment, or hotel room key.

Focus: A working door in a doorway. The door must be opened to enter the *hole in the wall*.

Karaoke

Enchantment

Level: Modern 1

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Target: One creature

Duration: 10 minutes/level

Saving Throw: Will negates (harmless)

Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless)

The target of this spell can sing and play musical instruments as if it has Perform (keyboards, percussion instruments, sing, stringed instruments, and wind instruments) bonuses of +15. This has no effect on creatures who already have Perform checks better than those provided by the spell. the target can only perform music and lyrics it has on its person (even if in the form of a record or CD) or can see (such as those provided by karaoke machines).

Phantom Scooter

Conjuration (Creation)

Level: Modern 3

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 10 minutes

Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

Effect: One quasi-real, scooter-like vehicle

Duration: 1 hour/level (D)

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

You conjure a medium-sized, quasi-real, scooter-like vehicle. If a picture of a specific medium-size two-wheeled vehicle is used during the casting, the phantom scooter matches its appearance exactly. The vehicle operates only for you unless a key is used in the casting, in which case it operates for anyone holding the key.

The scooter has an AC of 18 (-1 size, +4 natural armor, +5 Dex) and 7 hit points +1 hit point per caster level. If it loses all its hit points, it disappears. A phantom scooter has a speed of 20 feet per caster level, to a maximum of 240 feet. It can bear its rider's weight plus up to 10 pounds per caster level. It requires the same amount of concentration and skill to operate as a normal two-wheeled vehicle.

These scooters gain certain powers according to caster level. A scooter's abilities include those of scooters of lower caster levels.

8th Level: The scooter can ride over sandy, muddy, or even swampy ground without difficulty or decrease in speed.

10th level: The scooter may be a size Large vehicle, and carry two passengers plus 20 pounds per caster level.

12th Level: The scooter can use *water walk* at will (as the spell, no action required to activate this ability).

14th Level: The scooter can be a size Huge vehicle with four wheels, carrying four creatures and 40 pounds per caster level.

16th Level: The scooter can use *air walk* at will (as the spell, no action required to activate this ability) for up to 1 round at a time, after which it falls to the ground.

Noneday

Transmutation

Level: Modern 5

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 10 minutes

Range: Personal

Target: Caster

Duration: 8 hours (see text)

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

This spell grants the caster one additional workday which occurs outside of normal time. It can only be cast at a place

appropriate for working, such as a home, workshop, or office. This spell can be cast only once each week.

The extra eight hours can only be used to perform work on a Research, Craft, or Profession check, or spell research or magic item creation. The caster may use any of the resources available at the location the spell is cast, but cannot affect the condition of himself, other items, or other creatures. At the end of the spell the caster appears in exactly the same location as when the spell was cast, and no external time has passed. The caster cannot heal, rest, or even re-equip himself during the time of the *noneday*.

Material Component: A clock, calendar or watch worth no less than 200 gp (or with a purchase DC of at least 20).

ExP Cost: 25 experience points.

Nuke

Transmutation

Level: Modern 1

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

Target: 1 person/level worth of consumable materials

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

This spell transforms unattended foodstuffs into a lavish meal for one medium-size person per level of the caster. The meal is of the highest nutritional quality and tastes wonderful, regardless of the quality of ingredients used (though they must be edible in their raw state, or the spell fails). The prepared foods do not spoil for one day/level of the caster and are perfectly nutritious, with no unneeded calories and a perfect blend of other nutrients. The meal may be of any style with which the caster is familiar.

Pick-Me-Up

Transmutation

Level: Modern 1

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

Target: 1 creature

Duration: 24 hours

Saving Throw: Fort negates

Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell temporarily prevents the target from being affected by fatigue, exhaustion, or lack of sleep. Though the target must keep track of conditions such as being fatigued or exhausted, for the duration of the spell these conditions do not affect him. Not even magic sleep can affect the target. At the end of the spell's duration the target is automatically fatigued for 24 hours. If already fatigued, he is exhausted, and if already exhausted or slept the target sleeps for 24 hours.

Material Component: A mild stimulant, such as coffee, tea, or a caffeinated soda.

Redirect

Transmutation

Level: Modern 3

Components: V, S, M, F

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Target: One visual recording touched

Duration: Up to 3 hours (see text)

Saving Throw: Will negates

Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell allows the caster to change one visual recording. This includes video tapes (including security camera tapes), DVDs, digital formats, film, and any other form of recording moving pictures. The recording can be changed in any way the caster wishes though he must somehow describe all changes. If the caster has a script he would like the recording to follow, the change is immediate. Failing that the change must be one that can be described in a single sentence ("The main character always wears a clown suit."), or the caster must watch the recording and state changes as he wants them to occur. The spell can last up to three hours when used in this manner though all changes made are permanent.

Though the recording shows no signs of tapering, and all acting and effects are of the highest quality, bad scripting and contradictory changes can make the new recording obviously fake. Further only the single copy of the recording touched by the caster is changed; all other copies are unaffected. The new recording acts in all ways like a normal recording and can itself be copied or re-edited by normal technological or mystic means.

Material Components: A teleplay script. If desired, the script used can become the new script of the visual recording.

Focus: If elements from another visual medium are to be incorporated into the recording, such as characters from a movie or actors in a magazine, a copy of that visual medium must be held by the caster.

Security Risk

Illusion (Glamer)

Level: Modern 2

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Target: Object weighing no more than 50 lbs. touched

Duration: 10 minutes/level

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

Designed to conceal a weapon or contraband item from modern detection devices, the *security risk* glamer prevents an object (weighing no more than 50 lbs) from detection by any device, technology, or indirect method. It can still be perceived by all 5 normal senses by any living creature, but does not show on radar, metal detectors, chemical sniffers, X-ray, security cameras or even in mirrors.

Unseen Assistant

Conjuration (Creation)

Level: Modern 2

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

Effect: One invisible, mindless, shapeless servant

Duration: 1 hour/level

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

An *unseen assistant* is an invisible, shapeless force that performs simple tasks at your command. The force takes orders only from the caster unless ordered to obey a second voice (the force can only obey one creature other than the caster). The spell is complex enough to manage tasks an average person can understand and perform. It can run and fetch things, cook simple meals, type written notes, change diapers, make computer reservations, do laundry, and assemble pre-fabricated furniture.

The force can multi-task as well as a normal person and react to new stimulus, but cannot speak. For example it can cook a meal while listening to a baby on a monitor, then go to rock the child to sleep if it hears him crying, leaving the food on simmer. It has an effective Strength score of 2 (so it can lift 20 pounds or drag 100 pounds). It can trigger traps and such, but it can exert only 20 pounds of force, which is not enough to activate certain pressure plates and other devices. It can't perform any task that requires a skill check with a DC higher than 15 or that requires a check using a skill that can't be used untrained. Its speed is 15 feet.

The servant cannot attack in any way; it is never allowed an attack roll. It cannot be killed, but it dissipates if it takes 12 points of damage from area attacks. (It gets no saves against attacks.) Once cast the spell's range is unlimited.

Wardrobe

Transmutation

Level: Modern 2

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Target: 1 creature

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: Will negates

Spell Resistance: Yes

With this spell the caster can instantly change the clothes worn by one creature. Any clothing, jewelry, armor, or accessories currently on the target can be removed (with an audible "pop"), causing it to lay unharmed at the feet of the target. If the caster has a unworn set of clothes, armor, jewelry, or accessories he can cause these to fit onto the target in the proper manner. Even if the clothes to be put on are not exactly the right size for the target they size to fit, as long as they are designed for a creature within one size category of the target. Items put on in this way always seem custom tailored and well-fit. When removed, the clothes and other apparel return to their normal size.

Pyramid Review

Haven: City of Violence -- A Role-Playing Game of Modern Violence

Published by [Louis Porter, Jr. Design Inc.](#)

Written by Louis Porter, Jr. with Brent Dragoo, Steven S. Long, Angus McNicholl and Simon Rocquette

Illustrated by Rowan Dodds and Jason Walton

208-page b&w softcover; \$30.00

Playing Cops 'n' Robbers is one of the two analogies most often used when explaining the basic ideas behind roleplaying, the other of course, being Cowboys 'n' Indians, so it is no surprise that there have been roleplaying games for both genres. What is surprising is that there have been so few, with FGU's *Gangster!* and TSR's *Gangbusters* leading the way, both focusing upon the genre's classic period of the 1930s. Other games looked at either cops or robbers, with the *Dallas RPG* from SPI combining soap opera and the criminal actions of Texas oil barons, and Task Force Games' *Crime Fighter* exploring the TV cop show. All of these titles are long out of print and the trend for most games is to explore their setting's criminal underbelly through dedicated supplements such as White Wolf's *World of Darkness: Mafia*, though more recent titles such as Guardian of Order's *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai RPG*, the scathing *Violence: The Roleplaying Game of Egregious and Repulsive Bloodshed* from Hogshead Publishing, and *GURPS Cops* have all bucked this trend.

In the wake of such films as Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs*, television series like *The Sopranos*, and computer games such as *GTA: Vice City*, it still seems strange that no roleplaying game has appeared based on the organized crime genre. All that changes now, and although several have been promised, the first to see publication is Louis J. Porter Jr.'s self-created and self-published *Haven: City of Violence*. This is set in the fictional setting of Haven, on the USA's East Coast and described in back cover blurb as a cross between New York City, East Central Los Angeles and Beirut. The blurb also describes the RPG as a cross between *Frank Miller's Sin City*, John Woo's *Hardboiled*, and James O'Barr's *The Crow* as well as "... [Y]our worst urban nightmare come to life." (As an aside, it should be pointed out that in drawing from various movies, *Haven: City of Violence* is also going the other way and has been licensed for movies, as this [news story](#) attests.) This blurb states loudly is not a game of good versus evil, but rather one of, "Evil Versus Evil." All of which are high claims for the author to make about his project; so does *Haven: City of Violence* live up to them, or are they all so much hype?

Behind what is an eye-catching cover, the look of *Haven: City of Violence* is something of a throwback. Specifically to the mid-1990s, with a heavy black and white layout that uses a lot of "white text on black background" tables; together with the use of the Courier typeface as its signature font, this is very reminiscent of Eden Studio Inc.'s *Conspiracy-X RPG*. After the opening full-color (and somewhat confusing) 16-page comic strip, the book is illustrated with artwork that captures the gritty feel of the game and the decrepit look of Haven's worst boroughs. Overall, the appearance of *Haven: City of Violence* is well done, especially for a first-time product, though this is not surprising given that the author is also a graphic designer. On the downside, the book lacks an index and could have done with another proofreading prior to publication.

As a setting Haven feels a little forced, being something of an amalgam of the cities and sources listed above. Lying less than 50 miles North of Baltimore, its six boroughs are described as encapsulating America herself within their boundaries -- Arcadia has all the bright lights of Las Vegas, providing entertainment and pleasure; Armistad is Detroit with its empty car factories and the ever-present stench of its meat processing plants; Freeman Hill is 1950s suburbia

striving to hold off more modern influences and an influx of immigrants; Golden Heights is the city's most upscale neighborhood and the offshore Rome Island is its antithesis, being pure slum ghetto; and Haven City is its cultural and commercial heart, much akin to New York City. The city is dominated and riddled by crime and corruption from the top down.

The history explains how the current state of Haven's all-too-overt underworld have come to be over the last five years. From how the coalition of the three organized crime families -- the Carlucci, the Patrone, and the Santucci -- were split by infighting, allowing the Crimson Eagle Triad to move in and build up the Red Wing Tong. On Rome Island, one man united all of the African American gangs to form the Nubian Nation, which not only drove off the City of Haven Police Department, but also was able to decapitate the leadership of the expanding Red Wing Tong. To protect themselves from reprisals, the Nubian Nation allied itself with the Latino Sangre gang, which had earlier wiped out the Freeman Hill based White Aryan Resistance and is now facing a resurgence of Neo-Nazi resistance in the form of the Templar Knights. The Crimson Eagle Triad finally accepted the leadership of the Red Wing Tong by the wife of the late head, after she increased profits four-fold. More recently, the beaches of Rome Island have become home to a horrible mystery, a serial killer known as Milk Baby, who leaves his victims -- including all but one of the S.W.A.T. team sent to stop him -- crucified and reeking of fetid milk . . .

It is into this climate of fear and threat that characters are placed after their creation. Players can select from one of the several prototypes each given their own page or two. There is one each for the various crime gangs and families present in Haven, as well as more typical character types: mercenary, politician, police officer, bounty hunter, bodyguard, and private investigator. Alternatively, 100 character points can be spent to create a character, being spent on Primary Abilities (Strength, Will, Agility, Stamina, Intelligence, and Perception) -- each rated from 1 to 21 plus (9 to 15 is average); plus skills, languages, benefits, drawbacks, and special abilities. From the Primary Abilities a set of seven Secondary Abilities are derived. These are Influence (basically charisma), Movement Value, Accuracy (with firearms and throwing weapons), Fighting Value (in hand-to-hand combat), Subterfuge (ability to deceive or dissemble), Counter Measures (dealing with mechanical devices and security systems), and Health -- split between Concussion and Lethal types.

Characters receives a limited allotment of skills, equal to a fifth of their Intelligence ability. Each of these skills receives a +1 bonus, to which can be added another three levels. That +1 is equal to basic or high school training, while +2 represents a B.A., +3 an M.A. and +4 a Ph.D. Languages come free, with more intelligent characters being able to speak and read more than their native tongue, though no second language can be rated higher than their native. Unfortunately, how a language's rating is reached is not properly explained, while the selection available is a little odd. Mandarin and Cantonese are amalgamated into Chinese, while English is curiously broken up into English (that is, American English), English -- Australian, and English -- United Kingdom (that is, *English* English).

Benefits are the equivalent of advantages and include the usual mix, as does the list of drawbacks or disadvantages. Special Abilities are more outré in nature, such as Sixth Sense, Anti-Hero (this grants the player extra experience points), Berserk Rage, Cop Eyes (the character looks like the Law, even if they are not), Dodge (able to dodge items or bullets up to six times a day), Future Days (precognition), and Predator (the uncanny ability to track). Whether or not these are suited to every game will be up to the referee, as they may not always sit well in some variations of the genre that ***Haven: City of Violence*** is trying to portray. Anyway, the finished result does not take all that long, but it would have been made easier with the inclusion of a full example of the process, and also a character sheet. Nor does it appear that one is provided on the publisher's website.

The game's mechanics are a very simple affair: Take the appropriate skill, add it to the associated Primary or Secondary Ability, apply any situational modifiers, and roll equal to under the result on a 20-sided die. Each skill lists its situational modifiers, with even an easy task -- the equivalent of jumping over a puddle! -- suffering a penalty of -2, and an average task a penalty of -5! The system for gun combat uses the same system, but all modifiers are applied to a character's Accuracy Ability before the roll is made. Damage is determined location -- a leg hit would inflict d8 damage, abdomen d10, and head/neck d12+d8! This damage roll is modified by both the caliber of the weapon and the type of ammunition fired. So a successful hit from a .357 Magnum using Armor Piercing Explosive Tipped rounds inflicts +2 for the caliber, plus +1d4+1 damage for the round that also has penetrative properties.

Where the Accuracy Ability is used for shootouts, Fighting Value replaces it for hand-to-hand and melee combat. Characters receive a number of actions equal to a fifth of their Fighting Value, which can be split between defensive or offensive maneuvers. These are chosen prior to each round and revealed simultaneously, cross-referenced on a set of tables that cover both armed and unarmed combat to get a result. This can be concussive damage if unarmed combat, lethal if armed, and also result in a loss of actions as characters take more damage and thus become less effective. A similar system is used to handle car chases, with both systems feeling similar to TSR's **Top Secret RPG**, a favorite game of the author's. Like the rules for gun combat, the melee combat rules are accompanied by a very solid example that very effectively helps explain their use.

As a whole the rules and mechanics of **Haven: City of Violence** have a less-than-contemporary feel. This is particularly evident in that it favors a character's attributes over their skills, benefits, and special abilities. Further, the game's core statistics -- Accuracy and Fighting Value -- are even more integral to its play when you consider that there are no *direct* combat skills. Despite this, there is a coarse brutality to the game system that matches the genre of **Haven: City of Violence**. This is no more true than with the combat rules, which though effective, are hampered by the constant need to flip between pages to find the desired tables. The lack of an index does not help this, and neither does the fact that the tables have not been reprinted at the rear of the book.

So far **Haven: City of Violence** has lived to all of the claims given in its blurb -- certainly as far as the rules and the setting of Haven go. Where it does not come close to matching them is in the support provided for the referee or "Games Operation Director," this a hangover from the author's initial desire to make an action-orientated game similar to that of **Top Secret**, and ill-advisedly abbreviated to "G.O.D." What support there is comes in two forms; one is a chapter entitled "The Golden Rules," and the other is a scenario, "Emerald Hill." The Golden Rules turns out to be good advice to running a roleplaying game; in fact it is good advice for running *any* roleplaying game because it amounts to what is the standard text on the subject.

Nowhere in the 208-pages of **Haven: City of Violence** is the one claim made in the back cover blurb that sets it apart from other games actually addressed, the claim that the game is one of "Evil Versus Evil." There is no advice for either the G.O.D. or the player on running or playing in a campaign where the characters are either amoral or immoral thieving, murdering, drug dealing, double crossing, swindling bastards. Nor is the issue dealt with effectively in the scenario . . .

Actually, there is nothing wrong with the scenario, "Emerald City," written by Steve Long, except for the fact that it is really designed for investigative characters, as opposed to crooked, violent, or vicious ones. In the 20-page adventure, the characters get wind that a highly adept, ruthless, and infamous gang of thieves -- the Bryson Hill gang -- is about to set up a score in Haven. The job of the players is to stop them, whether as cops (perhaps crooked) or as members of another independent rival gang or as associates of a Haven-based criminal organization. Though there is advice for running the scenario using the latter two groups, it is primary a gritty heist caper in the mould of Michael Mann's *Heat*.

There really is one place in the pages of **Haven: City of Violence** where could be said that the blurb's issues are dealt with, and that is in the author's personal statement that comes after the opening comic strip. This explains what he wanted to do with **Haven: City of Violence**, but mostly he explains both who he is and his personal history, so as to underwrite his legitimate right to create a game as brutal and as violence as this. Several times throughout the statement, he clearly and volubly shouts out that everyone is responsible for their own actions and *not* a game, like say, **Dungeons & Dragons** or even, **Haven: City of Violence**. Likewise, parents are clearly warned to confiscate the book should they not want their children reading or playing the game's content.

This is all well and good, as there is nothing wrong in making such statements, and perhaps he is to be applauded for doing so, but in so doing, what is it *exactly* that he is protecting both himself and his game from? This is difficult to say, as there is such a minimum of background to **Haven: City of Violence** compared to other games and of course, no discussion of its themes or genre. Because of this, the game draws a stronger comparison with computer games like *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, as both lack any real depth. That is intentional in the computer game, but in **Haven: City of Violence**, it comes across as a gum shield worn by a toothless shark.

As a rules system, **Haven: City of Violence** presents a slightly quirky set of mechanics suited to the action genre that

the author wanted to emulate. With these in hand, the G.O.D. could run anything from *The Shield* to *The Sopranos*, from *L.A. Confidential* to *Live and Die in L.A.* as his game, but as to the hows and whys of the genre, the author leaves gamers very much on their own. This failure to explore the themes and genre of ***Haven: City of Violence*** give it an old-fashioned feel (as do the rules) and deprives the game of any potential originality and maturity that it could have had, and that the author so clearly desired.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Stargate: SG-1 Roleplaying Game

Published by [Alderac Entertainment Group](#)

Written by Robert Defendi, Scott Gearin, Patrick Kapera, Don Mappin, Christina Kamnikar, Rodney Thompson, Kevin Wilson, Greg Benage, James Maliszewski, Rob Vaux, & Rob Wieland

Edited by Patrick Kapera, Valerie Kessler, & Rob Vaux

Graphic design by Steve Hough, Dave Agoston, & Justin Lawler

Set photography by Steve Hough

488-page color hardcover; \$50.00

The Stargate can take Man to more and wondrous places than he can imagine. It can ferry him across this galaxy and into the next. More practically, it can spin off TV shows, cartoons, and the *Stargate SG-1 Roleplaying Game*.

The TV show builds on the movie and tells the further adventures of Colonel Jack O'Neill and his intrepid band of explorers as they use this large, stony ring, found in Egypt, to pass from this world to the next. Trapped in a never-ending war against the Goa'uld, a sluglike race that possesses the bodies of humanoids and passes itself off as gods to other species, SG-1 and its allies work to find technology and new friends among the stars who will help them fight the good fight.

First off: This is a massive book. Closer to 500 pages than to 400, it does not suffer a lack of thoroughness. "Powered by *Spycraft*," it foregoes *d20 Modern* and uses the base *d20 System* and Alderac's *Spycraft* game as its bases, also borrowing elements from *Star Wars* (like vitality points and Defense).

It opens with a rundown of the setting for anyone who hasn't seen the movie *Stargate* or the TV spinoff *Stargate: SG-1*. Readers are introduced to the evil, parasitic Goa'uld; mankind's allies the Asgard "greys"; the ravenous Replicators; the endless infighting of the Goa'uld System Lords and their subject worlds; and the various races and species that have played a part in the ongoing struggle to secure Man's future. From Jack O'Neill's cinematic first trip through the gate to the desert world of Abydos, the history takes the story up to the end of season 6 of the TV show and the team's encounter with Anubis at that same planet. Throughout the rest of the book, they build a good picture of events outside the scope of the on-screen action as well. Though thorough, they have mercifully forgone the excruciating level of detail found in the *Farscape* game's episode guide.

Players then get a look at the guts of the operation, a description of the Cheyenne Mountain Complex that houses Stargate Command. Security measures, responses to threats, personnel and their reactions, and the cultivating of the right people for Stargate duty are all included. This prevents players from stumping the GM with all (well, most of) those troublesome questions that pop up regarding the whys and wherefores of the process. More importantly, they delineate the meat of the game with all the mission types you can expect to go on: exploration, first contact, diplomacy, etc.

There's a gazetteer of worlds from the series, big and small, important and not so much so, describing who lives where and how much the people of that world would like to help or kill Earthlings. Various important races from around the celestial neighborhood get their own write-ups, and the vile Goa'uld have a whole section set aside just for them, their plots, their history, and how to handle player character interaction with beings who believe themselves to be gods.

Character classes provided are: the explorer, the guardian (alien foot soldiers), the multitasking pointman, the scientist (to be confused with the explorer), the scout (always at home in the wilds), and the generic soldier (so why the separate guardian class?). The similarities between the soldier and guardian, and the explorer and scientist, make the choices feel limited. Worse, most of these have feats that allow you to give other team members the use of your skills, feats, or knowledge during a mission. It creates effective teamwork, but at a cost of some individuality or a sense of any one member's worth. The offending items are the classes' core abilities, after all.

The prestige classes do little to alleviate things. The bodyguard is the imposing escort for teams with delicate missions or personnel (and has nifty feats that let him lend defensive bonuses to, or even trade places with, his charge); the field analyst tries to make sense of new information gathered in the bush (like the explorer or scientist); the field medic heals the wounded; the officer leads the team (another instance of a character that passes benefits to others); the prime, one who follows, or has followed, the Goa'uld and serves as their right-hand man in combat (and thus is an awful lot like a specialized bodyguard); and the self-explanatory sniper. Then again, when your characters are recruited from the Armed Forces, there are only so many places to take your roleplaying career.

PCs have several options open to them, especially where feats are concerned. The book is brimming with feats, all divided into subsections like combat feats; terrain feats that allow you to make the best use of all that strange territory; species feats that make the foreign races more than guys in rubber suits (in addition to the special abilities provided elsewhere); and covert feats -- good for when you run up against the machinations of the mysterious National Intelligence Department during its many plots to hijack matters from Stargate Command.

Stargate takes it easy on readers not deep into military lore. There are weapons, to be sure, but you're not buried in hundreds of different firearms and dozens of vehicle types. On the other hand, there is a huge list of "kits." Kits, or "bundles," are quick and easy ways to select equipment for a mission. If you're going to document a new planet, you can select a kit that includes video gear and the like, and off you go into the wilderness with gun and camera. This list begins to get strange, though, down to minutiae like the arrest bundle, the Internet fan bundle, the movie buff bundle . . . coupled with a lot of rules on who of what rank can get how much gear and you start to wonder if the SGC is more interested in saving Earth from invasion or keeping track of its inventory.

It also doesn't help that the gear sections have some shoddy editing. For the most part the text reads clean, but there are many dropped, added, or switched prepositions, the Os all look like the letter o, some page references are wrong, and the writers can't agree on the spelling of some names or whether to capitalize Stargate. PCs are well-equipped, however, and you do get to use expensive goodies like the UAV to scan planets, so it's not all bad news.

The section on gamemastering Stargate is in some ways a scattered set of odds and ends, but they do establish a logical flow of information. Going from how to adjudicate actions and action dice (which, if you haven't seen them in use in **Spycraft**, can be used to boost bad rolls, activate threats, and restore some health), it then goes to encounters, the world around the PCs, designing new worlds (all of it, from the terrain to the weather, though it leaves out guidelines for creating the star system in which they sit -- for that, it's back to the **Farscape** game), and pitting the System Lords and their minions against the party.

From there, it's GMing advice of the purest kind. Themes, settings, the science and action involved, and the genre used. A lot of this treads old ground and offers little that's new to any but the newest GMs, but the parts about establishing a sci-fi tone are simple, even invaluable. Following that: enough charts, tables, and lists to choke a Clydesdale, all in one convenient, easy-to-find location.

One of the cleverest bits of the book is the crossovers section -- other games, some from other companies, are listed in a brief overview so that referees who want to throw players a curve can send their SG team to another **d20 System** game setting, maybe even one of a different genre entirely. This kind of cross-pollination is one of the game's truly ingenious contributions, and they keep it brief. The book is rounded out by a character sheet and stats for the major

characters from the show. While exhaustive -- there's a low, medium, and high-level version of each persona -- that's about as helpful as they get. It's hard to tell which version represents which time period in that character's past. The low-level O'Neill is a lieutenant colonel, so he's obviously from before the TV series, but how much earlier? If her work at the SGC has made Dr. Frasier "one of the world's foremost experts in chemical and biological warfare," why doesn't she have Perfect Skill Mastery?

The look of the book relies entirely upon photos, so there's no "artwork" per se. The photos are plentiful, but not intrusive. Given the choice between text and graphics, the authors would clearly rather leave out the pretty pictures and give you more to read. The book is heavy, but it's tough, too, and the scope of the material and overall look are stunning.

The bad news when weighing (literally) the size of the book vs. its price tag is the combat section. Big chunks of it come, if not from the core **d20 System**, then from **Spycraft**, and since these books are both touted on the cover (one is required, the other "powers" this volume), anyone who already has those may feel ill-used getting big chunks of it again. Other sections are guilty of this to a degree, but the combat section is the most flagrant violator.

Alderac seems to have learned some lessons from their experiences publishing the **Farscape** game. The **Stargate SG-1 Roleplaying Game** is imposing, and it puts a greater percentage of that bulk to good use. It's thorough but seldom descends into needless or tiring statistics or exposition. Readers might have gotten more from it if it had -- somehow it's hard amid the military material to convey just what makes Stargate Stargate, and it could use more pages like "sci-fi tone" -- but as the game version of the foremost sci-fi show on television, it similarly stands out.

Open Game Content: Alderac cannot okay the use of licensed *Stargate* material, but aside from the particulars of that show and the material that identifies the text as being from *Stargate* or their own **Spycraft** game, most of the material - characters, feats, skills, combat and so on -- is OGC.

--Andy Vetromile

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Yes, We Have No-Win Scenarios

I recently finished the GameCube game *Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem*, having succumbed to my inner conspicuous consumer and picked up a GameCube when the price dropped recently to \$99. *Eternal Darkness*, a *Call of Cthulhu*-esque adventure game, is one of the better adventure games I've played, and it reinforced something that I bring to my gaming adventures as a GM, which I'll share in mere moments.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

Vaguely speaking (so as not to give away too much), the plot of *Eternal Darkness* revolves around an agent of unspeakable cosmic evil binding *another* unspeakable cosmic evil, in preparation for Something Big. Near the adventure's climax (and, again, I hope I'm not giving away too much), you summon a *third* unspeakable cosmic evil to deal with the first one; whether or not this is a wise move is debatable.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Anyway, the unmitigated pleasure of playing a nice survival horror game and controlling my tank-like lumbering victim has gotten me to thinking: I love a no-win scenario.

There are a number of reasons for this appreciation. I suspect it might have come out of seeing *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*, where the idea of the Kobayashi Maru scenario blew my eight-year-old mind. (For those of you who haven't seen the movie, the Kobayashi Maru is a training simulation Starfleet Academy runs for its recruits which has no successful resolution; it's a test of character to see how they'll react in those circumstances.)

But I suspect my no-win scenario interest comes out of a fundamental paradox in gaming. On the one hand, the general wisdom -- backed by all those "How To Roleplay" sections of gaming books -- states that RPGs aren't like other games, in that there are no "winners" or "losers" in the traditional sense that other games have. Instead, an RPG generally serves as a "simulation" of another world, and its participants can interact with it as they see fit (more or less). On the other hand, c'mon . . . we all know the truth. Most people play RPGs in order to "win," at least by some definition. In the old days this meant accumulating as much loot and power as possible; nowadays this means having your character succeed in his goals, succeed in the game world's goals, or . . . well, accumulating as much loot and power as possible.

Now, if the GM was solely interested in -- and responsible for -- creating a viable simulation, then this would be a pretty straightforward task. But the desire to "win" complicates this, especially since success and failure -- plus the rate of progression -- is primarily determined by the GM:

GM: "All right; you have all created characters for the grim, bleak world of *Blood Sugar Death Magick*. You are huddled in your ramshackle hut, fearful of the dreaded hazards waiting just outside the door."

Players: "We must take arms against the darkness and risk all, by venturing out of our meager quarters!"

GM: "Okay. Right outside your door you see . . . *gold!* More than you ever thought possible! Oh, and there's a caffeinated deity who twitches sideways at you, infusing you with power previously unknown in mortals."

Players: [Long pause] "How many XP is the deity worth?"

The arbitrary nature of the world -- and the delicate balance between challenging players but not frustrating them -- is one of the most difficult tasks for GMs to grasp.

But the no-win scenario is different; it turns those preconceived notions on its side. Rather than being worried about making sure the players have both sufficient risk and sufficient reward to satisfy them, the GM can focus on . . . well, just about anything else.

(To be clear, I define a no-win scenario as one where the heroes cannot achieve all the objectives they perceive; while it's possible to define it as a scenario where the heroes cannot achieve *any* of their objectives, that's a bit too bleak to be of much practical use in a continuing campaign. Thus if the heroes have the option to acquire an object of great import, save the life of a loved one, and preserve their own lives, in a no-win scenario they may only be able to accomplish two of those . . . or maybe even one, in a particularly harsh setting.)

The no-win scenario is perfect in its simplicity because it balances the scale against my desire to give the players what they want. It introduces realism into the game world (on that simulation side of the equation) because no-win scenarios are fairly common in the real world. You *can't* always get what you want: Personal safety can clash with familial or national safety; many people sacrifice happiness for wealth (or vice versa). Guns and butter. You can't be a jockey and a sumo wrestler.

By crafting a no-win scenario, an RPG suddenly acquires a lot more depth and excitement. A no-win scenario forces the PCs to consider their choices carefully; in fact, choice is the core of a no-win scenario, and the knowledge of real lasting consequences is appreciated by many players. After all, in many normal adventures the only "choices" the heroes have are to the order of events; do they want to kill the kobalds in the room to the right or the gnolls in the room on the left? But in a no-win scenario, the choices are that much more meaningful; do the heroes take the chance to thwart the sinister Dr. Alttab, knowing that he will take the opportunity to unleash his death beam on the city and kill hundreds or thousands? Or do they let him go, sparing the city and hoping they can catch him later? It may even lead to in-party roleplaying and conflict that can create a memorable game; in our object of value/endangered loved one/endangered selves example above, if different heroes choose all three options, then there is going to be some interesting PC interaction.

And, finally, every so often as a GM I encounter one of the most delightful surprises of presenting a no-win scenario: The heroes win. The players thought of something so original, brilliant, or otherwise counterintuitive that I can only step back and marvel. And, of course, I let them win. I suspect this is one reason my players don't revolt against me, even though these no-win scenarios are not terribly uncommon in our games; because in those circumstances, the players and characters alike know that they pulled off a seemingly impossible victory. And that victory is not because some benevolent cosmic force was stacking odds in their favor and ensuring success lay right outside their hut. No, the cosmic force was actively designing events so the heroes couldn't accomplish all their goals, and yet somehow they did; the resultant story is one that is truly special, and a delight to players and GM alike.

And that's a scenario where *everybody* wins.

--Steven Marsh

First Contact: We Are Not Alone

by David Morgan-Mar

An enduring theme in fiction is that of initial contact of humans with intelligent alien beings. This contact can take many forms, some of which will be explored in this article for their gaming potential.

Radio Contact

The most realistic means of contact for a present-day or near-future campaign is the reception of an interstellar radio signal. Physical travel between stars is time and resource intensive, whereas cheap radio signals can be detected across vast distances and travel at the speed of light.

The Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI) is a blanket term for several ongoing projects being conducted by various research groups and privately funded organizations around the world today. Their lack of success to date is not evidence that there are no alien radio signals to be found. So far only the barest fraction of the possible frequencies, time resolutions, and sky coordinates have been searched. The breakthrough detection could conceivably come at any time, giving GMs great latitude in setting a radio contact campaign. The first alien radio signal might be picked up on a terraformed Mars, or by one of Earth's Orion-drive-settled interstellar colonies. An alternate history could even begin with radio pioneers picking up alien messages on the eve of World War II.

Once a potential alien radio signal is found, it has to be verified and then announced. Verification involves several experimental steps to ensure that the signal is not terrestrial in origin -- including signals from satellites or space probes -- and that other observatories can detect it. The standard communications network of professional astronomers will serve to distribute news of the potential find so that the signal can be confirmed. It is highly unlikely that a stray terrestrial signal, or even a deliberate hoax, could pass muster.

In 1989 a working group of astronomers and other interested scientists drew up a protocol for the announcement of a confirmed signal to the public. The consensus was that multiple researchers would announce such a signal as widely as possible through conventional media. This strategy was designed to avoid the monopolization of knowledge by governments. Some governments will almost certainly, however, attempt to suppress the news. The potential for conflict here can lead to harrowing espionage-style adventures as investigators try to uncover enough clues to convince a skeptical public, or as government agents try to prevent the evidence from leaking out.

If a group of PCs are the first ones to come across the alien signal, their lives are about to become very hectic indeed. This setup can lead in many directions, from public acclaim and its associated problems of getting on with their jobs in the face of fame, to a desperate underground war against their government as they try to spread the news. Alternatively, SETI researchers may approach the heroes for help in either of these tasks.

Public Reaction

Public reaction to the announcement of an alien radio signal will vary widely. For some it will just be another news item that doesn't affect their daily lives. Some will see it as a profound increase in human knowledge, with an impact that might become known only in the fullness of time. At the extreme ends, there will be new age and "alienist" movements seeing the contact as a tangible sign of better things to come, and doomsayers who fear hostile aliens or a trick of the Devil. For the most part, though, an alien signal is likely to have little real impact on the daily affairs of society. Nearly everyone has other things to worry about, things which in the cold light of day are more important to their jobs, family, and health.

Significant impact will only come with the deciphering of any meaning in the radio message -- a task that could take many years. A deliberate message intended for reception by intelligent civilizations will contain clues on unraveling its

meaning, likely beginning with the establishment of mathematical and logical codes. Even with this help, discerning the information contained in the message will take much time and effort.

If the radio signal is not intended for an alien audience, deciphering it may be next to impossible. A leaked television signal is nonsensical unless you know the arbitrary encoding standards used, and even if reconstructed properly we are unlikely to glean much technical knowledge from an alien version of *Gilligan's Island*. Such a leak may provide intriguing insights into the alien society, however.

A possible reaction from national governments is the militarization of the signal decoding effort. Although an alien signal is extremely unlikely to be a prelude to invasion, wary governments will be reluctant to foster public paranoia by releasing anything that could be interpreted as the least bit threatening. However, once news of the signal's existence is out, there will be no way to prevent interested individuals or groups from receiving the signal themselves and launching their own decoding efforts. Who makes the first breakthrough could determine major shifts in public opinion about the aliens and what they mean for Earth.

Once an alien signal is public knowledge, various people from cryptography experts to physicists, engineers, linguists, philosophers, and even clergy will get involved in determining its meaning. Many groups around the world will be working on the problem, and it is likely that rivalries, espionage, and violence will occur before it is cracked. This Cold War style scenario could be further enhanced by setting it in the actual Cold War era, or even during World War II, making for a tense undercurrent behind the more overt actions of global politics. Heroic individuals will find plenty of opportunity for action, as bits of the message are unraveled and lead to technological developments that must be kept from the other side at all costs. This could lead to a full-blown conspiracy style campaign if the very existence of the message is still a secret. This type of action also fits into a gritty cyberpunk setting.

So What's In The Message?

A leaked radio message will at best contain incidental information about the biology, technology, and psychology of the broadcasters. The scientific rewards to be gained will mostly be in fields of knowledge rather than practical application.

A deliberate message, on the other hand, may well present us with a cornucopia of scientific and engineering information, including knowledge of other alien civilizations and of technology beyond the capabilities of our own. Governments will attempt to regulate such knowledge and the research it engenders, perhaps unsuccessfully. Many scenarios are possible, from rapid advancement and enlightenment of humanity to the building of cleverly disguised alien doomsday weapons with which we obligingly destroy ourselves.

There will be debate and social upheaval over any actions initiated by the contents of the message. The usual conflict between scientific curiosity and paranoid or superstitious fear will never have seen higher stakes at risk, fueling correspondingly heated discussions and conflicts. Terrorist actions aimed at sabotaging alien-inspired research projects will become increasingly common, prompting unparalleled security arrangements. Militant anti-alienist groups will need crack operatives to handle dangerous missions, and anti-terrorism forces will need to be alert to anything -- ideal jobs for PC mercenaries or heroes.

A question certain to arise is whether we should respond to the message. There will be military strategists and paranoids who insist that Earth maintains "radio silence," just as there will be those who advocate picking up the phone and saying, "Hello." Given the low likelihood of any expeditionary force crossing the immense gulf between the stars, the risks in replying are virtually nil, and the potential rewards enormous -- although some will point out that any non-zero risk of exposing the entire human race to annihilation is too high (not that this stopped the Cold War assembling of nuclear arsenals). The decision is likely to be taken out of government hands, however, by the first alienist who decides to build a dish and beam out his own response. This sort of response could only be stopped by a martial law crackdown on home technology, and then only for a short time.

Government agents could easily be involved with efforts to prevent unauthorized transmissions back to the aliens. Anti-alien activists might want to prevent an officially sanctioned reply message! People on either side could be

involved with protecting or disrupting work on alien technology. Perhaps some of the information contained in the message is simply too dangerous, or *horrible* that it is suppressed. Even if there is full disclosure, some people will claim a government cover-up and demand to know the truth. Investigators and reporters will have their hands full in such cases.

Physical Contact

An initial contact with alien intelligence is unlikely to be made physically in a setting with radio technology. Physical contact is, however, possible in two circumstances:

First, if the aliens are technologically far superior to humans and can travel between stars without alerting us to their presence by obvious radio signals or starship drive flares. This is the classic "Invasion Earth" scenario, but can also be played with benign aliens or as an encounter among the stars. It also works for historical periods before we had the technology to detect interstellar radio signals.

Second, if the aliens are intelligent but not yet industrialized and we stumble upon them in our own exploration of space. This presents the other alien contact staple: the dilemma over whether to reveal our existence or leave them to develop unmolested.

Physical contact allows alien influences in historically based campaigns. What if the Egyptians and Aztecs really did learn how to build pyramids from "visitors from the sky?" Creative GMs could weave a campaign out of Egyptian courtiers being sent to deal with these emissaries of the gods, learning cosmic secrets and directing the building of pyramids, and leaving behind no more clues to what really happened than we now see today.

An invasion of Earth makes an exciting campaign theme, but some originality is needed to avoid becoming a carbon copy of the many invasion stories in print and on film. To build an invasion campaign, decide on the general genre first. A 1950s Atomic Horror invasion is different from a gritty Cyberpunk invasion, and both are very different from aliens landing in ancient Europe and taking on the might of the Roman Empire. Scale the aliens' technology and power level to slightly superior to what the humans have (unless you want to subjugate humanity and play a game of hopeless resistance). Many classic invading aliens have a weakness that can be discovered and then exploited, whether it be physical, biological, or psychological; consider giving your aliens such a weakness.

The invaders need a motivation. Some just want *lebensraum*, some want to eat us, while others Want Our Women. Inscrutable aliens might not realize we are intelligent, or might need a demonstration of technological prowess, or psychological maturity, before they leave us alone. Invasion methods can vary widely too. The frontal assault approach is good for gung-ho military campaigns, while the insidious infiltration of Small Town America is a recipe for horror.

A different style of game results if the humans are technologically superior to the aliens. Philosophical moralizing might be the order of the day, or there may be action aimed at protecting the aliens from being contacted and exploited by unscrupulous fellow humans. Undercover work on unsuspecting alien worlds

The Fermi Paradox

In 1950, the nuclear physicist Enrico Fermi framed what has become the most debated question in bioastronomy research: "Where is everybody?" Behind this seemingly simple question is the knowledge that there are some 100 billion stars in our Galaxy. If just *one* of those stars gave rise to a civilization capable of interplanetary colonization, that civilization could -- assuming a reasonable rate of spread -- colonize the entire Galaxy well inside 10 million years. Given the Galaxy is roughly a thousand times older than that . . . well . . . where is everybody?

We don't see any obvious evidence of aliens on Earth, or within our solar system. But if there is intelligent life anywhere in our Galaxy, it should be here by now! Earth should be teeming with aliens, but as far as we can tell, it isn't. From this trivial observation, the simplest answer to Fermi's question is that there *isn't* intelligent life anywhere else in our Galaxy. There are other possibilities, however:

1. Intelligent life might wipe itself out before it can set up a sustainable wave of colonization. We have come precariously close to demonstrating this possibility ourselves, and there is no guarantee we won't destroy humanity in a global war

can range from slapstick to tensely serious. If the aliens are to be informed of the existence of humanity, special envoys, ambassadors, and xenologists will be employed to help ease the transition for them. Some aliens might react with antihuman paranoia, requiring careful handling to defuse conflicts without harming interspecies relations. Just the job for an enterprising group of heroes!

Artifacts

A variant on physical contact is the discovery of alien artifacts. These may be present on worlds newly explored by humans, from our own backyard in the Solar System to worlds around other stars. Collapsed civilizations, complete with decaying cities full of still-working scientific marvels, present cinematic settings for star-spanning heroes. More grittily, Martian colonists might find long-abandoned and mostly eroded evidence of a settlement, perhaps only fragments of extremely durable material that survived where all else was weathered by dust storms.

Building on the ancient contact idea, archaeologists might be on the front line of alien research when they discover irrefutable proof that early civilizations had otherworldly help in constructing their impressive monuments. Obscure technological items might be found in dusty tombs, and hieroglyphics deciphered to reveal knowledge beyond modern science. Cliffhanging adventurers would certainly become involved in the global hunt for alien artifacts, research into what might be achieved with them, and the preventing of them falling into The Wrong Hands.

Robotic Contact

Another possibility is that our first alien contact will be with *machines* built by aliens and dispersed throughout the Galaxy.

Von Neumann machines are robotic craft designed to be able to build copies of themselves using raw materials they find in their journeys across space. The number of such machines grows exponentially with time, and every star system in the Galaxy could harbor one (or more) within a few million years of a civilization releasing the progenitor. This time is *much* shorter than the age of the Galaxy. If any civilization has built such machines, then we are likely to stumble across one sooner or later.

A benign von Neumann machine might attempt to establish contact with any alien species it encounters, then beam the information back to its ultimate planet of origin (which may be long dead by now!). Hostile machines, designed to sterilize the Galaxy, are also possible. Such a machine may have vast resources available to it in the form of multiple copies of itself or subservient "fighter" robots. Von Neumann machines need some degree of robotic intelligence to handle unexpected situations. Some may evolve into true artificial intelligences and develop their own ideas about their purpose and how to deal with aliens . . .

Dealing with von Neumann machines requires xenologists, engineers, computer scientists, and possibly AI experts. Some machines may allow themselves to be examined, but they are likely to have defenses against destructive tampering. Threatening robots will need to be dealt with, leading to a "man versus the

or environmental catastrophe in the future. If this is an inevitable result of intelligent life, then there may be other civilizations out there now, desperately trying to get into space or contact aliens, and failing. Sound familiar?

2. Intelligent life might choose not to colonize the Galaxy. This seems unlikely. Human history shows we will colonize rapidly once given the technological capability. Any alien species will be able to get more of whatever it desires by interstellar colonization, and insure itself against extinction by spreading the population. Perhaps philosophy will restrain some aliens.

Points 1 and 2 above might well apply to *some* intelligent species. But if even one alien species manages to avoid blowing itself up, and has the desire to colonize, then it would be here by now.

3. Aliens are out there (or right here), but are deliberately hiding from us. Perhaps whatever alien species has colonized our corner of the Galaxy has a decree against interfering with developing biospheres or civilizations. This is not too difficult to imagine -- we would probably adopt a similar sort of policy ourselves. We do, however, have the ability to detect such a civilization's radio emissions and the most scientifically plausible

machines" type campaign, where military strategists and action heroes will be required.

A more recent idea is that of nanobots -- microscopic robots built with molecule-sized parts and capable of working together in a gestalt intelligence. A swarm of nanobots may be able to disassemble matter on a molecular level and rebuild it into almost anything. They could be shot across space by the millions in small capsules, to be captured by star systems and eventually hit a planetary body. Once landed, they could build a communications station, larger robots, or weapons. With an appropriate level of superscience, they could construct genetic material and a cloning lab . . .

Dealing with a hostile alien nanoswarm would be an intimidating prospect -- just the sort of job for freelance heroes or government agents. The important thing about a nanobot invasion is that it is insidious. The capsules containing the threat can be small enough to evade detection and destruction, and could set up a base of operation anywhere. If the swarm programmers were particularly evil, the swarms might initiate a covert takeover, "possessing" people and rewiring their brains to make them loyal to the invaders. This leads to Atomic Horror style paranoia with anybody potentially an alien invader.

First Contact Campaigns

The material above should provide inspiration for building several different types of campaign story around a first contact scenario. Here are some additional tips on running a campaign based on this premise.

Playing the Aliens

First, the important thing about realistic aliens is that they will be *alien*. They won't look like humans with prosthetics on their foreheads, nor like something from the *Star Wars* cantina. And their motives and psychology will probably be beyond human comprehension -- at least to begin with. Adventuring opportunities will arise from cultural misunderstandings, and the GM can emphasize the difficulties by mystifying the players. Describe seemingly illogical alien behavior and reactions, and let the players debate what's going through their thinking appendages.

In an Atomic Horror style campaign or one with deliberately rubber science, on the other hand, aliens probably will be humanoid and have recognizable emotions and motives. This is easier to play, but be sure to exaggerate some traits to produce stereotypical behavior appropriate to the genre.

Structuring the Campaign

Depending on the planned length of the campaign, the story can play out in a number of ways.

A short campaign, or even one-shot adventure, should begin with the alien contact almost immediately, to set the theme and get the heroes into the action. It may be best presented as part of the GM's opening scene-setting for the players: "It's the present day, and you all lead fairly normal lives . . . until the day CNN breaks the news that an alien radio signal has been received." From here, the protagonists can get caught up in whatever whirlwind events the GM has planned. Whatever problems the arrival of aliens causes should be short-term and able to be solved with some decisive action and quickfire heroics. The adventure can be brought to a satisfying conclusion when the heroes avert

starship drives using current astronomy instruments. A galactic civilization may have developed technology beyond these, so our inability to find them is not proof that such a civilization does not exist.

Each of these three explanations has campaign possibilities. A radio signal from a nearby civilization could indicate that it too is rife with war and struggling to establish space colonies. Or a signal might welcome us into a Galactic community of aliens who tell us there's no point in colonizing very far into space, for some reason. Or a leaked signal or crashed survey vessel may lift the veil of secrecy surrounding alien monitoring of our world.

At any rate, if your alien contact game is going to be based in realism, you will need to come up with a plausible answer to Fermi's Paradox to explain why we *haven't* seen any aliens up to now. If your game is more fantastic, like 1950s science fiction, you don't need to worry so much -- though a little thought will help if a player raises the question.

the immediate dangers and tensions and either usher in a new age of human-alien cooperation, or kick their sorry alien butts with good old Earth know-how.

A medium-length campaign could begin the same way, or alternately it could use much of the first playing session to establish the main characters, in much the same way that many movies have an establishing act. Give them some routine things to do, allowing the players to settle into their roles, interact, and throw some dice. Then, at the end of the session, drop the alien contact bombshell. This makes a suitable cliffhanger ending that should leave your players wanting more, especially if you gave them the impression this was some other sort of campaign and kept the aliens secret until now. Over the next few sessions, prepare problems and encounters that will keep the players on their toes, unraveling one mystery about the aliens at a time. Toward the end, unveil a startling revelation about the aliens -- some knowledge about their plans and goals for humanity, or something that allows their threat to be dealt with. Perhaps another alien species will be discovered, who tell the *real* story about the first contactees, or provide a catalyst for humanity and the first aliens to join forces.

A long or ongoing campaign can develop like a more drawn-out medium campaign. The first contact can develop into a guerilla action campaign against alien subjugators, a series of political machinations in an alien court, or a voyage of discovery into a wide new galaxy of exciting places and cultures. Alternately, the campaign could be built around dealing with multiple alien contacts in sequence. The PCs could be a "first contact strike team" deployed to establish relations with new species as they are discovered. This becomes a series a bit like *Star Trek*, and the challenge for the GM is to keep new contacts fresh and interesting. At this point, use the multitude of alien contact fiction for inspiration.

Further Reading

Non-Fiction

- Koerner, David and LeVay, Simon. *Here Be Dragons* (Oxford University Press, 2000). An introduction to the evolution of intelligent life and how it may be radically different from how it is usually imagined.
- Shklovskii, I. S. and Sagan, Carl. *Intelligent Life in the Universe* (1966; reissued by Emerson-Adams, 1998). The classic academic work on extraterrestrial intelligence.
- Shostak, Seth. *Sharing the Universe* (Berkeley Hill, 1998). An overview of SETI and possible reactions if we find an alien radio signal.
- Von Daniken, Erich. *Chariots of the Gods?* (Bantam, 1974). A pseudo-scientific study of how aliens contacted ancient civilizations on Earth.

Fiction

There are many, many stories dealing with alien contact. A few notable ones:

- Anderson, Kevin J. and Beason, Doug. *Assemblers of Infinity* (Bantam, 1993). Alien nanomachines arrive on the moon and build a strange structure.
- Clarke, Arthur C. *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968; reissued by Roc, 2000). Explorers find a strange alien artifact on the moon.
- Gerrold, David. *A Matter for Men (The War Against the Chtorr, Book 1)* (1983; reissued by Bantam, 1991). Invasion by aliens using biological warfare rather than military hardware.
- Niven, Larry and Pournelle, Jerry. *Footfall* (1975; reissued by Del Rey, 1996). Apparently friendly aliens arrive in our solar system and turn out to be more than we bargained for.
- Niven, Larry and Pournelle, Jerry. *The Mote in God's Eye* (1974; reissued by Pocket Books, 1987). A manned alien probe leads to an expedition and contact among the stars.
- Sagan, Carl. *Contact* (Pocket Books, 1986). The quintessential story about receiving an alien radio message and its effect on humanity.
- Wells, H. G. *War of the Worlds* (1898; reissued by Bantam, 1988). The grandfather of all alien invasion stories.

Film and Television

Again, merely a sample from a vast number of productions.

- *Contact* (Robert Zemeckis, 1997). The film of the book.
- *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Robert Wise, 1951). A benevolent alien robot tries to teach Earth a lesson and is tragically misunderstood.
- *Forbidden Planet* (Fred Wilcox, 1956). Alien ruins on a distant planet harbor a strange and dangerous secret.
- *Independence Day* (Roland Emmerich, 1996). Standard alien invasion with big Hollywood budget -- the hackneyed multiple storylines actually look a bit like cinematic RPG character plots.
- *Star Trek* (all the various series). Technologically advanced humans often encounter non-spacefaring aliens and have to deal with the ethical dilemma of not revealing themselves.
- *V*. A stealth invasion of Earth under the guise of friendly aliens.
- *The X-Files*. Aliens are here and dealing with our governments in secret.

Polymath Prep

by [Chad Underkoffler](#)

Art by [Chris Cooper](#)

Genre: Smart Kids/School Hijinks (Science Fiction)

Style: Somewhat realistic, somewhat cinematic/literary

Fidelity: Twiddle (see below)

Themes: Friendship

The Headmaster's Letter of Invitation to Prospective Students (Hook)

Greetings!

My name is Dr. Paul Timothy; I am the Headmaster of the Polymath Preparatory Institute for Exceptional Students. Simply, because of your academic achievements and intellectual talents, I write to you today to offer you a full scholarship to Polymath Prep, effective immediately. Congratulations!

Please see the included literature for more details on our campus, faculty, courses of study, and student life. If what you see interests you, please return the "Acceptance of Scholarship" form in the included mailer -- or use the online form at <http://www.polymathprep.edu> -- and one of our Administrative staff will contact you, to gather additional information and to answer any questions you may have about our school.

Sincerely,

Paul S. Timothy, PhD, Headmaster

School History (Campaign Setting and Background Information)

Polymath Prep was first established in over 50 years ago by Dr. Leonardo Wilmar, inventor of the Refract-7 electronic circuit, early pioneer of genetic research along with Crick and Watson, famed neurosurgeon, and respected attorney. The term *polymath* is from the Greek, and means "a person learned in many fields"; this word not only describes our founder, but also our overall mission in education: provide all the opportunities possible for budding students of extraordinary genius.

For three decades, the Polymath Prep campus has been located on a small island in the Gulf of Mexico, just off of the Texas coast. For the past five decades, "Poly-M" -- as

"How Did They Pick Me?"

Under special agreement with the US Department of Education, the Admin staff of Polymath Prep begins with the analysis of all standardized tests offered nationwide, beginning in the first grade. Every student showing achievement in the 95th or higher percentile is placed on the Watch List. For students on the Watch List, Poly-M continues to collect their standardized test scores and request further information (quarterly transcripts, IQ test results, progress reports, copies of the student's permanent record, etc.) from the prospective student's school.

Additionally, the staff will begin a "clips file,"

students and alumni fondly call it -- has been the most advanced institution of learning in the United States. A full range of fully-accredited secondary, collegiate, postgraduate, and doctoral coursework is available to students who wish to accept the challenge embodied in our school motto (taken from Aristotle's definition of happiness): "The exercise of vital powers along lines of excellence in a life affording them scope."

Students taking advantage of the full scholarship have their tuition, room, and board paid completely. In addition, they receive generous allowances for books, equipment, and travel between their hometown and Wilmar Island, plus a small stipend for sundry expenses. Additional money can be earned to supplement this stipend by enterprising students through our work-study programs, where they serve paid internships with some of the most brilliant scientists in the world, performing bleeding-edge research in a number of fields.

Sounds almost too good to be true, doesn't it? Where does the tremendous amount of money come from to support our school and students? Polymath Prep is totally funded through a combination of endowments from a number of foundations and donations from alumni. Many assign a percentage of their royalties -- on patents, copyrights, trademarks, product sales, and so forth -- to be paid directly to the institution. Since, as a group, Poly-M alumni hold more patents than any other organization, this is a substantial and stable source of financing. Students will never be asked to pay one red cent for the stellar education they receive at Polymath Prep.

School Prospectus (What Everybody Knows)

Mission Statement: As noted above, the mission of Polymath Prep is embodied in its motto: "The exercise of vital powers along lines of excellence in a life affording them scope."

- *"The exercise of vital powers"*: Students are encouraged to use their talents, skills, and knowledge on a daily basis, on coursework, individual research projects, and special events, both individually and in groups.
- *"Along lines of excellence"*: The faculty, facilities, programs, and mentoring offered at Polymath Prep are without peer, encouraging students to sharpen their abilities to the utmost.
- *"In a life affording them scope"*: Our curriculum has been designed to provide both *theoretical* and *practical* knowledge: Students will meet -- possibly for the first time -- their academic peers in an environment where opportunities to learn and grow abound . . . whether it's learning how to synthesize proteins in the lab or how to safely parachute out of a plane, developing infrared film or basic life skills, hunting out lost research in dusty theses or hunting the best bargain in investment portfolios, Poly-M is there to help extraordinary youths open their eyes to a wider world.

containing all publicly available newspapers, websites, or message-board posts that the student makes or has made about them. All of this information goes into the student's Rainbow File. On a rolling calendar, the Rainbow Files are audited by caseworkers for determination of whether to move the student's file to fast-track (Ultraviolet), retain on intensive watch (Orange), or demote to the slow-track watch list (Infrared). Upon completion of grade 6, all Ultraviolet prospects are immediately issued the standard scholarship letter, Orange prospects are sent the letter after a successful interview with a traveling caseworker, and Infrared prospects are "back-burnered" until the student achieves something that -- in the caseworker's opinion -- illustrates an extraordinary intellect.

The Interview

The traveling caseworker comes to the prospect's hometown and meets with the prospect and their parent(s) or guardian(s), to gather more detail on the student's brainpower and to answer any questions about Polymath Prep. All caseworkers are articulate, affable, insightful, intelligent, and (recent) alumni. They can arrange special medical or dietary needs, campus visits, travel and lodging arrangements . . . anything necessary to ease the acceptance of a scholarship by a prospect.



Campus & Facilities

Poly-M *proper* covers almost the entire northwest quarter of Wilmar Island, where the white marble of the Neo-classical buildings gleams amidst verdant lawns and lush subtropical forest. Much of campus life centers around Tate Commons, home to the Food Court, two dozen study/club rooms, the Archive Arcade (with pinball and videogames from every era), and the "acoustically perfect" Cassidy Auditorium. Most of the year, the verdant lawn of the Commons is packed with students sunning themselves, playing Frisbee, indulging in picnic lunches, or other leisure activities.

In addition to the "bleeding-edge" classrooms and labs on campus, Polymath Prep is the location of one of the finest research and teaching hospitals in the world (Saint Galen's); an interfaith chapel that has hosted talks from such luminaries as Bishop Desmond Tutu, the Dalai Lama, Billy Graham, and Imam Abdul Kazbaev (a former alumni); and one of the most extensive scientific and technical libraries on Earth (the Jefferson Library).

Rapid transit and deliveries across campus are provided by the Loop, an advanced monorail/subway system; there are stations in Tate Commons, all four dormitories, and a number of classroom buildings and labs.

Power for the entire island is provided by the school's Tokamak fusion reactor. This is supplemented by extensive solar- and aero-power installations on the eastern face of Mount Shiras. This mountain dominates the center and southeastern corner of the island; the surrounding forest has been set aside as natural parkland for the enjoyment and edification of students.

Just a short 15-minute Loop ride along the "Townie Spur" is Charles Village -- combining all the best elements of a small college town and a modern vacation resort (special rates for alumni and families or friends of current students). The Poly-M Rec Center, golf course, wharf, market, and airport are all based here. Charles Village takes up most of the northeast quarter of the island. Note that automobiles and motorcycles are permitted only within the city limits of the village, and these vehicles must be either fully-electric or hybrid. Most travel and deliveries between Charles

D-Square, D-Cube, D-Quad, D-Quint. . .

A longstanding tradition at Poly-M is to refer to faculty members by a verbal shorthand representing their number of earned doctorates (honorary doctorates do not count here). Thus, a "D-Square" is an individual possessing two doctoral degrees, a "D-Cube" has three, a "D-Quad" has four big sheepskins up on his wall, and so forth.

Village and Poly-M occurs via the monorail; except in extreme cases, the helipads located near the Administration building (also known affectionately as "Old Main") and atop Saint Galen's see little use.

Faculty

The Polymath Prep faculty is composed of world-renowned scientists and scholars, all possessing doctorates in multiple fields. From sociology to Sinology, from physics to philology, from mathematics to microbiology, from linguistics to logic, students learn from those who are at the top of their respective fields. Small class sizes mean that every student gets personal attention from his instructors.

Student Life

Coursework: First and foremost, incoming students are tested extensively to determine their proficiency in a basic secondary curriculum. They may then test out of courses that they show competency in: at Polymath Prep, we're not interested in boring students by telling them what they already know, but *exciting* them by offering something new.

Each semester, a unique slate of courses is offered at Poly-M, taught by the finest instructors in the world. Registration and scheduling takes place the week before the start of classes. Every student must take a minimum of one lunch period, one independent research/study hall period, one gym period, and three courses from different members of the faculty each semester. (Additional courses may be taken with the agreement of the student, the student's guidance officer/caseworker, and the relevant faculty member.)

Dorms: Polymath Prep's four dormitories -- Truth, Beauty, Charm, and Strange -- have been constructed with the remarkable student in mind. Most dorm rooms are double- or triple-occupancy, but some have up to six students in a suite; there are a very limited number of singles available. *Every* room contains a Refract-7 supercomputer (the same machines used as corporate mainframes by over 42% of the Fortune 500) with two terminals for students' personal use. All are connected by T3 lines to the Internet and the campus mainframe, which is an experimental COGNI hyper-computer developed by our own Comp Sci Department. Additionally, each dorm is co-ed by floor and possesses all the comforts of home -- television lounges, reading libraries, laundry facilities, commissaries -- as well as machine shops and limited chemical and biological laboratories. (Please note that students are not permitted to live off campus in Charles Village until their fifth year of study at Poly-M.)

Clubs: New Polymath Prep students have a lot of options

Robo-Arena

Take *Battle Bots*, add some elements of *Pokemon*, *the Matrix*, and the Boy Scouts of America's Pinewood Derbies, then crank up the Roman gladiator aesthetic -- and you get Poly-M's homegrown obsession: Robo-Arena.

Basically, each dorm supports a chapter of the Gadgeteers' Association. Members of a chapter break into two or more teams to design and construct robots, which will fight other students' robots. There are some broad outlines for robot creation, and generally involve a combination of required (or disallowed) components and materials -- for example, laser pointers and reactive photocells are to be used in place of dangerous weapons. Robots are generally given garish paint-jobs and flashy names (like "The Strange Strangler" or "The Beauty Basher" or "Number 9").

There are three established classes of robot design: Hand, Immersive, and Battlesuit. Hand robots are generally no larger than a shop-vac, and are controlled by a handheld radio remote. Immersive robots can be no larger than a riding lawnmower, and are usually tele-operated by radio by a "driver" in an arena-side simulation unit. Battlesuit robots are enclosed exoskeletons, about the size of compact cars, and are piloted from within. (Given the difficulty of design, the substantial amount of construction, and additional safety requirements necessitated by the Battlesuit class, it's rare to see more than three functioning Battlesuit-class robots per school year, despite the "mothballing" of previous years' efforts.)

In the last two years, a movement has begun to gain favor among the Gadgeteers' Association chapters to include a fourth class of design: that of the Autonomous robot. Built with the best (limited) AI

to pick from when it comes to student clubs and organizations! There are number of musical groups, ranging from Chamber Choir to "the Jazz Fusion"; they share studio space in Strange Dorm with the Thespian Society (whose musical production last year of student Forsythe Jones' epic *Lewis Carroll's Jabberwocky* was a tour-de-force). The Roleplaying and Wargaming Guild has a large collection of games and a spacious, well-lit playing area in the basement of Beauty Dorm. Poly-Fan-doM (the school's speculative fiction society) possesses an incredible collection of rare SF literature, movies, and other media; alas, access to the well-appointed library in Charm Dorm is limited to members in good standing. Student filmmakers should consider joining the Cinematrix Club: their attic meeting space in Truth Dorm has state-of-the-art AVID editing bays, digital and analog cameras for rental (with a valid student ID), and a professional-quality darkroom (for film purists).

Of special note is the campus-wide Gadgeteers' Association, with chapters composed of interested students in each dorm. Each semester, these chapters participate in the Intramural Robo-Arena Tournament (see boxed text), where their mechanical gladiators fight it out for glory and the celebrated Golden Gear.

Many other groups -- like the Entomology Club, the Goldfish Fanciers, the Coin & Stamp Collectors, the student-run cable and radio station (WPOL), and the student-run daily newspaper and website (*the Daily Parrot*) -- meet in the clubrooms of Tate Common; while more physically-oriented clubs (like the Poly-M Bikers, the Croqueteers, the Juggling Club, and the Lazer Tag Commandos) are based out of the Rec Center in Charles Village. Stop by the first week of each semester to see what's available and grab a calendar of meetings.

NOTE: The Individual Flight Society no longer meets in or around Tate Commons after the tragic accident that caused the death last semester of sophomore Wil Koolvord. Faculty-supervised IFS meetings now are based out of the Rec Center in Charles Village. Any student caught flying around campus in a powered or unpowered vehicle or contrivance -- including but not limited to jet packs, rocket packs, heli-packs, personal dirigibles, solo-zeps, etc. -- will face a Class C disciplinary action (please see your *Student Handbook*, Chapter 4, Clauses 2.2.1 through 2.7.2.8 for more details). This is for your own safety, as well as the safety of your classmates..

Academic Competitions: Poly-M fields several teams each year, chosen by campus-wide tournament, to participate in academic competitions like the Sci-Tech Olympiad and the College Bowl. The Chess Team and the Forensics Colloquy are also always on the lookout for new, qualified members.

Sports: Depending upon the interest level, size of the resulting team, and relative ages of participants, Polymath Prep has been able to compete in more traditional sports venues with other schools, albeit on a more sporadic basis than in academic competitions. In the past decade, we have had students involved in a number of sports: Archery, Golf, Ping Pong, Rifle, Tennis, Ultimate Frisbee, and Volleyball. Remember -- a sound mind in a sound body! (If interested in a physical sport, try your hand at assembling a team: visit the Clubs Desk in Tate Commons for more helpful information.)

students can manage, the intent is to let the robots duke it out on their own, with no more interference or control than that of occasional shouted commands from the sidelines (like boxing trainers or football coaches).

At the end of each semester, about a week before finals, is the Intramural Robo-Arena Tournament. This competition is administered by a trio of faculty members selected by lot. The dorm that accumulates enough points in the tournament wins the Golden Gear, preferential treatment at the post-finals Carnival of Science, and the deserved envy of their classmates.

NOTE: Robots should not be employed outside the auspices of a Gadgeteers' Association training or competition or other educational context. This means that using robots for dueling (with live weaponry or laser-tag systems), assault, vandalism, or any other illicit activities are subject to disciplinary action -- please see your *Student Handbook*, Chapter 4, Clauses 2.2.1 through 2.7.2.8 for more details.

(See also below, *Quick and Dirty Robo-Arena Rules.*)

Permanent Record (What Everybody Doesn't Know)

(Secret) Mission Statement: Why would someone go to all the trouble and expense of setting up a facility for geeks? Just to help them be nerdier? Here are some options for what the *real* reason(s) for the establishment of Polymath Prep could be:

1. *Socialization:* Highly-intelligent people - especially adolescent ones -- are often poorly socialized in today's world. Many grow up with a mix of strong feelings like isolation, depression, arrogance, elitism, and awkwardness. The lashes of the words "geek" and "nerd" cut deep on youthful skin, and who knows the negative effect those emotional wounds might have on a genius' future endeavors? Poly-M has been designed as a safe haven and community where the geeks can run free, without the stultifying and injurious jibes of the less-gifted, and develop into socially well-rounded individuals.
2. *DARPA's Watching:* All the "black projects" of the US Government aren't about stealth bombers, orbital missile platforms, or death rays. Horrified by the Big Science being pursued by the Nazis in WWII, the OSS-cum-CIA created Polymath Prep to collect the intelligent crème-de-la-crème of American youth so that we could get there -- "there" meaning advanced technologies and sciences -- first.
3. *Alien Technology Analysis:* The Roswell alien saucer makes our most advanced vehicular technologies -- like the Space Shuttle and the stealth fighter -- look like wheelbarrows pushed by chimps. Poly-M was founded for the sole purpose of learning how to "build the tools to build the tools" to puzzle out the mysteries of the alien craft. But who's behind the effort? The CIA? NASA? The Air Force? The aerospace industry? McDonalds?
4. *Suborn the Future:* After Captain Freedom tracked Dr. Demolisher's mentally sub-par henchmen back to the Lair and knocked the stuffing out of him back in 1936, the Bad Doctor finally called it quits on hiring moronic thugs and giggling imbeciles. What was needed were more intelligent assistants -- call them "apprentice evil masterminds." But how to assemble and properly train them? Why not start a school, nay, a university where they would *not* be called mad?
5. *All of the above.*



The Steam Tunnels

Every building on the Polymath Prep campus (and some of the geological formations, too) possess at least one hidden lab, secret passage, concealed room, weird device, or mysterious architectural feature; additionally, there is a network of underground burrows connecting many of the buildings with the steam and subway tunnels, other buildings, and still more hidden labs, secret passages, concealed rooms, and weird devices. Some may have been sealed for decades.

Students with a penchant for exploration should beware the "moles and trolls" dwelling in these areas. They might be escaped lab experiments, renegade robots, mutated vermin, or fellow students who have freaked-out (see below, *School Calendar*). Use caution!

Behind the Door of the Faculty Lounge

Things for GMs to keep in mind regarding the overall motivations of the Faculty (while some aspects are dealt with in the *Faculty Directory* below, others are left wide-open for customization):

- *Why Are They at Poly-M?:* Undoubtedly, geniuses like these NPCs could be doing important and/or lucrative research somewhere else, right? What are their secret reasons in accepting a teaching position? It might be simply for access to Polymath Prep's facilities, they might be on the run from an enemy, or have a genuine desire to educate the next generation.
- *How Do They Interact with Each Other?:* New students often have no idea of the relationships between Faculty members at first. Discovering those private enmities and amities can be interesting in and of themselves, and may also pay off in "alliances" for the canny pupil (especially if they serve as spies or agents in hidden conflicts between teachers).
- *How Does Their Course for the Semester Support Their Own Research?:* Since Faculty members set their courses based on their fields of academic interest, it only stands to reason that they'll use said course to help themselves out. What happens if a student makes the breakthrough that the instructor was hoping to make himself?
- *What Clubs/Teams/Dorms/Events Do They Serve as Faculty Advisor for?:* Not only does acting as adult oversight on an organization increase the numbers of student-teacher interactions, it also casts light on the personality of the Faculty member. Importantly, how do they comport themselves in this outside-the-classroom role? Does the normally boring Professor Y become a house on fire when counseling her Forensics squad? Does cool Doc T become restless and distracted while coaching the swim team? Either says something about the teacher . . . it's up to the GM to decide just what that is.

Teenage Wasteland

Poly-M was founded to help eliminate the negative effects of social ostracism, isolation, cliques, and bullying suffered by the intellectually elite. Unfortunately, humans being what they are, given the freedom to make their own new society, they've probably patterned it on the old one. Perhaps the details have changed (see *Playing Kids* below and the *Adolescent Alphas & Omegas* textbox), but the school experience stays the same.

Faculty Directory (NPC Backgrounds)

NOTE: Doctorates held by the Faculty member are listed in [\[square brackets\]](#); assume they have Master rank in that field.

D-Square Paul Timothy aka the Headmaster: [\[Chemistry, Biology\]](#) "Follow the rules!" is his catchphrase. Headmaster Timothy is outwardly stern and hidebound, but conceals -- fairly well -- a heart of gold. But he's not a soft touch, gets peeved over violations of the *Student Handbook*, and would never publicly show preference for one student over another. He's a Good Teacher, but has a Poor habit of being too busy to properly aid students outside of the classroom. His administrative duties preclude him from serving as advisor to any clubs or teams.

D-Quint Nancy J. Cochran-Taylor aka Dr. ADHD: [\[Engineering \(electrical, chemical, mechanical, aerospace\), Materials Science\]](#) Dr. ADHD speaks quickly, all her words gushing out like a tidal wave. This hyperactivity probably accounts for both her inability to sleep and her five doctorates. Friendly, (almost too much so) she's an Average Teacher (Good quality marred by Poor ability to communicate), but Expert at being there for students outside

Adolescent Alphas & Omegas

Popularity: the grail of the high school experience.

Popularity at Poly-M builds on different axioms than that at a typical American high school. Here are the factors that operate most strongly at Polymath Prep, from most "cool" to least "cool."

1. *Cleverness:* Whether it's analyzing a tricky chemical compound or figuring out a way to covertly record video of

of class, day or night. She often teaches a Phys. Ed. course in addition to her areas of interest. She's long-time friends with Doc T, and new but fast friends with Professor Y and Doc Spazz.

D-Cube Raven Jones aka Dr. Dreamy: [\[History, Archeology, Anthropology\]](#)

Dr. Dreamy is the beautiful daughter of two adventurer-archeologists who specialized in religious artifacts. Inspired by their example, she often takes her favored students on dangerous "field trips" and Semester Break excursions. An Expert Adventurer, Good Teacher, and (sadly) only an Average linguist, she is quite Poor at recognizing how her appearance affects others (most students despise and desire her simultaneously, and she is totally unaware that other Faculty members are smitten with her). She's good friends with Professor Y, but is a bit intimidated by Dr. ADHD.

D-Cube Topher Knight aka Doc T: [\[Physics, Optics, Astronomy\]](#) He's the coolest teacher on campus. Handsome, witty, and a bit nuts, Doc T is out to make learning fun for Poly-M students (his wackiness and sardonic humor counterbalance his appearance and athleticism in the students' eyes . . . mostly). Currently in deep lust with Dr. Dreamy, he constantly tries to think of ways to impress her. He's an Expert Teacher and Life of the Party, and Poor at Resisting a Challenge. He's not fond of Evil Professor Badger, is long-time friends with Dr. ADHD, and seems to owe the Headmaster a mysterious favor. He often teaches a Phys. Ed. course -- usually Surfing, Skiing, or Skating -- in addition to his areas of interest.

D-Square Scott Myer aka Evil Professor Badger: [\[Psychology, Sociology\]](#) Professor Badger only took a post at Poly-M to avoid prosecution for some gigantic "mind-control" pyramid scheme. To his dismay, he's stuck teaching the Civics classes in addition to his Psych course (he suspects it's some subtle dig of the Headmaster's). He's an Expert Psychologist, which helps cloak his failing of being a Poor Teacher: he makes his students feel like it's all *their* fault when it's really his. He's always scheming to get Dr. Dreamy into his bed and to make Doc T look like a fool. His friendship with Doc Spazz runs hot and cold.

D-Square Garry Wallace aka Doc Spazz: [\[Computer Science, Liberal Arts\]](#) Doc Spazz is a grown-up geek in the Bill Gates mode. Given to wild theories and teaching techniques that have little relation to any form of recognized pedagogy or psychology, he's the favored butt of jokes around campus. Still, he's been right where the students were like no other Faculty member, and thus serves as the Dean of Students. He is a Master at helping students with life issues, but only an Average Teacher. He's got a crush on Dr. Dreamy, yet rarely enters the ongoing competition for her affections -- but when he does, it's generally pretty overboard. He respects but does not like Doc T, and considers Evil Professor Badger a staunch friend (dummy!).

D-Square Charlotte Wye aka Professor Y: [\[Math, Philosophy\]](#) Professor Y is *dull*. Very, very dull. But she knows her stuff: students in her course come out with a complete knowledge of the subject, no matter how much plodding around in circles she has to do to get them there. She's a Good Teacher and surprisingly (Expert) Observant, but has the Personality of cold oatmeal (Poor). She's good friends with both of the female Faculty members, who often try to convince her to get a make-over, which she always refuses.

the girls' locker room showers, ingenious problem-solving is very much respected.

Academic achievement (being first in the student rankings or scoring well on a hard test) counts here.

2. *Memory:* Elephants would do well at Poly-M: rattling off the complete Periodic Chart or the names of every *Star Wars* action figure ever manufactured is a great way to make those geek-hotties swoon.
3. *Audacity:* Fortune favors the brave. The bolder a student's action, the bigger the return (for good or ill). Thus, while an attempt to hijack the dorm feed from WPOL for a pirate broadcast is undeniably audacious, it could turn out quite bad for the offender if he tried it during a *Monty Python* marathon or quite well if it's *Real World* one. Most sport or other non-academic competition achievement counts in this category.
4. *Sociability, Athleticism, & Beauty:* With most Poly-M students being young, quite socially-inept, and still smarting from the outrages of mundane public school, any public displays of friendliness, physical-fitness, and typically "attractive" features are big negatives in the popularity game. Cute students may find themselves shunned simply because they take reasonable pains to look kempt.

Big Students on Campus (NPC Backgrounds)

Andrew Ercan aka Jocko: Jocko is a new student and the Faculty darling. You see, he's the All-American Boy Genius -- handsome, friendly, smart, and athletic. Thus, all the other students hate him: he's probably the most unpopular (and lonely) student on campus. He's really interested in getting a Fencing Team together, and just wants to make friends. He's an Expert Athlete, Good at Math and Science, Average at Liberal Arts and Engineering, and has Poor Popularity.

And remember: popularity requires an audience -- public displays of these factors are the only ways to raise or lower one's stock in the *vox populi*.

Victoria Mason aka Rhymes (With Witch): Rhymes is pretty, in that "alterna-grrl/hipster" way. But she's a total you-know: she takes nothing from nobody (especially if it's deserved). But that's just towards her fellow students; towards teachers, Rhymes is a total suck-up. She's Expert at Liberal Arts; Good at Biology, Chemistry, and Popularity; but Poor at Math. She's President of the Thespian Society.

Liz Grant aka Lou: Liz "Lou" Grant is a nebbly-nose. She claims that it's because she wants to become the first bleeding-edge Flash-Web reporter, but really, she just likes finding out the dirt. Luckily, she's got a good attitude and a sense of decency -- not a yellow-journalist or scandal-monger. She's an Expert in Journalism, Electronics, and Computer Sciences; Good at Being Sneaky, Philosophy, and Popularity; and Poor at Resisting Mysteries. Lou is the star journalist and webmistress of *the Daily Parrot* (and secretly the Headmaster's leading snitch!).

Jackson Mickle aka Mick: He's the insanely arrogant uber-geek who's tops both in the classroom and on the academic competition floor. Mick has no qualms about using his superior intelligence to humble, beat, or break his rivals . . . and for this he is lionized. Rude, cruel, snide, underhanded, vindictive, pedantic, bullying, whiny, smelly, lacking in common decency and kindness; you name it. He's Rank Number 1 in the class standings, and thus the most popular student, the Big Man On Campus. Mick rules the school. He's a Master of Popularity; Expert in Math, Engineering, Computers, and Chemistry; and Good in Biology, Science, and Liberal Arts. His failing is that he's a Poor Excuse for a Human Being.

Forsythe Smith aka AFM ("Alien From Mars"): Even by the standards of Poly-M, AFM is one weird cat. He never eats, sleeps by hanging from the ceiling like a bat, enters labs by a different way each time, wears historical costumes to class reverse-chronologically (that is, he starts the semester in modern clothes and ends it in caveman furs), and while he knows remarkably trivial and persnickety facts, seems to suffer from major lacunae in basic early 21st Century knowledge. Despite -- or because of -- all this, he's an Expert in Liberal Arts, History, and Popularity; Good at Math and Physics; and Poor at Doing Anything In A Remotely Normal Manner. He often writes plays for the Thespian Club and columns for the *Daily Parrot*.

Student Haunts (Notable Locations)

The Mutant Cherry: This 24/7 diner in Charles Village is known for good burgers, milkshakes, and coffee, and is a gathering place for Poly-M students. It's the place to see and be seen off campus.

The Diamond: Located in the forest at the foot of Mount Shiras, this rhomboidal clearing is the site for *affaires d'honneur*, be they fought with robot, foil, or fist. Ignoring an invitation to "see the Diamond" is asking for social death. (Unknown to most students, the Faculty monitors the Diamond . . . but things being as they are, sometimes forget to if they're caught up in tricky research. Also, since most teachers are also alumni, they understand its role in student life.)

School Calendar (Events & Possible Story Arcs)

As a school semester is in-and-of-itself an arc, a short list of important days for students (all rife with adventure and roleplaying potential) is included:

Move Into the Dorms & Meet Roommate(s).

- Course Selection & Registration.
- Athletic & Academic Competitions (Robo-Arena trials, the Madame Curie Look-alike Contest, College Bowl, Swim Meets).
- The Daily Grind (classwork, labwork, homework, cram-sessions).
- Prank Wars and Dueling (just to liven up the monotony).
- The Big Dance (Who's asking who, or are we all going stag, together?)
- Midterms (This will be one-third of your grade . . .)
- Semester Break (Woo hoo!)
- Intramural Robo-Arena Tournament (There can be only one!)
- Finals Week and Freak-outs (Some kids just snap under the pressure . . . unfortunately, some of those students have the technology to crack tectonic plates!)
- Carnival of Science (aka Combining the party from *Weird Science*, the carnival from *Grease*, the luau from *Grease 2*, the Quidditch Cup celebration from *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, and as many high explosives as possible.)

Letter to Parents (Advice, Opportunities, & Pitfalls)

NOTE: Polymath Prep conflates high school and college elements willy-nilly, to give that full School Hijinks genre flavor.

Playing Kids

There's no real trick to playing adolescents: players and GMs should just try to remember what it was like (or is like, for some gamers still trapped in PS Hell). Fuzzy memories, time to ponder, a good imagination, and (more) mature sensibilities, all mixed with a pop culture patina, should allow every gamer to pull off better stunts in a Polymath Prep campaign that they ever could back in the day.

Some points to remember, though. Generically, most geeky teens have almost zero social graces, and staggering amounts of hormones course through their bodies. They tend to lack extensive life experience and often have weird obsessions. Characters should, most importantly, *feel* everything intensely: so much so that their normally clear reason is overwhelmed by schoolyard angst and melodrama.

Take a page from the *Batman* TV show from the 1960s: choosing whether to go on a panty raid or cram for the midterm will be funnier (and more entertaining to play) if approached with all the seriousness and gravity of deciding to drop an atomic bomb.

Fidelity: Twiddle

The Fidelity level of a Polymath Prep campaign -- that is, how close it hews to the real world -- really depends on how fast-and-loose the GM wants the PCs and NPCs to be able to play with "believability." However, the genre of School Hijinks comes in wildly varying modes . . . often within the confines of the same source.

Associated Institutes of Learning (Spins)

There are several schools that compete with Poly-M in Academic or Sports competitions or otherwise cooperate in exchange programs. (Indeed, many illustrate what Poly-M could be like in other times or other places . . .)

Here's a short list:

- Sunnydale High (Horror, [Buffy the Vampire Slayer](#))
- Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry (Fantasy, [Harry Potter](#))
- Excelsior Public School and Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters (Supers, [PS 238](#) and [The X-Men](#))
- The Staracademy (Science Fiction, [Space Cases](#))
- Illuminati University (High Weirdness, [GURPS IOU](#))
- Transylvania Polygnostic University (Steampunk SF, [Girl Genius](#))

A good example here is one of the touchstones of the science fiction end of the genre: [Real Genius](#). There are moments of somewhat realistic scientific extrapolation (building a better laser), alternating with cinematic science fiction (creating fake credentials to get onto a military base) and pure skiffy looniness (for example, the instant ice-rink and giga-size Jiffy Pop). However, Twiddle doesn't have to purely relate to science fiction tropes -- take a look at the non-science stuff that Saint Matthew of Broderick and Saint John of Cusack pull off in their respective bodies of work.

The Fidelity knob, then, in this subgenre often "twiddles" during play, roaming up and down the scale of "it could happen that way." Here are some benchmarks, using the average Twiddle level of the resource. Check 'em out!

- *Somewhat Realistic* (High Fidelity): Bertrand R. Brinley's [The Mad Scientists' Club](#), [Revenge of the Nerds](#), and [Fame](#).
- *Cinematic* (Medium Fidelity): [Ferris Bueller's Day Off](#), [Real Genius](#), and [WarGames](#).
- *Over the Top* (Low Fidelity): [My Science Project](#), [Weird Science](#), and [Back to the Future](#).

Thesis Topics [Theme(s)]

Friendship: The conflict between friendship and another impulse -- usually popularity, competitiveness, or romance -- is a popular one in School Hijinks. Will a character sacrifice their friendships (or their friends!) to gain something else? Will they stand up for a buddy if that buddy accidentally destroys a Loop station? After a night of bingeing, will they hold each others' hair when bending over the Porcelain God? Will they pursue a relationship with their best friend's Object of Desire?

Quick and Dirty Robo-Arena Bug Rules

GMs should feel free to use their chosen game system to replicate robot construction; extensive details on building robots (or using them against non-robot targets) lies outside the scope of this CiaB. However, for a quick and dirty rules-light system for building and fighting exclusively with other similar robots, the following system can be used:



- All robots possess four Functions: Sturdiness (strength and toughness), Speed (nimbleness and quickness), Weaponry (number and/or power of armament), and Special (whatever wacky thing the builder comes up with).
- Distribute seven dice (1d6s) between the four Functions to reflect the varied strengths and weaknesses of the robot. Every Function *should* have at least one die assigned to it; if not, then the robot does not possess that Function. The builder of the robot should provide a short description or handle for each Function (like Solid Steel, Tractor Treads, Laser Array, or Secret Balloon).
- The robot's class -- Hand, Immersive, or Battlesuit -- probably won't matter in official competition, since only robots of the same class compete against one another. However, in chapter practice or illegal duels where different classes are used, temporary extra Function dice can be added to the "bigger" robot, with 1 die per level difference, to be

assigned wherever desired. That is, an Immersive robot fighting a Hand robot would have an extra Function die to assign for the purposes of that combat, while a Battlesuit would have an extra Function die against an Immersive robot, or two extra Function dice against a Hand robot.

- When fighting another robot, players will each declare their robot's action for the turn. Declarations may be written secretly and revealed together, or players can alternate in declaring aloud.
- Actions are resolved simultaneously. Each player will roll their dice for the Function closest to what their chosen declared action is for the turn, add up the numbers (if there's more than one die), and compare their total to their opponent's total. *Note:* If the GM agrees that it suits the declared actions, the dice from more than one Function may be added together.
- The highest total wins; the loser must then discard one of their dice, from any Function, and describe the damage. In case of a tie, *both* robots lose a die.
- The battle continues until one or both robots are out of dice.

Example Robot 1: "Prince CHARM-ing" has Sturdiness 2d6 (Reinforced Frame); Speed 2d6 (Walking Legs); Weaponry 2d6 (Dual Laser Arrays); and Special (Super-spring Jump) 1d6.

Example Robot 2: "Beauty's Beast" has Sturdiness 3d6 (Armored); Speed 1d6 (Six Stumpy Legs); Weaponry 3d6 (Bigass Claws); and Special 0d6.

Example Robot Combat, by Turns

1. The Prince decides to keep its distance from the Beast -- all-out dodging by boinging around the arena on its Springs (Speed + Special; player rolls 3d6 since the GM agrees the Functions can be combined, otherwise it'd roll 1d6 for Special alone or 2d6 for Speed alone). The Beast attacks with its Claws (Weaponry; 3d6). The Prince's total is 7; the Beast's is 10. The Beast connects with the hapless Prince in the split-second between jumps. One of the Prince's Laser Arrays is now so much scrap (loss of one die; the player chooses to take it from Weaponry).
2. The Beast attacks again with Claws (Weaponry; 3d6), since it worked last time. The damaged Prince goes all out -- his player asks the GM if it can combine all its Functions -- Sturdiness, Speed, Weaponry, and Special -- if the Prince leaps up to plummet down on the Beast. The GM ponders, and offers that such an action would probably not include Weaponry, since it's more a brute-force physics question (Sturdiness + Speed + Special; 4d6). The Beast's total is 9; the Prince's is 12. This risky surprise move damages the Beast, knocking loose some armor plating (loss of one die; the player chooses to take it from Sturdiness).
3. The Prince repeats its jumping attack (Sturdiness + Speed + Special; 4d6); while the Beast gets tricky -- it will wait below for the plummeting Prince, then dodge out of the way while attacking. The GM agrees that this is Speed + Weaponry (4d6). Both robots' rolls total 16, strewing the combat floor with junk (they each lose a die; the Prince reduces Sturdiness to 1d6, while the Beast reduces Weaponry to 2d6).
4. The Beast decides to grab hold of its opponent, draw it in with its mighty servomotors, and claw rake it (Sturdiness + Weaponry; 4d6). The Prince returns to the bouncy dodge (Speed + Special; 2d6). The Beast's 14 beats the Prince's 12. Taking a mighty wound to the transmission, the Prince begins to move slower (loss of a die; the Prince drops Speed to 1d6).
5. And so forth . . .

This construction and combat system requires the players to be creative in their use of Functions and selection of actions, GMs to be fair and unbiased (even if running a fight with an NPC robot), and high-trust from all folks involved.

(OPTIONAL DAMAGE MECHANIC: To better reflect really good rolls in combat, an alternate damage mechanic can be used, where the lower roll total is subtracted from the higher roll total to give a *margin*. For every six points of margin (rounding up), the loser must take away a Function die. Thus, a margin of 1 to 6 is one die, 7 to 12 is two dice, 13 to 18 is three dice, etc. This optional mechanic may help speed robot combat.)

Summer Reading List (Other Resources)

Books and Comics

- *Archie and Jughead* [comics](#)
- [Been Down So Long It Looks Like Up to Me](#), by Richard Farina
- [Children of the Atom](#), by Wilmar Shiras
- [Ender's Game](#), by Orson Scott Card
- [The Fool on the Hill](#), by Matt Ruff

Movies

- [Animal House](#)
- [Carrie](#)
- [Fast Times at Ridgemont High](#)
- [Grease](#)
- [Heathers](#)
- [Little Man Tate](#)
- [Pretty Smart](#)
- [Sixteen Candles](#)
- [The Breakfast Club](#)

Television

- [Head of the Class](#)
- [The Kid with the 200 IQ](#)
- [Revolutionary Girl Utena](#)
- [Welcome Back, Kotter](#)

Misc

- "Fun with fusion: Freshman's nuclear fusion reactor has USU physics faculty in awe" -- <http://deseretnews.com/dn/view/0,1249,510054502,00.html>

Shell Games

Revised Rules for Digital Intelligences in *Transhuman Space*

by Phil Masters

One of the most interesting features of the *Transhuman Space* setting is the presence of digital intelligences as characters -- and hence the possibility of having sapient computer programs in play as PCs or major NPCs. Unfortunately, some of the rules presented in the line's core book to handle this act to make things harder than they should be. This article offers some optional fixes for these problems.

The first issue involves the rules for taking AIs as "programmed allies" -- characters closely associated with a PC, who happen to be faithful to him because they're software and have been programmed that way. Unfortunately, the rules contrive to suggest that 2100 vintage computers are implausibly unreliable.

Consider; the highest level of availability for an Ally, programmed or otherwise, is on a 3d roll of 15-. A quick calculation shows that this gives a chance that the Ally will be present during any given session of marginally better than 95%. Or, to put it another way, there's a roughly 5% chance that one's most faithful computer sidekick will be out of action at any time.

The book justifies this by suggesting that even an implant or wearable computer may be "tied up dealing with invading viruses, downloading something, doing the PCs' taxes, or whatever." But look at this from a contemporary point of view; in 2003, computers do crash or hang, or suffer virus attacks, to be sure. But they can usually be rebooted or cleared within a few minutes, while routine jobs such as tax calculations can be saved for attention at a later time. If most people's personal computers were unavailable to let them access the Internet, write letters, or play games nearly 5% of the time, they'd want the darned things either fixed or replaced.

The second problem concerns the possibility that a digital intelligence PC could operate more than one body. Even with laws against intelligent software duplicating ("xoxing") itself, it can always transfer between systems, using, say, one static cybershell with a fast Web connection as its "home," a mobile work unit for adventuring, and a humanoid "cyberdoll" for social interactions. Unfortunately, the rule designed to support this -- the Vessel advantage -- makes it prohibitively expensive on points; merely having access to emergency space on a mainframe somewhere costs 21 points, and that cyberdoll would cost 200. This is not a very good deal in **GURPS** terms, considering the practical limitations involved in transferring and the benefits granted.

The Solution

Fortunately, these problems can both be resolved by a pair of simple rules adjustments. First, introduce a new category of availability for Allies and Ally Groups; "Infallibly Present," with a $\times 4$ cost multiplier. This might be limited to *Transhuman Space*- style Programmed Allies; organic sidekicks have more complicated lives and concerns of their own, and do sometimes have to chase off on personal business, or go down with illnesses. On the other hand, the utterly faithful associate is a recognized feature of many kinds of story, so GMs who want to borrow this for other games are welcome to do so.

And second, scrap the Vessel advantage. Replace it with a simple rule; digital intelligences can freely transfer themselves to any cybershell to which they have full access codes -- which will certainly include all of their programmed allies. The only limits are processor capacity and storage, which GMs should monitor. Note that, logically, it's perfectly possible for digital minds to use this trick already -- making Vessel a bit of a white elephant -- although most people would probably accept that it is abusive to do so regularly so long as Vessel is theoretically the standard rules mechanism for the purpose.

In general, digital intelligences who want to maintain a "stable" of reserve bodies will install cheap non-sapient AIs (usually NAI-4 programs) on them to handle routine diagnostics and housekeeping functions. These changes bring the cost of "vessels" down to something more reasonable. A cyberdoll with a simple NAI-4 installed, with 5 points in skills to enable it to look after itself in routine situations, costs 40 points as an Infallibly Present Programmed Ally. A mainframe with similar software costs just 8 points.

As an optional refinement, to prevent one minor possible abuse, a character who wants a Programmed Ally cybershell to have a more powerful computer or more storage capacity than its usual resident AI actually needs (as may well be necessary if it is to be used as a "vessel") should pay the cash cost difference between the minimum (appropriate) computer that can be installed on this type of cybershell and the system actually installed. For example, a cyberdoll running a NAI-4 doesn't need more than a complexity 5 cheap small computer (the minimum processor standard for cyberdolls). If its owner chooses to fit it with, say, a complexity 7 compact microframe, the difference in cash cost to pay is (\$20,000 minus \$100) \$19,900.

There is just one drawback with all this; a player might select a cheap cybershell as his character's "primary body," and then take more powerful shells as Programmed Allies to use as "vessels." However, this is actually possible at present -- merely obscured by the presence of the Vessel advantage. To prevent this abuse, any AI character who wishes to have use of multiple cybershells *must* treat the one with the highest points value to which it could transfer as its "primary body." If players wish to have Programmed Allies more powerful than that, they must find excuses why their characters can't download to them -- such as, say, fundamental hardware/software incompatibilities.

Example: HEUROS-EPSILON is a digital intelligence PC -- a Citizen SAI-7 who is normally resident on a microframe in secure rented storage in Strasbourg, working as a consultant engineer. She (her self-image and preferred digital avatars are female) also owns a Volkspider to perform occasional hands-on tasks, and a cyberdoll to wear to parties and to deal with some less psychologically flexible potential clients. She controls a LAI-7 secretary/assistant, and a simple NAI-4 to manage any unused hardware that needs to be looked after.

Because the cyberdoll is the most expensive of these cybershells (170 vs. -44 or 71 points), the player must treat that as HEUROS's body when statting up the character. For convenience, the LAI-7 is defined to run on the microframe; it has 15 points in skills, giving it a character value of 21 points, and a cost as an Infallibly Present Programmed Ally of 8 points. The NAI-4 is defined to look after the Volkspider by default; it has 7 points of skills, making it a 53-point character when in that cybershell, so its cost as an Infallibly Present Programmed Ally is 16 points. In addition, HEUROS must pay \$39,900 to have a complexity 7 computer on a Volkspider which would otherwise only need a cheap system.

Note also that, under the present rules, HEUROS could pay 106 points for the Volkspider and microframe as Vessels, and lose the LAI and NAI -- or take them as Programmed Allies, leading to the question of whether or not HEUROS herself could download into the other shells.

Pyramid Review

Two Fisted Tales Roleplaying Game

Published by [Spectre Press](#)

Written by Matt Stevens

Cover by Christopher Shy

Illustrated by Jeremy McHugh and Matt Drake

124-page b&w softcover; \$16.00

For those wanting to play games set within the pulp genre of the 1920s and 1930s, there are only a relatively small number of choices to be found on the shelves of the local games emporium, and some -- such as Deep7's [Dime Heroes 1PG](#) and its *Jungle Heroes* supplement -- don't even exist there. Perhaps the cream of the crop is the Origins Award-winning [Adventure!](#) from White Wolf Studios and which, like DP9's [Gear Krieg RPG](#), is tied into a particular setting, while supplements such as *GURPS Cliffhangers* provides a more general overview of the genre. The choice is very limited for the **d20 System** with the articles in recent issues of *Dungeon/Polyhedron*, including "Pulp Heroes" in #90, the planetary romance "Iron Lords of Jupiter" in #101, and "Pulp Heroes" revised for **d20 Modern** with additional material for "Iron Lords of Jupiter" in #102, all far outshining the woeful [Forbidden Kingdoms: Master Codex](#) published by OtherWorld Creations. The latest entry to the field also sets out to provide an overview of the genre.

Published by Spectre Press, the *Two Fisted Tales Roleplaying Game* attempts to cover all aspects of the pulp genre, although in some cases it just touches upon certain elements rather than going into any depth. Primary among those is the pulp sci-fi typified by the thrilling adventures of Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon, and though there is nothing to prevent GMs from running that type of game using *Two Fisted Tales*, they will have to develop the game themselves or look elsewhere for further details. The game is also available as a 10.1 Meg PDF for download from [RPGnow](#).

Behind the *Doc Savage*-inspired cover -- also similar to the artist's cover for [All Flesh Must Be Eaten](#) -- the look and layout of *Two Fisted Tales* feels a little old-fashioned. The illustrations are mostly used to depict the various character types, with variations used for the headings of each chapter. Other than this, no art is used to break up the text; this is not as bad a defect as it sounds, as a relatively large font is used throughout and the chapters are themselves all kept quite short. In general, though, the smaller the image, the more effective a piece of art works in this supplement.

Initially the organization of *Two Fisted Tales* is a little disconcerting; the game's 21 character templates are listed before any explanation of either the mechanics or character generation. Part of this is due to there being almost no method of generating a character from the raw numbers and up. Instead, a player selects a template that fits the character type that he wants to play and modifies it with Hero Points, the number of which is determined by the campaign power. The four given are Gritty (H.P. Lovecraft's cosmic horror, or a nice cosy mystery); Escapist (essentially the default level of the hard-boiled pulps); Fantastic (the heroics of perfect characters such as Tarzan, Doc Savage, and the Shadow); and Amazing (the realm of low-powered super-heroes and the works of E.E. "Doc" Smith).

The 21 templates given are the Amateur Detective (Miss Marple et. al.), Brawler, Buccaneer (the Saint), Costumed Vigilante (The Green Hornet), Cowboy, Ethnic Sidekick (Kato), Explorer (Indiana Jones), Feisty Heroine (Wilma Deering), Flying Ace, G-Man (Dick Tracy), Gangster, Hard Boiled Detective, Magician (Mandrake), Professor, Psychic Investigator (Randolph Carter), Reporter, Scientific Detective (Hercule Poirot), Spunky Kid (Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys), Tough Scientist (Doc Savage or Buck Rogers), Wild Man (Tarzan), and the Everyman. This last

template does actually enable players to build a character entirely of his own design, but this is not really necessary given the comprehensive nature of the templates given. Each character is defined by eight abilities that range from one to 20: Brains, Luck, Mind (mental discipline and concentration), Muscle, Reflexes, Savvy (style and social skills), Status, and Weird. This last attribute is a measure of how different a character is from the average man on the street. The higher its value, the more adept he will be and the higher his ability scores. Another two sub-abilities, Reputation and Wealth, are derived from a character's Status ability. Rather than skills, characters can try their hand at anything, but they can take Specialties and Masteries to reflect their personal interests. Specialties represent their focus upon a particular subject, such as Science, Mental Defense, Swim, and Artillery or Well-Connected. By narrowing his knowledge even further, they can take a Mastery, but he must have the relevant Specialty first. Thus the Hard Boiled Detective, Tommy Trowel might have the Savvy Specialty of Empathy, which he could improve to the Mastery of Detect Lies, or Read Emotions; while his learned counterpart, Lord Wymbourne, might have the Brains Specialty of Forensics and the Mastery of Graphology or Criminology.

Most of the templates have just two or three Specialties, but the more they have, the fewer Hero Points that are available to spend on new Specialties or upgrade to Masteries or on Schticks such as Gadgets, Martial Arts, Maneuvers, Hypnotic Powers, Magical Spells, and Animal Companion. More Hero Points are available if a player takes one or more defects. Players are also encouraged to round out their characters with tags or personal habits, history, personal style and code, and motivations. Once complete, backgrounds and descriptions are passed to the other players for commentary, suggestions, and to help work out the relationships between the characters.

The mechanics of *Two Fisted Tales* are relatively simple at both their basic and advanced levels. The basic rules require the comparison of an Ability with a target or difficulty number, with +4 bonus for any relevant Specialty or +8 for a relevant Mastery. If the resulting Ability level is greater, the character succeeds. This is enough to beat an easy task or lower ability score, but more difficult tasks require the use of dice and possibly cards. Similar to the Yin and Yang dice of *Feng Shui*, two 10-sided dice are rolled and the penalty die is subtracted from the bonus die. Each die is valued from zero to nine and the rolls are open-ended. Rolls are made against the Brains, Mind, Muscle, Reflexes, and Savvy Abilities, but not those of Luck, Status, or Weird, as they have other effects upon the game.

The cards are ordinary playing cards; a player holds one for every two points that his character's Luck Ability is above 10. The ordinary numbered cards are spent and their value added to a roll or check; Aces add 10 straight points to a roll or check as do the face cards, which can also be used to multiply the value of other cards -- Jacks by two, Queens by three, and Kings by four. Cards can also be used to reduce or eliminate damage, or spent to elicit a hint or luck break from the GM. They can even be spent to force a time out in the midst of a game for when the players feel that they need more time -- say, when they are caught within the confines of a death trap.

Under the advanced resolution system the result of the dice roll becomes most important. If the roll is under, the attempt is a failure; a roll of doubles on the dice or a total equal to the target gives a success, but with complications; greater than the target gives a complete success, and greater by 10 is a great success. Cards can still modify this result, but they must be played before a roll.

The basic resolution system handles melee and unarmed combat in a quick and easy fashion. The winner of opposed or contested rolls is the one to hit and inflict damage. Should a character suffer more damage than his Mind score, he will not be on his feet for long, and if he suffers more than 20, then it is curtains for them! The rules for advanced fighting do not add that much more complexity, but do add a reasonable level of detail and also make the game a little deadlier. Characters can be knocked out if they take more than five points of damage from a single blow, and can be killed outright if they take 10 or more. The average person can only inflict two points of damage with their fists; a baseball bat will add +4 to this, while a .38 revolver will do +8 and a Tommy Gun +10. A total success needs to be rolled to inflict these full amounts, while lesser successes will half or even quarter this damage. Though some may argue that the rule allowing for instant death after suffering a single blow or shot of 10 or more damage is unreflective of the pulp genre; the author argues that it is. The heroes or player characters are not meant to take unnecessary risks and should outwit their opponents with their brains and guile rather than pure brute strength or the greater ability to inflict damage.

The experience system is also designed to model the pulps, and although it is possible to pick up Specialties and

Schticks between adventures through training, what and when a character can be improved is very dependent on events in play. Although a character may not have a Specialty, Schtick, or language listed on their sheet at the start of play, all have the potential to be acquired in the midst of a game. For example, our private eye hero Tommy Trowel may not have German as one of his languages, but could select it the first time it comes up as part of an adventure by explaining that he had spent time as a POW during the Great War. If Tommy does not mention this when it comes up, he cannot know German without time spent in thorough study. The same applies to Schticks and Specialties, but Tommy needs to get a result more than twice the associated Ability on the roll in order to purchase a new Specialty. For example, Tommy is in a sticky situation and the only weapon to hand is a bullwhip. He grabs it and cracks it into action and with a roll of 27: twice his reflexes of 13. He is allowed to purchase the specialty of Reflexes (Cowboy Weapons) for the cost of a Hero Point. Another lucky roll later might mean Tommy can take a Mastery in Bullwhip, thus giving him Reflexes (Cowboy Weapons) [Bullwhip]. Conversely, had Tommy been particularly inept at his first few attempts to use the bullwhip, he could not take the Specialty at all. This method of improvement is geared toward building characters with breadth rather than the narrow focus of a Mastery. It is also geared toward *Two Fisted Tales'* design as a skill-light game.

The range of Schticks available for purchase runs the gamut of the pulp genre, and include gadgets, marital arts, hypnosis, magic, and animal-related ones, such as animal companion and being able to speak with our friends of the jungle. The easy gadget rules cover every aspect of the invention process from time and research costs to mystery flaws and reworking a gadget invented by someone else. The list of over 30 examples includes everything from an Anti Gravity Harness and the Brain Case to the Portable Canoe and the Wrist Radio. Martial Arts maneuvers, hypnotic powers, and magic all work in the same fashion: make the appropriate roll against a given target number -- say, Mind 15 for Missile Deflection, Brains [Hypnotism] 24 to make a hypnotic suggestion, or Brains (Occult) 24 to cast Open Gate -- and then pay the appropriate cost in Hero Points. High totals on the resulting rolls will reduce this cost. The effect of these rules is to emphasize the "special" nature of these Schticks and make them more important when they are employed. Thus players need to be more judicious in their character's Schticks, as they are not really powers that can be purchased and used at will.

A character gains more Hero Points by challenging each of their four bonuses: "Cool Idea Bonus," "Experience Bonus," "Roleplay Bonus," and "Virtue Bonus." Each of these values begins at zero and cannot exceed a score of nine. When a player does well in each area -- by doing something challenging in the game or having learned something for the Experience Bonus, playing within the spirit of the game or their character for the Roleplay Bonus, coming up with a clever invention or a scheme to fool a villain or roleplaying their skills rather than relying on rolls for the Cool Idea Bonus, or being heroic for the Virtue Bonus -- they roll a 10-sided die at the end of an adventure. If the result is above their current score of a particular bonus, it increases by a value of one. Failed rolls do not lose a character their current bonus score, and the only way to do that is to spend them on a one-for-one basis as Hero Points. This is an interesting mechanic that encourages and rewards good roleplaying in general, and also good roleplaying within the genre. Doing so provides a ready font of Hero Points and players will need to find a balance between the points they need for powering their existing Schticks and those needed for improving their characters.

The Game Master's Guide presents a pleasing examination of various elements of the genre -- though without the inclusion of a bibliography -- as well as a series of tables to help create the basic elements of the pulp game scenario. These are backed up with a good set of NPCs, a set of location tables, and another for creating MacGuffins. Besides covering these elements, the chapter discusses time and atmosphere, mysteries, and murder (from the simple art of, to the Locked Room Mystery and more), to a final look at ciphers and codes. All of this is good advice, as is that given earlier in the rules and guidelines for handling characters brighter than their players and dealing with NPCs.

If there is a downside to *Two Fisted Tales*, it is a very subjective one; the core mechanics -- the use of the two 10-sided dice, one subtracted from the other -- may result in too wide a result for some players. Countering this by switching to a smaller die would be difficult, since this would reduce the chances of rolling both a great success and of a result double an ability and thus improving a character. This die-rolling mechanic is intricately bound up in the system and changing it might lead to a whole different set of complications.

Putting aside what is really a subjective problem, the only deficit in *Two Fisted Tales* is its lack of a bibliography, because otherwise it is a thorough, if general, treatment of the pulp genre. It is not a particularly innovative design, and

although there are some clever mechanics present, the game does in fact feel a little old-fashioned, as is the layout of the book itself. Yet where it really shines is in how it deals with each element of the game and the genre, particularly the Schticks. That the treatment of each is neatly packaged into a chapter of its own also helps a GM to pick and choose which of them they want in his game. There is also a pleasing modesty to the writing, despite the breadth and ambition of the game's scope, making ***Two Fisted Tales*** a very likeable game and anyone wanting a thorough guide to gaming in the era of the pulps would find no better starting point.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

Fantasy Hero (for Hero System Fifth Edition)

Published by [Hero Games](#)

Written by Steven S. Long

414-page softcover; \$31.99

Fantasy Hero is the latest genre book from Hero Games. The book is 414 pages long; this was something of a shock as few RPG books approach this size. When you add the art-light and text-heavy layout common to all of the books from Hero Games, you get something very large and very dense. As a reviewer, I find these types of products, with broad scope and innumerable details, the most difficult to approach by far. Many reviewers choose to take the work as a unified whole and omit the sections in detail; others choose to pick apart each section in turn. I hope this review covers the basic sections in broad detail, without the "nitpicking" many longer reviews suffer.

Players familiar with the ***Hero System*** in any of its incarnations will feel immediately at home with the book's nomenclature and jargon. However, players new to the system will have a steep -- possibly too steep -- introduction to overcome. In short, the ***Hero System*** is the first, and most complete, Universal system currently in print. Beginning in the 1980s with ***Champions***, ***Hero System*** has been massaged, sliced, and hammered on by legions of playtesters, fans, and developers. This, combined with enlightened management -- by both the original developers and the new owners -- has yielded a system incredibly difficult to break. Characters are constructed using points, and balance is at the very forefront of the system. Whether your character flies through the use of spells, artifacts, or psychic powers, the cost is the same with equal parameters. For players who classify themselves as "gearheads" or "min/maxers," this system is heaven.

Fantasy Hero is one of the ***Hero System*** core genre guides. These books, like ***Star Hero*** and others, cover the basics of broad categories like "Science Fiction," "Supers," and "Fantasy." It also appears there will shortly be a ***Pulp Hero*** and ***Western Hero***. Many of these were previously published in other editions. The ***Fourth Edition*** had both a ***Fantasy Hero*** and a ***Star Hero***; however, these books were much different than the books being published for ***Fifth Edition***. The ***Fifth Edition*** books improve greatly upon their predecessors, and ***Fantasy Hero*** is no exception.

The book begins with a fairly large table of contents and an introduction by the author. Steve Long is both the primary author of ***Fantasy Hero***, and the publisher of ***Hero System***. The "how to use this book" section also helps give a strong feel for how and where the players and GMs should go about looking for what they want. Combined with the table of contents this should give more than enough roadmap even for those unfamiliar with the system. Players who feel that they need more will find additional help in the extensive index located at the back of the book.

Fantasy Hero is divided into seven chapters. Chapter One, "Warriors, Wizards, and Wondrous Worlds," covers the basics of what fantasy is. There is a discussion of common sub-genres: Epic, High, Low, Swords and Sorcery, and Urban Fantasy. It also covers the meta-genres of Comedy, Horror, Tragedy, Romance, and Mystery. The book covers blending ***Fantasy Hero*** with other Hero books like ***Champions***, ***Dark Champions***, ***Ninja Hero***, ***Star Hero***, and ***Western Hero***. Using substantial material from multiple genres and creating "elseworlds" and "what-ifs" is a core strength of any universal system, and the ***Hero System*** is no exception. Finally, Chapter One has a basic listing of fantasy elements -- the tropes or shticks that are common within fantasy. Chapter One is only 25 pages long, making it the shortest section of the book. This chapter seemed short; while much could have been trimmed from the overall size of the entire book, this section should have ultimately been much longer. There is serious discussion here that is not present in any other fantasy RPG. Approaching the fantasy genre with fresh eyes and examining what makes it tick is something many, if not all, fantasy RPGs should seriously consider.

Chapter Two, "Subjects Of The Realm," covers the meat and bones of character creation. There are somewhere north of 50 different Package Deals, though to be honest I lost count. Package Deals are **Hero System** jargon for a grouped purchase of abilities, skills, and disadvantages. Included in the plethora of options are racial, cultural, environmental, and professional Package Deals, which makes for a great deal of information. The different packages can be mixed and matched to create standard fantasy archetypes, and can also be used as guides to build new and interesting archetypes of your own. There is a discussion of both the standard skills and abilities as well as powers and talents. This discussion looks at not only how they commonly fit into the various fantasy genres, but also new ways of looking at certain powers through the lens of fantasy. The complexity of frameworks and package deals leaves two distinct possibilities. One is that all of the players are very conversant with the direction of the game and the clearly communicated vision of the GM, and have a complete understanding of the rules. The other is that all of the players individually create what they want in a character, and then the GM is left with the task of making all of these opinions work together. This second possibility is further complicated by the possibility that the individual players may have wildly differing experience levels with the **Hero System**. Hero products have always tried to mitigate these two opposing possibilities, but **Fantasy Hero** takes almost no time discussing this in detail, instead focusing on the encyclopedic Package Deals. At 111 pages, Chapter Two is also the longest chapter of the book, adding to the confusion.

Chapter Three, "Battles & Blades," deals with the intricacies of **Hero System** combat as it relates to fantasy. Not only does it cover the basics nicely, there are also optional rules for Modifiers and Maneuvers in fantasy settings. There is quite a bit of discussion of what is and is not appropriate in Fantasy settings. While most GMs will find this refreshing and somewhat of a relief with more difficult players, some will feel that this unfairly restricts their interpretations of how various powers and abilities should be represented in "their" campaigns. This concern is generally unwarranted, as Hero has always asserted that the GM is the ultimate arbiter of all disputes. While only 67 pages long, none of the subjects addressed in Chapter Three seem rushed.

Chapter Four, "Arcane Creations," deals with magic in Fantasy Hero. With the chapter weighing in also at only 67 pages, many consumers may feel slighted. However, they should be reminded that all of the vast rules for powers and abilities presented in the **Hero System** are available for spells. What this chapter really deals with is the nature of magic in the specific campaign world. What is the origin of magic? What is its nature? What frameworks are available for it? This is the core of **Fantasy Hero**, and in many ways the most important chapter of the book. The chapter also reviews social and technological issues of magic, addressing the age-old question, "If magic were real, what would change?" There are a dozen magic "systems" presented for use together or separately. Finally there is a discussion of magic items, the "gadgets" of fantasy games. It is here that a lack of examples becomes painfully apparent. While source material of an encyclopedic nature invariably covers some topics in too little detail for some readers, this section is desperately in need of definitive examples for how the systems and frameworks not only work, but also interact.

Chapter Five, "Beyond The Fields We Know," deals with the issues of creating and populating a fantasy world with strange and exotic beings. Many Fantasy RPG GMs feel that world creation is one of the penultimate pleasures of running a game. These GMs, and even those who take a more pragmatic approach, will find ample grist for the mill within these 42 pages.

Chapter Six, "Wonders Of The Imagination," is a discussion of gamemastering **Fantasy Hero**. Like Chapter One, this chapter is entirely too condensed. Subjects as diverse as tone and theme are alongside tips for types of campaigns and more setting advice, all in 40 pages. Running the game, villains, monsters, and NPCs are also shoehorned in. This section alone could have, and in many other games has, merited an entire book of its own. Too little detail and too broad a brush here seriously limit the utility of the information presented.

Chapter Seven, "Drudaryon's Legion," is primarily composed of a set of examples, a bibliography, and an appendix of random settings. The greatest issue here is the complete inadequacy of the Bibliography. To attempt to cover a genre this diverse in only a few pages is criminal. What the players and GMs are left with is (at best) a few highlights in the opinion of a few people. Hero should generally leave this to the individual consumer, unless a specific reference illustrates a specific example in the text. The characters and villains represent a very straightforward and basic view of character construction. None of the finer points or intricacies of the **Hero System** are covered. While these 31 pages

may be helpful for a few players unfamiliar with the system, they will be of almost no utility to more advanced **Hero System** veterans.

Even with its flaws, **Fantasy Hero** is an amazing book. Let us be completely clear on this point. Not only does the book attempt a task no other RPG book has ever accomplished, it clearly succeeds on several levels. Unfortunately, the encyclopedic nature of the finished product is its most disappointing aspect. There is both so much here, and so clearly much more to be covered. It could be that the text required a vicious editor to prune and scrape every ounce of force from every word, while preserving some of the room for other ideas and examples. It could also be that the product is simply too big, and should have been presented in multiple volumes, much like **Hero Games** has done with **Champions**.

I have covered a few dozen products over the last few years; none of those has been nearly as difficult to digest or to formulate an opinion of as **Fantasy Hero**. What the reader is left with are more questions (though also more ideas) than there were before. The largest question is evident from the start. The scope and depth that it covers, or attempts to cover, across the fantasy genre is simply unequaled in the history of RPGs, but is it too big? After a short discussion with Steve Long at GenCon 2003 I was informed that **Hero Games** is also looking to publish four "settings" for **Fantasy Hero**. It is completely possible that judging any game by a single product is too harsh, and that the unified whole will be triumphant. However that is a discussion that cannot be resolved here.

It is my opinion that Fantasy RPGs are the primary driving force behind the growth of the hobby -- but **Fantasy Hero** will never bring new players to the hobby. The level of work, money, and experience investment needed for entry to the world of **Fantasy Hero** is simply too daunting for any neophyte. This is too bad, as there are stories to tell and settings that can only be built in **Hero System**. For the experienced and those familiar with game systems and **Hero System** in particular, this book simply proves that the sky is no limit for this game.

--Ross Winn

Pyramid Review

Torn Asunder (for d20 System)

Published by [Bastion Press](#)

Written by Steven Creech & Kevin Ruesch

96-page b&w softcover; \$22.95

Basic **d20 System** combat is designed to be fast and furious but abstract. Hit points are whittled away until a combatant drops with all-or-nothing effects once 0 hp is reached. Heroes and monsters can always fight until the last gasp or run away wounded without hindrance under this system. Flashiness is left to the numbers and the DM's descriptions. Maiming is just not part of the base combat system.

Almost since its origin, there have been optional add-ons for doing more than simple hit point damage in combat. *Best of Dragon* had an article for adding critical hits and fumbles to **Advanced Dungeons & Dragons** and **Rolemaster** took critical hit charts to a peak of complexity that at base could still be applied to **Dungeons & Dragons**. Grittier, more specific and crippling criticals make combat more risky and can change the feeling of combat. Players both enjoy lopping the limbs off of opponents and fear the increased risk to their characters.

Bastion Press' **Torn Asunder** presents an optional add-on critical hit system for **d20 System** games. At base the system works on top of the existing abstract **d20 System** critical hit system of threatening hit roll with confirming secondary roll for extra hp damage. For a specific critical, the threatening hit must beat the target's AC by five, 10, or 15. If a normal critical is confirmed, then depending upon the amount of original success a mild, moderate, or serious critical effect will occur in addition to the normal critical hit point damage.

For a specific critical effect a roll is made to determine the affected body part (either from a general chart or a chart specific to the body type of the target) and then the appropriate level of critical is looked up for that body part. For each effect there are different descriptions for bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing weapons although the mechanical effects are usually (but not always) the same. The actual effects of criticals range from attack penalties with a specific limb, movement and Dex AC penalties, skill penalties and -- at the serious level -- loss of limbs or incapacitation and death in a few rounds. The penalties are straightforward and easy to apply.

Since only one extra roll is involved, the combat procedure is not significantly slowed down to resolve the additional effects.

Now mechanically this means that high threat ranges and touch attacks become more dangerous, gaining a slight advantage over low-threat-range but high-multiplier weapons. Also, attack rolls in general have more of a potential bite, so power attack has more of an opportunity cost and weapons and attack spells gain a little power compared to saving throw based effects. Conversely, AC becomes more important than in the standard **d20 System** because, even if hit, a higher AC can reduce the severity of a critical effect.

Torn Asunder takes this base critical effects system and builds upon it bit by optional bit. Whether critical effects can apply to monsters immune to criticals is left up to the DM to decide; you may want to be able to cut off a skeleton's hand, but you might not want to be able to hamstring a stone golem. The determination of what effect happens is based on the random body part charts, but an optional called shot system allows a character to target a particular body part. To make a called shot a character must use a standard action and the target can not have been moving. The character must either have weapon focus in their weapon or make a concentration check to target the body part in combat. Each body part is assigned a specific called shot penalty, but if successful it is a moderate critical to that body part. This

makes concentration a combat skill of use to warriors but leaves a useful feat option open for marksmen fighters and barbarians without the class skill.

Once individual body parts can be targeted, the next step is piecemeal armor that can leave certain limbs uncovered. If 50% of the body is covered by piecemeal armor then the AC applies to general attacks and to covered areas for called shots; if less than 50% then only for called shots. This discourages the use of "chain-mail bikinis." This contrasts with the system from *Diablo Diablerie* where piecemeal armor parts added non-stacking one or two points of general AC.

Once a critical has scored it lasts until magically healed or weeks and weeks of time have passed for recovery. The healing skill can reduce the amount of time it takes for recovery but has DC modifiers depending upon the amount of hp damage suffered from the critical and what percentage of the victim's hit points that accounts for, adding an extra layer of recordkeeping and computation. In addition there are some guidelines for higher DC improved short term healing beyond stabilization that can give hit points back to a character.

Serious criticals, however, can only be healed by magic. This leads to the development of prosthetics and magic prosthetics for those without regenerative magic. Weapon attachments and special gnomish gizmos as well as magical almost cyberware style magic items are presented. Of note, the magic items are presented in the new **3.5** format with detect magic information, etc., but the later appearing monsters are in **3.0** format. Bastion has stated there is a planned web enhancement for updating the monsters and templates to **3.5** along with compiling errata. Complementing the prosthetic equipment are healing rules for dealing with the chafing of prosthetics against limb stumps.

Individual types of new armors such as a mithril cloak as well as new weapons ranging from the very big ogre maul to the exotic sword chain, a seven-foot-long bladed chain with a sword handle. One of the magic armors, the cloak of the kyton, has an amazing full column illustration, matched only by an earlier one of a kyton being maimed by an elven swordsman. Another option is a modification of the armor as DR instead of AC rule from Bastion's *Arms and Armor* sourcebook.

There is a panel of illustrations for many but not all of the new weapons. Some of the weapons are a bit suspect; the sword chain and triple crossbow don't seem to be really workable weapons, and the weighted martial greatsword seems too generous in going up a damage die type in return for only a modest price and weight increase with no other drawbacks compared to a normal greatsword.

For more character options there are two 10-level prestige classes and a new core class. The marksman is a duelist focused on causing criticals and called shots. The spiritual healer gains healing abilities and 1/2 divine spellcasting. The new core apothecary is basically an expert healer with a few potent non-magical healing and skill abilities. The book also collects a number of powerful combat feats, including ones for tripling a weapon's threat range, gaining $\times 2$ strength damage on two-handed attacks, weapon finesse for damage, and full strength with offhand weapons. Spells are split into two sections, healing spells and combat spells including such effects as a magical one-shot vorpal greataxe blow.

Finally there are seven new **3.0** monsters and three new templates. The primal, spined, and threatening templates are quick and easy templates to make things just a touch nastier. The bonecracker giant, combative reptilian humanoid ramzadi, and little predatory lamprey-like bonesaws are nice vicious combatants, but the inclusion of two porcupine monsters seemed a bit duplicative although one is a mysterious humanoid race and one is a small vicious pest that travels in swarms. The dung golem is just gratuitously grotesque and is thankfully unillustrated.

So overall the core of the system is a quick-paced critical hit add-on system that allows for more graphic specific game effects than hit point damage. It shifts the balance a little for power in combat and makes things deadlier for wounded PCs, but if you are looking to add specific criticals to your *d20 System* game so that your Conan-esque barbarian can cut off an opponent's hand while it is still gripping a sword, this is a nice easy to implement system that is worth considering.

--John Henry Stam

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



This Looks Like a Job For . . . Superstition!

I'm not a huge baseball fan. I have a reasonable knowledge of the game, and I have childhood memories of bonding through both playing and watching the sport, but those early events never created a lasting love. Nevertheless, I know which teams are usually good and which aren't, and I generally know how they affected the Tigers:

"Do the Tigers have tonight off?"

"Yep; they're playing the Red Sox."

See, the Boston Red Sox, like the Chicago Cubs, have a long-lasting losing tradition, which has been labeled -- at least as far as the Cubs go -- as a curse. But, oh, how times have changed. My own Tigers narrowly avoided tying a record as most losingest team in modern history, and the Red Sox and Cubs both found themselves competing for spots in the World Series, baseball's big enchilada.

So the prospect of a Red Sox/Cubs match-up was too good for a casual fan to ignore. I found myself rooting for both teams, knowing that the ultimate match-up of those two would be a sign of the end times -- Armageddon with chaw.

Alas, it was not meant to be. In fact, *neither* team made it, meaning the world is faced with the prospect of a Yankees/Marlins confrontation, a World Series that will be of interest to almost dozens outside of New York and Miami.

Anyway, the two teams synonymous with "not doing anything in October" will *not* be playing against each other for World Series redemption. My hopes dashed, I started thinking about the events that led up to this event. In particular, I recall an interview on National Public Radio's [Only a Game](#) with one Cubs fan who had this ritual of changing hats depending on how the team was doing. He would switch between three Cubs caps depending on how dire the situation was, in this elaborate ritual I could only begin to fathom. It was left unresolved how much influence he believed his actions actually had over the game.

On another program I heard about the great lengths some sports figures go through to ensure a winning streak (or break a losing one): complicated schemes that dictated how they would eat, step up to the plate, dress, and so on.

All these activities boil down to one common denominator: superstition.

Of course, while superstition may be common in sports, the athletic world is by no means its only forum. Minor rituals designed to align the fates more to our liking are common; one study suggests that 25% of Americans consider themselves to be superstitious, but given the stigma associated with superstition it's likely this number is much higher. (My friend Kathryn and I had a running joke where, whenever discussing plans, I would make a statement like, "What could *possibly* go wron--?" . . . whereupon she would smack me. Personally, I tend to literally knock on wood whenever making a statement about the future.)

Stopping to think about it, there are dozens -- if not hundreds -- of superstitions that are commonplace; while many have "logical" (or at

Random Thoughtlet

So after the Cubs lost, I sent an e-mail to the inimitable Ken Hite, himself a Chicago resident:

SUBJECT: And thus it ends...

Poor damn Cubs.

To which he replied:

SUBJECT: Re: And thus it ends...

On the other hand, that means I have some hope of hitting deadlines for the rest of the month. But what an excuse it would have been: "Sorry I didn't get that piece written, but the Cubs were in the World Series. Won't happen again."

And *that's* why he's a brilliant writer.

least fascinating) origins, the truth is that most of them simply don't make sense nowadays, and have no intrinsic ability to change reality:

- Black cats
- Broken mirrors
- Saying "God bless you" (or "gesundheit," "fahrvergnugen," etc.) after a sneeze
- The number 13 (especially Friday the 13th)
- Rabbit's feet
- Full moons
- Walking under ladders
- Opening umbrellas indoors
- Chain letters
- The groom seeing the bride in gown before the wedding
- Tossing salt over your shoulder after spilling it
- Pedestrians pressing the "Push to Walk" button at traffic intersections

And so on.

Of course, even though we know about all of these common superstitions, and we know logically on some level they don't mean anything, for many of us there is still a visceral reaction to them. I know otherwise rational people who say, "It must be a full moon tonight," or "I'm staying home on the 13th."

And, of course, all of this is ripe material for <drum roll> gaming.

On a macro level, any game world is going to have its own superstitions, which will likely be common to the culture. And it can lead to interesting insights into the game world, showing what minor activities can become major annoyances or even impossibilities:

- It's considered unlucky to be aboard a ship at night. (This would severely limit seaborne exploration.)
- The middle daughter with an older and younger brother is destined for greatness. (This might influence child-bearing choices, as well as the attitude and actions of the middle daughter.)
- The first day of each month is an auspicious time to begin a new undertaking. (This may result in a lot of activity at the beginning of the month, and an encouragement to resolve matters before the end of the month so new deeds can begin.)
- Cyberspace is safer if the computer used is plugged into the top outlet.

Thinking up reasons why these superstitions came to be can help develop the flavor or history of the world; perhaps a series of important naval expeditions all met unfortunate ends at night, or maybe a truly special and powerful woman was the middle child with two brothers. And the reasons behind some of the superstitions may be completely unknown, or lost to the mists of time.

Regardless, any of the big superstitions that will be an integral part of the game world should be introduced early on, so the players don't suddenly learn six years into the campaign that, oh yeah, everyone is terrified of dachshunds. (Of course, games that feature globetrotting can introduce all sorts of new and previously unknown regional superstitions.)

Besides these collective superstitions, many (if not most) people develop their own personal rituals. The reasons behind this are myriad: nervous energy, a sense of helplessness, a need for control, and so on. However, the fact remains that if a dungeon-crawler is near death and manages to successfully conclude a climactic battle while emitting a guttural scream, it's easy to envision that he might believe the guttural scream *caused* him to win. From there, it's no stretch to picture the same warrior screaming his head off before any confrontation.

The "great" thing about superstition is that it's usually self-reinforcing. If our fighter wins a battle while screaming, it "proves" that the screaming caused the victory (or at least helped). If he loses while screaming, it just means he wasn't yelling right, or loud enough (or, least irrationally, it was so difficult a battle that even yelling wouldn't help). If he loses while not screaming, it also reinforces the supposition; and if he wins without screaming, then that merely means

the battle was easy enough. In addition, superstition can also be self-reinforcing by providing the mental impetus necessary to win, or the hindrance to lose.

Of course, a bit of thought reveals the truth behind most superstitions. The universe can be a random and chaotic place; events good, bad, and indifferent can happen at just about any time. Our ability to see patterns where none exist coupled with a desire to survive makes us use *any* advantage -- real or perceived -- to help ensure our continued existence.

As an aside, in a world with magic or other working rituals, many of these superstitions would likely be *true*; starting your ritual during a half-moon may have dire consequences to its outcome, as would using blood from a dog instead of a wolf. But the ironic thing is that, even in this circumstance, people would almost certainly develop superstitions that did *not* affect the outcome. In other words, a ritual might demand the blood of a wolf, but not have any requirements as to how it's obtained; nevertheless, if a mage obtains good results from cutting the wolf with a gold blade at high noon while wearing a fez, he's likely to incorporate some or all of those elements into his next attempt. If that next attempt is also favorable, then those will probably become a part of the repertoire. (The only likely way this wouldn't be true is in a universe where superstitions can mold reality; thus if enough people believe gold knives are the best for sacrifices then it will become true. Such a world is beyond the scope of this article, but I'd point out this type of universe would probably be awash with minor superstitious rituals and rites for everything.)

Most superstitions are harmless, and work to build character and game worlds; a thief who sees significance in the patterns of his flipped coin has an intriguing quirk, as does a diplomat who believes he cannot succeed unless he has the final word in any interaction. But other superstitions can become hindering or even crippling if taken to an extreme. A hacker who never bathes in order to ensure his continued success will not be appreciated by his friends, and someone who feels every day is unlucky except Sunday may be hard-pressed to accomplish much of anything. Many game systems have the means of simulating these limitations.

In all, while it's commonplace to envision our own characters as stalwart empirical observers who would never succumb to superstition, the fact is that many people do. And even people who don't believe in such nonsense would likely still be aware of the world's common superstitions, and may be faced with difficult prospects: Do you risk becoming a social pariah by, say, breaking a mirror in front of others, even if you don't believe? Do you try to force a confrontation during a full moon, knowing that any outcome may be seen in light of that phenomenon?

And if you're a team that is known for losing, do you risk your very identity by actually winning it all?

Fortunately, the last question need not be answered tonight . . . but there's always next year.

--*Steven Marsh*

Alternate Enchantment

An Expanded Look at Creating Magic Items in *GURPS*

by Sam Young

Lorith moved deftly to set her wares out as the market crowd began to trickle in. With a flick of her wrist, she folded red felt matting into an attractive wave around a Resist Fire amulet. It was one of her finest pieces yet, the kind of work that could gain her recognition and maybe a few commissions. She wanted it displayed prominently. After a few more adjustments, she stood back to appraise her stall's appearance and then, satisfied, turned away.

Taking a deep breath, she began to hawk her wares. "Enchantments! Fire enchantments! Finest quality!"

It wasn't long before she'd attracted a customer. He indicated the Amulet with a bony finger. "How much?" he rasped.

Lorith clenched her jaw to repress a smile. Had to remain professional. The stranger's eyes never moved from the amulet while she went through the figures in her head. After a long silence, she turned to the GM. "Well?"

The GM grimaced and paged through her notes. "Uh . . . are you using Umana?"

* * *

One of the things that sets the enchantment system in *GURPS*' Magic apart is its attempt to explore the economic implications of its mechanics. Unfortunately, the prices in the Basic Set and Magic are based on assumptions that do not hold up in every setting. This article discusses how to alter those assumptions and what effects the alterations will have on the prices of magic items. Five fully-computed examples are provided as well.

There are five basic forces influencing the cost of magic items:

Energy and Fatigue

The standard *GURPS* magic system assumes that all mages are fatigue casters. The amount of energy they can expend is limited by their fatigue scores, and they recover from its use fairly quickly. A fatigue caster with no skill in Recover Strength will recover one point of fatigue every 10 minutes. Quick and Dirty enchantments take 60 minutes per 100 energy used, and use 10 fatigue from each caster. That makes one casting cycle at least 160 minutes long. In an eight-hour work day there are 480 minutes, so three casting cycles can be completed. Three cycles take 30 fatigue from an average caster, so each fatigue point costs 1/30 of the enchanters' daily salary. For example, \$25 per day divided by 30 points comes to \$0.83 per point, which is rounded to \$100 in Basic and Magic.

The best known and most widely used alternative to fatigue casting comes from S. John Ross' "Unlimited Mana" article. Unlimited Mana ("Umana") gives casters access to limitless magical energy, but balances increased power with increased risk, and measures recovery in days rather than minutes. Umana mages recover from energy expenditures at an average rate of eight points daily. Enchanters may choose to exceed Thresh on occasion, but can't make a regular practice out of it. Therefore, they charge one-eighth of their daily salary per energy point they use. With an average salary of \$25, each point costs \$3.125.

The Speed of Slow

Many genres have nearly ubiquitous magical items, which is implausible under *GURPS*' default pricing scheme. GMs looking to keep economic realism alongside cheap and common magic items will want less expensive enchantment options. Simply allowing Slow and Sure enchantments to be cast more than once per day can drastically change the

prices for large enchantments. Likely limits are one casting per hour or one casting per fatigue point per day, but anything is possible.

Powerstones

Not every setting will have powerstones, but their existence in ready quantities is a central assumption of **GURPS'** enchantment rules. Without powerstones (or another external power source -- see **GURPS Technomancer** for the effects of Industrial Enchantment), the amount of energy contributed by each caster will be limited to his own reserves, averaging 10 fatigue normally, or 8 energy points with the Unlimited Mana system. Without extremely high skill and a large number of casters, the size of Quick and Dirty enchantments will be very limited. For the standard group of six enchanters, the normal cap will be a paltry 60 fatigue or 48 energy points -- hardly enough for even basic enchantments. Slow and Sure casting will have to be used for most items of useful size. Of course, if the GM permits a series of Quick and Dirty castings to contribute toward the same enchantment, the resulting items will be extremely cheap to produce!

Large powerstones are very likely to have quirks that will affect their use, recharge rate and conditions, and so on, and enchanting can be a risky business. The risks of summoning a demon, destroying the item (and days if not *years* of work), or perverting the enchantment are great enough without imperfect powerstones contributing additional difficulties. If quirked powerstones aren't adequate for enchanting, the cost of other enchantments will be raised, often very significantly.

When creating large powerstones, the expense of the gems quickly outweighs the enchanter's salary. For example, the labor for a standard 100-point powerstone accounts for only about 1% of its cost! Obviously, use of cheaper gems can alter this ratio, but enchanting frequency and mage salaries will make little difference. Two options exist for making gems cheaper. First, less expensive materials can be used. Second, more energy can be permitted in a smaller gem. The end result of either decision will be similar, and they can be combined to justify virtually any formula the GM wishes to apply to get the unenchanted stone's cost.

A final consideration is the enchanter's expected return on the powerstones used in Quick and Dirty enchanting. **GURPS Basic** assumes 36% per year, or roughly 1,000 days to full recovery of the stones' cost. If powerstones are very common or cheap, there will be less pressure on the enchanters to recover those costs. Conversely, more rare stones will make every enchanter anxious to recoup his costs to ensure they will not cripple his business over the long term.

Enchanter Salaries

At the default \$25 per day with \$1,000 starting wealth, enchanters make quite a nice living. Depending upon the scarcity and efficacy of thaumaturgic knowledge, and societal attitudes toward magic, though, enchanters could range from Struggling to Filthy Rich. Because of their long recovery times relative to fatigue casters, Umana enchanters are especially likely to be dabblers and to have other jobs, which may lower enchanters' salaries across the board.

Enchanter Skill

An effective skill 15 is assumed throughout **GURPS'** enchantment rules. However, by improving by only one level, a powerstone enchanter can greatly improve the quality of his work and his returns compared to less-skilled competitors. And if skill 16 were the expected norm, market prices for both powerstones and enchantments would decrease significantly.

High skill levels also decrease enchantment costs by permitting larger casting circles and more -- hence smaller -- powerstones. Conversely, lower skill will lead to smaller circles, and will drive prices up.

Putting It Together

It would be impossible to list prices for every potential combination of the enchantment variations discussed above. Here are a few tables for selected combinations.

A few notes apply to all the prices below. First, all prices have been rounded to two digits. Second, note that powerstone prices reflect only their manufacturing costs -- typical retail price will be twice the given values. Finally, the prices for enchantments exclude the item itself and any special components (e.g., "a black opal worth at least \$2,000"). To keep magic items especially rare, GMs may want to double the price of the basic items in addition to their enchantment costs. This can also allow the enchanters to better recover their costs.

Unlimited Mana

The standard enchantment guidelines remain in effect, but enchanters use Unlimited Mana and, because they often have short work days, their daily salary is only \$20.

<i>Powerstones</i>		<i>Unquirked Powerstones</i>		<i>Enchantments</i>	
Size	Cost	Size	Cost	Size	Cost
1	\$71	1	\$73	<120	Size × \$2.5
2	\$170	2	\$180	120	\$310
3	\$290	3	\$310	125	\$360
4	\$430	4	\$480	130	\$410
5	\$600	5	\$700	135	\$460
6	\$810	6	\$960	140	\$520
7	\$1,000	7	\$1,300	145	\$590
8	\$1,300	8	\$1,600	150	\$670
9	\$1,600	9	\$2,100	155	\$760
10	\$1,900	10	\$2,600	160	\$850
12	\$2,700	12	\$3,800	165	\$960
15	\$4,200	15	\$6,400	170	\$1,100
20	\$7,600	20	\$13,000	175	\$1,200
25	\$12,000	25	\$25,000	180	\$1,300
30	\$19,000	30	\$45,000	185	\$1,500
35	\$28,000	35	\$75,000	190	\$1,700
40	\$39,000	40	\$120,000	195	\$1,900
45	\$53,000	45	\$190,000	200	\$2,100
50	\$71,000	50	\$300,000	205	\$2,300
60	\$120,000	60	\$680,000	210	\$2,500
70	\$200,000	70	\$1,500,000	215	\$2,800
80	\$310,000	80	\$3,000,000	220	\$3,000
90	\$460,000	90	\$6,100,000	225	\$3,300
100	\$690,000	100	\$12,000,000	230	\$3,700
				235	\$4,000
				240	\$4,400
				245	\$4,800
				>245	Size × \$20

Commonplace Enchantment

Because Slow and Sure enchantments are cast twice a day and energy is stored in powerstones at two points per carat, this variant brings down the prices of enchantments without altering enchanters' skill or salary. The low cost of powerstones allows enchanters to recover those costs at only 20% per year.

Powerstones

Size	Cost
1	\$36
2	\$78
3	\$130
4	\$180
5	\$250
6	\$320
7	\$400
8	\$490
9	\$590
10	\$690
12	\$940
15	\$1,400
20	\$2,400
25	\$3,800
30	\$5,600
35	\$8,100
40	\$11,000
45	\$15,000
50	\$20,000
60	\$34,000
70	\$54,000
80	\$83,000
90	\$120,000
100	\$180,000

Unquirked Powerstones

Size	Cost
1	\$37
2	\$82
3	\$140
4	\$210
5	\$290
6	\$380
7	\$490
8	\$610
9	\$760
10	\$920
12	\$1,300
15	\$2,100
20	\$4,300
25	\$7,800
30	\$13,000
35	\$22,000
40	\$35,000
45	\$55,000
50	\$84,000
60	\$190,000
70	\$400,000
80	\$820,000
90	\$1,600,000
100	\$3,200,000

Enchantments

Size	Cost
<165	Size × \$0.83
165	\$140
170	\$160
175	\$180
180	\$200
185	\$220
190	\$240
195	\$260
200	\$290
205	\$340
210	\$370
215	\$400
220	\$440
225	\$480
230	\$520
235	\$560
240	\$610
245	\$670
250	\$720
255	\$780
260	\$850
265	\$910
270	\$990
275	\$1,100
280	\$1,100
285	\$1,200
290	\$1,300
295	\$1,400
300	\$1,500
305	\$1,700
310	\$1,800
315	\$1,900
320	\$2,000
325	\$2,200
330	\$2,300
335	\$2,500
340	\$2,600
345	\$2,800
350	\$3,000
355	\$3,200
360	\$3,400
365	\$3,600
370	\$3,800
375	\$4,000
380	\$4,300
385	\$4,500
390	\$4,800
>390	Size × \$12.5

Lower-Paid Enchanters

Here, enchanters are paid only \$15 per day, on average, and work 10-hour days. Because highly skilled mages find it easy to make a better income doing more interesting things, lead enchanters typically have skills of only 18, limiting the enchanting circle to four mages. Also, powerstones in this setting are made of less-valuable materials, costing only 80% normal, and enchanters recover their costs at 25% per year.

<i>Powerstones</i>		<i>Unquirked Powerstones</i>		<i>Enchantments</i>	
Size	Cost	Size	Cost	Size	Cost
1	\$56	1	\$58	<75	Size × \$0.40
2	\$130	2	\$140	75	\$35
3	\$230	3	\$250	80	\$48
4	\$340	4	\$380	85	\$65
5	\$480	5	\$550	90	\$86
6	\$640	6	\$760	95	\$110
7	\$820	7	\$1,000	100	\$150
8	\$1,000	8	\$1,300	105	\$190
9	\$1,300	9	\$1,600	110	\$230
10	\$1,500	10	\$2,000	115	\$280
12	\$2,100	12	\$3,000	120	\$340
15	\$3,300	15	\$5,100	125	\$410
20	\$6,000	20	\$11,000	130	\$490
25	\$9,800	25	\$20,000	135	\$580
30	\$15,000	30	\$36,000	140	\$690
35	\$22,000	35	\$60,000	145	\$800
40	\$31,000	40	\$98,000	150	\$940
45	\$42,000	45	\$150,000	155	\$1,100
50	\$57,000	50	\$240,000	160	\$1,300
60	\$97,000	60	\$540,000	165	\$1,400
70	\$160,000	70	\$1,200,000	170	\$1,600
80	\$240,000	80	\$2,400,000	175	\$1,900
90	\$370,000	90	\$4,900,000	180	\$2,100
100	\$550,000	100	\$9,700,000	185	\$2,400
				190	\$2,700
				>190	Size × \$15

Master Enchanters

This variant assumes that lead enchanters routinely have skill levels of 25, which allows an effective skill of 16 with a circle of 10 mages. Powerstones are also enchanted with skill level 16, and only unquirked powerstones are used for enchanting. Naturally, master enchanters like these are paid handsomely, but the large number of apprentices involved in enchantments keeps the average daily salary at only \$40. Otherwise, the default assumptions apply.

<i>Powerstones</i>		<i>Unquirked Powerstones</i>		<i>Enchantments</i>	
Size	Cost	Size	Cost	Size	Cost
1	\$90	1	\$92	<190	Size × \$1.33
2	\$200	2	\$210	190	\$260
3	\$330	3	\$350	195	\$290
4	\$490	4	\$520	200	\$370
5	\$670	5	\$710	205	\$400
6	\$860	6	\$940	210	\$430
7	\$1,100	7	\$1,200	215	\$470
8	\$1,300	8	\$1,500	220	\$510
9	\$1,600	9	\$1,800	225	\$550
10	\$1,900	10	\$2,200	230	\$600

12	\$2,500	12	\$3,000	235	\$650
15	\$3,700	15	\$4,500	240	\$710
20	\$6,100	20	\$8,000	245	\$770
25	\$9,300	25	\$13,000	250	\$830
30	\$13,000	30	\$20,000	255	\$900
35	\$18,000	35	\$28,000	260	\$970
40	\$23,000	40	\$40,000	265	\$1,100
45	\$29,000	45	\$54,000	270	\$1,100
50	\$37,000	50	\$72,000	275	\$1,200
60	\$54,000	60	\$120,000	280	\$1,300
70	\$75,000	70	\$190,000	285	\$1,400
80	\$100,000	80	\$300,000	290	\$1,500
90	\$130,000	90	\$450,000	295	\$1,600
100	\$170,000	100	\$660,000	300	\$1,800
				305	\$1,900
				310	\$2,100
				315	\$2,200
				320	\$2,400
				325	\$2,500
				330	\$2,700
				335	\$2,900
				340	\$3,000
				345	\$3,200
				350	\$3,400
				355	\$3,700
				360	\$3,900
				365	\$4,100
				370	\$4,400
				375	\$4,600
				380	\$4,900
				385	\$5,200
				390	\$5,500
				395	\$5,800
				400	\$6,100
				405	\$6,500
				410	\$6,800
				415	\$7,200
				420	\$7,600
				425	\$8,000
				430	\$8,400
				435	\$8,800
				440	\$9,200
				445	\$9,700
				450	\$10,000
				455	\$11,000
				460	\$11,000
				465	\$12,000
				470	\$12,000
				475	\$13,000
				480	\$13,000
				485	\$14,000
				490	\$15,000
				495	\$15,000
				500	\$16,000

505	\$17,000
510	\$18,000
515	\$18,000
520	\$19,000
525	\$20,000
530	\$21,000
>530	Size × \$40

Rare Magic

This Unlimited Mana variant assumes that few mages exist, and magic items are rare. Lead enchanters rarely have skill levels exceeding 17, so only three mages work together on enchantments. Powerstones are made from gems costing twice normal, and enchanters use only unquirked stones, so they are enchanted at skill 16 to keep the number needed to a minimum. The rarity of magic allows competent enchanters to command high salaries, averaging \$40 per day, and to recover the costs of their powerstones after only one year.

<i>Powerstones</i>		<i>Unquirked Powerstones</i>		<i>Enchantments</i>	
Size	Cost	Size	Cost	Size	Cost
1	\$160	1	\$160	<50	Size × \$5
2	\$400	2	\$410	50	\$350
3	\$730	3	\$760	55	\$580
4	\$1,100	4	\$1,200	60	\$900
5	\$1,600	5	\$1,800	65	\$1,300
6	\$2,200	6	\$2,400	70	\$1,900
7	\$2,900	7	\$3,200	75	\$2,600
8	\$3,700	8	\$4,100	>75	Size × \$40
9	\$4,500	9	\$5,100		
10	\$5,400	10	\$6,200		
12	\$7,600	12	\$8,900		
15	\$12,000	15	\$14,000		
20	\$20,000	20	\$26,000		
25	\$31,000	25	\$44,000		
30	\$45,000	30	\$68,000		
35	\$63,000	35	\$100,000		
40	\$83,000	40	\$140,000		
45	\$110,000	45	\$200,000		
50	\$130,000	50	\$260,000		
60	\$200,000	60	\$450,000		
70	\$280,000	70	\$730,000		
80	\$380,000	80	\$1,100,000		
90	\$510,000	90	\$1,700,000		
100	\$650,000	100	\$2,500,000		

Other Times and Places

The prices in Basic and above assume an average starting wealth of \$1,000. To adjust prices for other economies, multiply them by the quotient of the campaign's starting wealth divided by \$1,000. For example, in a campaign with a starting wealth of \$5,000, prices for enchantments and powerstones would be five times their listed values.

Where Do The Numbers Come From?

Brett Slocum's "The Compleat Powerstone" goes into great depth describing the pricing of powerstones. The prices

here were generated with the same formulae, but vary due to labor costs and skill variations. For skill 16, replace "0.9815^P" with "0.9954^P" in the formula for the odds of breaking a stone and "0.9717^P" with "0.9860^P" for the odds of an unquirked powerstone.

To get the cost of an enchanted item, take the total energy required and subtract the amount of energy that can be provided by the casters. Divide the remainder by the number of casters to get the necessary size of powerstone. Fractions mean that two different sizes of stone will be used, in an appropriate ratio. The cost per point of energy from a powerstone is equal to its production cost divided by the number of days required to recover its cost (roughly 1,000 in *GURPS Basic*). The total cost of the enchantment is the cost per point of the powerstones' energy multiplied by their size, plus the cost of the enchanter's energy.

An example:

In the Unlimited Mana setting above, we want to figure out the cost of a 160- point enchantment. With six enchanter's, we get 48 energy. 48 from 160 leaves 112. 112 divided by 6 is 18.7. We'll need four 19-point stones and two 18- point stones.

Doing some calculations, we find that a 19-point stone costs \$6800 and 18- points stones cost \$6000. The cost of the energy from each stone is its size times its cost, divided by 1000 (for 36% recovery), for a total of \$517 for the 19- point stones and \$216 for the 18-points stones.

Because we're using all of the enchanter's energy, labor costs are \$20 times 6, or \$120. \$120 plus \$517 plus \$216 is \$853, rounded to \$850.

Additional Reading

- Anthony Jackson. ["Rapid Enchantment."](#)
- David Pulver. *GURPS Technomancer*, pages 40-42.
- S. John Ross. ["Unlimited Mana."](#) (see also *GURPS Best of Pyramid, Volume 2*)
- Brett Slocum. ["The Compleat Powerstone."](#)

The Next 10 Years

by Steve Jackson

Ten years of *Pyramid*. Hard to believe. Few zines in this hobby get anything like that long a run.

That suggests that we did something right. A certain amount of backpatting is in order. So: Yea, Derek, yea, Scott, yea, Steven, yea, everybody else who helped get us this far. Go us. We rule.

Okay, that's enough.

Where Do We Go From Here?

Ten years is a long time, but it's less than half the time SJ Games has been in business. And we plan to be around for a long time yet. When I think of *Pyramid*, I focus, not on where we've been, but what we learned in the process, and where we need to go next.

Start with a few hard truths:

First, our side of the game business is, and remains, a fringe hobby. Sure, the total market expands a bit every year, but when an adventure game company has a breakout success, that success seems to take almost as much away from the rest of the hobby as it gives back . . . and the successful company usually leaves the hobby behind, in spirit if not deliberately.

Second, doing zines is rough. The only truly long-term survivor among hobby zines is *Dragon* . . . and even the "ancient read *Dragon*" made it simply by being The Official House Organ of The First And Most Popular RPG. And, while I don't know any details about its finances, I do know that it was on hiatus for a while during TSR's last days, and that Hasbro decided to sell it, which is how its enthusiastic new publisher got it. (Best of luck to Paizo!)

Third, e-zines are **not** the magic formula to success either. Not even here. Sure, *Pyramid* is a success for us. But its circulation goes up and down, up and down, and I don't think it has quite ever broken 4,000. And our other experiments in that line haven't been overwhelming winners. *Comic Book Life* was stillborn (arguably it was too far away from our core fan base, but it didn't find its own). *d20 Weekly* was a noble effort that didn't make any money. Even *JTAS* is a break-even proposition, justifiable in business terms only because it supports the **Traveller** fan base.

So it would be pretty desperately dumb of us to assume that just because *Pyramid* has made it through 10 years, it's now immortal. *Au contraire, mes amis*, big time. The only way this zine will be around for the next 10 years will be through constant re-evaluation, and, where necessary, change. Never change for its own sake, but change whenever we see that our fans want something new. And change whenever we see that the old ways aren't working any longer.

Sacred Cows Make Great Hamburger

So what do I think might change around here? Other than "whatever it takes," of course?

Regular features. That's something that always has to be tuned and re-tuned. We know you like cartoons, for instance . . . but only if they're the right ones, and cartoons can get very expensive if you have very many. Regular columns are a double-edged sword; once they develop a following, they're very popular, and if they come in on time the editor is happy, and if they don't come in on time, the editor develops ulcers.

Reviews. We know you like reviews. We also know that you mostly like the reviews of the games you were thinking of buying anyway. And with dozens of new products coming out every week, how can a review zine keep up?

Answer: It can't, really, not with the budget allowed by a few thousand readers . . . unless it pays nothing for the reviews and doesn't spend any time editing or checking them. That's the rpg.net model. And rpg.net has a lot of readers. And you **can** make a case for that model. Sure, it leads to a lot of bad reviews: unfair ones, even deliberate hatchet jobs; clueless ones, even some written without actually playing or even reading past the cover; drivelingly stupid and misspelled ones, so your brain hurts just looking at them. But there are also a lot of good, insightful reviews there. And most people can tell which ones are clearly bad, and either read them for laughs, or just ignore them. So . . . should *Pyramid* get out of the review business? Or open up its own sandbox area for free reviews? Or go on as it has, with the philosophy that a **few** reviews every week, by reviewers of known quality, are a useful thing for the readers? It's certainly a question . . .

The house-organ thing. It's an old truism. Adventure game fans will SAY that they want a general-interest magazine . . . but most of them, when they vote with their dollars, really want a house organ that covers their current interests. The majority of our readers here come from the rock-solid SJ Games fan base and might be quite happy if we became more of a house organ. We have always resisted that with *Pyramid* (though house organs *Roleplayer* and *Autoduel Quarterly* had good long runs). But it's easiest to get articles about our own products, because that's what most of our fans are playing. We hope that the deal with Issaries will help that . . . sure, in a sense, it makes us a house organ for **another** publisher, but still, variety is variety!

Editing. We . . . and I mean both Steve Jackson Games in general, and Steven Marsh and I in particular . . . take pride in the quality of the material that appears here. That doesn't happen by itself. Steven spends a lot of time picking out the best articles, and working with the authors who have good ideas but need help on presentation or development. If he didn't do that, you could have about twice as many words in every issue. But fewer of them would be spelled right. We **think** our readers appreciate quality. If we ever become convinced otherwise, we'll have some hard decisions to make.

Playtesting. This has been a feature of *Pyramid* for a long time. But how many of our readers really care about it? And with Kazaa and its ilk out there, and the **certainty** that some weasel somewhere is going to "share" material with his fellow weasels, is there really any point in having a unique feature? Unique to subscribers is good. Unique to subscribers and weasels, but leaving out the honest non-subscribers, is not so good. The whole issue of online playtesting is up for review.

The Concluding Paragraph

It really **has** been a good 10 years. But the only thing we can be sure of is that *Pyramid* will continue to change. I hope you'll stay around and be part of that change, and give us your thoughts on how it should happen. And I hope you've enjoyed the ride so far as much as I have.

Pyramid Pick from the Past

Dark Continent: Adventure & Exploration in Darkest Africa [2001]

Published by [New Breed \(UK\)](#)

Written by David Salisbury with Mandy Smith

Cover by Andy Hepworth

Illustrated by Katherine Lee & Jon Hodgson

Boxed set with three books and two maps; £24.99 (approximately \$41.75)

Darkest Africa holds a certain allure in the Western cultural mind: the mysteries of the interior, the impenetrable jungle, the immorality of the Arabs of the East Coast, the majesty of the beasts abroad the Serengeti, the deadly diseases of the rivers and swamps, and the exoticism (not to say eroticism) of the natives and their tribal practices. Of course, Hollywood has promulgated such myths so that the image of the Great White Hunter paddling up Africa's long rivers beset by hungry crocodiles and barrages of spears and arrows from head-hunting, cannibalistic natives is one to set our sense of adventure racing! Africa in general, is almost, but not quite ill served by the RPG industry. African-set adventures (seen in *Fragments of Fear* and *Masks of Nyarlathotep* for *Call of Cthulhu*, *Heart of Darkness* for GDW's *Dark Conspiracy* RPG, and most recently in the *Feng Shui* scenario anthology, *In Your Face Again*) and supplements (*Rifts World Book 4: Africa* from Palladium, *Magic & Mysticism: The Dark Continent* for West End Games' *Indiana Jones* RPG, *GURPS Voodoo*, and even *Jungle of Chult* and *The Ivory Triangle* for *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*) are not uncommon, but even despite the recent release of Atlas Games' *Nyambe: African Adventures* for the *d20 System*, there has been no single RPG published that is devoted totally to Africa.

That is, except for *Dark Continent: Adventure & Exploration in Darkest Africa* from the small British publisher, New Breed (UK), released at Gen Con UK in 2001. This is a *straight* Victorian-era RPG: no elves or steampunk here. Indeed, the author advises that such elements as æther flyers would ruin *Dark Continent*, since they would reduce its themes of exploration and Imperial assimilation of the interior. Nominally the game is set during the late 1860s and 1870s, but it also serves as a useful source for games set right up through to the 1920s, from White Wolf's [Adventure! RPG](#) to *Call of Cthulhu*.

Dark Continent is a boxed game that is almost complete, mainly lacking the dice that would increase production costs and the UK retail price with an additional tax. Thus the GM will need to supply 4, 6, 8, and 10-sided dice as well as a set of percentiles. Besides these, a compass and protractor are required if accurate mapping is to be part of the game's play; *Dark Continent* is, after all, a game of exploration. Inside the sturdy box are the 108-page *Player's Guide*, the 140-page *GM's Guide*, the eight-page half-sized Catalogue of Goods available in Zanzibar, and the 22-page Gazetteer of the Island of Zanzibar, also A5-sized. Also included are two double-sized partially filled-in maps. One is of East Africa and the other of North-East Africa or Abyssinia, each to be completed as the players' expedition travels the interior. Both in fact, are for use with the two scenarios found in the pages of the *GM's Guide*.

Both the *Player's* and *GM's Guides* are laid out in dark brown text with just the occasional typographical error. Throughout, both books are heavily illustrated with 19th-century period drawings. The remainder have been specifically done for this game, and while decent, do suffer from possessing a rather brutal or scratchy quality. Neither of the game's two books has an index, which is a major omission given the author's obvious knowledge of other RPGs is not a little odd.

The period art of **Dark Continent** does bring up two of the game's more difficult or controversial aspects: slavery and the treatment of the natives. **Dark Continent** addresses these in a simple manner, without miring itself in political correctness. During the time period of the game, slavery continued to be practiced in East Africa, despite the efforts of the Imperial powers, Great Britain in particular. Since in **Dark Continent** players can create Arabic characters, they can also create slave traders, and the rules provide advantages and awards that they gain in doing so -- at least in the eyes of their own culture. This, however, is an optional rule and the author does not condone slavery, but instead condones us feeling uncomfortable when we come across it in the game. Likewise the GM is welcome to ignore Victorian racism, although as with slavery, it is regrettably in keeping with the time.

Although **Dark Continent** is Anglo-centric, it allows players to create any type of character appropriate to the period and setting. There are 10 occupations included: adventurer, explorer, jungle lord, missionary, officer, scholar, shootist (both of the big game hunter and American cowboy variety), trader, warrior, and Wangwana, free Africans who work as guides, interpreters, and porters. A player selects one of these and a nationality; these are mostly European, but the also includes the American, African, Arabic and Indian origins. A player has six points to spend on Backgrounds, which flesh out a few aspects of a character's past history, faith, social origins and military training amongst other things. At each stage a character gains skills, bonuses to their attributes and renown. Points are spent on attributes, and once settled upon, the scores for a character's attributes, renown, and skills are totaled.

The final step is to purchase Competences. These represent specializations within each skill and points equal to each skill known are spent on them. For example a character with the Faith skill might buy the Protestant and Steadfastness competences if they were Christian, or they may purchase Animism, Divine Guidance, and Faith Healing if they were of African background. Each skill provides a range of competences and these add further depth to the character, reflecting their history and training. In general character generation is easy, but could have been better explained had a full example been provided. A completed example is given for each of **Dark Continent's** 10 occupations, as well as suggestions of how to modify that occupation or create a particular archetype, such as Lord of the Jungle or Great White Hunter or even Masked Avenger!

Dark Continent is described as a skills-light system, simply requiring a roll under a skill or attribute on a 10-sided die. Rolling a one and then making a successful Luck attribute check means that the player has made a critical success. Likewise, a failed Luck roll made after a roll of 10 on the action check is a critical failure. The rules do not get much more complicated than that, but a suggested option (which was popular with the playtesters) is to make the basic system a percentile one, perhaps bringing it in line with **Cthulhu by Gaslight**.

Renown performs three important functions within the game. The total throughout an ongoing campaign is the measure of a character's total reputation -- about 200 points is enough to bring you royal attention and a possible knighthood. The temporary total is spent to improve a character, and, most importantly during the game, to outfit expeditions. Thankfully, an expedition's sponsor invariably provides a large starting sum of renown before players have to dip into their own; personal renown is really for items that a character needs for his own use. The Catalogue of Goods available in the Arab slave trading port of Zanzibar provides a list of most things that a character might want and their cost.

As a game of exploration, a fair portion of the rules and background are devoted to this activity, much of it revolving around the Expedition Sheet. This introduces an abstract war-gaming element to **Dark Continent**, with the players both roleplaying and deciding their expedition's progress and activity on a day-to-day basis. The rules take a party through the process of dealing with a patron, hiring and outfitting an expedition, its travel, the basics of dealing with any tribesman encountered, and potential natural encounters along the march. The section is rounded out with rules for mass combat in case the expedition comes a cropper. These build upon the rules for individual combat.

Rounding out the *Player's Guide* is an excellent bibliography. This details not just the usual books and films, but also RPG adventures, supplements, and articles (most notably from issues of *Dungeon* and *Dragon* magazines), board games, plus numerous **Wargames Illustrated** articles and websites. For the GM wanting more information, this list of suggested further reading is invaluable.

The *GM's Guide* provides yet more background and advice, including animals, disease and a handy guide to Swahili.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The one section that is likely to perk the interest of those not looking to play ***Dark Continent*** is on the subject of "The Hungry Night." Deliberately left out of -- and not even mentioned in -- the *Player's Guide*, so as to keep the information out of their hands, this is a discussion of the secrets of Africa: Cults, shamans, animism, witch doctors, sorcerers, monsters, supernatural creatures and secret societies. These include not just the African ones, but also those that the Europeans brought with them: Freemasonry, spiritualism, and the Jesuits. The author advises against turning ***Dark Continent*** into a Victorian-era version of *The X-Files*, but whether or not African magic is real is left for the GM to decide. There is no reason not to include it in the game, since it could quite easily be all just smoke and mirrors, just as easily as it could actually be real.

The GM's Guide also includes two long scenarios, both of which make use of the partially filled-in maps provided in the box. "Captives of Abyssinia" sends the players on an expedition of the medieval Christian kingdom of Abyssinia, whose ruler, Emperor Theodore, has taken an American heir hostage. Their mission is to rescue him before the British mount an invasion. This is an interesting adventure, which does contain elements of "The Hungry Night" and comes with advice for running it with "smoke and mirrors" rather than with real magic. This cannot be so done with the second adventure, "Rivals at the Rift," which takes the party into the Kenyan interior hunting for a missing explorer. This is a less impressive adventure; in the main because it strays too far into the fantastic, thus going against the straight historical feel of the game. If the GM wants to run a more pulp action style game, then "Rivals at the Rift" is at least perfect for that.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

With the plethora of Victorian RPGs available that combine the period with other genres, it is refreshing to see a historically straight Victorian set game. That said, it is a pity that the second adventure breaks from this straight take upon the age. Further, in places, the author's own voice shines through more than it should. Not that his comments are unwelcome, but perhaps they could have been placed in sidebars instead of the main text. Overall, this is an interesting, well-written game that should appeal to anyone with an interest in Victorian gaming. Even if ***Dark Continent*** is not played as is, the game still serves as useful source material for the time and setting.

Currently, ***Dark Continent*** is only available in the UK, having never secured US distribution since its initial release. This does not mean that the game is unavailable, as it can be obtained through several friendly local gaming shops here in the UK. [Leisure Games](#) in London provides a decent mail order service, as does [Waylands Forge](#) in Birmingham, but unfortunately the game will not come cheap once the cost of shipping to the United States is factored in.

--Matthew Pook

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



The Timing of Memories

Wow. *Pyramid* has been around for a decade. And, looking back at my piles of *Aberrant* books, *Man O' War* miniatures, and *Dragon Dice*, I get the idea that this is a less-than-common occurrence.

And, since the years in a decade correspond roughly with the number of fingers and toes we have (not combined), and since a decade is the only unit of time that can be spelled out in musical notation, this seems a noteworthy event to acknowledge.

In thinking back about the past years, however, I came to one firm realization: I can't fully grasp what 10 years is.

In October of 1993 I was starting my third year of college, which I guess puts me at still being a Computer Science major, albeit one who knew his days with the program were numbered. That seems like a long time ago.

However, August of 1991 saw me *begin* college, and I can still remember that with an intensity and anticipation that doesn't seem so far away.

It doesn't seem like that long ago that Bill Clinton entered the White House, but it feels like ages since Ross Perot was a serious candidate (at least, as serious as he ever was).

Fears of Y2K seem like some bizarre caveman times, as does the era of indiscriminate corporate spending and the "new" dot-com economy. But it feels to me like the *Matrix* movie just came out.

And I can still remember seeing that first issue of *Pyramid* on my gaming shelves. I think this was shortly before I started working at the game store; I remember being vaguely disgruntled at it, because it had (in my mind) supplanted *Roleplayer* as the official *GURPS* magazine. "How much did we need another general purpose gaming magazine?" I found myself thinking. "After all, we'll always have *Shadis*."

I still remember my first issue of *Shadis*. I certainly remember it more vividly than the last issue.

That first issue of *Pyramid* is, really, a self-contained nostalgia bomb itself for what's changed in the industry. The inside cover is an ad for GDW's products (including the universally beloved *Traveller: The New Era*). There's a news story about how Palladium was suing upstart Wizards of the Coast for using Palladium's game system in their *Primal Order* book, and another one about the continuing struggle between TSR and Mayfair and TSR over the same issue, only this one involving the *Dungeons & Dragons* game. Eight years later WotC would turn the publishing world on its ear by *encouraging* other companies to publish material using the *Dungeons & Dragons* game system. There's a blurb about Steve Jackson Games' multi-line BBS, just a toll call away! (They even support blazing-fast 14.4k baud modems!) All the computer games reviewed or advertised were DOS-based, although one of them *did* have an Amiga version.

And, frankly, it doesn't feel like much time at all has passed since I first took the reins of *Pyramid*. (This despite the fact that it's been almost four years.) But it feels like forever when I broke up with my first serious girlfriend. (This was about six months before becoming *Pyramid* editor.)

In some ways, 10 years doesn't seem like that long at all. This is when I focus on how life has remained the same: my friends and family whom I still see, my interests and dislikes. There is a part of me tied to my 17-year-old self in 1991, desperately trying to fathom *GURPS* combat five minutes before going off into Game Masterly battle.

But when I think back to what *has* changed - those who I've lost, those who I've grown apart from, hobbies and interests that no longer hold the same interest, or that simply no longer exist - 10 years feels like an eternity. I don't really play *Magic* any more, so it seems like eons ago when I sold those *Unlimited* cards, complete with Forks and Moxes.

In truth, this dichotomy in my perception of time is somewhat frightening to me; where is the consistency of self that a personal history demands? My friend - who recently celebrated the birth of his first child - used to be a DJ. I asked him a couple weeks ago how he looked back on that period, and he said he didn't. When I pressed him on the issue, I suspect I moved him close to my own discoveries; those events that are only a few years old can feel ancient in the right (or wrong) light.

I tend to think of time as a constant thing, when really it isn't. It's irrevocably linked to memory. I suspect that events which reinforce my current view of myself seem very fresh, while those episodes I've outgrown or parted ways with feel like another lifetime ago. Likewise I suspect that time itself is more perceptible the older we get; telling a kid to wait in a corner for 10 minutes is about the worst punishment imaginable, and asking a seven-year-old to envision himself at 17 is an exercise in futility. But as someone who is way too close to being 30, I would view 10 minutes in a corner as a Zen blessing, and I can picture a 10-year goal with reasonable clarity.

And through the magic of the Random Thought Table, all of this, of course, ties into gaming. The most obvious lesson is that, in the same way our perception of our histories is influenced by our current view of ourselves, so too is our perception of our characters' histories. Those adventures that reinforce how we think about our characters are more easily and vividly remembered - and feel more chronologically "recent" - than those which do not. For example, my long-running ***Vampire: The Dark Ages*** character eventually evolved into a damned paladin, using the powers of darkness to further a higher purpose (as he perceived it). As a result, the adventures that reinforce that view - adventures revolving around difficult choices, attempts at self-sacrifice, confrontations with sinister temptations - feel much more recent to me (and no doubt the *character*) than those which do not . . . like, say, the period when my vampire's preferred means of finding drinkable victims involved having his scantily clad ally feign drunkenness around unsavory taverns, so he could attack those who would attack her. In truth that was only a month or so earlier in the character's evolution, but to him - as to me - it must have felt like a "lifetime."

I suspect we all do things in our lives that feel out of place with where we are now, and the memories of which feel much older than perhaps they are. (Paradoxically, I suspect it's possible to have memories that are so out of character that they are *more* vivid than surrounding events.) And it can be tempting to attempt to "overlook" those other episodes in a character's life, either by never mentioning it or actively [revising](#) the history. But I suspect there are hidden gems in those "lost" episodes, even if they do not resonate as loudly in our memories as events that are more parallel with that current view.

Ten minutes can be an eternity, and ten years can go by in an instant. And individual years of that decade can be dissected into day-long hours or eye-blink months.

But even if time is an illusion, our 10 years together with *Pyramid* form a collective chimera that I hope has been as memorable and enjoyable for you as it has been for me.

--Steven Marsh



Pyramid People

It was around dinnertime when I landed in New York. Rick and Suzanne had just moved to Manhattan from Austin and I was going to visit them on my way from California to Europe.

"I got a great e-mail the other day," I told them over dinner. "I've been asked to do a '10-Year Anniversary' piece for *Pyramid*."

Suzanne counted back on her fingers, then stopped herself. "When did it start?"

"1993," I told her. All that the three of us could do was look at each other and nod slowly. "Because it was on its second year when I went to Europe for the first time, when **INWO** came out."

"Quite some time ago," said Rick.

"Remember your early ad campaign for *Pyramid*?" I asked him. Rick shook his head.

"It was genius," I declared. "There was a little icon of, I don't remember, something simple like a lollypop, I think. And it said something next to it like, 'I want a lollypop!' Then a pyramid, and 'I want a Pyramid!' Then an icon of a pony, and 'I want a pony!' Then, at the bottom, '*Pyramid*: Almost Better Than A Pony.'"

We laughed. Steve opted not to use that one. Back in the day, around the time that *Pyramid* was first getting off the ground, I told Suzanne, an old friend of mine so much as a 23-year-old boy can have old friends, that she should interview for a job at Steve Jackson Games. It was very much the kind of place where people worked because they'd talked to their friends and been told that it would probably be cool. She worked out just fine. About the same time that she started, I came to realize that we weren't going to make the insanely tight schedule that we'd set for ourselves with ***Illuminati: New World Order*** unless we hired another art colorist, so I convinced Steve to hire Rick, another old friend of mine. Rick and Suzanne were married within the year. That was eight years ago, and they're still two of my best friends.

Rick & Suzanne



A lot of good things came out of that time at Steve Jackson Games.

Over the course of my life, I've gone back and forth between doing very social things and doing very nerdy things. I like them both, but I've never

Rick & Suzanne

felt as nerdy -- and, strangely, social -- as when I worked for a game company.

Don't get me wrong, I was a big geek in design school. I wasn't an especially gifted designer, but I had a good eye and I was absolutely in love with the tools. *Pyramid* magazine was really the first thing I did out of school, and it was far more about me geeking out than it was about design.

I have a history of being a geek. In my early teens, I managed to convince my parents to let me buy a computer with some money that I'd saved. I set up a bulletin board system, which (for those of you too young to remember) is a piece of software that would answer the phone and give other people, through their computers, access to a number of text files on my computer. I started out with pirated software, but rewrote it all within a year. I called my site *Illuminatus*, after the Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson trilogy. Around the same time, a friend of mine introduced me to the game *Illuminati* and it was love at first play. I was already familiar with Steve Jackson Games, from my time with roleplaying games when I was even younger -- I'd gotten in trouble as a freshman in high school for playing *Killer*. Then I found out about Steve's very similarly named BBS located in Austin, three hours and an area code south of where I lived, and it was dialing into that where I learned about *GURPS*, the idea for which -- a generic roleplaying system -- struck me as very appealing. The concept seemed to lend itself naturally to the computer-inclined, in that there seemed to be one processor (the game system itself) upon which different sets of software (the genre) could be overlaid: The geek's game for especially big geeks. They planned to put out a set of core rules and then an expansion book for, well, every genre and then some, which they eventually did and continue, 15 years later, to do still.

Up until then, the roleplaying games that I'd messed with had borne a different set of ill-explained rules for each genre: fantasy, science-fiction, westerns, whatever. I contacted Steve when I was in high school, wanting very badly to write *GURPS Illuminati* and *GURPS Cyberpunk*, both of which were later put together masterfully by people I would meet and call friends -- however briefly, in Nigel Findley's case. Being little more than a kid at the time, I didn't get either job, but I continued hanging out with what was at the time a very strange circle of very strange people when I moved to Austin for college, and where I went after college for my first job.

In this little missive, I will urge you, the reader, to do two things. I'll save the second one for the end, but first let me impress upon you the urgency with which, if you are a geek with any youth or geographic freedom at all, you should move to Austin and work for Steve Jackson for six months. Then get a job elsewhere and continue to hang out with all the friends you made there. You will learn a great deal, and you will earn very little money, but it will be incredibly worth it. I know a large number of people who were given a chance at that shop and who are now incredibly successful people. As Allan Varney put it once, the place throws off some awfully bright sparks. I can't say whether or not I'm bright, but I certainly learned a lot.

Back when I first started as a full-time employee, a number of people -- Dave Searles (sales guy), Chris McCubbin (who was, at the time, editor of *Autoduel Quarterly*), and Loyd Blankenship (managing editor, author of the infamous *GURPS Cyberpunk*) -- had this feeling that they should be doing a magazine, a less-partisan work than some other industry magazines, although naturally our own games would feature heavily in our own mouthpiece, not least of which because they would have to placate the audiences of *Roleplayer*, which was the *GURPS* newsletter-cum-magazine, and the aforementioned *ADQ*, to which a number of extremely avid fans of Steve's *Car Wars* game relied upon for their contact with the outside world.

It would be good, we thought, to continue to put out material for these two audiences, while reporting news and, yeah, selling ads. For the first three issues -- just over six months -- I did the whole magazine: deciding what went in it, writing a big chunk of it, editing all of it, selling the ads, and stressing about it pretty badly. Two nights before the first issue was due to the printer, my girlfriend and I were taking pictures after midnight in my bathroom for the voodoo article. But while the design wasn't great, I was really proud of how I made *Pyramid* affordable to do as a print magazine with a large color section, which was Steve's understandable requirement, and imbued it with a good sense of fun at the same time.

The first three issues, and much of its later personality, were very much influenced by two guys in the office. Jeff Koke was an editor and Andrew Hartsock was the print buyer. They'd know each other for years, and the three of us

spent a great deal of time cracking jokes, spouting off at wildly inappropriate times, and in general mocking death. The general enamored-but-irreverent sense that made the first three issues of *Pyramid* so much fun was very much a representation, in magazine form, of how much fun it was working with those guys, how creative an environment they engendered, and how generally cool the whole situation was. That six months was the best half-year of my 20s.

One of the biggest fans of the first couple of issues was also one of the most prolific letter-writers. When Jeff handed over to me the large accordion folder of all the submissions that anyone had ever made to *Roleplayer* magazine, I discovered that this guy had his own tab -- S, for S. John Ross. It's true: all the submissions around **GURPS Space** went into "T" because there were so many large envelopes of S. John's submissions. They were, in a word, gold, and he went on to be a frequent contributor both to Steve's game line and briefly the editor of *Pyramid*.

For the fourth issue, Steve hired older-school ex-employee Scott Haring to edit the text, and as I arced off to work on *In Nomine*, and later *Illuminati: New World Order*. Scott ended up taking over article selection and other folks even started laying out articles. I don't remember when it happened, perhaps three years after it first began, but I remember when I held the first issue of *Pyramid* that I hadn't had anything to do with. That made me most proud, the feeling that I'd started something that people saw good enough to improve upon.

My geekery drifted into other arenas of technical-but-social nerdness and I ended up leaving the game industry entirely after another couple of years, so I never caught up with the magazine in its electronic incarnation. I hear very good things about it; it won that Origins award for which, while I was working on it, we had only ever received nominations.

The Future Of Gaming

But in the end *Pyramid* was about two things, besides pushing new Steve Jackson Games products: saying nice things in our reviews, because it's easy enough to run things down; and plotting out the future of gaming, because the direction of culture is a very interesting thing. I discovered with this experiment that both of these goals are admirable but unachievable. For example, while it is easy to write negative reviews it is also too easy to examine things without a critical eye and simply be happy with them for no reason that a reader might find compelling. The subtitle of *Pyramid* has always been "The Best In Gaming," but sometimes instead of merely focusing on the best, the reviews -- at least when I was with the magazine -- seemed sort of glad-handing, even some of the ones that I wrote, simply because we wanted to see a good review.

The other thing that I learned is that the future of gaming is a moving target. In one early editorial, I went off on some rant about how cool technology was, that what few people understood back in 1993 was that you could play roleplaying games with people sitting in beautiful parks on the other side of the world with the same efficacy that you could with people within arm's reach, even with the technology at the time, provided that you had enough money. This was pre-Internet boom, back when it had not been so long since I'd had to stop work for two days because a lawyer from the Secret Service wanted to paw through the records in my office for some time, back before we won that lawsuit and reinvented *Illuminati* as an early ISP rather than a BBS for the local area code. We were making the future of gaming, we thought, and I can tell you that those days in Austin it really felt like it, too. And to some degree, our early (failed and flawed) text-based interactive adventures -- our MUDs and MOOs, and our friends' and our friends' friends' -- inspired the folk who later worked on the *EverQuests* of the next age in online gaming.

But back in the first issue of *Pyramid*, the literal future of gaming had already reared its head. Before a single page of the magazine was laid out, a struggling company bought a single-page black-and-white ad from me. I'd spent hours on the phone trying to get to know a bunch of game industry people who I'd never met but who were on at least friendly terms with our company, and finally found some folk who were willing to buy an ad in a new magazine that was very nearly the sole product of an untried design student who was a big fan of gaming but who, while ambitious, had never before done anything of the sort. The company was called Wizards of the Coast, and at the bottom of its very text-heavy ad (with a very terrible piece of line art off to the side, in classic early-80s adventure gaming industry style, like those old ads towards the back of *Dragon*) it announced that the company had something very clever in store, promising a "magical" summer. That summer saw the release of **Magic: The Gathering**, which was and continues to be a phenomenon, and the sort of thing that certainly none of us around the office ever expected when we

talked about the future of gaming. And I should have given up back then and thrown in my "Future of Gaming" towel but instead I continued to worry about it for some time.

One very bright spark that was thrown free of Steve Jackson Games, the immensely successful Warren Spector, thinks that gaming may well be to this upcoming century what cinema was to the 20th century. At first, this article was little more than a very long and very droll rant about what I find to be inherent roadblocks to such a world -- things like the entry-level restrictions imposed by the growing complexities of avatar interfaces, or the fact that most people would rather watch a movie than struggle through acting in one, especially a free-form one.

But if I were to be honest with myself, I think that those roadblocks exist to be knocked down, and it's stupid to talk about the future of gaming if it's just for pontification's sake. Someone, somewhere, is working right now on the future of gaming -- and it'll be great, and magical, and much of it will seem obvious in retrospect, but it won't happen unless some big geeks get up off a couple of asses and does it.

"The very early 20s," Rick told me last night, "is like a star, pulling people in with its enormous gravity." This is a very clever way of saying that people in our culture -- American culture, for those of you reading this outside the US, or perhaps more broadly geek culture from any country -- have a tendency to avoid responsibility and put off growing up.

Listen: you can grow up and still play, as long as you keep growing. Play! Experiment. Don't ever stop. Take the tools that you've got sitting around and say, "What would happen if I made a game out of this?" You have more influence over the future of gaming than you might think.

Myself, I'm off doing other things. I love the problems posed by interactivity, but I'm only so much into games nowadays. But I have to say, that the best thing I ever did was to get up off my ass and work really hard to make something real, from scratch, with no plan or experience. When you do that, you either learn very fast or you get burned so badly that you have to lie low for a little while. I've had both experiences. When it was good, it was almost better than a pony.

But even if you do get burned, keep at it and you'll learn something. If you're really lucky then you'll have made something that other people will like so much that they'll want to help with it, to make it better, to take it to the next level, to carry it forward to the future.

--*Derek Percy*

Extinction Is Evolution, Too

Gosh, that's a pretty downer of a thing to say, isn't it? I mean, this is supposed to be the Happy Happy 10th Anniversary Celebration of *Pyramid* Magazine, and I should say wonderful things about the magazine, both the old paper edition that came out every two months for the first half of that decade (30 issues in all) and the electronic edition, published every week for the second half of that decade. No, I have no idea how many issues that is* -- but I know that the little auto-counter that assigns an ID number to each new thing that's posted is up in the 4,000-and-somethings . . .

So I gotta be impressed, right? And I am, no doubt. And I would dearly, dearly love to take a huge chunk of the credit for this rare success in the game magazine field. But *Pyramid* has done so well these 10 years due to not just a lot of good people working on it, but an uncommon combination of fortunate circumstances, and the singular will of the guy at the top of the food chain around here, Steve Jackson.

Fortunate circumstances? Let's start with an explosion in the industry that started about the same time *Pyramid* was launched -- collectible card games. Suddenly, lots of companies had new games and a lot of money. Ad revenues went through the roof, and when we started including magazine exclusive promo cards, circulation went bonkers, too. When distributors heard that an issue would have a promo card for a hot CCG game that wouldn't be available anywhere else, pre-orders leapt into the five-figure range. It was very profitable, and it was quite a heady time.

And then, of course, it was over. Ad revenues didn't collapse right away, but circulation came right back to where it was before we started putting cards in the mag. Every issue, revenues dipped just a little more. Eventually, we couldn't sustain it as even a break-even proposition. That's where most game magazines die; but Steve wouldn't let that happen. He looked for an alternative, and decided to take the magazine on line. The rest, as they say, is history.

Pyramid was lucky. The game magazine business is tough. Without a special edge, I would submit that a game magazine is doomed to eventual failure. There are only three magazines in gaming still out there today with a better run than *Pyramid* -- *Dragon*, *Dungeon*, and *White Dwarf*. They, of course, enjoy the advantage of being published by the two largest companies in the industry, and they are devoted exclusively to their companies' line of products.

So we have three magazines hanging in there, a tantalizing standard for the others to shoot for. And on the other side . . . well, the list is long and distinguished. And just last week, another one joined the roll call of the dead -- Fast Forward's *Campaign*, devoted to **d20 System** support. Technically, they announced they were putting the magazine "on hiatus," but I can't think of a single magazine that ever came back from there. So with another example of game magazine evolution in action fresh in my mind, I devote the rest of this column to the memory of some fine gaming magazines that died too young:

Another magazine that went "on hiatus" but never came back was *Shadis*, by Alderac. They got up into the 50 or 60 issue range before they cashed it in. *Shadis* was where Jolly Blackburn introduced the world to the *Knights of the Dinner Table*, and they were also *Pyramid*'s own Steven Marsh's big break into the field when the editors looked at a letter he wrote them with his vision of the kind of articles a perfect gaming magazine should have. They took his suggestions to heart, and produced the ["Steven Marsh Issue"](#) of *Shadis*. It was pretty good, but it ultimately couldn't save the magazine.

Different Worlds was published by Chaosium, and mostly covered their own games, particularly the original **Runequest** and **Call of Cthulhu**. The thing many folks remember most about *Different Worlds* was the back-page gossip column penned by the pseudonymous "Gigi d'Arn," which actually dealt real dirt about many of gaming's leading personalities of the day. The identity of the writer behind Gigi has remained a closely guarded secret to this day.

Sorcerer's Apprentice was published by Flying Buffalo, who were doing quite well with **Tunnels & Trolls** in the early days. *Sorcerer's Apprentice* was, I believe, the first place Mike Stackpole was ever published and, thanks to the large

SF writer's community Rick Loomis was tapped into in the Phoenix area, one of the more literary of the early magazines.

TSR UK had a fine magazine called *Imagine*, that lasted some 40 or 50 issues, I believe. But it was one of the first things to go when TSR started having money problems in the mid 1990s, and never returned.

A lot of people who play the various *Storyteller* games probably don't realize this, but White Wolf got their start as a gaming magazine publisher. Their first product was *White Wolf* magazine. They had a real nice run, too, but about eight or 10 years ago, they faced the same inevitable decline that claimed nearly everyone; their choice was to remake the gaming magazine into a general culture mag that covered traditional gaming as just one element of a lifestyle that included LARPs, movies, computer games, books, raves, goth culture, and any of a number of other things. They called it *Inphobia*. I really liked a movie column ex-SJ Games writer Chris McCubbin did for them, but that was about the only thing. Particularly grating to me was a graphic design that looked incredibly cool, but rendered many articles each issue practically unreadable. *Inphobia* lasted less than a dozen issues.

And *Pyramid* is certainly not our first stab at magazines -- Metagaming published *Space Gamer*, a general-interest gaming magazine with a small emphasis on their own products. After Steve Jackson left Metagaming to found his own company, one of the first things he did was buy *Space Gamer*. There was an ill-advised spinoff mag, *Fantasy Gamer*, that only lasted six issues. And, of course, there was 10 years of **Car Wars** support in the pages of *Autoduel Quarterly*, which was my way in to this industry 20+ years ago. Steve was also in the wargame magazine business for a while, with *Fire & Movement*.

Wargame magazines were a special duck, because several of them included complete games in every issue, making them part magazine and part Wargame-Of-The-Month Club. Avalon Hill supported their wargame line for years with *The General*, and *The Courier* was (and still is) the Bible of miniatures wargaming. Other wargame magazines leaned toward reviews and commentary on the games -- the king of that genre was Richard Berg's *Berg's Review of Games*, which is also still being published.

And joining *Campaign* as a victim of the **d20 System** slowdown is our own *d20 Weekly*. I really liked *d20 Weekly*, and thought it had a good chance to make it because online publishing kept the costs so low; but with so much fan material out there for free, not enough people became convinced that they should pay for what *d20 Weekly* offered -- even though it was better than the free stuff, it wasn't better enough to overcome the price resistance.

Gateways was a magazine that showed a great deal of promise; the editor/owner (whose name escapes me) had an interesting vision, and a great way of communicating it. But he only got a dozen or so issues out before the business side crashed. My last memory of *Gateways* was attending a GAMA Trade Show and discovering that the *Gateways* people had a booth. I went over there to have a friendly chat about some money they owed us for advertising, only to discover that the guy in charge had sent his poor sister to work the booth for the show. I don't think he even warned her there would be a bunch of people there looking for a piece of his hide; he just served her up. Sad story.

But a story I know very, very well. I had my own magazine for a while, you know. I was living out in Los Angeles, desperately looking for something I could do in the game industry so as to avoid getting a real job. The one thing I felt I really knew was game magazines. (If I was in that boat today, I'd probably go for an online mag. Or a PDF house. Or both.) Anyway, I got together with a guy who had also been burned by the company we were working for out in L.A., and we started *The Gamer*. *Space Gamer* was my admitted role model; we were going to be general interest, covering all aspects of gaming, with tons of reviews. It went pretty well for a little while, but we never did get the circulation and the ad revenue up over the hump, and we quit publishing the big glossy version after about 12 issues. We tried to switch over to a newsletter format, and then a tabloid format whose hook was we would give them away to retailers and depend on advertising. That didn't work either, unless our goal was to put us deeper in debt and make my bankruptcy more spectacular. I did real good at that.

But *The Gamer* was a great learning experience, and I was proud of the work we did. I also have one claim to fame with *The Gamer*, when I published a game review written by a Wisconsin editorial cartoonist and newspaper feature writer named John Kovalic. It was his first published credit in gaming, and I do my best to remind him of it pretty much every time I see him, and whenever I need a favor from him. Fortunately, he's such a nice guy it tends to work

out.

We made some spectacular business mistakes with *The Gamer*. The biggest two were a) going in undercapitalized, and b) insisting that we needed a struggling Wizards of the Coast to pay their advertising bill, instead of taking their offer of company stock to settle the account. Not our smartest move . . .

And I'm sure I've just barely scratched the surface. There are many more examples, some of which you might remember as a personal favorite. You'd think we'd have learned by now, but a few undeniable facts keep bringing people back to the game magazine business: First, it's a relatively cheap and quick way to get into the industry. Magazine articles are a lot easier to write, acquire, and edit than complete games or even game supplements. Second, there are three revenue streams -- distributor sales, subscriptions, and advertising. At first blush, that's got to be better than the one stream of traditional game products, right? Third, always sitting there as an example of What Could Be if things break just right are wildly successful magazines like *White Dwarf* and *Dragon*.

And then there's the fourth reason -- game magazines are *fun*. Every issue is a new set of challenges and chances to be creative. You can do hard news, opinion columns, roleplaying adventures, boardgame strategies, reviews, comedy and satire, sample CCG decks, genre fiction . . . and anything else you can think of. No matter how many times Darwin comes along and slaps a magazine down, there will always be people willing to step up and give it another try. Me included. I guess we're just funny that way.

--*Scott D. Haring*

* * *

* 293 issues, including this one -- *Summation S*Marsh

Notes From The Gantenbrink Passage

"It took ten years' oppression of the people to make the causeway for the conveyance of the stones, a work not much inferior, in my judgment, to the pyramid itself. This causeway is five furlongs in length, ten fathoms wide, and in height, at the highest part, eight fathoms. It is built of polished stone, and is covered with carvings of animals. To make it took ten years, as I said -- or rather to make the causeway, the works on the mound where the pyramid stands, and the underground chambers, which Cheops intended as vaults for his own use: these last were built on a sort of island, surrounded by water introduced from the Nile by a canal. The pyramid itself was twenty years in building."
-- Herodotos, *History*, II:124

Since we're already well ahead of Cheops, let's take a little break and look back down the slopes of our pyramid. I can call it "our" pyramid, because by gum, I helped cover the causeway with animal carvings, and if I haven't exactly dragged my share of ten-ton limestone blocks, I always had a doctor's note to explain why. I even helped pay for some of those blocks; I've been a buyer of *Pyramid* since issue Number 1, and I'm fairly sure I subscribed to it for a year or two in there as well. I've still got every single paper issue, including the first one I appeared in, stacked on a shelf in my basement. (But it's a proud shelf.) That issue was Number 21 (September/October '96), and the piece was the **GURPS Alternate Earths Designer's Notes** (with the admirable Mike Schiffer and Craig Neumeier, whose dorm room we wrote them in). Thus, this is also my seventh anniversary with *Pyramid*. (That piece was later collected, no doubt to fill an unwieldy page count, in **Best of Pyramid, Vol. 2**, where it appears as "23 Skiddoo.") Technically, however, my first appearance in *Pyramid* was in Number 18 (March/April '96), where someone named Daniel Eastland said any number of very flattering things about my first game publication, in the "Pyramid Pick" of **Secret Societies**, a work still available (unlike *Pyramid* issue Number 18) in used-game shelves and fine remainder bins everywhere.

Conspiracy Theory: How I Came To Write *Suppressed Transmission*

*"You know I hate it when you stick your hand inside my head
And switch all my priorities around
Why don't you go pick on someone your own size instead?
Go on without me, I'll just slow you down
Go on without me, I'll just slow you down . . .
I'll just hold you up
When I fall behind
I'll just throw your schedule off
So you get going if you're so inclined."*
-- Warren Zevon, "I'll Slow You Down"

And precisely two years after that hint (in a review of a book of conspiracy theory, yet, by someone whose name combines prophecy -- Daniel -- and disaster -- Eastland), that issue's editor, Scott Haring, asked if I'd like to write a regular column for the new electronic incarnation of *Pyramid*. In retrospect, I should have noticed the "coincidence," but at the time, I was still a starving freelance game writer, eager for any crumb of work or attention from Industry Greats such as Scott. Writing and developing **Nephilim** books hadn't quite become the full-time gig that it had seemed, back in the palmy days of 1996, when I bade farewell to offices and other people's word processors forever. (Knock wood.) In fact, besides **Nephilim** books, in April of 1998 my only professional credits were with Steve Jackson Games, who had tossed chunks of **In Nomine** work my way on occasion (at one point, Scott asked me if I'd like to be the **In Nomine** line developer, but alternate history is the next section), and said nice things about **GURPS Alternate Earths**. Nice things such as, "We'll publish this."

I'd gotten into game writing thanks to Chaosium, of course, in my case by running **Call of Cthulhu** back in Oklahoma City during my college years for a friend, Donald Dennis, who went on to great things working for Iron Crown. He got a playtest copy of **Nephilim** from Chaosium thanks to his industry connections, sent it to me for comments, and I sent Chaosium 10,000 words of notes and back-sass that wound up (mostly) incorporated into the core rulebook. Suddenly, in 1994, I was a Chaosium writer. And that was thanks to Don, and to **Call of Cthulhu**, which burst onto my

consciousness in August of 1981, when I still maintain that I bought the first copy sold in Oklahoma City. And why was I so receptive to that glorious game? Because a couple of years before that, I found, in a box in the garage, a paperback collection of H.P. Lovecraft short stories that rewired my brain. I *think* it was my dad's book. But I've never found out for sure; my dad is less maniacal a bibliophile than I am, and seldom kept books long. Mysteriously, that book has now disappeared; I can't even remember its title, or anything much about it, except that it had a lurid green cover. And, of course, that it set off a memetic bomb that flung me onto the slopes of a pyramid, where Scott Haring was "coincidentally" waiting for a columnist.

Alternate History: Other Columns I Might Have Written

"[H]e could not establish a connexion in his mind between the the absurd trivialities which filled the day and the serious business of putting words to paper. . . . But that was all right. He would not have written well, and so he would have got no pleasure from it. And even if what he might have written had been good, how many people would have known it? It was all right to speed into the desert leaving no trace."

-- Paul Bowles, *The Sheltering Sky*

At that time, Scott and I didn't have any idea what the column was going to be. I was already writing "[Out of the Box](#)," so we knew the new column couldn't be gaming news or reviews. After some back-and-forth, we hammered out an official mission statement, as follows: "Ken will rattle on about whatever he feels like, so long as it isn't gaming news or reviews." This helped me not much; even I knew that I needed a little more structure for a weekly column than that. Scott was still too canny to show his hand, and in the weeks before the first column's deadline I came up with a number of possible column ideas. Such as:

- *The Garden of Forking Paths*: This would have been an alternate history setting and design column. Every column would start with some historical change point and rambled on in a James Burke *Connections* kind of fashion to illustrate one, or many, possible consequences of its alteration. I still do this kind of column in *Suppressed Transmission* every great once in a while, but not in the fashion I had intended.
- *The Library of Babel*: Simple, easy, and a great way to scam free books. I'm still kicking myself for not going with this one. This would have been, pure and simple, a book review column of books suitable for gamer adaptation. One week I might have done a setting or historical work like *London Under London*, a study of the rivers, tunnels, and so forth beneath London by Richard Trench and Ellis Hillman; the next week fiction such as Avram Davidson's brilliant steampunkery-of-manners *The Adventures of Doctor Eszterhazy*; and the third week some wonderful piece of madness such as *Mazzaroth*, by Frances Rolleston, a brilliant (and completely misguided) exposition of stellar magic in fundamentalist Biblical terms. None of which I've managed to work into *Suppressed Transmission* yet.
- *Clio's Footnotes*: This would have looked at some strange, little-known event, location, or person in history with an eye toward being adaptable for gaming. This kind of material I wind up lifting for *Suppressed Transmission* every now and again, but I always need to make sure I'm not just writing a *Terra Incognita* entry instead. I would have had the same issues with a column like this, too.
- *Tentacle Tracings*: This would have been a pure conspiracy column, either "explaining" current events or past history, mostly tied into one of the 10 **INWO** Illuminati. I'm not sure a pure diet of this would have lasted after 9/11 (if that long), but I still toss the odd nugget past the conspiracy plate even now.

I had a few other, even less coherent, notions such as a game design or GM advice column, but who, in those days, would have cared to hear my opinion on either topic? (Or now, for that matter?) I still sneak some GM advice into *Suppressed Transmission* when nobody's looking, and as the next section will indicate, *Suppressed Transmission* can be viewed as a kind of meta-GMing advice column. Or GMing meta-advice column. Or GMing advice meta-column. But I finally took most of the best parts of the above ideas (except the scamming free books one, darnit) and boiled them all into one mess, a column that took as its ambit my random thoughts on the fields of conspiracy theory, alternate history, secret history, and horror. Now, all it needed was a name.

Secret History: What I Think I'm Doing

"And it is utterly true that he who cannot find wonder, mystery, awe, the sense of a new world and an undiscovered realm in the places by the Gray's Inn Road will never find those secrets elsewhere, not in the heart of Africa, not in the fabled hidden cities of Tibet."

-- Arthur Machen, *Things Near and Far*

Suppressed Transmission was almost named *Thirteen O'Clock High*, but rather more people (including Scott) preferred the first title. And, as names will, it wound up not only describing but prescribing. What [began](#) as a kind of inventory column, taking a topic and looking at it through all four lenses (you can still see me taking this approach clearly as late as the [Antarctica](#) column), with the dream of someday *competently* ripping off Avram Davidson's "Adventures in Unhistory," eventually became something else. The [bisociation](#) column set it up; holding two contradictory ideas about Truth is a technique, not a fallacy -- and I notice it popping up in the [Roanoke](#) column, the [manticore](#) column, and the [hollow history](#) column -- but with the [Coke](#) column, I think it began to take over. In many ways, the first "real" *Suppressed Transmission*, (almost a year after my debut), the Coca-Cola piece really bought into the conceit that the column was looking at an ongoing stream of -- well, Something Else.

Or somethings else. Although I jokingly blended all 200 columns into [one background](#) for my anniversary issue back in May, I've only purposely identified (or tried to chart) four or five subterranean streams through the madness:

- *Bronze Age Madness*: My endless fascination with history before history springs to life here; the terrifyingly irrational Greek gods (before logicians like Hesiod rewrote the myths), and their associated monsters, dominate this stream. One could also call this the "Cybele" stream, as she effectively combines both godhead and monstrosity, and I love to name-drop her for effect. This is also the "bestiary" stream, since it began with the [manticores](#) (though it draws on the [hollow history](#) and [mirror](#) columns), and its most recent hookup was in the [unicorn](#) column. It's this series, specifically, in which my craven desire to incarnate, or at least seamlessly rip off, Avram Davidson makes itself most manifest.
- *India Ultraterrestria*: If the last stream was about murky history, this one is about murky geography. The notion of a hidden country "in India" is as old as the word "India," and it, too, supplies much of the oomph for (and overlaps with) the "bestiary" stream mentioned above. This specific attempt to chart the boundaries of the Imaginary starts with, of course, the [Mandeville](#) column and its most recent conurbations include [Sheba](#) and perhaps even sunken [Dunwich](#).
- *London Gothick*: This is the product of my endless fascination with the city of London. I suppose if I wanted to give it a high-sounding justification, I could cite it as an intensive example of the endless, fractal weirdness available in any location, but it's really just an excuse to read more books about London. It either began with the [urban adventure](#) column or, more likely, with the first [Spring-Heeled Jack](#) column; its most recent clear appearance is in the [Pepper's Ghost](#) column. This stream ties into the "John Dee" sub-stream, and into the occult Shakespeare columns I produce for Valentine's Day and Christmas, both of which began with ["Surfing Bohemia."](#)
- *The Matter of America*: I am an American mythographer. Meaning both that I am an American, and that I mythographize America. Part of this is a reaction to the pernicious notion that "ancient wisdom" and magical history all have to happen in the Old World; part of it is my share of that American mythomania that goes back to Cotton Mather and Sir Walter Raleigh. (Who ties into John Dee, and thence to London.) Either way, I've tried to add, or explicate, or tie in, various elements of the American Mythos to the subterranean stream. The first one of these might have been the choice of Los Angeles (instead of London) in my [urban adventure](#) column, but the stream doesn't really get started until the [1897 Airship](#) column and the [Emperor Norton](#) column the next year. Its most recent appearance is the [Lewis and Clark](#) column two weeks ago.

Each stream has its own gestalt Truth, somewhat compatible with the others, but qualitatively different. Whether you do or don't wind up using any given Secret Truth or column topic, or any one crazy idea, I hope that *Suppressed Transmission* helps illuminate the overall concept of secret history in a gaming context. Secret history is vast, it contains multitudes. All narratives reflect it, distort it, and contradict it -- and each other. This is not a bug; as Lovecraft realized when he created the distorted and contradictory Cthulhu mythos as a reflection of mankind's real mythologies, it's a feature. Real myths work that way, so does (to an alarming degree) real history, or at least real historians. Thus, more stories (and more games) and more facts and coincidences can connect to it. Using this habit of seeing, this facility for finding wonder and connections everywhere, can add an X factor or a fourth dimension to any

game world you build. And hopefully, I've done most of the heavy lifting for you.

Horror: How I Actually Write *Suppressed Transmission*

"I awakened each morning in a fever, sometimes frantically trying to verify or discredit such information as fell within the range of modern human knowledge. Traditional facts took on new and doubtful aspects, and I marvelled at the dream-fancy which could invent such surprising addenda to history and science."

-- H.P. Lovecraft, "The Shadow Out of Time"

And heavy lifting it usually is. The easiest columns are the multi-setting columns, where I take a single theme or schtick and run setting-riffs on it, usually through a series of alternate histories. Once I come up with the premise (which is no easy feat, now that I've used most of the obvious ones), finding those header quotes is usually the hardest part. (Although, looking back at ["Six Flags Over Roswell,"](#) still my highest-rated column, it only has the one header quote at the front. Hmmm.) Sometimes, of course, the quote triggers an even cooler idea for the mini-setting, which is a nice payback. And every now and again, I get a setting idea rich enough to support an entire column; a "setting in a box," if you will.

But for a more "normal" column, I have to come up with a basic topic, run a few riffs on it, and then tie it into the larger subterranean stream. Or at least to something secret, archetypal, or Deeply Kewl. The basic topic, as I have learned to my cost, can't be too recondite or nobody (possibly including me) will care. On the other hand, it can't be too broad or general, or I'll never fit it into one column. (I'm still amazed that I thought I could write one column on faeries.) Sometimes, I'll get an idea from something I'm reading anyway (like Laurie Winn Carlson's *Seduced by the West*) and I usually give a shout-out to that book. Other times, I'll want to write about a given topic (like manticores) and have to read up on it. Either way, this involves a hunt through my library (no trivial task itself) and plentiful Google searches on promising keywords. Sometimes, the Google search turns up the perfect book on a topic, and I have to wait for Amazon to send it to me, and then I have to come up with *another* topic in the interim.

Research done (although it never is; I'm usually Googling like mad up to the last 500 or so words of a column), I have to turn it into a column. This means "iceberging" it; taking the 10% or so of the facts that are the shiniest, sharpest, and most dangerous, and sinking the other 90% of the research underwater. Often, a fact is amazingly cool by itself, but doesn't fit with any of the other stuff, and I have to excise it and all the stuff dependent on it. (Sometimes I realize this *before* I email the column to Steven.) Anyhow, I usually spend a paragraph setting up the premise, or introducing the anomaly or figure or concept the piece is theoretically about. Then another paragraph giving the Real Explanation, if any, just so we all know it's just make-believe. The rest of the column is variations on a theme, with one or another crazy lens bisociated onto the facts to build dimension and effect. Finally, the big payoff, which ideally ties into one of the subterranean streams I mentioned before, but not always. Hopefully, these last paragraphs give the craziest, coolest, most madly persuasive "explanation" ("interpretation" might be the better term) yet. And for just a second, before rationality kicks in and you go off to read *Dork Tower*, you've heard the hum of the Suppressed Transmission.

And with any luck, we'll both be hearing it for a few more years.

Growing Older

I am 30 years old.

It isn't an admission of weakness. It is simply a fact. It is 2003, and I am 30 years old.

I have been gaming for more than half of my life.

My first brush with gaming was at age 12 in a friend's basement at a sleepover. All girls. Someone bought the old red box introductory ***Dungeons & Dragons 1st Edition*** box set -- whose and from where, no one knew. We didn't understand the rules, and we weren't terribly sure how to play, but we had fun. Someone killed something and someone else set off a trap and someone found treasure, but we weren't sure what the treasure was or why we cared. Quick . . . roll the dice!

For years, that was my entire conception of tabletop gaming.

After the sleepover, we put the game away and never played it again. It didn't appeal to anyone in the group -- not even to me. Besides, we had computer games. Middle school and into high school came the fevered pitch height of an endless parade of bad computer roleplaying games, all purporting to be of some major RPG significance. I finally learned ***Dungeons & Dragons*** rules -- ***Advanced Dungeons & Dragons 2nd Edition*** this time -- through SSI's *Pool of Radiance*, and the other infamous gold box games. My first real brush with gaming was not sitting at a table at all, but reading through the truncated SSI-produced rulebook and looking up what the heck a Glaive-Guisarme was in the library encyclopedias.

With high school came ***Battletech*** -- oh, the ***Battletech*** arguments! -- and some introductory tabletop gaming. We could talk ***Dungeons & Dragons*** but . . . but the *mechs*! Have you seen the mechs? Have you read the latest "technical readout" sourcebook? Did you hear about so-and-so and how he was in a Panther and he leapt up with jump jets and landed on someone's Battlemaster? *So very cool!*

Gaming didn't really begin until college when we had an online community and a dorm full of gamers and people who sat around before, in, and after class talking about gaming. We played, and played, and played, because when you're a poor college student and your budget is in the negative, one rulebook and some Doritos go a long way. We were open to many different games and systems, as long as those games and systems were *Shadowrun* or, later, *Amber Diceless*.

We were narrow-minded about that sort of thing. Although, hidden in the dark recesses in my mind, my secret love, my darkest desire, was *Call of Cthulhu*. Ah, beloved ***Call of Cthulhu***.

After college, in the warm red afterglow of graduate school, the great meeting of the ultimate gaming consumer came to pass: the juxtaposition of *money* and *time*. Running games! Buying games! Playing games! My shelf, which originally included a tiny collection ***Advanced Dungeons & Dragons 2nd Edition*** books from a game in college, ***Call of Cthulhu 5th edition***, three ***Shadowrun*** books including the core rules, and a copy of ***Amber Diceless*** exploded. I bought anything that had death in the title. I bought the entire run of ***Nephilim*** with all its juicy goodness. I bought the full run of *Kult* -- first and second editions. I bought ***HoL***.

Then, finally, I got old.

That is my life in gaming.

There's a lesson here, somewhere.

A brief audit over my last 10 years of game playing produces a big arc in interest and productivity with the hump hovering over that blessed conflux of events -- having enough time to play and having the money to buy. That's the magic quotient, the philosopher's stone of gaming, the true gold-encrusted head of John the Baptist: having time and

having mad disposable cash.

But now I'm 30, and I am on the skinnier end of the arc. I walk into game stores, and I am no longer thrilled. I no longer buy games because they have cool covers. I no longer buy games because a friend of a friend told me it was *neat* and the *coolest thing*. I buy a game or a supplement because, for some reason, it is the absolute best of the best, or it appeals to some deeper need.

I would not say that I have outgrown gaming.

I would say my taste in gaming becoming refined, like an old wine or a fine cheese.

Not that many gaming production companies are aiming at the 30-year-old market -- although flush with disposable income, we're not much of a demographic -- but out of curiosity, I ask myself (since I am sitting right here): What do I look for in a game? What do I want out of gaming?

Two different questions with two different answers.

First things first. Ideally, new games fall into two categories. The first is a game either so unique or weird or appealing it knocks my socks off -- and I am not known for wearing socks, so that's quite the feat. The game makes me say, "Woah." It makes me blink in surprise. I lift it off the shelf in the game store because I'm staggered it exists. Someone with great foresight looked into my soul and pulled forth the essence of amazing. I bow down before the creator and, duly, fork over my cash. A rare event, but a true one. (This recently happened, although I have not bought it yet, with Paul Czege's excellent ***My Life with Master***. The game is available for purchase online.)

I want to pick up the core book and be surprised. I'm not terribly interested in re-releases of old games under new systems. I'm not terribly interested in books full of lists of objects and items. I'm generally looking for new, fresh ideas, something easy enough to learn that it's fun to play on the first outing, and something lasting enough to turn into a small campaign. My ideal holy grail of games. The quest and search for perfection.

The second category is a game that is easy to learn and fun to play. I recently played ***Baron Munchausen*** and realized that game is about the level of rules complexity I want. As I've grown older, my patience with tables and charts and rules for every niggling situation has grown short and I grow weary. I know, and realize such a beast is popular, and many arguments rage on about game theory and game design and how much is too much when it comes to rules. My belief is almost any rules are too many -- this day in age, with so much going on and time short, spending hours learning new systems is an experience in frustration, not discovery. A game should have just enough rules to consider it a game, no more, and certainly no less. Interestingly, I will buy *old* games I suddenly discover over new because they are easy, fun, and gamey.

But buying a game is less interesting than *playing a game*. Once, a long time ago, my interest in gaming was simple: killing things. Blowing the left leg actuator off the Jenner facing me down across the map. Swarms of Locust Light Mechs. Delving a dungeon. Shooting down hordes of unnamed mooks with an Ingram Smart Gun like a named character from a John Woo Hong Kong Action flick. I can do all this with video games on my own time. What I want is *story*.

Age has taught me many things, and one thing I have learned is the importance of the engrossing, all-encompassing story. The story transcends the system. The story pulls players in, and turns a group from just another tabletop gaming group into a collective tale that spans star systems and races across time. It makes the game last. It makes the game *mean something*. With limited time and resources, *meaning* counts for everything.

I want the game to last even after the session for the night is done.

I now have years of experience to draw upon -- years of reading, writing, thinking and doing. A question was posed recently: Do you draw upon your past experience when playing or running a game? I hope so. With all the years of experience, it's now no longer guessing and flailing about. It is all about knowledge and understanding, and using that knowledge to fill in details, add to plot, and make the story more real. The game is still a *story* and it is fiction, but

now it's not just "kill the foozle." It's kill the foozle and feel emotionally connected to the foozle while doing so.

The big question, the question unasked, looms. The games, after all these years, after the orgies of buying and playing and doing: Are they better? Certainly no one fumbles through rules in a basement, and does not blow apart little stand up action figures on a hex map. Yet, are they fundamentally better? Years of experience in gaming and reading and thinking is brought to the table, along with a refined sense of *what is good*, and knowledge of how a world should work. Yes, I would say games, now, are better than they were 10 years ago, and better during the height of feverishly buying and playing any games that looked even remotely promising. They're better because the plots are better, the stories are better, the people are better, and the experience is better.

But, not as often. The great trade-off comes with growing old: the games are better, richer, and full of goodness, but the sessions meet less often. Everyone is beholden to jobs and family and real life. In my life, full of adults long grown and moved on from the college gaming scene, we plot our games so they happen with less frequency but with more substance. The games have more bang for the buck. They're simply better, but fewer. This is a different conflux of events; instead of money and time, it is time and quality.

And thus is the trade-off of growing up.

It gets better with age. Less frequency, but more substance. A better, more refined taste.

It's not so much the growing old. We all grow old. Many of us grow up, and others simply move on and leave gaming behind. Times change. It's growing better with age. It's becoming more refined, more intelligent, and knowing what we want and how to spend our time and money. It's not about being good, but about growing *better*.

This is the way of most hobbies. And 10 years -- and nearly 20 years -- is a long time for change.

Obelisk Online

by [Chad Underkoffler](#)

Genre: Alternate World

Style: Mildly Cinematic Journalism

Fidelity: High, except for prime conceit

Themes: Investigation

Campaign Setting and Background Information

It is an Earth much like ours, with one major change: The roleplaying game industry is bigger and better in all ways. More market penetration, more popular appeal, more money, more *respect*.

Yeah, it's pretty alternate, as alternate worlds go.

What Everybody Knows

In this continuum, the RPG industry is slightly larger than our world's computer gaming industry, with all the commensurate changes to the landscape. For example:

- The customer population supports not only numerous standalone game stores, but all of the mega-chain bookstores have extensive RPG and board game sections.
- There have been at least a dozen Hollywood blockbusters filmed with a direct connection to RPGs -- but nobody really expected *TROLL: the Movie* (see boxed text) to get that Oscar nomination for best special effects.
- RPG-related news and events (especially tournaments) occupy roughly the same television footprint in America as the World Series of Poker, Billiard Championships, or sumo wrestling -- it's on the tube a lot, but at strange hours.
- The Gazebo Casino in Las Vegas has created a new style of gaming called the Gambling Roleplaying Game (GRPG) which is becoming very popular. A cross between proposition bets and performance art, gamers play against the "house GMs" through devilishly clever adventures, to win real money in addition to their experience point awards. As challenges are faced, parleyed with, or beaten down, cash accrues to or is deducted from the player's account, depending upon how well they do. State of the art holograms, computer animation, and animatronics unite to provide a stunning multimedia display of the in-game action. Within the game room, it's pure entertainment for the observers as they revel in the roleplaying of the gamers and GM, both out-of-game and via the in-game graphics.

Outside the game room, an extra dimension is added. In the betting room, every action and reaction made by the gamers or the GM blossoms into computer-organized side-bets with calculated odds based on the difficulty of the scenario and the experience level of the gamer and his PC. For each scene, bets like "2-1, Hektorius gets past the Minotaur; 3-2, the Minotaur kills Hektorius; 5-1, Hektorius outwits the beast; 10-1, he kills it outright." (Betting is also available long-distance, much like off-track betting.)

- More and more young, hip celebrities openly admit their love of the hobby. A number have done commercials or promo items for their favorite games, or have fought tooth and nail to be part of one of the big-budget gaming flicks. They wear game-related t-shirts and ball caps in their movies, TV shows, and music videos. They are also big spenders in the GRPG circuit (see above), and help make GRPG tournaments more telegenic.

With all this going on, how is the average gamer expected to keep up with what's happening in the industry, the hobby, the phenomenon? That's easy: just get a subscription to *Obelisk Online*.



Obelisk Online is a subscription-only weekly webmagazine published by Jack Stevenson Games, one of the giants of the field. With a circulation of over 75,000 subscribers, it's *the* place to go for all of your gaming news. Its crack team of journalists, photographers, columnists, cartoonists, and editors (see *NPC Backgrounds* below) are seen as the consummate professionals of the RPG journalism industry. *OO* publishes stories covering all aspects of the gaming life: GM advice, new supplemental rules, quality gaming fiction, sneak peaks at new games in development, handling small group dynamics, product reviews, adventures, designers' notes, gaming celebrity watch, sales reports, publishing industry news, and even entire minigames!

How much longer can *you* live without a subscription?

What Everybody Doesn't Know

URGE Cyberpunk & the U.S. Secret Service

Most people are unaware of the assistance JS Games gave the Secret Service back in the Nineties; it's known of, but not talked about, in the upper echelons of both government and the game industry.

On March 1, 1990, the offices of Jack Stevenson Games, in Austin, Texas, were approached by the U.S. Secret Service as part of a nationwide investigation of data piracy. They came to JS Games because they knew that the work being done on the latest *URGE* supplement -- *URGE Cyberpunk* -- had brought them into contact with the hacker underground, and thought that the game company, being a step removed from it, could offer useful insights on the subculture.

The Secret Service asked JS Games for help in separating the fact and fiction of datacrime, assistance in assembling profiles of hackers, and advice on how to enforce online Intellectual Property law without going overboard and wasting time, money, and manpower chasing down false leads. With JS Games' help, they were able to focus on real cyber-criminals, take *appropriate* measures against underage hackers, and learned numerous tricks on improving computer security.

One tangible benefit that JS Games received from this aid was an ongoing string of consultancy projects for the Secret Service (and, later, other parts of the U.S. Government) where roleplaying would be used in various types of training (acceptance of diversity, sensitivity, threat analysis, sexual harassment, emergency simulations, etc.). The company provides such services on an ad hoc basis at reasonable rates.

PC Opportunities

Players can have characters take on numerous roles in the setting of *Obelisk Online*. Here are some examples:

- *Stringers/Cub Reporters*: The news may make itself, but finding it as it happens is a necessity. PCs can be freelancing stringers, roaming the gaming countryside after hot, breaking stories that

Jack Stevenson Games

Jack Stevenson Games was founded in 1980 by (no surprise here) Jack Stevenson. It publishes books, games, and magazines for game fans.

Their best-known games include ***Rosenkreuz***, the card game of world domination; ***URGE*** (the Unilateral Roleplaying Game Engine); ***Pax Mechanics***, a post-apocalyptic board game where those who can keep the world's aging machines running rule; ***TROLL*** (Tank, Robot-Operated, Laser-Laden), a fresh look at future war; ***Chalet Nerd***, the wacky card game of fannish obsession; and many others.

They publish *Obelisk Online*, which covers "The Best in Gaming," be it news, reviews, systems, tournaments, or the gamer lifestyle.

For more general information about JS Games, see their website at <http://www.jsgames.com>.

Other Game Companies

C'mon, you can fill these in yourself.

...

Okay, I'll get you started:

- *Magi of the Plains*: Creators of the d02 System and the "Closed Game License"; publishers of

- will catapult them into a staff position. Whether it's covering a book signing party at the local game shop or snooping around on a celebrity's game night, they have their ears to the RPG ground.
- *Research Assistants*: The columnists and editors help turning that news into interesting and accurate stories, and that's where the PCs come in. Tracking down pre-computer gaming stories in the "morgue," running to libraries and online reference sites to fact-check columns, analyzing trends for their bosses, fetching coffee and crullers . . . the possibilities are endless!
 - *Foreign Correspondents*: PCs could be dispatched by the Editor-in-Chief to far-away lands, to learn of exciting new developments in the worldwide gaming industry. Expense accounts, exotic locations, and getting the story when you barely speak the language enhance the fun.
 - *Industry Insider*: The players take the roles of the staff of a game company, focused on getting into *OO* as often as possible. Adventures could focus on buttering up reporters, columnists, or editors or otherwise coming to the attention of the webzine for that sweet, sweet "free advertising."
 - *Corporate Spies*: The characters could secretly be spies for a small game publisher, seeking to ride *Obelisk Online*'s coat-tails into a juicy pre-release review of their competitors' work. In a world of NDAs and noncompetes, the secrets of rival game companies can bring big bucks . . .
 - *Sponsored Player(s)*: Perhaps *OO* has decided to back a talented player (or players) as he works the GRPG circuit. They help defray travel costs and entry expenses in return for up-close, behind the scenes exposes of this new style of gaming.

Hospitals & HMOs, the nurse-novel genre RPG.

- *Black Lion*: Publishers of that groundbreaking RPG *Shiny Happy People: Holding Hands* and its supplements (including the fantastic *Clanbook: Fuzzy*).
- *Warders of Chaos*: This Canadian company hit the big-time with their licensed game based off of pirate comic sensation *Tales of the Black Freighter*.
- *Hercules Games*: With their best-selling heroic game of seafaring/gadgeteering action (*Mysterious Navies*), this St. Paul, MN company garnered rave critical reviews.
- And so forth . . .

Items & Locations

The Obelisk Offices: Located in Austin, TX, this red-brick, 13-story building is the home of Jack Stevenson Games. Many of the staff is based out of this looming tower, while others simply connect to the company's private website ("rc.com") remotely. JS Games does all of their own writing, playtesting, layout, printing, finishing, warehousing, and distribution from this one site. The building itself has a high tech basement R&D complex dedicated to creating new "bleeding-edge" gaming (also, unknown to anyone but the Editorial staff, the place is honey-combed with secret passages and hidden rooms).

NPC Backgrounds

Ivan Cilavok (*Cartoonist*, "Geek Spire"): Ivan Cilavok is a right bastard. Vituperative, rude, and just downright mean . . . especially to the fans of his acclaimed strip "Geek Spire," which heaps disdain, condescension, and outright scorn on the gamer lifestyle and mindset. The kids, they love being insulted, though, and so Cilavok's popularity just continues to grow. (Secretly, Cilavok is a *huge* fan of the Black Lion "World of Shininess" and owns at least one of every product Black Lion has created. If this got out, he'd be subject to the contempt he dishes out himself.)

Pierce Derrick (*Editor Emeritus*): The first editor of *OO*, Derrick vanished into the South American jungles in search for a rumored ancient RPG played by the Oingo Boingo tribe. He's been missing since 1995. (Taken by alien space brothers and taught extraterrestrial gaming techniques? Who knows?)

R. Sam Johns (*Editor-in-Disgrace*): They're pretty sure he cracked from the strain. The third editor of *OO* went on a rampage after one late night too many trying to beat the upload deadline. He was apprehended before he could successfully light the building on fire using a case of Liquid Paper. Unfortunately, he escaped police custody; his current whereabouts are unknown. (Johns is living in the secret passages of the Obelisk Offices, sneaking out only at

night.)

Henry Kite (*Columnist*, "Promulgated Broadcasts"): Henry Kite works for the government as a Roleplaying Exercise & Training Coordinator. He also writes the well-respected column "Promulgated Broadcasts," which talks about current government uses of RPGs and initiatives regarding the game industry. (Unknown to most, Kite is a retired Secret Service agent who served as GM for more than one President.)

Mark Morgan-David (*Cartoonist*, "I'm A Regular Comic"): The latest addition to the OO staff, Morgan-David works mostly in oils . . . which, while a work intensive way to do a cartoon strip, has garnered him world-wide acclaim. (He's really a Bollywood spy; the Indian movie studios want part of that gaming movie ka-ching, but only want to pursue the hottest, newest products on the horizon.)

Jean Mèche (*Former Columnist*, "Play Nice!"): Jean Mèche is a kindly old grandmother who lives in Dubuque, IA. Her much beloved column about dealing with gaming group disagreements in an open and sensitive manner no longer appears in OO... because it's been syndicated for the Hearst Newspaper chain as a gaming-focused advice column! (They call her the "Dear Abby of Adventure Gaming." Isn't that sweet? She has no secrets.)

Thad Overcliff (*Columnist*, "Crusades in the Field"): This intrepid soul hits the streets every other month, searching out the stories of how games are being played out there in the real world. Sometimes, he goes undercover, to game incognito in stores and at conventions across the country. His expose of "House-Rules-Gate" shocked the game industry to the very core, and toppled at least two publishers due to lack of customer confidence. He's driven to find the truth, at any personal cost. (Unknown to Speed, Thad Overcliff is secretly his brother, Rex Racer . . .)

Esteban Pantano (*Editor-in-Chief*, "the Whimsy Chair"): This hot-blooded Cuban-American rules OO with an iron fist. Contributors to the webzine fear his slashing blue and red edit-marks, which seems to sear into their very souls. An international playboy and member of the jet-set, he is never seen with the same woman on his arm twice. (Curiously, Pantano has *never* met Jack Stevenson -- his boss -- in person. Even stranger, he's discovered no one else has, either. Time to dust off those reporting shoes and get the story!)

Harry Scotting (*News Editor*, *Former Editor-in-Chief*): Scotting took over the Big Chair when Pierce Derrick vanished, and served a long and successful tenure. Uncomfortable with the awesome power of Editor-in-Chiefdom, however, he stepped down to run the News Desk. Nothing gets by this guy . . . (. . . Except for the stories he's paid to bury by other publishers. And he's paid well.)

Amelia Thorndress (*Former Columnist*, "Gaming by Women"): Thorndress wrote a year-long series for OO which focused on the female writers, artists, publishers, and other professionals of the gaming industry. Currently, she's taking time to assemble the columns into a single critical work of analysis, and no longer contributes to the webzine. (Thorndress shot a man in Reno, just to watch him die.)

Events & Possible Story Arcs

- **Avast Ye!:** Some internet hacker has been committing IPiracy on soon-to-be released games from major companies, and producing bootleg copies. The economic impact on the industry has been enormous. Find out who it is and how they're doing it. The only lead is that Christine Littlebee, owner and operator of the Magic Cowboy Range bookstore/gamestore, has discreetly let Esteban Pantano know that she's been approached by an individual with illegal copies of the much-awaited reboot of Black Lion's *World of Shininess* corebook manuscripts . . .
- **Missing Columnists:** One by one, OO columnists are disappearing, blowing their deadlines, and causing Pantano gnash his teeth in rage. He calls in the second-stringers and gives them their marching orders. First, PCs must step up to the plate and fill the wordcount shortfall with something -- anything -- that's game-related. Second, they must go and seek out their lost coworkers. Where will this mystery lead?
- **Exclusive Coverage:** Las Vegas. The Gazebo Casino. The World Championship GRPG Tournament. Six gamers, ready to risk it all for the big bucks. Then, the night before the first session, one turns up floating face-down in the Casino's pool. Who did it? More importantly to the tournament, who will take his place? The Navy Captain?

The Klutzy Dolt? The Millionaire (or his Wife)? The Movie Star? The Respected Scientist? The Corn-Fed All-American Kid?

- *Recursion Roleplaying*: The PCs are Secret Service agents who are testing a new virtual reality RPG for JS Games, in the high-tech basement complex of the company's headquarters. Equipped with HUD sunglasses, earpieces, laser wands, a Cray Supercomputer, and several GMs (both offsite humans and onsite AIs), the agents play characters trapped in a world under siege by aliens. Then, unaccountably, their communications links to the human GMs go dead, the AI GMs become eccentric, and the doors to the playfield are sealed shut. What do they do? And who has trapped them so fiendishly? (Paging R. Sam Johns, white courtesy phone . . .)

Using the *Obelisk Online* Setting

Just Passing Through: The *OO* setting works well as an alternate Earth for dimension-hopping games. It's enough like the real world so as not to be too ridiculous, but if played subtly, its differences can have a humorous impact around the gaming table.

Campaign Seed: Or, this setting can be used as the basis for an entire campaign based in a thinly-veiled "real-world," with the added benefit that many players will already have a greater or lesser grasp of how the game industry works (or doesn't work). However, note that the concept of this world might be a bit precious for some players -- be warned!

*Happy Anniversary, **Pyramid**! Here's to another decade of the Best in Gaming.*

Pyramid Pick from the Past

Demons (for Use with Advanced Dungeons & Dragons) [1992]

Published by Mayfair Games Inc.

Written by Mike Nystul

Boxed set with consisting of 192 b&w pages; \$20.00

Demons are fun to develop in RPGs. Spirits of evil summoned by sorcerers, they are a source of corrupt power as well as personifications of malign forces. They raise questions about a campaign world's divine cosmology and the nature of souls and the afterlife. Or they can just be a set of big bad evil guys for the PCs to whomp on. In 1992 Mayfair Games started a set of demon products for their Role Aids line of *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* compatible RPG sourcebooks. These demons are not based on any real-world religions but provide a useable cosmology for using demons in an RPG fantasy world.

The flagship of this product line was titled *Demons*, a folio containing 48 three-hole-punched individual monster entry sheets, an 80-page DM sourcebook on demons, a foldout map of the product's demon dimension, and a 64-page in-character treatise on demons appropriate for use as a player handout.

The treatise is a fun starting point. It details a legendary history of the universe, including the rising of the gods, creation of the world and men, a split into good and evil gods who war, and the divine discovery of demons as a distinct-but-heretofore-hidden corrupting element of the divine aspect of the universe. It briefly describes the divine casting out of demons into a dimensional prison, and the Compact that is later made allowing them out of their prison to tempt mortals, so that pure souls go to the good gods and corrupt ones to the evil gods. The treatise continues with a discourse on the breakdown of the hierarchies of the demons, and how they are individually associated with various sins associated with the heart, soul, blood, flesh, mind, and their interactions. Demon lords are named and described along with their associated sins, and some of their powers. There is a list of terms of the Compact that the author has deduced through study, along with conditions that create exceptions to these limitations on demonic interactions. It finishes off with a number of ritual components for sample spells, including what appears to be Latin verbal components.

Throughout the text there are notes and commentary from a subsequent researcher challenging many of the conclusions and exclaiming on the implications of the author's theories. As a handout it works well, providing challenged theories and deductions that feel right in context, as well as providing substantive information for a character. The nature of demons as deceivers means that the information is valuable, but also not necessarily correct. Only one divine city and the demon lords are named, otherwise gods are only referenced vaguely as "the gods of law," or "the gods of evil." This means that it is easy to fit the book into most any campaign.

The DM's sourcebook presents the same history with advice on how to integrate the story into a DM's own campaign. Demons are defined as evil extra-planar spirits that gain power from mortal sins. Standard demon abilities are defined including the power to manifest circumstances related to their associated sin to tempt mortals, and the ability to possess mortals. Demon lords gain additional abilities such as gating in minions and teleportation at will. Great advice is given on creating campaign or demon specific indicators for demonic presence and on different personality types for role-playing demons. The Compact is discussed and possible limitations on demonic interactions for the DM to decide upon.

There are a number of player options presented. A half-demon race, a demon slayer class, and a thaumaturgist specialization for wizards who

Demons was followed up by:

focus on dealing with demons are introduced. The wizard specialization would work fine in versions 3.0 or 3.5 of the **d20 System** and the slayer could be worked up fairly easily after determining skills and saves; the existing guidelines give them warrior attacks, d8 hit dice, bard spell progression, and a limited spell list of demon-related wizard spells, along with some demon-fighting specific class powers. A number of spells are introduced both for protecting against demons, and summoning and making pacts with the various types of lesser horde demons all the way up to demon lords. The summonings usually take hours to accomplish, but pact spells can lead to services, queries answered, or lesser demons being available for single-round calling spells. There are also three evil archmagics (epic spells higher than 9th level originally introduced in Mayfair's **Archmagics** book) for banishing an entire race to an extra-dimensional prison or snuffing out the sun; there is also *lesser apocalypse*, a 13th-level spell that will destroy an entire country or even a continent after a certain number of months.

The demonic hierarchy of lords is explored a bit more in-depth with alliances and hatreds spelled out. The nature of the various demonic demi-planes is described along with a number of unique magical items, each presented with an in-depth and evocative history. There are a number of adventure seeds for using demons in a campaign and advice on how to integrate demons from the sourcebook into an existing campaign. Also there is a full short adventure investigating the ruins of an old demon summoning cabal, where the players can find a copy of the annotated treatise handout.

Finally there are the monster entries, hole-punched in the **Advanced Dungeons & Dragons 2nd Edition Monstrous Compendium** format. Stats for the various demon lords, including ability scores ranging up to 25 and class levels ranging from a duke who is a 16th-level wizard, to the king of demons who has 54 class levels split among three classes. There are also entries for the lesser horde demons, including a new set of Type 1 to 5 demons, gatekeeper guardian demons, and magically active venomous demonic dragons who breathe negative energy.

If you are playing **Hackmaster**, the conversions are quite easy: Throw on a 20 hit-point kicker and you are ready to go. For players of the **d20 System** or **Arcana Unearthed** there is a bit more work, as the base monsters need stats, feats, skills, and saves determined. The lords will require some judgment calls as well, although they will probably do well as outsiders with lots of class levels. Their hit points will end up being seriously upped, but after conversion they would make great Epic Level opponents. It will take some time to stat them out to the full **d20 System 3.5** format, however.

So what does **Demons** provide for today's gamer? First it provides a good cosmology, providing base of answers to what is are demons, and what their relationships are to the gods and mortal souls. Also, the demon lords form a unique pantheon, described well, with evocative associations to individual sins. It would take a little conversion work to bring them up to full **d20 System** compliance, but provide a great set of antagonists once the work is put in.

--John Henry Stam

Demons II: a boxed set that provided an inquisitor class, rules for demonic taint, information on demonic cults, and more adventures and items for using demons.

A series of monster folios for some of the demi-planes of the demons (**Denizens of Diannor, Denizens of Og, Denizens of Verekna, Denizens of Vecheron, Denizens of Thanis**) exploring the lesser hierarchies of sub-rulers including individual demonic marshals, governors, and thanes. **Denizens of Verekna** came with the *Grey Grimoire*, a sourcebook of demon spells. These were good but could have used more descriptive text for the individual demons.

Sentinels: a boxed set with the angelic counterparts to demons, including a little discourse on why it is an evil act to summon an angel and bend them to your will.

Apocalypse: A boxed set to bring on an end of the world.

Finally there was *Seed of Darkness*, a novel by Nigel Findley set in a world using the **Demons** cosmology.

Pyramid Pick from the Past

Fluxx 3.0 [First Edition in 1996]

Published by [Looney Labs](#)

Created by Andrew Looney

84 cards, rules, in a tuck box; \$12.00

***Fluxx Blanxx*: \$3**

In 1998, Iron Crown published the "first" edition of ***Fluxx*** -- a full distribution of the game Icehouse had released in limited quantities themselves in 1996. Icehouse licensed it to I.C.E. and later took it back when they started Looney Labs. That company has recently seen the publication of the third edition of ***Fluxx***.

The object of the game is to be the first player to fulfill a Goal card, but at the outset there aren't any Goals on the table -- only the basic rules. Those rules are as follows:

Draw one, play one.

That's it. Those are all the rules in the game -- until such time as someone plays a New Rule card. Each of these cards alters the rules in some way. They may ask that players now draw two cards instead of three, or impose a limit on how many cards a player can keep in his hand. If a contradictory card is played (Draw 4 is played when Draw 2 is already on the table), the old rule is discarded and the new one enforced, even if it alters how the current player plays during that same turn.

A Goal card, like a New Rule card, is played on the table and affects all players. It tells everyone what Keeper card or cards are needed to finish the game. As soon as someone plays the necessary Keeper cards in front of him, he's declared the winner. Keepers embody thoughts, ideas, and objects like War, Peace, Taxes, Love, Coffee, and Television. So if the current Goal is "All You Need Is Love," having the Keeper card "Love" in front of you is enough to win. If the Goal is "Hearts and Minds," you'll need both the Brain and Love Keepers. Then again, a couple of cards will turn things on its head and ask that a certain card not be out at all; The "Brain" Goal only works if you have the "Brain" (no relation to the Cheapass game) and no player has "Television" in play.

So while you're trying to keep up with all the New Rules as you play your hand (if the New Rules allow you to have a hand) and try to get the right Keepers and Goals out at the same time, the Action cards will be making your life simultaneously miserable and downright entertaining. The Actions are quick plays, usually with a temporary effect or a circumvention of the current rules. The order of play may be reversed. You may be able to sweep a number of New Rule cards from the table. You may be able to fish cards out of the discard pile, or out of an opponent's hand. Some Actions let you jumble up those Keepers already on the table and redistribute them, or steal a Keeper from someone, or draw cards from any number of sources and play them immediately.

What this all adds up to is a quietly controlled chaos. One player's turn may be the work of a moment, and the next player's turn might spiral, card by card, into a laughably exasperating flurry of contradictory rules and additional plays. Games (you will play more than one) are often brief; few go past the 10-minute mark, but they can go further if events conspire to allow it. It's all part of ***Fluxx's*** delightful unpredictability. Not only is play fast, the tuck box actually deserves the oft-misused designation "pocket-sized," and a few square feet of playing space suffice to get things underway.

Not only has the game been one of the most popular and notable card games on the market since the "original"

edition's release in 1998, it has served as both a mechanical and thematic basis for other Looney Labs releases (most recognizably **Chrononauts**). Changes in this edition range from the cosmetic to the complete. About one quarter of the cards have been altered in some way. In some cases it's as simple as a different illustration for the same Keeper card, a switching of the images on a Goal, or even just a renaming of the same Action card. There are fewer Keeper cards, but more Goal cards. New Rule cards deal a lot with bonus cards offered to players depending on how many Keepers they have in front of them. They may also allow two Goals to be in play at once, or change all numbers in the game to X+1 (anytime a card says "draw this many cards," for example, players draw one more than that). You won't be hiding Keepers anymore, and the New Rules that depended on having certain Keepers are gone.

The new cards take up the game's full allotment, so there is no longer a blank card included in the deck. Looney Labs still sells **Blanxx** in packets of 15. These aren't entirely blank but rather have the Action, Keeper, Goal, and New Rule imprints, leaving the rest of the card open for you to write in your new house rules and create new effects. (One of the 15, oddly, is a promo card for the aforementioned **Chrononauts**.) Most of the game's cards make common sense assumptions about how the game should play, so players coming up with new variations on their own shouldn't be too hard.

It's hard to find a game that works this well and holds up for as long as **Fluxx** has, but it has amazing backward compatibility and it's a hard system to bust. The price has gone up two bucks for the new edition, but when one considers that in spite of all the fluctuations, the game's playability has, if anything, increased, that's one more alteration worth making.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Pick from the Past

The Realm of Shadows (for Call of Cthulhu) [1997]

Published by [Pagan Publishing](#)

Written by John H. Crowe III with John Tynes

Illustrated by Blair Reynolds

204-page b&w softcover; \$20.95

Editor's Note: Although this review has a defined "Spoiler Space," much of the review talks about elements that make this adventure special and noteworthy. Read at your own risk.

How you rate the many **Call of Cthulhu** campaigns, scenario anthologies, and supplements that have come out over its two decades of life would make for a potentially lively debate. But for the sake of argument, here is how I rate the various campaigns:

Certainly, Chaosium's **Masks of Nyarlathotep** deserves its much-lauded status alongside **The Enemy Within** campaign for **Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay** as one of the best ever published -- at least up until the last few years or so. It is still very good and still best typifies the archetypal "onionskin" format established with the publication of the very first **Call of Cthulhu** campaign, **Shadows of Yog-Sothoth**, back in 1982. Two of Chaosium's more recent campaigns, [Beyond the Mountains of Madness](#) and [Unseen Masters: Modern Struggles Against Hidden Powers](#) -- both Origins Award winners in their own right -- are also amongst the best. Joining them would be at least two books from Pagan Publishing, the first of these being the equally award winning **Delta Green** campaign setting, along with its equally as good (and better in the eyes of some) supplement, [Delta Green: Countdown](#), which breathed new life into the **Cthulhu Now** or 1990s setting for the game. Pagan has also published their own fine example of the onionskin campaign in the form of the highly regarded **Walker in the Wastes**.

If these then, are the best, what of the rest? Certainly Pagan Publishing's **Golden Dawn** supplement did as much for the 1890s of **Cthulhu by Gaslight** as **Delta Green** did for the 1990s. And yet titles like these have eclipsed another campaign penned by John H. Crowe III, the author of **Walker in the Wastes**. Although it owes a little to the onionskin format of campaigns that came before it, **The Realm of Shadows** is in many ways very different to the typical **Call of Cthulhu** campaigns that came before it. Of course, this should come as no surprise to devotees of Pagan Publishing. Published in 1997, **The Realm of Shadows** is set in 1940, against the backdrop of the war in Europe and in particular, the fall of France to the Axis Powers. This is an era little explored by any publisher of **Call of Cthulhu** supplements and really, it is only recently that a few supplements have begun to expose the 1930s to the threat of the Mythos. Further, the threat faced by the investigators -- the player characters being literally that in the form of Private Investigators -- is very far from being typical. It is not some grandiose scheme to end the world and replace mankind's domination of the planet by having some cult return their alien master to his rightful place once again, whether by raising the island of R'lyeh or launching a rocket to destabilize the orbit of the moon or the setting free of the Wind-Walker from his prison above the Northern latitudes. Rather, the threat they face is that of the humble Ghoul.

Always relegated to minor status, the Ghoul has always been regarded as something akin to an entry-level Mythos foe or creature for both the neophyte investigator to face and the neophyte Keeper to run. They have never been seen as a serious threat, content to serve a more powerful figure such as that of the witch Mercy Booth, in the scenario "The

Wail of the Witch" (most recently published in Chaosium's *Curse of Cthulhu*), or as oddities as in "Paper Chase," the single-player scenario first seen in the *Cthulhu Companion: Ghastly Adventures & Erudite Lore*. Or they are content to reside alongside and below humanity, dining upon our recently departed and buried nearest and dearest.

Although *The Realm of Shadows* is Mythos-based, John H. Crowe III does not draw as much upon the works of H.P. Lovecraft, but rather from the works of one of his respondents, the artist, sculptor, and painter, Clark Ashton Smith. Best known among Mythos circles for the "Zothique Cycle," Smith's stories are set in the far future, upon the last continent of mankind, known as Zothique. It is from one of these stories, *The Charnel God*, and its setting of the city of Zul-Bha-Sair, that Crowe draws his most direct focus and inspiration for *The Realm of Shadows*. The city, located in a far-off part of the Dreamlands, is both home and prison to Mordiggian, worshipped by Ghouls and human cultists alike, both in the Dreamlands and in the waking world, where the Cult of Charnel God is also known as the Cult of Mordiggian and the Charnel Cult. Like any of the Great Old Ones, Mordiggian possesses great patience; surprisingly, so do his worshippers, unlike the cults of other Great Old Ones and Elder Gods. Detailed in the Mythos tome, "Cultes des Gouls," described both here in *The Realm of Shadows* and in more detail in [The Keeper's Companion](#), the Cult of Charnel God fled France at the end of the 18th century to find sanctuary and then establish a very secret headquarters deep in the jungles of France's least regarded colony. Even into the 20th century, French Guiana remains a backwater located on the Northeast coast of South America, surviving only on handouts from Paris and best known for being home to the infamous Devil's Island penal colony. From their isolation in the jungle, and their true headquarters in Zul-Bha-Sair, the cult's high priests seek to spread their influence and corrupt humanity such that necrophagy and cannibalism are an accepted practice. Only then, they believe, will Mordiggian be able to cross from the Dreamlands through the gate that connects the cult's headquarters in Zul-Bha-Sair to the one in French Guiana. Thus another Great Old One will be returned to the world, but one that seeks domination through social change rather than through destruction.

Of course, the investigators know nothing of this at the beginning of *The Realm of Shadows*. They have found work in post-depression Massachusetts as private investigators. Rather than create characters using the Private Eye occupation found in the *Call of Cthulhu* rulebook, the author (and Pagan Publishing) encourages the players to work to create more rounded investigators, their skill and personal interest points distributed across a range of skills to reflect a character's background that could easily stretch as far back as the Great War. This discussion also includes a fully worked example that could be used a Player Character. The default set-up for the campaign also casts the investigators as completely ignorant of the Mythos, as there is no real reason for them to have had any experience of it. This does not mean that *The Realm of Shadows* cannot be played with more experienced investigators, and indeed one option discussed is that of using the campaign as a sequel of sorts to another previously published by Pagan Publishing, *Coming Full Circle*, also penned by Crowe. For the player characters this may be advantageous, as both campaigns are set in Greenfield, Massachusetts, and the author takes time to indicate the links between the two.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The Realm of Shadows is broken into four parts. The first is "Kith And Kin," in which a local doctor, Franklin Quigley, asks the private investigators to locate his wife Katherine, who has absconded with their daughter Anne. This seems to be just a missing persons case and should be run and played as such. At the end of this scenario, the investigators will have gained their first exposure to the Mythos, as had Katherine Quigley prior to her flight. Deeply religious, she has discovered that her husband is not human, but in her eyes, a demon. Of course, Franklin Quigley is nothing of the sort, but rather is a Ghoul, making his daughter a crossbreed or Hu-Ghoul. Successful exposure of Quigley will also give clues to the existence of others of his kind, some coming from those in his possession, others not.

The second chapter, "Provender of the God," contains the first hints that the Ghouls are in any way organized and given their bent, have found a home in one of the local funeral homes. The task of investigating any of these establishments found in Greenfield is not an easy one and demands no little subtlety if the cult is not to become aware of the characters. As with "Kith and Kin" this part of the campaign places the investigators in a very proactive role and works them hard in their efforts to follow up all of the clues. Should the cult based in the town become aware that they are under investigation, they will also have to react with some care lest they expose themselves. Since they happen to operate a funeral home, they also have some status in society that gives them some protection, and which they wish to

keep. If the investigators can get inside the funeral home, major clues indicate that some of the staff are in the process of preparing for a trip to French Guiana.

Another clue comes in the form of a drug to be ingested or injected. Doing so sends the consumer straight into the Dreamlands, but rather than descending the stairs to the Cavern Of Flame as in any other journey there, they travel directly to Zul-Bha-Sair! What they discover there is revealed in the third chapter, "Charnel House," that really allows the investigators to explore the nature of the cult at its source, rather than via its highly dispersed network of cells across the waking world. Curiously, this part of ***The Realm of Shadows*** is almost tangential to the needs of the main plot and it is not absolutely necessary to play through it to complete the campaign. Of course, not playing through "Charnel House" would mean that the investigators (and therefore the players) miss out a major aspect of ***The Realm of Shadows***, one that lies at its core. The formula that actually allows the imbiber to travel to Zul-Bha-Sair -- which also enables cult members to get orders directly from its headquarters -- is only a recent development, and the campaign includes details of who has created it, and where, should the investigators wish to follow it up.

The final part of ***The Realm of Shadows*** is "When Darkness Falls," which gives the investigators the opportunity to foil the long-term plans of the cult. It involves finding safe passage to French Guyana; the chance of their boat being torpedoed by a German U-Boat is remote, but still a possibility. Once there, they must make their way deep into the interior. Nothing about this is easy, from planning and outfitting the expedition to the hiring of a decent guide -- several are fully detailed -- and dealing with the local corrupt bureaucracy. All this before they make the trip up river and trek through the jungle. Once the investigators get to the cult's secret headquarters their job is no less easy, as there is no simple way to discern how exactly to foil the cult's plans. This can be seen as a disadvantage to the campaign, as it may frustrate the players, but at the same time, it makes sense; why *would* the cult make it obvious?

[END SPOILER ALERT]

In addition to the four main parts of ***The Realm Of Shadows***, several addenda allow the investigators to follow upon side plots as well as organizing each part's handouts. These are all very well-done, and previously available separately in the now out-of-print ***The Realm of Shadows Player's Aid Kit***. They add greatly to the atmosphere and feel of the campaign as Pagan Publishing goes to some lengths to make each individual handout feel like the genuine article.

The campaign is also supported with extensive details on the cult and its goals, the nature of the Ghouls, adding the Greater Ghoul and the Hu-Ghoul crossbreed to the Lesser Ghoul type described in the ***Call of Cthulhu*** rulebook. The Mythos tome "Cultes des Goules" is described and expanded upon to include several *Nostradamus*-like prophecies. These have a somewhat gruesome anatomical theme to them and the last few will only really be appreciated by the players with the benefit of hindsight. To help with the time frame and feel of the campaign, a calendar is given for 1940 (marked with both days of the full moon and new moon) and, in an appendix, a timeline of world events from early 1939 through to the end of 1940. Used judiciously, they can impart a sense of ominous apprehension as the players have an awareness of the significance of the listed events and where they lead, one that the investigators most certainly do not.

Unfortunately, and despite the well-organized contents of ***The Realm of Shadows*** that includes a contents page for each part of the campaign, the book as a whole is let down by a lack of an index. Given the wealth and depth of information found in this campaign, the inclusion of an index would have proved not just useful, but nigh-indispensable. This is the only major let down in ***The Realm of Shadows***, the minor being a single spelling mistake. Otherwise this is a beautifully produced book, the look of which would be further evolved for future Pagan Publishing releases, ***Mortal Coils*** and ***The Resurrected III: Out of the Vault***. The pages preceding each chapter are done in dark gray and near black tones, again with a strong anatomical feel --both of humans and Ghouls. Their effect is to enhance the sense of uneasiness that pervades the pages of ***The Realm of Shadows***. There is also a sense of the anatomical in the attention to detail of Blair Reynolds's sublime and subtly disturbing illustrations that run throughout the book.

As much as ***The Realm Of Shadows*** owes to the previous campaigns done in the traditional onionskin format, it goes beyond that format to present something not so sharply divided into separate chapters, each of which is set in a different location. Instead, it is more fluid and natural in feel, with its events really only taking place in two main locations: Greenfield, Massachusetts and French Guiana. The mood is also very different, with the strong sense of

foreboding coming not from the plans of the Cult of the Charnel God, but from the external events of the real world -- the spread of the war in Europe to the rest of the world. The writing style is also not as stiff as in previous ***Call of Cthulhu*** books, with the author taking the opportunity to step into his own voice and regale the reader with tales of playtests held for ***The Realm Of Shadows***. Ever wondered what happens if an investigator stomps too hard on a grave they think is being looted by ghouls? Or how one group finished the campaign? Or what happens if you dope a goat with the cult's recently developed formula and send it to Dreamlands? Not only do the answers greatly enliven the book, they also provide interesting suggestions and options for the Keeper.

Eclipsed by subsequent releases from Pagan Publishing and regarded as perhaps too different from other more traditional ***Call of Cthulhu*** supplements, ***The Realm Of Shadows*** works so very well because of its differences. Indeed, it can be seen as almost a celebration of such differences within the format of the onionskin campaign. Perhaps set too far from the decade of the 1920s and too close to WWII for most campaigns, the eventual and hoped-for arrival of Chaosium's ***Pulp Cthulhu*** supplement may turn ***The Realm of Shadows*** into something that can be used to cap a long-running campaign as the war approaches. But until then, ***The Realm Of Shadows*** is a campaign of a singular mood and flavor that casts a little-regarded independent race in a whole new light. For that, ***The Realm of Shadows*** deserves special attention, but the superb and subtle campaign that the author builds around them is the reason that ***The Realm Of Shadows*** deserves to sit alongside the best that ***Call of Cthulhu*** has to offer.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid 10th Anniversary Spectacular

by Steven Marsh

As you may have noticed, this is *Pyramid's* 10th Anniversary issue. (Actually, we declared October 23rd as the "official" Anniversary -- 10-23, get it? -- but we figure October 24th is close enough.)

To celebrate our milestone, we wracked our brains to figure out how to celebrate. Our first inclination was to invite the Beatles to reunite for our special issue. But after two of them didn't return our calls, we had to come up with something else.

And that's when we hit upon the happy thought of having our *own* reunion, of sorts. We invited just about everyone who's been a part of the *Pyramid* family -- along with everyone else who's still a part of our posse -- to come over and say, "Hi!"

In addition we've tweaked our review format for this week into "Pyramid Picks from the Past," highlighting some noteworthy games over the past decade or so that somehow escaped our all-seeing gaze the first time.

We hope you enjoy this super-sized trip down memory lane. Thanks to all our contributors for making our magazine a reality, both this week and over the past decade. And thanks to you, our readers; whether you've been with us for the whole 10 years or just joined us this week, you have our gratitude for making this milestone possible.

As ever, we welcome your comments and suggestions. You can send them to us directly by e-mail at pyramid@sjgames.com, or drop by our [discussion boards](#) if you'd like to engage in discourse with the masses.

It's been a great journey so far, and we hope you'll stick around to see where we go for the *next* decade. And the next. And the next . . .

No, Really, What's in a Name?

Making a Name Mean Something in *d20 System* Games by Owen K.C. Stephens

Yes I'm revisiting the subject of my first *Pyramid* article and spinning it into a *d20 System* article. But first, an aside to explain how I came to be able to celebrate *Pyramid's* 10th anniversary beside many more well-established contributors. If you don't want to read my anniversary-themed thoughts, skip the next two paragraphs.

My first *Pyramid* article (["What's In a Name?"](#)) went up on May 12, 2000. I was thrilled when that happened, as my published professional credits up to that point were limited to a few issues of *Dragon Magazine*. Getting published in *Pyramid Online* represented a real step forward for me -- and it meant one of my favorite articles was finally getting published. Its history included "successful" submissions to the short-lived *Troll* and then *Shadis*, both of which went out of business shortly after sending me an acceptance letter. I actually considered not submitting it to *Pyramid*, for fear the article was cursed and would doom one of my favorite magazines to termination.

Happily *Pyramid* was stronger than any mere article curse, and as proof here we are celebrating its 10th anniversary, and the third year since my first article went up. Although I ended up being too busy to follow up that first article for several years, a series of events recently put me in the position of being asked by SJ Games if I'd be interested in producing a biweekly *d20 System* article, and I immediately accepted. I have no idea what the next several years will bring, but expect to happily raise a glass to toast *Pyramid's* 20th anniversary of great articles and community.

Okay, on to the article.

Names with Meaning

It's all very well to have a great character name, but *d20 System* players tend to focus on things that give them real game-mechanical benefits. A cool name, background, or honorific is less important than the best combination of skills, feats, and class levels. Of course, this is a broad stereotype, but there is some truth to the idea that what gets rewarded gets duplicated. GMs looking to change the tone, feel, or sound of their games can use this to good advantage by rewarding the behavior they'd prefer to see more of. Subtle rewards such as engaging role-playing opportunities and positive NPC reactions are fine . . . but sometimes a direct game benefit is better and faster.

If you want to encourage players to give character names more thought, tie game effects to them. Players are far more likely to consider whether their wizard is Larken the Blue or Larkin Sharkslayer if that distinction makes a real difference. It's important to set one ground rule for such names regardless of what method is used to introduce them -- only names that sound appropriate to the campaign are rewarded with game benefits. Bob the Mighty may meet the technical requirements for a name of renown, but the GM is well within his rights to refuse any benefit be granted by it.

One method for adding such names is to allow characters to take a feat (see *Name of Renown*, below). This balances the advantages of such names, and puts the power to choose one in the player's hands. Other options are to allow players to buy such names with experience points (a cost of 100 XP is balanced), or even simply assign bonuses to the best names in a campaign without requiring those players to make some sacrifice. This last method is the least balanced, since it grants a benefit with no cost, but it's also the one most likely to encourage players to stretch their imaginations looking for a good, appropriate character name.

New Feat

Name of Renown

You have a name or title that is important, granting you real advantages.

Prerequisites: Character level 1 or performing a noteworthy action related to the name selected (GM's discretion).

Benefit: You gain a name with game-mechanical advantages (as defined below). It may be your full name, or an honorific applied before or after your name. Anyone who recognizes you through your reputation knows this name.

Anything of approximately the same power level as a typical feat can be turned into a name-based benefit. GMs should be cautious about allowing players to define their own name benefits, instead matching a good name with a benefit appropriate to the style of the campaign. In some cases it may be reasonable to require a decent name to take existing feats or prestige classes (such as those that include membership in an organization of increased fame). Some suggestions for name benefits for fantasy *d20 System* games are given below.

Most of the following suggestions assume the name granting these benefits is a tacked-on nickname or honorific. It's equally appropriate to use the character's birth-name, especially if the Name of Renown feat is taken at first level. In these cases it may be the meaning of the name that's most important. For example, Abdiel is a Hebrew name which means "servant of God," making it perfect for a blessed name benefit.

Arcane Names

The character has a name that represents his connection to or aptness with arcane powers. This may be a mystic-sounding descriptor ("Star-Eyed," "the Seer," "Spellweaver"), a reference to arcane materials and symbols ("Runebearer," "the Owl," "Ironstaff") or a color associated with arcane magic (often blue, red, or yellow).

Choose one arcane spellcasting class. This class is now considered an additional preferred class for your character. Additionally, you may select three 0-level spells from this class, each of which you may cast once each day using your character level as the casting level.

Blessed Names

These names indicate the character is particularly well-regarded by one or more divine power, and has the grace of the gods with him. This may be a variation on a particular god's name (Balderi, Hela, Lok, Thora, Wodin), or a word with associations to good luck or positive traits (Able, Charity, Gallant, Hope, the Blessed).

Select one clerical domain (if you worship a god, it must be a domain that clerics of that god may take). You gain the granted power of that domain. In some cases, this may not benefit the character (such as a fighter choosing the healing domain).

Divine Names

The character has a name that represents his connection to or aptness with divine powers. This represents not the character's high favor with some god, but his ability to draw upon holy powers. The name may be a religious-sounding descriptor (the Holy, Heavensent, Angelic), a reference to divine materials and symbols (Oakenbranch, the Chandler, Pallbearer) or a color associated with divine magic (often black, gold, silver, or white).

Choose one divine spellcasting class. This class is now considered an additional preferred class for your character. Additionally, you may select three 0-level spells from this class, each of which you may cast once each day using your character level as the casting level.

Noble Names

The character's name is noble, suggesting high courts and chivalrous behavior. The name may evoke courtly virtues

("the Fair," "Pureheart," "Dauntless"), a noble-sounding birth-name ("Baron," "Laird," "Lady"), or a nickname based on some tool or symbol used by nobles and knights ("the Shield," "Stagheart," "Cupbearer").

You always have access to the Diplomacy and Ride skills as class skills. If these are already class skills for you, you receive a +2 bonus to both skills.

Alternatively, you gain a +1 circumstance bonus to any bonus granted by a non-magical masterwork item.

Racial Foe Names

The character's name indicates his enmity for a particular race or a reputation for killing them. The name may be a simple combination of the race and a harsh-sounding term (-bane, -death, -fighter, -foe, -hammer, kill-, -slayer, -spear), or it may be something associated with enemies of the race ("the Lion" for a slayer of were-rats, "the Holy" for a slayer of undead, etc.).

Choose any one creature type. The character gains a +2 bonus on Bluff, Listen, Sense Motive, Spot, and Survival checks when using these skills against creatures of this type. Likewise, he gets a +2 bonus on weapon damage rolls against such creatures. If the character chooses humanoids or outsiders as a favored enemy, he must also choose an associated subtype.

The name may refer to one particular example of a creature type (Boar-Killer), but the advantages of the name still apply to all creatures of the selected type.

Racial Friend Names

The character has a name indicating his acceptance or alliance with a particular creature type. The name may be a simple combination of the race and an allied-sounding term (-blooded, -brother, -friend, -sister), or it may be something associated with the race ("the Spider" for drow, "Rockthrower" for giants, etc.).

Choose any one creature type. The character gets a +2 bonus to all Charisma-based skills with creatures of this type. Additionally, creatures of this type normally have an initial reaction of no worse than "neutral" toward the character. The character counts as a member of this race for purposes of meeting racial prerequisites for prestige classes, feats, and item creation.

The name may refer to one particular example of a creature type (Goblinblood), but the advantages of the name still apply to all creatures of the selected type or subtype.

Scoundrel Names

The character's name is roguish, suggesting back alleys and shady deals. The name may be evocative of stealth or the night ("the Shadow," "Nightstalker," "Midnight"), a street-name ("Knuckles," "One-Eyed Jack," "the Butcher"), or a nickname based on some tool or symbol used by thieves and knaves ("the Dagger," "Icepick," "Footpad").

You always have access to the Hide and Move Silently skills as class skills. If these are already class skills for you, you receive a +2 bonus to both skills.

Trait Names

These names are simple statements regarding the character's prowess in some physical or mental arena. The honorific may be a simple description of the trait ("the Strong," "the Nimble," "the Clever"), a descriptive term ("Mountainheart," "Ironwill"), or simply something that evokes the trait ("the Bear," "the Weasel").

Select one ability. You gain a +3 bonus whenever making a check for that ability, and a +1 bonus to all skill checks

based on that ability score.

Creating Fear in Horror Roleplaying Games

by Paul M. Frazier

GM: *"The floorboards creak as you walk down the dark hallway. Your flashlight plays across portraits of old, dead men. A rat scampers across the top of your foot and you jump involuntarily. You come to the last door in the hallway. You pause before opening it, wondering what might lurk behind it. You slowly open the door and a foul creature, dripping ichor, reaches out to claw your heart from your chest."*

Player [stifling a yawn]: *"I pull my UZI out and blast it back to hell."*

* * *

Monsters, no matter how nasty, just don't frighten most roleplayers.

They've seen 'em all. Characters kill monsters and sometimes monsters kill characters, but once a combat starts, roleplaying games often become little more than crap games with color commentary. To really scare players, hit them where it counts. This article presents a technique that a GM can use to scare the players (not just the characters) in any horror roleplaying game.

At one time or another, everyone who plays horror games has tried to create an eerie atmosphere. Candlelight is good, but it's hard to read dice in the dark. Spooky music is always a good choice (the soundtrack from *The Omen* is a personal favorite), but monotony can quickly set in. These techniques, and others, can help create the proper mood, but they won't create fear *in players*. To do that, the GM must design a character-based roleplaying situation that presents a threat to the player characters that also means something to the players.

The best way to do this is to develop the PCs' personal relationships in some detail. Have each player answer the following questions before the campaign starts:

1. Describe your character's relationship with his or her family in detail. Include their parents, spouse or significant other, and children.
2. Describe their relationships with their closest friends in detail.
3. Describe their relationships with their professional associates in detail.

Convince the players to give these questions some thought and write short essays in response instead of one or two word answers. Every bit of detail they provide will supply fodder for the referee's imagination, which will improve the quality of the game. If a player is having a problem answering these questions, don't pressure them too much. Someone will write answers in sufficient detail for the GM to use the technique described below.

The answers to these questions will be the seeds used to create fearful situations for the players. By basing the upcoming horrific elements on material that the players have created themselves, they will have some control over the situations their characters will face. No one who has genuine phobias will offer them up as fodder for the game. So, for instance, a player who has a real fear of rape will not provide answers in her essays that would lead a GM to include that event in his game.

Start by selecting two or three candidate NPCs from each player's essays that can be put in harm's way in the course of the campaign. Design these NPCs carefully. They must match the description given by the player and be useful as possible victims in the future.

The next step is to roleplay mundane events in the lives of the PCs and their candidate NPCs. Don't spend too much playing time on these scenes at first. Roleplay a 10- to 15-minute scene with each PC and one of their candidate NPCs once every second or third play session. Possible scenes include a conversation over breakfast, a trip to the grocery store, or looking in on the kids while they sleep.

These short scenes serve two important purposes. First, they establish the "normal" world in which the characters live as the baseline reality that will be shattered by the horror to come. Second, these scenes bring life to the candidate NPCs. Once they have a presence in the lives of the PCs, threats to them will have a strong effect on the players. Both of these purposes are crucial to the goal of creating horror.

At first, these scenes may need to be scripted carefully until the players become familiar with these potential victims. As these scenes continue, some of these candidate NPCs will resonate with the players. They may talk about them or initiate scenes with them. These candidates have graduated to victim status.

The next step is to select one of these NPCs and start working them into the primary plotline of the campaign as the victim of a horrific enemy. Do this slowly at first and gradually increase the threat level. Children can become mysteriously sick, girlfriends can start hinting about marriage, or spouses can become oddly distant.

This strange behavior worsens until the character realizes that an enemy is harming their loved one. This is the point that real horror sets in. By building slowly toward this crisis, the players will develop an emotional investment in the victim. Threatening that investment will have a genuine emotional effect on the players.

Here is an example of this technique from a *Vampire: the Masquerade* campaign. One of the players chose to play Tiny, a Nosferatu (a hideously ugly vampire). He decided that Tiny had a mortal young daughter, Angela, who was still living in the city. Tiny still had feelings for her and would observe her from hiding frequently. He watched her during a late birthday party, while she played quietly with a doll he had gotten her for his last Christmas with her, and while her mother read her a bedtime story, as well as other mundane family activities. As Tiny watched this candidate NPC, the player became more interested in her fate.

After Tiny had learned about a particularly ancient and nasty vampire NPC, Angela became strangely ill. One night, Tiny went to watch her from outside her bedroom window as he had done in the past, but all he saw was the dried, bloody vomit she had left on the floor. Angela and her mother were gone.

Tiny tracked them to a nearby hospital, where he learned that her doctors could find nothing wrong yet could not stop the vomiting. Angela was being sickened by the ancient vampire as an indirect attack on Tiny. Tiny (and his player) became quite upset over Angela's illness. He frantically tried to discover what was happening to his daughter, abandoning his other responsibilities.

Eventually, Angela improved and was sent home from the hospital. Tiny, relieved, went to watch her secretly while she slept. She was awake when he arrived, however, and she spoke to him for the first time since he became a vampire. "Are you my Daddy?" she asked. In the conversation that followed, Angela told Tiny about the big, blonde man who has been giving her candy every night. Tiny knew that the ancient vampire was a big, blonde man. She told Tiny that she started feeling better after eating the candy for a few days and that she "really, really likes the candy." Tiny asked to see a piece of this candy, and Angela reluctantly gave one to him. He tasted the candy and was overwhelmed with the taste of vampiric blood. Tiny's enemy has turned his daughter into a Ghoul (a human that is addicted to vampiric blood, has some supernatural healing powers, and is enslaved by the vampire that created her). As Tiny left in a rage, she said to him, "Daddy, the big, blonde man wants to talk to you . . ."

The moment the player realized what had happened to his character's daughter, a look of pure horror crossed his face. Taking vengeance on his enemy was all the *player* wanted to do. (His muttered, "You bastard!" made me a very happy GM.) If he had simply been told that his daughter had been turned into a Ghoul, without doing any of the previous groundwork, he would not have had this reaction.

Many game systems have mechanics for creating NPCs that are dependent upon a PC for protection on a regular basis. The technique discussed here works well for these characters, but everyone has family, friends, or associates that can be endangered once or twice in a campaign. Don't be limited to using those characters with dependent NPCs as a part of their character design. Put all of them through this emotional meat grinder. It will create a much more horrifying roleplaying experience.

With the appropriate groundwork, real fear can be brought to horror genre roleplaying games. Urge the players to provide details about the people in their characters' lives. Once they have written these short essays, decide which people described in them are good candidates for becoming victims in the campaign. Bring these characters into play, first in mundane ways and later in more horrific ways as the players begin to think of them as real people and not just numbers on a character sheet. When the players realize just what is happening to the important people in their characters' lives, fear will set in. This process will take time and effort, both on the part of the Game Master and the players, but the payoff will be worth it.

The Jaws of Defeat

There's a point in many console video games -- particularly the exploratory adventure-type ones -- where I confront fear. It's usually around the time of the bosses at the end of the level; over the course of the battle I'm dealing it damage and it's damaging me. My eyes flicker back and forth between the raging battle and my current health level. Usually -- cruelly -- I don't know how many more hits I need to defeat the boss, so the only option is to keep attacking.

There's a point where I know the battle will end soon; I'm at a point where I cannot withstand many more hits, and all I can do is keep attacking and hope for the best. In my mind, ideally, the best moment of that gaming situation is when I literally cannot be hit once more . . . and I land the final blow that fells the foe.

At that moment, I feel a sense of surging relief and triumph. The moment *before* that moment is a mix of anticipation, dread, and concentration. And that entire experience is, in my mind, one of the most satisfying sensations of any gaming pursuit. It is a projection of survival without a literal saber-toothed tiger nipping at my heels. It is a triumph over adversity at the precipice of failure, augmenting the feeling of survival with the knowledge of victory.

Of course, this moment exists in other pursuits. Athletes talk about breaking past the wall, where they find the reserves and focus necessary to triumph at the moment when they should collapse. And, obviously, it's also common in gaming; John Wick discusses this very issue in his [first column](#), where he talks about players enjoying being knocked down, only to get up shakily and prevail.

Of course, in gaming this can be a difficult moment to achieve. For one thing, by definition the thrill of victory necessitates the risk of failure. For each boss fight where I manage to barely win, I probably fought the *same* fight at least a half-dozen times where I got my butt kicked. And while many athletes get that burst of energy necessary to win, far many more find their second wind . . . only to lose anyway.

In RPGs, on the other hand, there is often a temptation to let the heroes survive and even win (or at least, there's been that lure with me and my gaming associates). This obviously undermines the effects of the horror quite a bit. And I've also realized that RPGs are often dealing with the statistical anomalies; they're focused not on the 10,000 previous victims the Eater of Souls has claimed, but on the one party lucky and stalwart enough to thwart them . . . maybe.

In my games I've found a few ways around these opposite considerations, and it seems appropriate to bring them up on Halloween.

First I note that secondary goals can bring the PCs to the brink of failure -- and even beyond it -- without placing their characters in direct danger. I brought up this possibility a [few years ago](#) by musing about the *Indiana Jones* movies. Although you know Indy's going to survive, it's never a given that he'll win every time. Furthermore, those movies are rife with secondary goals -- protect a certain person, keep a certain object out of the Nazis' hands -- that, again, Indy may succeed or fail at. In this week's article "[Creating Fear in Roleplaying Games](#)" the author shows that one of these "secondary goals" in a horror campaign can be the friends and loved ones of the PCs themselves. Of course, any of the standard secondary goals -- keeping the Big Evil Plan from succeeding, saving other innocents -- can apply here, giving the good guys a yardstick against which they can measure their success or failure.

As another possibility, there are several games that allow the players more control over their fate, either by using some kind of "hero point" system, cards (a la *Torg* and *Masterbook*), or the like. These systems give the player an edge, but it doesn't change the underlying situation; much like [Voltron](#), it's hard to come up with a reason that the heroes don't use those points early and often. In that case, the curve of desperation drops off fast. As the heroes take damage, so too do they burn the things that give them an edge; by the end of the battle, the good guys are hurting *and* they don't have any tricks up their sleeves left. Unless the players are clever or the GM has planned very carefully, they will probably either defeat the baddies too soon and not achieve that blissful "jaws of defeat" feeling, *or* they'll become PC salsa.

As a variant on this, it might be possible to structure the game so that the protagonists get more able and capable of

survival the more they fail. The rush of adrenaline is a marvelous thing, and can help those about to die to amazing things. To simulate this, whatever "hero points" the hero might receive may be doled out as the battle progresses. For example, White Wolf's Storyteller games have a tiered health system with seven levels, ranging from "Healthy" to "Incapacitated." Perhaps each level of damage corresponds to a number of "bonus" dice the PC gets (maybe equal to twice the damage bonus) that can be expended to add dice to the dice pool for important rolls. Thus at the "Crippled" health level the character normally is at a -5 penalty, and can barely *move*; under this system he would get 10 bonus dice; if he used them all at once, he would actually be at a +5 bonus for one roll only.

This system could work for other games, of course; it would primarily be a matter of designing a tiered health system for any game that doesn't have them (for example, the alternate **d20 System** [hit point rules](#) that appeared in *d20 Weekly*), and figuring out what to give the PC for each level of damage taken. (Generally speaking, a good place to start is the system's Luck ability, if it has it.)

Of course, the GM will need to make sure this is regulated; I would probably say that each health loss "bonus" can only be gained once per adventure, so that a hero who drops a few health levels and gets the bonus in an earlier battle can't get the bonus again in the final battle, even if he heals up in the interim. And the GM may want to enforce the "don't be a smartass" rule, so that heroes don't try to shake the system by saying things like, "Hey, Lou! I need a bonus; can you stab me a couple times?" Still, this system should work pretty well, especially if there are already negatives for being injured; after all, the bonus only offsets the damage penalties a limited number of times, and after that the hero is hurtin'.

In all, that climactic moment -- where success seems just out of reach and utter failure is a real possibility -- is a magical moment. Keeping the heroes focused on how things can go wrong *or* right in those times will hopefully keep them on the edge of their seats, and filled with anticipation and dread.

--Steven Marsh

Summer's End

by [Chad Underkoffler](#)

Genre: Dark Fantasy/Horror

Campaign Setting and Background Information

This mini-CiaB is more an adventure scenario than a full-blown setting, but may contain seeds for an interesting campaign.

What Everybody Knows

It's just the world around us. . .

What Occult People Know

. . . Where only a few can see the secrets writhing in the deepest shadows. Knowledge of magic and monsters is occulted -- hidden from most. However, there are some who have trailed their fingers in this undercurrent of history. . .

Sorcerers

A sorcerer (also known as witch, wizard, magician, or mage) commands spirits through various means to create supernatural effects. Their rituals vary from hoary ceremonial productions handed down from time immemorial to pop-culture chaos magick rites created yesterday.

If chased, a sorcerer could jam a door shut behind him by whispering to the spirit within the door, cause a red light to turn green by entreating the *genius loci* of the crossroads, or leave a fog of daemons to sow confusion in his pursuers.

There's no particular in-born talent required to be a sorcerer: great concentration, a modicum of knowledge, and strong faith can pay mystical dividends. . .

The "Rules" of Sorcery

. . . Once the basic rules of sorcery are understood:

1. *Magic best changes the Unseen, not the Seen.* Fireballs and levitation are right out; magic is not good for that sort of thing. What magic is good for is subtle things like affecting luck, emotions, thoughts, and -- over the long-term -- health. Magic may make minor alterations to the Seen World, so long as the sorcerer's desires: a) lie within the bounds of the probable; and b) involves things that are unseen. Thus, a sorcerer has a better chance at healing a sprained back or a toothache than a knife wound or black eye.
2. *Magic requires faith to work.* The reason more people are not sorcerers is because they lack enough concentrated belief to hold a magical mindset during a ritual. Any flicker of doubt kills the magic. Few are single-minded enough to control their thoughts to that extent. Furthermore, actively skeptical (not the same as doubting) people generate supernatural "static"; the disbelief of a Skeptic counters the faith of a Sorcerer, on a one-for-one basis.
3. *The spirits have minds of their own.* Sorcerers can ask for a desired end, and if their ritual is effective, have a decent chance at getting it. Yet, the spirits choose the means to that end. Any attempt to dictate means or methods reduces the efficacy of the magic. And, due to #1, the path these desired ends will almost never be verifiably unnatural -- who's to say if the curse a sorcerer casts at his foe or stress at work causes the enemy's

migraine?

4. *The spirits respect rituals, sacrifice, and symbols.* Spirits are drawn to regular patterns, and the most potent tools a sorcerer has are the elements of *ritual* -- mystic circles, chants, magical words (almost always palindromes), runes, glyphs, etc. (Also, strong patterns also help the sorcerer open concentrate.) The length of a ritual is important only in how strong a pattern it sets up. With an amiable spirit, a simple word may do; a recalcitrant spirit may need to be swayed via the whole ritual circle, robed attendants, athame, wand, incense, and blood route.

Sacrifice is important, in that spirits must consume the mana, life force, luck, or inherent quality of something from the Seen World to affect it; the emptied "shell" of the sacrifice remains, but all integrity has been taken from it. For example, if a crystal chalice is offered as a sacrifice, after the ritual it will soon break -- probably by an accidental bump and fall, someone gripping it too tightly, or other "random mishap."

Symbols -- especially those of life or luck (blood, eggs, pennies, rabbit's feet, lucky shirts) -- make excellent sacrifices to the spirits, but may also affect them directly, as their qualities extend beyond the Seen into the Unseen. Thus, highly-charged symbols can serve the sorcerer as both carrot and stick.

Under the cyclic pattern of the year, one of the best times to work sorcery is. . .

Samhain

. . . When the Veil is thin. A harvest festival celebrating summer's end, *Samhain* (SOW-an) is celebrated on October 31st, between the Autumnal Equinox and the Winter Solstice. Some ancient peoples believed this date was a powerful time for communication with the spirits; indeed, the dead were often invited to return to feast with their living loved ones. Which brings us to. . .

The Circle

. . . An eclectic band of magicians, pagans, and friends have gained permission to use a prehistoric ceremonial site to perform a Samhain ritual. However, they've bitten off more than they can chew this time.

The Players and the GM

The players will play one of the roles of members of this Circle, with the GM playing those left over; the Circle should have at least four characters involved. Six potential character write-ups appear below; the GM may add more if desired.

Each character has a brief description, things they're *Good* or *Bad* at, a *Fear*, and a *Goal*. Feel free to use your chosen game system to further flesh out the characters.

Pre-generated Characters

***Moonflower Nolan*, Crunchy Pagan (male version, *Sunbeam Nolan*):** Nolan believes in peace, man: you should give it a chance. Maybe she and her friends can summon up some groovy spirits to help everyone feel the good vibrations. Friends with Vic Hades and a customer of Alex Barnagat. Owns an old VW van. *Good*: Music and Sorcery. *Bad*: Fighting and Debate. *Fear*: Extreme violence. *Goal*: Act as a peace-maker.

***Alexandra Barnagat*, New Age Bookstore Manager (male version, *Alexander Barnagat*):** Sibling of Chris Barnagat, and acquainted with Nolan, Kirby, and Vic Hades. Alex runs a New Age bookstore with a sizable used-book section. This puts her in touch with much of the local occult subculture, some of which have become her friends. Alex sold the Indigo Tome to Vic Hades. Owns an SUV. *Good*: General Knowledge and Occult Knowledge. *Bad*: Pedantic and Style. *Fear*: Looking stupid. *Goal*: Offer proof to Chris that the spirits exist.

Christopher Barnagat, *Conflicted New Age Catholic: (female version, **Christine Barnagat**)*: Chris is a conflicted New Age Catholic, the sibling of Alex Barnagat, and the friend of Kirby. He more or less believes in supernatural forces, but is unsure about how they work, or if they're just human projections of some kind. Chris comes to the ceremony looking for answers. *Good*: Fighting and Debate. *Bad*: Style and Romance. *Fear*: Being made fun of. *Goal*: Experience a supernatural event.

Donna Bella, *Perky Goth: (male version, **Donald Bella**)*: Friend of Vic Hades. Donna comes to the circle for fun, friendship, and hanging out. And squealing cutely whenever possible. *Good*: Goth Knowledge and Cute. *Bad*: Attention Hog and Being Quiet. *Fear*: Being treated like a nut. *Goal*: Have someone tell her she's cute.

Victor Hades, *Angsty Goth Pagan: (female version, **Victoria Hades**)*: Vic's a little chubby, but still very attractive, especially when all dolled up in Goth finery. He's the leader and organizer of this Circle, an acquaintance and customer of Alex Barnagat, and a friend of Nolan and Donna. Vic arranged the campsite and owns the Indigo Tome, which he feels must be used somehow in the Samhain ceremony. Owns an old hearse. *Good*: Sorcery and Goth Knowledge. *Bad*: Music and Debate. *Fear*: Confronting or being confronted with any failure of his own. *Goal*: Speak with the Dead.

Kirby, *Urban Hipster Skeptic: (male version, **Kirby**)*: Friend of Chris Barnagat, acquainted with Alex Barnagat. Kirby's just tagging along tonight with Chris, looking for a good time. *Good*: Skeptic and Style. *Bad*: Hiding Disdain. *Fear*: Looking uncool. *Goal*: Sleep with "a hottie."

Edwin Ronald, *Slumming Sorcerer: (female version, **Edwina Ronald**)*: Acquaintance of Vic Hades and Nolan, and customer of Alex Barnagat. Ed wants desperately to contact a powerful spirit, and wishes to hijack Vic's little shindig for personal goals. *Good*: Sorcery and Lying. *Bad*: Spending Money. *Fear*: Being caught in a lie. *Goal*: Bind many spirits in order to win the lottery.

What Everybody Doesn't Know

There's a bunch of stuff even the clued-in occultists don't know:

No Spirits, Just the Dead

There are no spirits -- no powers residing in wind, dirt, flame, water, whatever -- other than the ghosts of the Dead. And they're angry, every last one of them. After a few decades of standing around immaterial, powerless, only able to interact with the other Dead, being drawn like a moth to any regular pattern, and having to watch the living have all the fun. . . even the kindest soul gets a little bent. And some of the crueler souls get positively twisted.

Ghosts help sorcerers with sorcery so that they can, if but for a little while, affect the material world. They prefer to receive sacrifices (since they can use the energy bound up within them to change things in the Seen World *and* take back the extra mojo in a spiritual doggie-bag) rather than be forced by the pattern of a ritual or a symbol to use their own power. However, when the Veil is thin, they can reach across with greater ease and conserve their force.

Tonight, the Dead are not satisfied to be given sacrifices; tonight, they will *take* them . . .

The Veil Walkers

Luckily, the Veil Walkers are there to protect humanity. From birth, Veil Walkers have been marked as being spiritually powerful, and stride along the boundaries of life and death. Once a month, they have terrible dreams or nightmares, when their astral form sallies forth into the Unseen World. Only if told by another Walker or particularly insightful will a Walker realize that they are not just having vivid dreams.

Good Walkers fight off angry ghosts, exorcise the possessed, and disrupt spiritual probability shifting. *Bad Walkers* use their abilities to command and strengthen spirits, without recourse to the patterns of Sorcery.

The "Rules" of Veil Walkers

Veil Walkers:

- *Can see a short distance into the spirit world.*
- *Can physically interact (grab, lift, punch, fondle, etc.) with ghosts.*
- *Uncontrollably project their astral form into the spirit world each month.*

Any Walkers who die in that narrow window of monthly uncontrollable astral projecting become *Vampires*, the Dead who easily stride the boundaries of death and life . . . but that's another column. (GMs should feel free to make one or more characters into unrealized Walkers -- possibly Chris or Kirby.)

NPCs

The Dead: Ticked-off ghosts. *Good:* Mayhem. *Bad:* Too crazed to think straight. *Fear:* None. *Goal:* Wreak Havoc.

Items & Locations

- *Indigo Tome:* It appears to be your basic tome of Sorcery, full of invocations and rituals to bring and bind the spirits for service (love spells, luck spells, curses, etc.). Unfortunately, it's poorly-written and full of broken patterns and mistaken symbolism . . . enough to attract ghosts, but not enough to command them. If one of the Dead sees the Tome, it will focus all its rage on its holder.
- *Prehistoric Site:* Be it an Indian Mound, a megalith ring, or an ancient grove, this remote site once thrummed with the chants and hymns of spirit worship. Within the ring, the Veil is thin, giving it an eerie atmosphere. On certain sacred nights, it's positively supernatural. Add to this a powerful magical ritual, and the Veil may tear, allowing the Dead to pour through and into the Seen World . . . Luckily, they won't be able to bodily move beyond the Site, but their spiritual powers outside it will be stronger now that they they've secured a beachhead.

What Will Probably Happen

Here's a brief outline of how the scenario might unfold, given the concept that this is a short camping trip and ceremony where weird events happen. This will change, depending upon the actions of characters within the scenario, as they pursue Goals, avoid Fears, and react to events:

1. *You're Going Camping!:* Basic layout of the concept of the trip: camping at a Prehistoric Site with a ritual to celebrate Samhain. What will the characters bring along as camping and ceremonial supplies?
2. *Driving to the Site:* Note that only Nolan, Alex Barnagat, and Vic Hades possess vehicles, so all the characters must be divvied up between them. Plenty of potential for roleplaying between passengers in each vehicle.
3. *Hiking In:* The Site is about two miles from the parking area, and about five miles from the nearest bits of civilization (park office in one direction and a gas station in the other). The Site itself is in a mostly flat clearing, between a low rise and a deep gully with a small creek.
4. *Set Up Camp:* How close or how far from the actual site will the camp be pitched? Note that the closer they are, the more dangerous it will be later.
5. *The Ritual:* Agreement and discussion of the ritual ceremony to be undertaken might be amusing, given the agendas of many of the characters (the overt heckling skepticism of Kirby, the peace 'n love ethos of Nolan, the need for verification of Chris, etc.). Stage-dressing will also be necessary -- torches or candles, robes or garb, and so forth.
6. *The Veil Rips:* Unless Vic is forced to exclude the Indigo Tome in some way (and, even barring that, Vic'll still try to slip spells or elements from the book into the ceremony), during the ritual, the Veil will rip, and angry ghosts will appear.
7. *Swarmed by the Dead:* If going for the fleshy manifestation option, the Dead should be all zombified and ravenous. If going with the ectoplasmic option, they'll stick with glowing slime, terror, bad luck, possession, and

mental attacks. In any case, they cannot visibly or physically manifest beyond the limits of the Site, but their spiritual powers can reach beyond it for about a mile in all directions.

8. *Now What?:* Do the characters run away at night through unfamiliar woods, try to strike a bargain with the Dead, or attempt to seal the tear in the Veil? How do they do that? Can it *ever* be closed? (Even Sorcerers shouldn't be sure.)
9. *Daybreak!:* At dawn, the Veil will reknit itself, and all will be well. Or will it? If a spirit has successfully possessed a character and not been exorcised, does it get to keep the body, or is it kicked out? Do characters that were killed get up and brush themselves off? Will bargains made with the Dead still need to be honored?

Advice, Opportunities, & Pitfalls

- This mini-adventure might work very well as a Live Action Roleplaying Game (LARP), with players taking on each of the roles above, and the GM -- and any assistants -- playing the angry Dead.
- The interaction of Sorcery, Spirits, and Skepticism can be played with for great effect: can Kirby's skepticism help protect him from spiritual assaults, or just make him more willing to do something unwise, since ghosts "obviously" do not exist, or both?
- The character interactions of this scenario are key. Attempts to steal and use the Indigo Tome before being caught, flirting and romance, philosophical in-character conversations, avoiding Fears while trying to achieve Goals, and so forth.
- The GM's watchword should be "creepy," though for some, "gory" has its charms.

Other Resources

- [The Blair Witch Project](#)
- [Expiration Date](#), by Tim Powers
- ["Suppressed Transmission: Who Ya Gonna Caul? The Benandanti,"](#) by Kenneth Hite

Play Dirty . . . Again

Hi. Remember me? I'm the kid who had an article called *Play Dirty* a while back. Then, I disappeared. Some of you may be wondering where I went, what I've been doing with my time. More than a few of you probably either don't remember me or couldn't really give a d4 where I've been. But, for those who are curious, let me just say that I've been busy getting paid to write. It's good work, if you can find it. I *did* find it, so I've been doing it, because as Robert Wuhl in *Bull Durham* so sagely observed, "It beats working Sears."

In the meantime, I've rediscovered an old flame. For a long time, I gave up on gaming. Just gave up on it. Wrote a novel, wrote for a video game company, kept a journal of my adventures . . . but I just didn't do any gaming. Not until I bumped into a group who reminded me why I love it so much. These wonderful folks who reminded me why I love gaming and I return the favor by doing absolutely awful things to their characters.

And so now, in celebration of Pyramid's 10th anniversary, Mr. Marsh writes to me and asks, "John, we'd really like a *Play Dirty* for the 10th anniversary. Can you send us something?" Well, I'd walk on fire for Mr. Marsh (as long as they gave me asbestos boots), and for such a big event, I should give him something *huge* -- like Atlas huge, like Zeus' libido huge. But, instead I've got something very *small*.

I share with you now one of the little tricks I've used in that time since we last talked. I say "little," because it is, really. A trifle. Barely a mechanic at all. Can't even call it a technique. It's just this tiny, little thing I did for a tiny, little player of mine. The smallest thing in the world. But, then again, as my Grammy used to say, "It's the little things that make the soup."

And who knows . . . if Marsh digs it, maybe I'll send him another one. But only if he sends me those boots . . .

Happy Fun Ball Meets the God of Murder

There's a new girl in my life. I say "girl," because that's what she is. Barely out of high school, but smart and cute as a button. And bouncy. She's gained the Secret Superhero Nickname of "Happy Fun Ball." Cute, bouncy, and full of potential disaster. "Do not taunt Happy Fun Ball" is what everyone says whenever someone gives her a hard time. 'Cause you just don't know what she's capable of.

Happy Fun Ball works with me at my current place of employment (which shall remain nameless . . . until the bio section of this article) and when she found out I was running a ***Dungeons & Dragons*** game, she jumped at the opportunity.

(Yes -- believe it or not, a ***Dungeons & Dragons*** game. One of the not-so-dirty secrets I've learned of being a good GM is you run what the *players* want to *play*, not what *you* want to *run*. Remember this rule, and, as the Umpa Lumpas sing, you will go far.)

The game isn't your standard hack 'n' slash campaign, though. Oh, no. I've got something much more interesting in mind. At least, interesting to me, and hopefully, interesting to the players.

Thieves. Just thieves. No, not "rogues." Thieves who call themselves rogues are like Trekkies who call themselves "Trekkers." *Lame*.

All of them -- all six of them -- have taken at least one level of thief. And the game takes place in The City. They're all members of the guild, and they have to pay dues, and they have to watch out for members of rival guilds, and dodge the town guard. Carrying a weapon is illegal . . . without a permit. Using magic is illegal . . . without a permit. Doing just about *anything* is illegal . . . without a permit. So, even being *adventurers* is illegal without paying the proper taxes to your local representative and carrying around a nifty piece of paper that says it's okay for you to do it. This is the campaign setting, filled with mystery, intrigue, and plenty of places to loot and get rich.

Like I said, everybody's got at least one level of thief. We've got the thief-ranger (he's a city ranger), the thief-sorcerer-noble, the thief-monk, the thief-thief (that's Happy Fun Ball), and the thief-paladin.

Yeah. A paladin of the Goddess of Thieves. Pardon me while we take a very long aside here.

* * *

I can get away with a thief-paladin this because I've ditched alignment. Funny how many ideas that liberates, eh? Besides, if you think about it, the whole thing makes perfect sense. It all came to me after a conversation I had with Jess Heinig (who gets mentioned here because this is half his idea anyway).

Paladins tend to have a high charisma. The high charisma tendency indicates someone with a lot of flair and panache. The paladin archetype we gamers are all familiar with is a chivalrous soul who adopts righteous causes, helps the helpless, thwarts the wicked, all that good stuff. When applied to a medieval character, we get images of Arthur, Lancelot, and the like. But, what if we applied it to a Renaissance figure, or a Restoration figure? And why don't we just throw on a little bit of roguery on to that paladin . . . and *voila!*

As a "goodly soul," the paladin-thief is a gentleman of high character who inspires others and gives them the courage to survive. When he "lays on hands," it's not "I lay on hands and heal you with divine power," it's "I sweep you into an embrace and kiss you and tell you that you can't go" The thing to remember is that the ideas of "virtue and vice" here are the Renaissance or Restoration-era ideals, not the early middle ages ideals we commonly associate with ***Dungeons & Dragons***. Thus, the paladin-thief does in fact smite evil -- but that's because he casts down villains and has the strength to fight against people of low character -- cheaters, robber-barons, people who abuse women, liars, etc.

Conversely the paladin-thief is an example to others of how to be a courtly figure: You can still be witty, be involved in romances, even be involved in some "nocturnal hijinx." The difference is that the paladin-thief does things with a pure heart and conscience. He rendezvous with his secret sweetheart out of a pure love and romantic ideal, not out of some treacherous desire to possess her and destroy his rivals. He races across rooftops at night helping his larcenous friends because he hopes to lead them into worthwhile causes -- tweaking the nose of an overbearing church, throwing down unjust rulers, inspiring the populace to find their own inner heroic strength. He is not a man with a rigid and inflexible dogmatic code that says "I can't have fun, I can't steal, I can't be in romances." He's a man with a romantic code that says "I must inspire others, I must never let the wicked rest, I must abide by law in public but in private I am driven by charity and compassion for my fellow man, especially those who are downtrodden by a wicked society."

That's the thief-paladin. Feel free to use him. Just make sure to thank Jess for him, because without Jess, he wouldn't exist.

* * *

Anyway, one of the antagonists our party encounters is a priest of the God of Murder -- Ikhalu. See, he and his brother had a bet at the beginning of time about who would be the God of Death. Each made a house for men to rest in when they died. Ikhalu made his difficult to get into -- so only the worthy would enter. His brother, Khalee, made his easy to get into -- so *anybody* could enter. The men chose Khalee, and Ikhalu got pissed. Now, he's the God of Murder, and his priests use daggers that steal men's souls and send them to Ikhalu. So, when an assassin-priest of Ikhalu kills you with one of his magic daggers, you go off to that black fortress in the sky. What's more -- the guy who killed you? You and (everybody else he killed) get to serve him when *he* enters the House of Ikhalu. The assassin-priests of Ikhalu. They'll be seeing your ***d20 System*** shelf any day now.

These guys, they're one of the first antagonists my party meets. Now, Happy Fun Ball, she's never played a roleplaying game before (she says I'm ruining her for other GMs; a gross miscalculation of my skills, I assure you), and we're playing ***Dungeons & Dragons*** . . . but a slightly modified version. A "wicked" version you might say. Because I've introduced a little mechanic called Hero Points into the game. Not a new idea, not even a novel one. Just a way for the players to get little bennies now and again and modify really bad die rolls.

Well, our Happy Fun Ball has chosen her thief to be a specialist in knives. So, while they're all fighting these assassin-priests, she sees one of those magic knives in the dead hand of an Ikhalu Priest . . . and I tell her to make a Willpower Save. She looks confused at me. "What for?" she asks.

"Just do it," I tell her, firmly, but with a smirk and a wink, just to let her know nothing's gonna kill her. So, she does. And she fails. And I say . . .

"The next thing you know -- you've got the dagger in your hand."

Happy Fun Ball jerks in her seat. "I've *what*?" she asks.

"And," I continue, "there's an Ikhalu priest with his back turned to you." The smirk stays on. "That means if you attack him now, you'll get your full sneak attack damage bonus."

She nods. "Okay," she says.

"You don't need to roll to attack," I tell her. "Your strike hits perfectly. Roll for damage and assume you got a critical."

She's smiling now. She's not too much of a noob to know what that means. She rolls a whole handful of dice and adds up the damage. She tells it to me. I don't even consult the guy's hit points. Why bother? The moment is the moment, and it's moving fast. No need to ruin it with number checking now.

"Your knife enters his back, slips between two ribs and finds his heart. You feel the pointed blade slip into the muscle there, and you feel something *cold* rush down your arm, into your chest, and down into your own heart . . . before it slips away."

The thief-paladin asks, "Was that his *soul*?"

I say nothing. Okay. That's a lie. I do say something. "Annie," I say to Happy Fun Ball. "You get a Villain Point."

The whole table gasps. We've been playing for many months now, and they've *never even heard of Villain Points*.

"What's a Villain Point?" she asks me.

"It can't be anything good," says Evilzug, the thief-sorcerer-noble.

"Wanna know what it does?" I ask Happy Fun Ball.

She nods. I smile. "Then *spend it*," I tell her.

She shudders and hides under the hood of her sweatshirt. Poor little thing.

Happy Fun Ball has had that Villain Point for a few months now. Every time she's in trouble, every time one of the other characters is in trouble, every time they could really use a hand, I always turn to her and say, "You know, you *could* spend your Villain Point."

That's when she shrinks down and pulls the hood of her sweatshirt over her head.

Poor thing. One day she'll find out what a Villain Point does. And so will the other PCs. But, until that day, they'll just have to sweat it out . . . knowing that one of them has a Villain Point. And could spend it at any moment.

Now, you may be asking, just what *does* a Villain Point do? Faithful Reader, the answer to that question should be obvious! It *is* obvious to all those astute GMs out there who have used the same technique. It isn't a new one. It's a very old one. Something I picked up a hundred years ago in Tibet from a wise old GM who taught it to me in exchange for a d16 -- a rare artifact, indeed.

What does a Villain Point do? My friend, you just *saw* what it does. It sits on Happy Fun Ball's sheet and stares at her. Reminds her that she's capable of doing something awful . . . something dreadful . . . something -- dare we say it? -- *EVIL*.

That's what it does. It mocks her, torments her, and yes, even *taunts* her (do not taunt Happy Fun Ball). And I don't have to do anything at all. Just ask her once a session, when she's rolled really cruddy and someone's at ?9 hit points and really needs help *right the hell now* . . . and it says to her, "*I could help . . . all you have to do is ask.*"

Just one little Villain Point. It's changed the face of the game. Gave it a depth it didn't have before. Brought to focus what all the other PCs are capable of becoming. *Villains*. And it teaches them something else, too. That not all villains are born evil.

Some are smart, cute, bouncy girls who duck under the hood of their sweatshirts when things get hot. To hide from that little point at the top of her character sheet.

* * *

John Wick gets paid to do this. His current employer is www.neopets.com where he writes Neopedia stories for children. In the meantime, he runs a D&D game on Tuesday nights, a Vampire game on Friday nights, and an L5R game on Saturday nights. Between all that, he's writing his second novel. You can follow his adventures at <http://www.livejournal.com/userinfo.bml?user=wickedthought>.

Urban Legends: Reed Park Zoo

A d20 Modern Campaign Resource

by Daniel Bronson

* * *

A tall, hooded figure solemnly strode out before the hushed group, turned to face the stone arch, and threw his hands to the sky. He held his pose for a dramatic moment, then intoned: "Oh, Great and Mighty Spirits of the Jungle, hear us!"

Joan rolled her eyes. Did they have to put on their little show every time? Sure, you want to give the customer what they paid for, but how many of them really believed in this stuff?

"Hear us, and grant us passage by Your Great Power!"

Yes, she thought to herself, the concept was impressive enough, but she'd seen stranger things before. Besides, she'd used the portal so many times now that it was really just a tool to her anymore. It didn't matter to her how it worked; it simply worked. These kids and their productions had nothing to do with it. Heck, she'd walked through the portal twice today already, just getting everything ready for tonight's safari group . . .

Joan resisted the urge to sneeze as clouds of machine-produced fog rolled past her and around the arch. She'd forgotten they were adding that touch to the ceremony this time around. It was just as well; it might distract the "guests" from the hooded figure's rather uninspiring performance. And there was her cue: the flash of fire at the center of the arch, courtesy of some other gadget. Joan walked out from the jungle border as the hooded figure left the clearing.

It was time to go to work.

* * *

Reed Park Zoo was established in 1959 when wealthy businessman and world traveler Wallace Reed not only donated the land for the project but also enough money to add elephants, crocodiles, and a giraffe to the existing city zoo's domestic animals. By the mid-1970s the zoo had reached the limits of what the land would support due to the expansion of the exhibits in an attempt to make them more naturalistic and to the large numbers of new animals being brought in. Further expansion was not possible because in the years after the park was originally established the city grew around it, blocking it off on all sides.

Wallace Reed passed away in 1982 but the zoo continues to flourish thanks in large part to his generous donations. Efforts are constantly made to keep the zoo exhibits modern and ideal for their inhabitants, and the zoo has become a popular education and recreation facility within the city. One area of the zoo that has been deliberately left unchanged, however, is the section known as the Garden. The existence of this section of the zoo was one of the few stipulations attached to Reed's contributions; Reed designed it himself.

The Garden, which is located right in the middle of the zoo grounds, is encompassed by a nine-foot tall chain link fence. The fence is hidden from the rest of the zoo by a thick hedge and from the inside of the Garden by a 10-foot thick band of dense jungle vegetation that grows along it. Surrounded by this jungle growth is a grass glade and a pair of sculptured pools populated by exotic fish. Partially hidden throughout the jungle growth are several incredibly lifelike stone statues of animals, the most obvious of which is a large tiger standing at the edge of the west pool. Last, but far from least, a stone arch stands on the jungle/grass border at the north end of the glade. It is 8 feet tall, 10 feet wide, and has jungle animals and landscapes carved all along its surface.

Reed mostly used the Garden for the occasional family get-together and for evening soirees with his many well-to-do and influential associates. That wasn't all it was used for, however, as the arch in the Garden is more than it appears. When allowed to properly charge up it opens a temporary portal to a sister arch carved into a rock outcropping not far from where the Brahmaputra crosses the India/China border. Reed acquired the arch for his Garden from a foreign acquaintance and used it to excellent effect smuggling weapons and other goods into that region of the world during the border wars of the early 1960s.

The arch takes 70 days to charge up, absorbing a set amount of primal life force each day. This life force cannot come from humans or domesticated animals but can come from animals that are, in their hearts, wild. The amount of life force needed each day is approximately that of a medium-sized animal but it can be drawn from multiple sources within 1/8 of a mile of the arch. Thanks to the size of the zoo, enough animals are within reach of this arch and sharing the life force loss that they show no ill effects. At the end of the 70 days the area inside the arch begins to shimmer faintly, as if heat were rising there. Anyone stepping through the arch will find themselves stepping out of the other end of the portal. This two-way transportation effect remains open for 48 hours, at which time the shimmering vanishes. Another 70 days must then pass before the portal re-opens.

Reed stopped making use of the portal in his later years and the few who knew of the arch eventually passed away. When Reed himself died the secret went with him but the arch remained at the zoo. The Garden remained largely closed to the public, used only on special occasions and when it was rented out for weddings and the like. Then, in 1993, one of the groundskeepers found a monkey inside the gates of the Garden. The zookeepers quickly realized that it was not, as they had first assumed, an escapee from one of the exhibits and they began trying to figure out where it came from. When one of them, a young man by the name of Tony Leeuwenhoek, investigated the Garden for clues he discovered the active portal.

Just as before, the portal was and is largely kept a secret. These days, however, it sees a bit more use than in the past. Once the pattern of openings was determined someone had the idea of quietly offering mini-safaris to the rich and adventurous. For a sizable fee individuals can join an exclusive group of peers in not only taking an fantastic 10-hour tour of the lush jungles of India but in doing so using an amazing and neigh-unbelievable mode of travel. As part of the preparatory work travelers-to-be must sign confidentiality agreements as well as forms waiving the zoo of any responsibility should something go wrong on the trip.

The safaris begin in the evening in the Garden with Tony Leeuwenhoek and two other zookeepers performing a dark and mysterious magic ritual, complete with incense, hooded robes, and chanting. According to what they tell the customers, this opens the portal. In reality the portal opens of its own accord at some point during the day, usually in the afternoon. No one at the zoo understands how or why the portal works, but they feel their safari guests are paying as much for a show as they are the trip itself and simply saying, "Okay, walk on in," seems a bit anti-climatic. On the other end of the portal the guests find a small "base-camp" where they are provided with food, water, and gear. After spending the day being guided around the jungle they return to the zoo in time to leave just as morning visitors are beginning to arrive.

Dramatis Personae

Tony Leeuwenhoek, Zookeeper

"It's a pity you never had the chance to meet Mr. Reed; he was an incredible man."

Dedicated Ordinary 3: CR 2; Medium-size humanoid; HD 3d6+3; hp 13; Mas 12; Init +3; Spd 30 ft; Defense 11, touch 11, flat-footed 11 (-1 Dex, +2 class); BAB +2; Grap +4; Atk +4 melee (1d3+2 nonlethal, unarmed strike); Full Atk +4 melee (1d3+2 nonlethal, unarmed strike), or +1 ranged (1d2 piercing, air rifle); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL the memory of Wallace Reed, Reed Park Zoo; SV Fort +3, Ref +0, Will +4; AP 0; Rep +1; Str 14, Dex 8, Con 12, Int 13, Wis 15, Cha 10.

Occupation: Zoological (bonus class skills: Handle Animal, Knowledge [earth and life sciences], Research)

Skills: Craft (pharmaceutical) +3, Handle Animal +6, Knowledge (arcane lore) +2, Knowledge (earth and life sciences) +10, Knowledge (physical sciences) +9, Knowledge (popular culture) +6, Listen +4, Perform (act) +1, Profession +6, Research +5, Ride +1.

Feats: Animal Affinity, Defensive Martial Arts, Educated (Knowledge [earth and life sciences], Knowledge [physical sciences]), Improved Initiative, Simple Weapons Proficiency.

Possessions: Air rifle, assorted tranquilizer darts, zoo radio, dark gray fedora, zoo uniform, and personal possessions.

Tony Leeuwenhoek idolizes Wallace Reed and does all he can to be like him. To Tony, Reed was a masterful man: wealthy, clever, and generous. He has copies of everything ever written by or about his hero, numerous photographs, and a couple pieces of clothing Reed once wore. He has made one of these items, an olive-green fedora, a permanent part of his wardrobe. Regardless of what else he is wearing, he will have the fedora with him as well.

The discovery of the portal only increased Tony's adoration of Reed, as the man became even more interesting and more impressive. Tony is certain that Reed used the portal to rescue animals and to show his associates the glory of the jungle. Anyone suggesting to Tony that Reed had other motives, i.e. smuggling, will be aggressively refuted. Continued investigations along these lines will make Tony outright hostile.

Much as Tony falsely believes he is very knowledgeable about Reed's life, he also incorrectly assumes he is well-acquainted with the occult. Again, he has done a great deal of reading on the subject, but few of his sources were correct to begin with. For the most part he hides this side of himself, just as Reed did, but he opens up and offers what he knows in order to help people . . . as he is sure Reed did as well.

Dr. Christie Gram, Zoo Veterinarian

"I wouldn't expect a human to understand."

Smart Ordinary 2/Dedicated Ordinary 3: CR 4; Medium-size humanoid; HD 2d6+2 plus 3d6+3; hp 22; Mas 12; Init +1; Spd 30 ft; Defense 14, touch 14, flat-footed 13 (+1 Dex, +3 class); BAB +3; Grap +3; Atk +3 melee (1d3 nonlethal, unarmed strike); Full Atk +3 melee (1d3 nonlethal, unarmed strike), or +4 ranged (1d2 piercing, air rifle); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL animals, nature; SV Fort +3, Ref +2, Will +6; AP 0; Rep +2; Str 10, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 16, Wis 14, Cha 8.

Occupation: Zoological (bonus class skills: Craft [pharmaceutical], Handle Animal, Treat Injury)

Skills: Computer Use +7, Craft (pharmaceutical) +14, Craft (chemical) +9, Handle Animal +9, Knowledge (earth and life sciences) +13, Knowledge (physical sciences) +13, Knowledge (technology) +8, Profession +8, Research +8, Ride +3, Search +10, Sense Motive +7, Treat Injury +13.

Feats: Animal Affinity, Educated (Knowledge [earth and life sciences], Knowledge [physical sciences]), Medical Expert, Simple Weapons Proficiency, Surgery, Weapon Focus (air rifle).

Possessions: Air rifle, assorted tranquilizer darts, zoo radio, medical kit, pharmacist kit, surgery kit, zoo uniform, lab coat, and personal possessions.

Christie Gram was badly burned as a teenager and still lives with horrible scarring on her face, shoulder, and back. Treated as a freak by those around her, she found companionship with animals instead; they loved her despite her appearance. Though she had once dreamed of being a doctor, after the accident Christie decided that it was more worthwhile to help animals rather than people so she became a veterinarian instead.

Those who are as close to Christie as she will allow any human to get were somewhat surprised by her choice to work at a zoo given her feelings that animals should be free. More than once she has made it clear that a zoo should only be for injured, ill, or otherwise endangered animals needing protection, with the intention of setting them all loose when they can fend for themselves. Christie sees her choice of employment as a necessary evil, however. She realizes that she would have difficulty maintaining clientele as a private veterinarian; this job lets her help animals without having to deal too much with other people.

Christie was only recently hired by the Reed Park Zoo. (She lost her previous zoo veterinarian job due to an incident involving herself, a tranquilizer gun, and a zookeeper who like to throw rocks at the animals when he thought no one was watching.) She currently knows nothing about the portal. If she should ever learn of it she will see it as a wonderful chance to release some wild animals back into their natural environment. Should she also learn that it is powered by the life force of animals, however, she will do everything she can to see it destroyed.

Joan Salk, Safari Guide

"Some things are more exciting to hunt than others."

Fast Hero 4/Wildlord 2: CR 6; Medium-size humanoid; HD 4d8+4 plus 2d8+2; hp 35; Mas 12; Init +2; Spd 30 ft; Defense 18, touch 18, flat-footed 16 (+2 Dex, +6 class); BAB +4; Grap +6; Atk +6 melee (1d3+2 nonlethal, unarmed strike) or +6 melee (1d6+2 slashing, machete); Full Atk +6 melee (1d3+2 nonlethal, unarmed strike), or +6 melee (1d6+2 slashing, machete), or +6 ranged (2d6, Colt Double Eagle), or +6 ranged (1d8+2 piercing, compound bow); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL chaotic; SV Fort +5, Ref +4, Will +6; AP 3; Rep +2; Str 14, Dex 15, Con 12, Int 8, Wis 14, Cha 10.

Occupation: Rural (bonus class skills: Handle Animal, Survival)

Skills: Handle Animal +10, Hide +11, Listen +4, Move Silently +11, Navigate +5, Ride +4, Spot +8, Survival +12.

Feats: Alertness, Animal Affinity, Archaic Weapons Proficiency, Combat Reflexes, Guide, Personal Firearms Proficiency, Simple Weapons Proficiency, Stealthy, Track.

Talents (Fast Hero): Evasion, Uncanny Dodge 1.

Abilities (Wildlord): Animal Empathy, Animal Companion.

Possessions: Colt Double Eagle (10mm autoloader), 50 rounds of 10mm ammunition, compound bow, 50 arrows, air rifle, assorted tranquilizer darts, machete, survival knife, urban and jungle camouflage fatigues, mesh vest, assorted survival gear, and personal possessions.

Joan Salk considers herself to be a specialist in animal acquisition, and rightfully so. She's tracked down and captured all manner of beasts, some of which most people can't see for what they really are. The normal creatures are either provided to zoos or are released back into the wild. Joan has yet to find a good market for the creatures of Shadow, however, since few people believe they exist even after being shown one. She has heard rumors of [a man who might pay well for them](#), but she's also heard he might be too caught up in his own machismo to buy then from a "girl." Thus, she tends to let them go as well. For her the thrill is in the hunt and capture, not the kill, but she is not above taking creatures out permanently if she feels it is necessary.

Joan was surprised to discover she could see the more bizarre creatures when everyone else seemed to think they were just normal beasts, but quickly accepted her ability as a tool. She doesn't know why or how she came to have it, and she doesn't really care. The same goes for her connection to her animal companions. When she does ask a creature to travel with her for a time she chooses something that won't be too out of place, and a hunter if she can. She particularly enjoys the company of eagles.

Like her take on other strange things, Joan takes the existence of the portal in stride. She loves the chance to travel and hunt through the jungle enough to agree to act as baby-sitter for a bunch of city slickers for part of the time she is there. That and she is well paid for the service. On the days that the portal is scheduled to open, Joan waits in the Garden watching for the event. When the portal does open she spends as much time as possible on the jungle side, usually coming back through only a few minutes before it closes. She did enjoy the one time she spent the 70 days on the jungle side but has yet to make doing so a habit.

Occupation

Zoological

Anyone who works closely with animals fits within this category. This includes veterinarians, zookeepers, trainers, and animal handlers.

- **Prerequisite:** Age 18+
- **Skills:** Choose three of the following skills as permanent class skills. If a skill you select is already a class skill, you receive a +1 competence bonus on checks using that skill.
 - Craft (pharmaceutical), Handle Animal, Intimidate, Knowledge (earth and life sciences), Knowledge (physical sciences), Research, Ride, Search, Spot, Treat Injury.

Adventure Seeds

- Something has been disturbing the zoo animals at night but the staff's attempts to discover the source have been unsuccessful. Also, an epidemic of a weakening illness has been spreading through the animal population. A very important party for the zoo's benefactors is coming up soon and will be held in the Garden, with a private tour of the zoo being part of the festivities. It is imperative that these problems be taken care of before then.
 - The cause of the trouble is a feral haunt of a jaguar that recently died at the zoo under suspicious circumstances. When it wanders around at night it is upsetting the other animals and its effect on its hosts is creating the "epidemic."
- A small, wounded monkey was dropped off at the zoo by County Animal Control after someone found it in their garage. Christie Gram has been nursing it back to health and would like to see it returned to its natural habitat if possible since it didn't come from the zoo. She is having difficulty determining just what kind of monkey it is and where it originally came from, however.
 - The "monkey" is a cololuna in its docile stage. It may have originally been wounded in a battle with the heroes or perhaps it was hurt by something or someone else. Christie will do whatever she can to protect the monkey from anyone trying to hurt or capture it.
- The group that went through the portal on safari should have been back almost seven hours ago, but there is still no sign of them. Someone needs to go through and make sure everyone gets back before it closes, trapping them on the other side. There are 24 hours left before that happens.
- An individual who took a safari in the past is planning to smuggle something in through the portal when next it opens. Since he is only aware of the portal being open during the safaris he has associates who will be in place on the jungle side when the time is right. He will be on the safari as well, so as to have a reason to be on location.
 - Given the effort involved, the smuggled items need to be of great worth. Some possibilities are magical items or ingredients, drugs, military-grade weaponry, people, or beings of Shadow.

Creature Cast

Feral Haunt

A feral haunt is a spirit that possesses only animal hosts. Each night it leaves its current host, taking some of the creature's life force with it. When seen outside of a host a feral haunt appears as a semi-translucent version of its original self. As daylight approaches it seeks out a new host (which can be the one it just left if necessary), merges with it, and takes control of its body. As is the case with most undead, animals are unnerved by the presence of a feral haunt. It therefore tends to target sleeping creatures as hosts or to sneak up on its chosen host by sliding through solid objects and coming up behind it.

Feral haunts have all of the traits of a possessing spirit with the differences that they are not invisible, that they cannot travel through glass, that they can only attempt to possess animals, and that they cause a temporary loss of 1d4 Con to their host when they leave it.

Feral Haunt: CR 4; Medium undead; HD 4d12; hp 26; Mas -; Init +8; Spd 30 ft.; Defense 15, touch 15, flat-footed 11 (+4 Dex, +1 deflection); BAB +2; Grap -; Atk +6 melee touch (1d6, corrupting touch); Full Atk +6 melee touch (1d6, corrupting touch); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ undead, incorporeal, corrupting touch, possession (DC 11), rejuvenation, +4 turn resistance, imprisonment, darkvision 60 ft.; AL none; SV Fort +1, Ref +5, Will +2; AP 0; Rep +0; Str -, Dex 18, Con -, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 4.

Skills: Hide +12, Listen +9, Search +4, Spot +9.

Feats: Improved Initiative

Advancement: 4-7 HD (Medium); 8-11 HD (Large).

Cololuna

When in its docile state a cololuna appears to be a small arboreal monkey, albeit a very ugly one with row of tiny bone-spurs down its spine. On the night of a new moon it shifts to its aggressive state, bulking up tremendously and entering a blood-thirsty rage that drives it to kill and consume anything it can bring down. When in this form the

cololuna is roughly the size of an ape, standing nearly eight feet tall and weighing about 600 pounds. It has long, nasty claws and incredibly sharp teeth, and the bone-spurs on its back grow into thick, curved spines.

For a cololuna in the docile state, use stats for small monkey. For a cololuna in the aggressive state, use stats for an ape.

Map

Map of Reed Park Zoo



G. The Garden: See map insert.

1. **Tigers**
2. **Asian bears**
3. **African grasslands:** This exhibit includes cranes, storks, antelope, zebras, and ostriches.
4. **Tortoises**
5. **Macaques**
6. **Polar bears**
7. **Information / Education areas:** A variety of zoo displays and children's activities are located in these areas. Zoo docents are often available to answer questions and may have an animal out for people to meet.
8. **Rest rooms**
9. **Flamingos**
10. **Llamas and assorted water fowl**
11. **Veterinary building:** Veterinary offices, a surgery room, a food preparation area, and animal pens can be found in this building.
12. **Zoo offices**
13. **Service entrance / Maintenance buildings:** The buildings immediately north and south of the service entrance are used by the maintenance crews as offices and storage buildings.
14. **Anteaters**
15. **Walk-in aviary**
16. **Spectacled bear**

17. **Snack bars**
18. **Zoo entrance / Ticket booth**
19. **Gift shop**
20. **Reptile house**
21. **Aviary**
22. **Otters**
23. **Elephants**
24. **Giraffes**
25. **Mandrills**
26. **African lions**
27. **Jaguars**
28. **Crocodiles**
29. **Rhinos**
30. **Capybaras**
31. **Tapirs**
32. **Monkeys**
33. **Zoo exit**

Higher Magic Version

Reed Park Zoo was designed with a low-magic setting in mind but it can be turned into a higher magic one. Some changes that could be incorporated are:

- One section of the zoo is used to display strange and magical animals not of this world. Powerful magics allow visitors to see the creatures for what they really are.
- Thanks to spells allowing comprehension, zoo visitors can get the chance to speak directly to the animals.
- Shapechanging magics are used to give people the ability to see what it is like to live in the zoo as an animal.
- Spells that charm and hold animals allow visitors to see normally very dangerous animals up close and personal, petting zoo style.
- There is more than one portal. Either the arch has multiple destinations to choose from (if properly adjusted) or there are multiple arches in the Garden. Exit locations should have enough wildlife near them to power up that end of the portal as well. Portals that are unable to charge sufficiently at both ends will not open.

Pyramid Review

Torches & Pitchforks

Published by [Green Ronin Publishing](#)

Concept by Adam Conus

Designed by Luke Matthews

Developed by Adam Conus & Luke Matthews

Illustrated by Rich Werner

200 cards (108 Mob, 30 Townsfolk, 60 Monster, two reference) plus rules (requires one six-sided die, not included); \$24.95

Night falls, and the moon rises. A thick fog billows across the glen. As you and your fellow townspeople step gingerly into the mist, a raspy growl reaches your ears. It's Vlad the Inhaler, one of the asthmatic undead, and the sound makes it easier for you to bury a stake in his chest. That's unlife in Green Ronin Publishing's *Torches & Pitchforks*.

The object of this swollen-tongue-in-decaying-cheek card game is to fend off the monsters attacking your tiny hamlet -- but when the sun rises you'd rather the town remember you as the man of the hour, so you want to be the first villager to reach 30 points.

Each player (two to five of them) gets six Townsfolk cards. Each one of these is a personality from your burg, ready and willing to lend a hand. (How much help you can expect from the likes of Luke the Inconsiderate Ass and Howard the Village Idiot is questionable, but they're all you've got.) For your turn you get a hand of five Mob cards. This deck contains everything the effective monster hunter needs for a night of supernatural tail-kicking:

Enhancement cards will give you a leg up in your fight. The first kind of Enhancement is Weapons, most of which, in true cinematic style, are various farm implements like cudgels, shovels, and the eponymous pitchforks and torches. Fancier items include pistols and the exotic boar spear. The other Enhancements are Leader cards. A leader is a slightly smarter townspeople that attaches himself to your band, and they usually have a special ability to make your life easier. The Occult Librarian increases your hand size to six, for example, while the Night Watch lets you draw two Monster cards and pick the one you'd like to deal with.

The rest of the Mob cards are Action and Defense cards. Action cards, as in most card games, are played as you please to alter the play of the game. You can make a monster easier to kill, or give an opponent's monster a sudden boost of power. You can look at another player's hand (or cancel the card they were going to use to ruin your evening); steal a card from them; alter the mob's effectiveness up or down; or add or remove weapons from play. Defense cards provide protection against monsters. Some are generic, allowing you to slip past any monster whose abilities fall into the range listed on the Defense card, while others are geared toward specific monsters. The Antacid will target the Glob if he pops out of the Monsters deck at you, and the Harpoon Squad will protect you from the Creature from the Tide Flats.

Once you've got a hand of cards, it's go time. The player flips the top card in the Monsters deck. If it's an Event, players play out its effects. It may target one person or it may affect everyone at the table. It may force you to lose your Leader card, or your weapons, or your highest-scoring monster to date. Many Events seem to affect your hand --

players have to shuffle what they have and divvy the cards up again, or switch hands with others.

If it's not an Event, that means it's a monster and you're going to have to beat the sap out of each other. Each creature featured on the cards has two stats, Power and Kill. Power is the number you have to beat to defeat the beastie. Each Townsfolk card adds +1 to your total. You start with six Townsfolk, so if you want to take out more than Giant Rats, you're going to have to start stocking up on shovels and rakes and implements of destruction. If, through Action cards and Enhancements, your band of poorly organized warriors manages to destroy the fiend, you get to add them to your Score Pile. The Power you had to beat now adds to your point total.

Of course, sometimes the unthinkable happens and a group of untrained, sleepy-eyed villagers armed with farm equipment are no match for a Killer Clown. The monster's Kill number is the number of Townsfolk killed in the battle. You flip that many Townsfolk cards face down, and the monster wanders off to the Moor. If you flip a monster and find yourself face-to-muzzle with something you know you can't beat, you can try to flee.

To flee, roll a six-sided die (not included). The result is the number of Mob cards you have to discard from your hand. Once you do that, the Monster heads for the Moor. If you don't have enough cards to discard, you don't have to discard any -- but now you must fight the beast and take your lumps. Once done eating your friends, it also joins its friends on the Moor.

The Moor is a face-down discard pile of Monster cards in the middle of the playing surface. All the undefeated critters end up here. If you didn't get to attack something during the Attack! phase (usually because you turned over an Event card or fled), you can fly in the face of common sense like so many movie heroes do and go looking for something to kick around. During this Hunt! phase, you shuffle the Moor deck, pick a card at random, and let the fur fly -- only this time flight isn't an option (hey, you asked for it).

Having dispatched another ghoul to your Score Pile (or been sent home with your tail between your legs), you can Recoup. Here you can play new Defenses and Enhancements, and you may flip one of your dead Townsfolk cards face up again (there's always another eager soul ready to join up). When you've finished outfitting the troops for next turn's bloodbath, discard any Mob cards you find displeasing and pass play to the left. This continues until someone amasses 30 points.

Torches & Pitchforks is easy to learn and quick to play, though it is another of those games that can go either way -- someone may win in short order, or the cards may fly fast and furious, hampering anyone's ability to reach the goal. Successes and failures even out nicely; you won't get constantly beaten down by superior forces, nor will you get bored from easy rewards. Clever mechanics spice things up: If your villagers die at the hands of a werewolf, you go through the Monsters deck and get more werewolf cards to add to the Moor. It's a good bit of fun, and there are little strategies that aren't immediately obvious to anyone who hasn't played a few rounds (though having some of them spelled out might also avoid some rules-lawyering). The Defense cards that send a monster off to the Moor instead of the Score Pile need not be placed on the user's own forces . . .

The cards have a tendency to sprawl in no time. There's a Monster deck, Mob deck, a discard pile for both, the Moor, and six Townsfolk per player. Each of these folks will probably get a Weapon card, and then there are Defenses . . . you need a lot of space for even a two-player game. A bigger hindrance to play is trying to read the cards -- the descriptive text is small, and thick to boot (the font listing the cards as Weapons, Leaders, etc. is smaller still). But the greatest tragedy is that the cards aren't in glorious color; maybe they were going for that black and white retro look. Rich Werner's comical cartoon illustrations scream for fancy treatment, especially given the level of loving care that went into the cards, and the basic black only adds to the difficulty of reading the cards (but probably also keeps the price down).

Green Ronin's atypical foray into card games may be a mixed bag, but it's got a quirky sense of humor born of an on-target grasp of its source material. In short, fire bad, ***Torches & Pitchforks*** good.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Sauron Expansion (for The Lord of the Rings Boardgame)

Published by [Fantasy Flight Games](#)

Designed by Reiner Knizia

Illustrated by John Howe

\$24.95

A postulate, humbly submitted:

There are two types of gamers in this world: those who love the *Lord of the Rings* boardgame and those who hate it. (Never played it? Never heard of it? That's okay -- you still love or hate it on a theoretical level. You just don't know it yet.) All right, maybe nothing is so unambiguously polarizing, but if anything is, it's probably as unconventional, unprecedented, and unique as Fantasy Flight's purely cooperative boardgame based on Tolkein's magnum opus. The *Sauron* expansion for *The Lord of the Rings* will likely be just as polarizing for the boardgaming audience, but not in the way one might expect. The *Sauron* expansion makes a cooperative boardgame competitive, scripted events more unpredictable, and a friendly (though challenging) experience doubly harrowing.

To start with, though, there are probably a few things everyone can agree on about the *Sauron* expansion. Like the first expansion for *The Lord of the Rings* -- called *Friends & Foes* -- it is ingeniously integrated into a core game that, on its own, is carefully crafted, finely tuned, and strikingly elegant. The central mechanic of the expansion is this: there is an added player who, instead of taking the role of one of five Hobbits, plays Sauron himself, the great enemy that in the basic game is controlled by scripted movements and a handful of random events. When the game's die would normally be rolled by a Hobbit (signified on the board and certain cards by a black square), the Sauron player takes a turn in the form of card plays from two special decks of cards, called the "Sauron" deck -- filled with dark consequences mirroring those often suffered from the basic game's die rolls -- and the less numerous "Nazgûl" cards -- ferocious special effect cards that, played at the right time, can quash a Fellowship's hope of reaching Mount Doom. It's worth noting that because *Friends & Foes* uses the same innovative "swap-the-mechanic" system, you can play *The Lord of the Rings* with both expansions simultaneously.

Another quality of the *Sauron* expansion everyone will recognize is the continued excellence in production values, from the evocative illustrations by John Howe which adorn every card, to the new felt bag that can be used for drawing the basic game's Event Tiles, to the sculpted Black Rider pawn which, almost heretically, rivals the red-eyed Sauron marker for fearsomeness. The Black Rider is a wholly new feature for the game. Controlled by the use of Sauron cards, the Black Rider starts each of the four Scenario Boards in Mordor (the fifteenth space of the Corruption Track upon which Sauron and the Hobbits slowly converge as they move in opposite directions). In addition to managing his other methods of bringing doom to the Fellowship, Sauron can try to move the Black Rider from its starting space to the current location of the Ring-Bearer. It's a trip that, inevitably, gets shorter and shorter as the game progresses. Not only do bad things happen when the Black Rider encounters the Ring-Bearer (Sauron hits him with a Sauron card and gets to draw a new Nazgûl card) but if the Rider can return to Mordor before the Scenario Board is completed by the Fellowship, that's it -- game over, Sauron wins.

You'd have to be a strange kind of gamer not to appreciate the craftsmanship that went into the *Sauron* expansion's game design and production, but that doesn't make *The Lord of the Rings* any less divisive because your ultimate opinion of the expansion will depend on your reaction to the original game. Were you perplexed by the idea of a purely cooperative game where the "enemy" was the board and most of gameplay was near-endless chatting about what to do

next? If so, then Sauron turns the tables dramatically. Now the enemy is intelligent and he hears your plans as you make them. He can respond to your good fortune and smart decisions with fortune and decisions of his own. No longer is the outcome of the game either happy-joy-joy for all involved or a kind of depressing fruitlessness; now, at least, there's a winner when the Fellowship loses. You don't feel quite as much like you were beaten by German game designer Reiner Knizia, who, after all, couldn't even be bothered to show up in person.

Did you cringe at the heavily scripted nature of the basic game, where (quite unlike the Hobbits of the novels) you knew when Shelob would attack and could do something to keep it from ever happening? Well, Sauron steals much of the control bestowed by foresight and tosses it in the Dead Marshes. You may know a great strategy for blazing through Helm's Deep before the Orcs storm the gates, but if Sauron decides to put the pressure on with his Black Rider, Helm's Deep may look hopeless once again. The Sauron expansion also adds a couple new random factors in the form of player incentives -- new feature cards like Gwaihir and the Star of Elendil that are shuffled and placed on the secondary Activity Tracks of each Scenario Board. Because these compensate for some of Sauron's new power, they tempt the Fellowship to spend more time on the secondary tracks, which don't get them on to the next scenario and closer to Mount Doom. And being random, they throw a kink in experienced players' well-honed strategies that take advantage of the scripted sameness of the basic game.

Perhaps you thought ***The Lord of the Rings*** was just too difficult? A dreadful turn of luck can turn fun for five into a retrospectively wasted hour and a half. For players of this persuasion, the ***Sauron*** expansion includes two special one-use cards, "The One Ring" and "A Watchful Peace." These cards are like tuning knobs on the game's difficulty level since the rules allow them to be added to the game at the players' will, whether the Sauron expansion is being used or not. The One Ring lets the Fellowship instantaneously determine a new Ring-Bearer, instead of having to wait until the end of a Scenario Board. It gets the Ring out of harm's way when used intelligently. A Watchful Peace is the only thing that can ever move Sauron backwards on the Corruption Track. For all intents and purposes, it's the "we meant to start with Sauron on 15 instead of 12" card. Regardless of your opinions about the original difficulty of the game, these cards -- once you'd tested them out to measure their impact -- are a welcome addition for when you are showing the game to new or younger players.

So, what if you liked the ***Lord of the Rings*** boardgame? What if you relished the rare experience of a truly cooperative game? Despite its careful design and lush appearance, the ***Sauron*** expansion might bring to ***The Lord of the Rings*** everything you didn't miss from those other, more conventional games. Letting a friend take over a role that used to resemble a force of nature more than a foe profoundly affects the atmosphere around the table, to say nothing of the internal conflict that the Sauron player feels if he happens to be a connoisseur of the cooperative gameplay of the basic game. Sauron is the ultimate bully and always fights from a position of vast advantage. Watching the Hobbits cobble together an admirable strategy knowing that your next Sauron card will tear it to pieces is, frankly, heartbreaking if you're an empathetic type (especially one who has himself traveled many a Scenario Board in those hairy feet).

If you particularly enjoyed the careful planning, hedging, and hoping of the basic game, you also may feel that something has been lost by the addition of the ***Sauron*** expansion. While luck is always a big part of the game, the odds that ruled the random elements in the unexpanded version always seemed generally measurable. With Sauron's hidden hand of cards, all bets are off. (It is significant, I should note here, that the dreaded Nazgûl cards in Sauron's hand are displayed face up for all to see. Sauron cards are kept hidden.) Perhaps after a lot of experience facing Sauron across multiple games, players might better comprehend his capabilities and be able to predict them with some efficacy, but even then, a Fellowship must always assume a far more dynamic landscape with Sauron than they will ever see in the basic game.

The long and the short of it is this: the ***Sauron*** expansion for ***The Lord of the Rings*** has many of the qualities of its foundational game -- great art, inspiring components, clever mechanics, and subtle strategies. Yet, perhaps ironically, it essentially undermines, at nearly every turn, the underpinning premise of the original. It's that basic premise that you either love or hate (yes, even those of you still muttering, "Lord of the *what?* Reiner *who?*"). If you wanted to love ***The Lord of the Rings*** but just couldn't grasp the appeal of a non-competitive boardgame, the ***Sauron*** expansion may be just what Gandalf ordered. If Reiner Knizia's grand experiment was the best thing to happen to your gaming group since cheese curls, you may not find yourself setting an extra chair for the Dark One at the gaming table very often. And, hey, who can blame you.

--*Christopher Floyd*

Pyramid Review

The Collectors -- the burning house

Published by [Rogue Publishing](#)

Written by Thomas MacKay

Illustrated by Eric Lofgren with Todd Downing

84-page perfect bound book; \$17.95

At one time or another, we have all held jobs that we consider to be Hell, or at least an aspect of it. So imagine if your job really is Hell? This is the premise for *The Collectors -- the burning house*, one part source book and campaign setting, three parts scenario for the *Fudge* system. From Rogue Publishing, who have released a number of other *Fudge* sourcebooks as well as a pair of similarly themed card games in the form of *Den of Thieves* and *Rival Den of Thieves*. In *The Collectors -- the burning house*, the players take the roles of demons with a job: collecting souls that are owed to Him . . . and he is the Master, the Chair, the Executive, or the Home Office. Since the business of calling in contracts made decades or even centuries before has got bigger than any one minion can cope with, Home Office sends out pairs of Collectors to do the job. Assigned Contracts by a Receiving Officer, the Collectors must fulfil this Contract and return their Client to Processing. Of course, no Collector in his right mind likes to give any thought as to what happen once a Client has been Processed . . .

Every Collector gets a suit, a set of wheels for the pair -- highly durable, never needs refueling and built like a Volvo whatever the shape (even if that of an ice-cream van!), a Contract pertaining to the Client, and a Locator to help find said Client. This Locator can take almost any form, but always provides clues to the Client's location. As demons, Collectors are formally supported by fellow Collectors through the Network and informally supported through the Union. They are nearly unkillable, and possess a supernatural biology, wings, a limited amount of wealth and -- of course -- are vulnerable to the Sacred. They are also assimilated into human society, and are able to operate within it as easily as you or I.

Yet while this degree of assimilation and the very Skin or human form they inhabit is false, to a degree it is also more important to a Collector than that of being a demon. This comes from a demon not actually being able to remember what Head Office or Hell is actually like, except in snatches and flashes. Yet these are enough to ensure that no Collector will ever, never want to go back.

Which of course, sets up a dilemma and a dichotomy in each Collector. In order to keep from being recalled to Head Office, they have to fill their Contracts as they are assigned, but suffer the consequences for doing so. This manifests as their Follow -- also known as their Baggage -- which is not just the recalled flashes of Hell, but also the memories of their past (probably in Hell itself) and of the souls they have returned to Processing. Their Follow is a method by which a GM can slip hints to the players as to the pasts of the Collectors and even allusions to their current Contract. Not every Collector can withstand the strain of their job and their Follow, and these break their Contract and become Watchers, ever hiding from Head Office. The Head Office, in return, is very interested in these rogue demons and send out "Enim" -- demons that lack a Collector's Skin and are literally pieces of Hell -- to capture any Watcher they locate. In addition Collectors may face competition when pursuing a Contract in the form of Counselors, their Angelic counterparts.

The character generation of Collectors follows the normal pattern for the *Fudge* system -- purchase three levels of Attributes, 40 levels of Skills and five of Gifts, with more points available should a player take up to three Faults for their Collector. Gifts can come from the core *Fudge* rules, as well as the new ones listed in *The Collectors -- the*

burning house. These are in addition to a Collector's basic default Gifts, and need to be purchased as normal. They include the ability to mask worn or carried items with the signature of their flesh, so that with "All Things Are My Flesh," a gun would not trigger a metal detector and so on. With "Dragon's Talons," a Collector can manifest iron hard claws, and completely hide their wings, even when naked with "Hidden Wings." Other Gifts enhance roleplaying, such as "Wicked Grandeur," that makes a Collector enticing to anyone attracted to a certain kind of bad people.

Further, a Collector can have an affinity with the powers of Hell and be able to physically express them. Each of these three-point Gifts includes a range of spell-like abilities that each needs to be purchased in a manner similar to that of skills. For each affinity, there is one ability given that also requires the expenditure of Fudge Points to fuel. The six given provide affinities with the hideous fires of Hell, with human appetites for both food and sex, with the inescapable labyrinths of Hell, with hates and grudges, with the filling of empty spaces with the unsettling and the insubstantial, and with enhancing the flaws of others and snuffing out human creativity.

The guide to creating Collector characters is backed up with quick and dirty guide to the **Fudge** system, given in the appendix, "Bite Sized Fudge." This is supported with an extremely utilitarian character sheet that adds only function to the game. In general, **The Collectors -- the burning house** is decently written, with only the occasional piece of odd phrasing. Eric Lofgren's artwork is sparse and perhaps not as well handled as it could have been, being a little pixellated throughout. If the book is let down by any one factor, it is the lack of an index, and of two ready-to-play Collectors. Their inclusion would have served as worked up samples of the character generation and inspiration for players wanting to create their own. Even so, several character concepts for creating a pair of Collectors are discussed, both in the campaign and setting section, further in the scenario itself.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

If **The Collectors** is one part campaign and background setting, then it is three parts scenario with **the burning house**. This opens with the Collectors awakening in a big black S.U.V. with a body in the back seat, which turns out to be their Locator -- the means by which they will find their Contract. By following the clues found on this corpse, the Collectors will follow a trail through the seamy side of New Orleans nightlife and up into its world of the *nouveau riche*. Players that enjoy taking the role of detectives will certainly enjoy this process, as all of the clues are nicely detailed and well handled. The difficulty for the Collectors comes when they locate the Client, as not only is he expecting them, he also has a deal for them. Instead of his own, he can offer Head Office another three souls -- quite the coup for the Collectors! It becomes even more complicated when it becomes apparent that the Client is no longer in possession of his own soul, and that the new "owner" is an innocent that the other side is very keen to protect and ensure does not get processed . . .

[END SPOILER ALERT]

As a potential campaign setting, **The Collectors -- the burning house** does a very good job of establishing everything a GM might want. Equally, it works just as well as a one-off scenario that should provide two good solid sessions of roleplaying -- perhaps more if the players like to roleplay. The given guide on how to use the effects of the Follow to enhance the scenario particularly underpins this, graded upon the depth of roleplaying the players prefer and tied into the several suggested Collector concepts. The seamier side of the scenario (several of the characters being homosexual) may be distasteful to some, but it is in keeping with the mature nature of the campaign setting. Though potential sequels are discussed, the GM will find the author of **the burning house** has set them a challenge if they are to match its standards. Whether as a one-off adventure or as the basis for a campaign, **The Collectors -- the burning house** presents an interesting and challenging roleplaying experience for a pair of players, and further, would work just as well were the GM to run it under either version of Steve Jackson Games' **In Nomine RPG** or **Demon: The Fallen** from White Wolf Studios. And the **Fudge** system would allow easy conversion to either set of rules.

--Matthew Pook

House of Clio's Nightmares

*"He thought: 'Somewhere there's thunder,' as he strove
To shake off dread; he dared not look behind him,
But stood, the sweat of horror on his face.
He blunder'd down a path, trampling on thistles,
In sudden race to leave the ghostly trees.
And: 'Soon I'll be in open fields,' he thought,
And half remembered starlight on the meadows . . ."
-- Siegfried Sassoon, "Haunted"*

Every Halloween, Clio herself races to leave the ghostly trees. She hopes for open fields, but blunders down wrong paths, where history takes horrific turns. She comes to fields unknown, worlds (in this case) where the dark magic of location becomes paramount. In places like these, under the lowering skies of dread and thunder, she sees starlight on the meadows -- but feels the sweat of horror on her face. And then -- hopefully -- she wakes up . . .

*"I said: 'O Circe, who shall steer my course
To Pluto's kingdom? Never ship had force
To make that voyage.' . . .
'The fresh North Wind shall waft ye through the seas.
But, having crossed the Ocean, you shall see
A shadowed shore, that to Persephone
Puts up a consecrated wood, where grows
Tall firs, and willows that their fruits soon loose.
Cast anchor in the gulfs, and go alone
To Pluto's dark house, there, to Acheron."
-- Homer, *Odyssey*, X:620-631*

Two and a half millennia after Odysseus, another expedition crossed the Ocean, wafted by the North Wind into an unmapped shore. Columbus was searching for the Indies -- but he discovered Hades. Just as the Greeks (and Gauls, and Irish, and Romans, and Egyptians) had believed, the land of the dead lay across the Ocean to the West. The "new" continents held the souls of all the pagan dead (and, to Their Most Catholic Majesties, at any rate) an uncomfortable proportion of the Christian dead, as well. The islands Columbus had mapped were home to squabbling remnants and refugees -- the soul-subjects of Sicilian tyrants, Viking thanes, Carthaginian grandees -- driven out of the Hegemony of Alexander in the northern continent, and rebuffed by the Saturnian Empire under Vespasian along the southern shore. Although the battle was hard (especially against an enemy that can't be permanently killed), Cortez and Torquemada managed to conquer Ramesses' kingdom in the middle of the continent, and sack its gilded pyramids. The Inquisition's enchantments enslave the dead to mine gold and silver from the mountains, even as the sound of church bells protects its borders against Attila to the north and Saladin in the south. Conquistadors and freebooters seek new lands to exorcise, whether the legendary realm of the Great Khan in Calyferne, the Lost Island of King Arthur, or the New Bagdad rising over the Missouri's banks; mystics hope to find dead souls who knew Jesus or Moses; necromancers and adventurers seek the dead for knowledge, secrets, and power.

PCs in this **GURPS Swashbucklers-Riverworld-Undead** crossover can be Spanish conquistadors looting the treasure-houses of Cleopatra or English pirates sailing with Leif Ericsson or Themistocles. The exact flavor of undead PCs will be up to the GM; perhaps the more evil the soul was in life, the more rotten or disincorporate he is in death. Undead heroes might be part of a band of Tartarean Templars, questing to save Christian souls in the lands of the pagan dead, or a ragtag band from all across history (before 1500, anyway) trying to carve out kingdoms or just survive the onslaught of the living.

"[W]e came in sight of a noble pile of building, which . . . I conceived . . . to be the Lord Mayor's Palace, for I could not imagine so stately a structure could be designed for any quality inferior. He smiled at my innocent conjecture, and

informed me this was Bedlam, an hospital for mad folks. 'In truth,' said I, 'I think they were mad that built so costly a College for such a crack-brain society . . . It was a mad age when this was raised, and no doubt the chief of the City were in a great danger of losing their senses . . . ' 'You must consider,' says my friend, 'this stands upon the same foundation as the Monument, and the fortunes of a great many poor wretches lie buried in this ostentatious piece of vanity; and this, like the other, is but a monument of the City's shame and dishonour, instead of its glory.'"
-- Ned Ward, *The London Spy* (1703)

In 1674, Robert Hooke saw a strange, operatic adaptation of *The Tempest*. Shortly thereafter, he began his design for the Bethlehem Hospital for the insane -- Bedlam -- just outside the London Wall. While building Bedlam, Hooke was also laying out the new streets of London after the Fire, gazing through lenses only he could comprehend, and drinking pure mercury. Is it any wonder that the geometries of his new hospital opened not only onto the green and pleasant Moorfields, but onto dimensions and planes that shimmered and glistened at the edge of his vision? The people of London saw their new hospital and exulted at its finery; they danced and capered before the statues of Madness that somehow appeared at its gates, they painted its angles and spirals on walls and doorways from Kensington to Deptford, adding bricks and railings here and there, always in the corner of their vision. Slowly, all of London became Bedlam, a mad vertex of eldritch planes -- the King wore a yellow mask in Whitehall, and Isaac Newton sang to angels in St. Paul's bulbous domes. But the Royal Society was not selfish -- no, they promulgate the new architectures, the blasphemous calculus that opens up fresh angles and perspectives, the threnodies of knowledge that seep down from the ever-closer stars. They send these gravid truths in letters, written in ever-more frenzied scrawls, all across Europe. Soon, other savants will return from London, having Seen. Soon, other kings will hear the Call. Soon, other Fires will Burn . . .

This **GURPS Swashbucklers-Horror** setting is one of slow disintegration; London (and probably all of England) has fallen to the Outer Ones, but stodgy Europe remains immune -- for now. As in any good cosmic horror game, the PCs (who may be mathematickall savants, stern Puritan divines, alchemists, architects, or mercenaries) must seek to comprehend the new knowledge in order to combat it. From intrigue in court and church to night patrols on haunted coasts to harrowing expeditions into Great Bedlam, no risk is too great to keep the things from Robert Hooke's hallucinatory visions from emerging into the light of a new Europe -- or a New England.

"You have bought a fine land, Brother, but a cloud hangs over it, and you will find it a dark and bloody ground."
-- Chief Dragging Canoe to Richard Henderson of the Transylvania Company, March 16, 1775

Although it had killed his son James, Daniel Boone was determined to colonize Transylvania -- the land washed by the Kentucky and Tennessee Rivers. Richard Henderson's Transylvania Company had bought the land from the Cherokee Indians in March of 1775 at the Sycamore Shoals Treaty conference. The Continental Congress and His Majesty's Government both declined to recognize the treaty; Colonel George Washington writing in his diary that there was "something in that affair which I neither understand nor like." Settlers there "lived without law or gospel," and listened to the music of the wolves. The Cherokee knew it as the land of the Shawano, a fearsome tribe half man, half sorcerer; but Dragging Canoe knew that it held the dark heart of Cherokee power, the Uktena, a mighty horned serpent who bore the Ulunsuti -- the bloody crystal -- in its brow. But Daniel Boone and the whites moved in; into the land of the raven mocker that devours the heart, and of Utlunta whose stone spear-fingers carve out the liver. They somehow placated Walasiyi, the giant froglike beast who eats mankind, and blinded Astildihyegi, whose eldritch glow moves over the mountains when the stars are right. Rumors drifting back over the Cumberland Gap hinted that they had come to some other agreement with Ulagu, whose insectile spawn hummed in the shadowy places in Transylvania's deep forests. Then a shot heard round the world was fired half a continent away, and everyone forgot about Transylvania . . .

Everything in the above paragraph is historical (or folkloric) fact. The alternate comes in the treatment you give it. It can be a standard (if dark) **GURPS Old West-Horror** game of brave pioneers fighting the monstrous nightmares of Cherokee legend, as well as the "sons of the Dragon," the Chickamauga who followed Dragging Canoe into war over the land. (Surely it's just a coincidence that that *other* Transylvania has its own "son of the Dragon," or as the locals there call it, *dracula* . . .) Or, it can be a creepier alternate history, in which the settlers come to terms with the darkness, and all the Gothic horror of the antebellum South from "land pirate" serial killers to brutal slave factories concentrate in the State of Transylvania. In this **GURPS Voodoo-Old West** sort of world, the Transylvanian regiments fight fiercely for the Confederacy, or Transylvanian senators conspire with necromancers to drain the blood of slaves

for vile alchemies in Washington. Or the flow of Western settlement might have left Transylvania behind, and those woods and mountains still rise wild in the center of a prosperous ***GURPS Atomic Horror*** USA, where shadows stretch back in time to Daniel Boone's bravery and Dragging Canoe's curse.

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Designer's Notes: Spooks

by Jason D. Wittman

*Once, my love and I were meeting
For a night of trick-or-treating
When a storm arose and drove us
To an old house on the moor.
Through an open door a-fleeing,
What on earth should we be seeing
But all sorts of ghostly being.
Spiders crawled across the floor.
Bats and Spooks and Skeletons
And Goblins rose up by the score
In this old house on the moor . . .*

Halloween has always been one of my favorite holidays. Aside from the costumes and trick-or-treating, I've always liked ghost stories (in my other career as a fiction writer, I've even composed a few). The quiet suspense, the creaking floorboards, the flashes of lightning providing snapshots of things best left unseen-ghost stories contribute a lot to the atmosphere of Halloween. So it should come as no surprise that, as a game designer, I would want to create a game with the feel and atmosphere of a Halloween ghost story.

So what sort of game should it be? Well, since Halloween is a kid's holiday, I thought the game should be fun, the sort you would play at a Halloween party, so I decided on a card game. "Haunted Palace," as it was first called, started out as a trick-taking game, similar to Hearts, played with an ordinary deck of cards. The Hearts were the good ghosts, which you tried to collect, and the Spades were the evil ghosts, which you tried to avoid. And, because I thought a little gimmickry would spice the game up a little, I gave each Heart and Spade a card-specific rule, which would only take effect if that particular card was led to start a trick-things like, "All players give their hands to the player on their left," or "Take one Spade from your trick pile and put it in another player's trick pile." It looked good on paper, but you don't know if a game is good until you play it. Fortunately, I had a handful of gamer friends on hand, and in exchange for a few pizzas, they were gracious enough to playtest it.

*From the Spooks and Goblins fleeing,
In the dark we groped unseeing,
Running blindly for our lives
Across the creaking wooden floor.
My love screamed when one big Spider
Scuttled on the floor beside her,
Then leaned toward her neck to bite her
In this old house on the moor.
I watched helpless as she struggled
With the Spider on the floor
In this old house on the moor . . .*

Well, they liked the idea at first, but as time wore on, problems began to surface. Trouble was, the game was too similar to Hearts. Trick-taking games have been played for centuries, and it was hard to come up with something new in that field. The card-specific rules, which were supposed to spice the game up, instead slowed it down a lot. That, and I couldn't come up with a point system that worked right . . . what it all boiled down to is that the game did not have the atmosphere of Halloween. One of the playtesters suggested using a five-suited deck (which certainly sounded like a good idea, since four-suited decks have been done ad nauseam), so we jury-rigged one by cannibalizing two ordinary decks with the help of a magic marker and tried it. But the game still didn't work out quite right.

So "Haunted Palace" was shelved -- for the time being.

*Trapped inside this mansion manic,
Both of us quite close to panic,
I espied a Cat that huddled
In a corner on the floor.
Seizing this feline, I threw it
At the Spider, though I knew it
Would be angry at me. (True, it
Could not be entitled more.)
Cat and Spider fell to fighting,
Leaving my love free once more.
She fled screaming through the door . . .*

The creative impulse is a weird thing. A lot of it is non-volitional: Ideas come to you more often when you're not trying to come up with them. It's almost as if the idea decides to show up in your mind. (I've heard other creative types say things along these lines, so no, I'm not crazy.)

Such was the case here. I was in bed, it was around midnight, when the idea finally came to me (see what I mean?) of how to improve this game. A lot of the more popular card games (especially those for kids) are of the get-rid-of-your-cards-first variety. (Trick-taking games, like Hearts, Spades, and Bridge, are more for adults, so that might have been where I was going wrong.) Since getting rid of your cards is often referred to as "going out," that would fit in nicely with the Halloween theme: all the players would be trapped in a haunted house and trying to escape. And that led to a great idea for the Ghost cards: I would add an element of danger to the game by assigning a penalty to any player who could not discard on a Ghost (of course, you would not have to discard on a Ghost if someone else hadn't already played one, which fits right in with those stories and films where the ghosts are only able to wreak havoc when some idiot lets them out).

This left the problem of the method of discard. I didn't want to make it too difficult to discard on a Ghost, but the easiest method of discard, matching the suit or the number of the card in play, was too common to be interesting (one popular card game, which is really just a glorified version of Crazy Eights, depends solely on this method of discard). But I couldn't think of any other method that would work well with this game mechanism.

And then another idea hit me: what if I used, not one discard method, but two? The above easy method would apply to the Ghost suits, and would carry a stiff penalty for inability to discard. The non-Ghost suits would be more difficult to play on, but if you couldn't discard, the turn would simply pass to the next player. I wanted to keep the idea of good and evil Ghosts, so I invented a different penalty for each of the two Ghost suits. And I also kept the idea of five suits, because of the novelty.

But when I sent this version to the playtesters, they said there was no need for five suits; the game played identically with four. So I was faced with a decision: either ditch the fifth suit (at the time called Stars), or invent yet a third method of discard for it. This was when I found a way to bring a little bit of trick-playing back into the game: anyone playing a Goblin (as the suit is now called) would start a trick-playing round, with the winner of the trick playing the next card.

The friends who playtested this version said they liked it. So I pitched it to Steve Jackson, and when he said, "Send it over, we'll playtest it," I sent him a jury-rigged 67-card deck, with five 13-card suits, plus two Jokers. Steve Jackson and Company did some tweaking-the deck was reduced to 56 cards, with only 11 cards per suit (the suits now being Spiders, Spooks, Goblins, Bones, and Bats) and one Joker (here called the Cat), plus the penalties for the inability to discard were modified-and we at last had the finished product before us.

I would like to take this opportunity to compliment Alex Fernandez for the artwork he did on Spooks. The images he put on each card, particularly the Cat, contribute much to the Halloween atmosphere of the game.

So I hope you enjoy Spooks, especially around Halloween. Think of it as a ghost story told through playing cards.

*My escape by Spooks impeded,
My dark doom I now conceded.
Then a hooded Spook approached me,
Seven feet in height or more.
Hood removed, dark hair cascaded
To the floorboards unabated.
And she said, "You now are fated
To stay here forevermore.
But it's not all screams and anguish.
Here, come through the kitchen door.
Would you care to have a S'more?"*

Grenada In The Age Of Sail

by Mark Gellis

The Island Of Grenada From Columbus To Napoleon

The island of Grenada lies at the southern end of the Windward Islands, the string of islands that mark the eastern edge of the Caribbean Sea. It is a small island, roughly oval in shape, 21 miles long and 12 miles wide. The island is volcanic in origin and its 133 square miles are mountainous. The highest peaks are more than 2,000 feet above sea level. The terrain includes rain forests at the middle altitudes, dry forests of scrub woodland as one moves closer to the coast, and mangrove in the coastal regions themselves. The climate is tropical, but regular trade winds usually keep the heat from being oppressive.

To the south lie Trinidad and Venezuela. Port of Spain is about 100 miles south of the island; Caracas is about 300 miles to the southwest. To the north lies the rest of the Windward Islands. St. Vincent is about 100 away, Martinique is about 200 away, and Guadeloupe is about 300 away. To the east is open ocean; Africa is more than 2,000 miles away.

The island was spotted by Columbus in 1498, but Europeans were not able to make any permanent settlement until more than a century later. The native Caribs ferociously resisted early attempts to colonize the island, driving off the English in 1609 and the French in 1638.

Around 1650, however, Jacques-Dyel du Parquet, the French governor of Martinique, established a settlement of about 200 men on Grenada. Aware of the threat posed by the Caribs, du Parquet gave his men a secret weapon: a prefabricated fort. J. David Zimmerman explains that the fort was probably "transported in sections just small enough to be floated ashore and rapidly manhandled into position" and adds that it was surrounded by "a palisade and a ditch"; the initial fort was soon replaced by larger and more permanent structures. This offered the settlers enough protection to establish their colony, and they set about growing crops like indigo and tobacco. Later, sugar plantations were established, and by the 18th century it was one of the most important crops on the island.

Originally, the Caribs had allowed the French to settle in return for trade goods like knives and glass beads, but within a year they had decided to force the Europeans to leave the island. They killed some of the settlers, but du Parquet organized an attack against the Caribs which left more than 100 of them dead, including about 40 who, when they realized they were unable to defeat the French or escape, leaped to their deaths from a cliff rather than surrender. Some remaining Caribs continued their fight against the French for years, but by the end of the 1650s the conquest of the island was effectively complete. The island would remain French territory for the next century, although in 1675 it was briefly occupied by Dutch privateers who had to be driven off by French warships. French domination of the island ended when the British occupied Grenada in 1762 and the French formally ceded it to England in 1763.

By this time, sugar had been an important crop on Grenada for decades. Sugar, being a labor-intensive crop, meant that the Europeans needed a large number of slaves for its cultivation. In the late 18th century, however, natural disasters had taken their toll on the sugar industry. In 1770, the island was beset by an infestation of ants which severely damaged the sugar crop. Then, in 1780, the island was hit by a hurricane, which again devastated the sugar industry on the island. In the early 1780s, Sir Joseph Banks, botanical advisor to George III, initiated the cultivation of nutmeg on the island. As it turned out, the island's volcanic soil was quite suitable for growing nutmeg. In addition, Grenada was much closer to England than the Dutch plantations of the East Indies. Nutmeg eventually became one of the island's most important crops.

The island also saw its share of military action during the late 18th century. In July 2, 1779, Count Charles-Henri d'Estaing sailed into view; Zimmerman tells us that he had 24 ships of the line and more than 1,300 troops. There were only about 150 British troops on the island. Although the Grenada Militia added another 400 men to their force, and another 200 men volunteered (or were simply drafted into service), the British were still seriously outnumbered. After four days of fighting, Grenada was once again in French hands. It would remain so until the island was returned to the

British in 1783 as part of the Treaty of Versailles.

In 1795, Grenada witnessed a full scale rebellion. Julian Fedon, a Catholic plantation owner of mixed ancestry, inspired by the French Revolution, led an uprising and quickly took control of most of the island, thanks in part to assistance from French-controlled Guadeloupe, which provided the rebels with arms and ammunition. Only the town of St. George's and Fort George remained under British control. It was not until 1796 that the British were able to quell the rebellion. General Sir Ralph Abercromby fielded a large force and crushed the insurgents, although some "brigands," as they were called, remained on the loose on the island for years afterwards.

No one knows what actually happened to Fedon. Some believe he drowned while trying to escape the island in a small boat, but it is possible that he somehow managed to escape; in fact, one report made to the Council of Grenada in 1814 claimed that he was living in Cuba. A GM could assume he had not only escaped but that by the turn of the century was working secretly to further Napoleon's ambitions in the Caribbean.

Swashbuckling Campaigns

There are a number of options for using Grenada as a locale in the 17th century. One could begin with the initial settlement of the island. French adventurers, hired by du Parquet, would have to survive the rigors of a tropical wilderness, manage their indigo or tobacco plantations, and fend off Carib attacks. Eventually, of course, there will be a full scale military campaign between the natives and the French, and the GM could start at this point if the players are not interested in running a plantation.

And there are pirates. One might reenact the historical attack by Dutch privateers in 1675; the Franco-Dutch war lasted from 1672 to 1678, so to keep things lively a GM might bend history a little and allow more than one such attack. In addition, genuine pirates might show up at any time during this period. These outlaws might attack the settlement, hoping to take the gold or other valuables of the plantation owners. Or, they might be looking for a safe harbor and offer the colonial governor a substantial bribe to look the other way while they make repairs, replenish stocks of food and fresh water, and so on. This should be a profitable situation for everyone involved, but if the pirate crew does not behave while they are on shore, things might get ugly; if the governor backs the pirates rather than his own people, the player characters might find themselves caught up in (or organizing) a rebellion.

Another aspect of the campaign could be exploration. This would not be so much a matter of scientific curiosity as seeing if there is anything valuable (not to mention the tactical advantage of having good maps). Grenada does not have any native species that are more valuable than the tobacco and indigo the settlers are already trying to grow, but the GM does not have to tell the players this.

It might seem that there would be much to explore on Grenada, but one needs to consider the situation. Grenada may appear to be a tiny island to persons living in our time (cycling around the island on modern roads only takes a few hours), but 100 square miles, especially when it consists of rugged terrain including mountains and dense forest, is a tremendous area to explore if one has to do it on foot, particularly if one does not have a complete map (or any map) of the area.

The real excitement for characters exploring the interior of the island will be the Caribs. In the early months of the 1650 settlement, the Caribs will not be hostile, but this will change, making any attempt at exploration risky. In fact, a good adventure could be built around having the players becoming the target of one of the initial Carib attacks as they explore the island; surviving and getting back to the fort to warn the rest of the settlement would be the main challenges of this particular scenario.

The Caribs

The Caribs originated in South America. By the time the Europeans had reached the New World, the Caribs had colonized some of the islands of the Caribbean, where they had seized the territory of the more peaceful Arawaks. According to Hughes, they were a well-built people with high cheekbones and almond-shaped eyes. Their weapons of

choice appear to have been war clubs, javelins, and bows with poisoned arrows.

Assuming that we are using **GURPS**, it is likely that most Caribs had some degree of skill in Fishing, Boating, Poisons, Survival (Island/Beach), Tracking, Stealth, Bow, Axe/Mace (for their war clubs), and Spear Throwing. The tribal leaders may have had Leadership, Tactics (Guerilla), and Bard. Some would have had Agronomy. Common Advantages would include Alertness and Fit; Disadvantages would include Sense of Duty (To tribe) [-10] and Intolerance (Anyone outside the tribe) [-10].

Most accounts claim the Caribs were cannibals, although there is some conflicting evidence on this issue. Assuming that they were cannibals, it may be treated as a combination of Odious Personal Habit (Cannibal) and either Social Stigma (Barbarian) when dealing with Europeans or Reputation (Cannibal) when dealing with other tribes. The exact value does not need to be calculated because the combination would be worth at least -20 points, giving the average Carib a total of at least 40 points of Disadvantages, the maximum allowed under **GURPS**.

One may presume that their weapons correspond to the javelin and short bow (pp. B206-207), and the knobbed club (p. LT107). (Many clubs are covered under Broadsword skill, but primitive war clubs are clearly an early form of the mace, and as such are covered under Axe/Mace skill.) The poison appears to have been some kind of tree sap and is reputed to have been quite deadly; it may be treated as a Type A venom doing 2D-1 damage per failed HT roll.

It should be noted that while most of the scenario ideas in this article assume European characters, and that a "Swashbucklers and Indians" campaign has a lot of potential, this is a sensitive issue for many people. The European settlement of the New World involved two of the greatest crimes ever committed in human history: the genocidal mass murder (and sometimes enslavement) of native peoples and the enslavement of Africans. Europeans were often -- although not always -- guilty of the worst kind of bigotry. The Caribs were brutal, but they were also defending their territory from invaders. GMs and players should balance their desire to portray characters in a historically realistic manner with sensitivity and good taste.

Campaigns In The Age Of Napoleon

Grenada is in British hands during most of the late 18th century. Historically, the two major periods of action on the island are during the American Revolution and Fedon's rebellion.

Because the French take control of Grenada so quickly in 1779, this battle may not work well as the basis of a campaign, although it might work well as one battle in an ongoing campaign for military characters moving from setting to setting. Fedon's rebellion, which takes place over more than a year, might be a better option. Player characters could again be British soldiers or plantation owners or ordinary people caught up in the chaos. The action might even start before the rebellion breaks out, with rumors of sedition and French spies, and attempts to root out the leaders of the insurrection before it even takes place. Then, when Fedon makes his move, the player characters would need to fight, perhaps making their way through the jungle, desperately trying to reach the capital with the insurgents in hot pursuit. Over the next several months, player characters might be involved in scouting missions or attempts to prevent the French from getting supplies to Fedon and his men. Once Abercromby arrives, player characters would be able to join his troops and bring the fight, at last, to Fedon. And finally, even after the rebellion is over, it is not really over. Fedon may have escaped Grenada and may be working mischief from his new home in Cuba. In addition, many of his supporters will plague the island for years to come (one was not captured and executed until 1808).

Finally, players could run a group of plantation owners or merchants who are simply trying to make a living (and, perhaps, find suitable marriages) in the face of ant plagues, hurricanes, invasions, rebellions, competition from other landowners and merchants, local politics, corrupt officials, yellow fever, and the transition from growing sugar to growing nutmeg. (And they said buying Agronomy-17 was a waste of time . . .)

Grenada Gone Wild

Most of this article has assumed a campaign based on the historical Grenada, more or less, but one really does not

have to do this.

First, one can simply ignore various little details of history. Grenada really was not critical to any of the major wars during the second half of the 18th century, but there is no reason why this should interfere with a good campaign. Perhaps new gold mines have been established in French Guiana in the 1790s, mines that spies have learned will provide enough gold to finance a dozen major wars. British-controlled Grenada now serves as a base for adventurers whose mission is to keep that gold from reaching Paris and the minions of Robespierre. Our intrepid heroes will hunt for spies on Grenada and then sail to Guiana where -- by stealth and open battle, boarding ships with knives between their teeth and seducing the wily mistresses of government ministers so they can steal the secret plans for invading Jamaica -- they shall save the Empire.

Yes, this is utterly ludicrous, but it sounds like a rousing good story, so stop worrying about the history and have a good time.

This doesn't even include various supernatural story elements a GM could bring into a campaign. Voodoo is mostly associated with Haiti, but there is no reason why Fedon might not have studied it or why he could not be building an army of zombies to help him in his fight against the British. The island is small, but it is certainly large enough for a werewolf or three (fighting pirates was bad enough, but at least they died when you shot them). And no island campaign would be complete without something unnatural (or, at least, something very old and very angry) coming out of the sea . . .

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Alternate Earth: Taxila

for *GURPS Time Travel*

by Paul Drye

Taxila is a Quantum-7 timeline recently discovered by Infinity Unlimited. In it, Alexander the Great lived not quite two decades longer than he did in the Homeline. While he was unable to extend his conquests to the west as far as he did to the east (partly due to endless rebellion in the former Persian Empire, and partly a Carthago-Roman alliance opposing him), his son Alexander IV was old enough on his father's death to prevent the Macedonian Empire's complete collapse. It would last another 100 years, and bring far more of Greek culture to India than occurred in Homeline.

History

In 326 BC, Alexander the Great passed into India and conquered the three main states along the Indus River: Porus, Taxila, and Abisares. Shortly thereafter, on the banks of the Hyphasis River, his army declined to move any further into India and demanded a return to Macedonia. The point of divergence is that, after three days, it was the will of the army's ringleaders that cracked, not Alexander's. For two more years Alexander roved northern India, conquering as far as the headwaters of the Ganges.

With the birth of his son, the future Alexander IV, the king decided that he had done enough, and returned with much of his army by ship through the Red Sea, debarking near Homeline Suez before returning to Macedonia via Fayum and Alexandria. There he based himself for another fourteen years, though much of this time was spent on campaign resubjugating portions of the Persian Empire that sought to break free of Macedonian control.

When he died in 310 BC, parts of the empire rose in upheaval, particularly Persia, and while most were eventually brought under control the Gangian territories were lost to Chandragupta Maurya. Unlike on Homeline, however, the Greek territories on the upper Indus were retained, and a substantial Greek colony grew around the cities of Taxila (near Homeline Islamabad), Peshawar, and eventually the Vale of Kashmir.

When the Mauryan empire collapsed following the death of Ashoka during the Kalinga War (261 BC), Taxila expanded south into the Punjab and east along the Upper Ganges as far as Benares. For two generations, the eastern end of the Macedonian Empire flourished, and tens of thousands of Greeks came to live in the lands of the Hydaspes.

Unfortunately, except where the elevation was greater than a thousand feet (essentially only the northwest around the original core of the state), the disease environment in India was lethal to European Macedonians and Greeks. Taxilan control over the new territory was weak, and when Philip IV of Macedon died in 223 BC, they were cut off by a successful Iranian revolution in Persia. The borders of Taxila were rolled back to their original extent, and by 50 BC it had been conquered entirely by the upstart Haryanan Kingdom. It has popped back into existence every now and then as one power or another collapsed, and is even independent in the present day (1710 AD, by Homeline standards), but intermarriage between Greeks and Indians has turned it into no more than another Indian state.

Hellenistic India

Taxila's major influence on India was not its political power, but in the realms of thought and religion.

Greek mathematics and philosophy sparked the Golden Age of Indian thought several centuries before it occurred in the Homeline, and positional "Arabic" notation was invented six centuries earlier in Taxila. Most of the mathematical developments that took place in the Muslim world and Europe of Homeline instead happened in India here. Taxila's

"Isaac Newton," Rajendra Chawla developed calculus and a theory of gravity some 100 years ago, and India is on the verge of the Industrial Revolution.

Similarly, the Greeks were responsible for the importation of Persian religion, with a variant on Zoroastrianism named "Theosimos" being developed by the prophet Xenares when Taxila was at its height. Fusing Zoroastrian dualism with aspects of Buddhism, Greek polytheism, and Hindu worship he produced a syncretic religion that swept the subcontinent. By 200 AD, Theosimos was unchallenged in India, with only a small minority hanging on to pure Buddhism.

Theosimos was a useful gift. By positing a continual war for the world between Theos ("God," identified with Zeus and Brahma) and Kakourgos ("The Evil Doer," identified with Hades and Shiva), in which humans played their part, Xenares set his converts on a continual quest to upgrade themselves and make things better. As well as encouraging economic growth and quasi-scientific investigation, it set many Indians against the subcontinent's formerly dominant caste system, and within a few centuries India had far greater social mobility than it did before.

Since then, India has resembled Homeline Europe of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, with a welter of states competing against one another and never one empire ruling the whole. For the last three hundred years, the two countries with the greatest power have been Tamilham (consisting of most of India south of the fifteenth parallel) and Sinhala on the island of Ceylon.

These two, however, have been exhausted by their latest round of wars, and the northeastern kingdom of Utkala (corresponding roughly to Homeline Orissa) is advancing quickly. It is the most technologically advanced nation in Taxila, and their overseas empire is slowly pushing out Sinhalese trading posts as far away as Europe and Manchuria. The first true Indian colony, Dokkhandess, was founded by Utkala some 50 years ago in South Africa, and is now home to 250,000 people.

Technology and Society in Taxila

The most advanced societies in Taxila are those of India and China, which are both at TL4. China is stagnant, however, and India is advancing. Utkala is closing in on TL5, having invented the steam engine and laid down the first railway tracks at the country's central coal mines. Mathematics is quite advanced, with several fields that were not touched until the early 20th century on Homeline already being explored. Medicine is similar to that of Homeline in the mid-18th century: neither germ theory or many effective medicines have been developed.

Both Tamilham and Sinhala are monarchies, with the former being extremely centralized and autocratic, while the latter is slowly developing into a constitutional monarchy. The Sinhalese king still wields considerable power. Utkala is an oligarchic society revolving around the richest merchant families and nobility, with a powerless king. The franchise is expanding as the legal requirements for gaining a voice (based on monetary grounds) are not increasing, while overseas trade and technological development are making Utkalans richer every year.

Elsewhere, the world is much as it was in the 10th century on Homeline. Africa and the Americas are home to petty states or entirely uncivilized. Central and South America's empires have suffered a great deal from successive plagues of smallpox, typhoid, influenza, and others brought by Sinhalese trading posts in the last few centuries, but are finally starting to show signs of recovery as disease resistance has been built up the hard way. North America's native civilizations have collapsed entirely.

Europe has done somewhat better, and at late TL3 has some ability to resist Indian expansionism while it is in its early stages. In Taxila's Europe, the Roman Empire never became particularly large (being restricted to Italy, Spain, and Provence, while the north African coast from Tunisia to Morocco was Carthaginian). North of the Mediterranean, migrating Germans pushed the Celts into the ocean, then in turn were pushed into the fringes of Europe by Turks, who were then displaced by Kirghiz in Eastern Europe. Western Europe is settled by sedentary people speaking Turkic languages, while the Germanic kingdom of Staurin, based in the British Isles, is noted for its piratical depredations on Indian traders to the region.

Australia was discovered ten years ago by the Utkalan mariner Nirendranath Talapatra, who sailed south from Timor down the western coast past the location of Homeline Perth. While India's central location and easy access to spices and Chinese goods has slowed colonization of the rest of the world, southwestern Australia is now attracting some attention, as is the mouth of the Rio Plata in South America.

Outtimers in Taxila

As a Quantum-7 world, Taxila is more easily accessible to the Centrum than Infinity Unlimited. Normally the Centrum would be uninterested in a world that is more than a century away from nuclear weapons and parachronics, but the continuing existence of Greek as a minor language in India has balanced that. Instead of the usual communications difficulties encountered by the monolingual Centrum agents, they had sufficient knowledge of Ancient Greek to eventually puzzle out this world's Indo-Greek (which is heavily influenced by Panjabi).

While Infinity Unlimited only discovered this timeline last year, it is believed that the nation of Taxila is shot through with Centrum agents. As a result, this world has been selected as a good site to try and take up the offensive against the Centrum. Unfortunately, things are not going well so far, and several Infinity Patrol agents have disappeared while investigating the Centrum organization. Taxila has also recently allied itself with Utkala, a combination that could lead to its rapid ascent on the coat tails of the Orissans. In many ways, this particular move has the fingerprints of the centralizing Centrum all over it.

By allying with Utkala's junior partner, however, an opening has been left for Centrum's enemies. A post has been set up in Bhubaneswar, capital of Utkala, and Bengali Infinity Patrol agents are learning the local language, Oriyan, at a feverish rate. It is hoped that, if secrecy is maintained until Taxila is too entwined with Utkala to back out, Infinity's client can dictate policy to Centrum's rather than the other way around.

Adventures in Taxila

Lucky Strike: The settlers in Dokkhandess have just discovered the diamond and gold fields of Southern Africa. Riches have begun flowing back to Utkala in unprecedented amounts. Not only are they further fueling that country's heated economic growth, they are making Tamilham and Sinhala jealous -- the latter especially so, since their trading posts in the region were destroyed by the Utkalans not too many decades ago.

There is also the disturbing fact that both fields were found within a year of one another, and are hundreds of miles north of the still nascent Utkalan colony. Were the colonists merely very lucky, or has outtime knowledge been used to draw them to their attention?

Heart of Darkness: An expedition is being sponsored by the Shonaanawd Tolli ("Gold River Company") to explore the region between the Parana and Uruguay Rivers (a rectangle of land about 400 miles long and 100 miles wide). For the first 200 miles or so after leaving the mouth of the river, the Parana has many swamps along its banks, with grasses head high providing many hiding places. Unfortunately for the explorers, the region has been well-prepared by Sinhalese traders, who've been monopolizing the trade here for two centuries. The natives are certain that they must be killed or else another round of dreadful plagues will start. They may not be wrong.

The explorers will also make one other discovery: the Centrum is involved too. A few of the locals will be found with high-quality (if tech-appropriate) equipment that will prove to be Centrum made.

Playing Both Ends Against the Middle Ages: So why is the Centrum interested in opening gold fields and propping up the Sinhalese trading empire? A mission to the city of Taxila will eventually prove (should the agents survive, unlike their predecessors) that Centrum is trying to provoke a war between Utkala/Taxila and the alliance of Tamilham and Sinhala. They don't like war very much, but think that one is necessary before their Indian clients will be in a position to expand over the whole world. Better to have the war now when it's going to be limited, rather than risk it not coming for a century and turn into this timeline's equivalent of World War I.

The task, then, is to foil their scheme to buttress the two southern nations just enough that war breaks out only to have the Centrum pull out the rug from under them once hostilities are under way.

Oh Holy Day

Make The Holidays Special For Your *d20 System* Campaign

by Owen K.C. Stephens

In typical fantasy *d20 System* campaigns, the gods are real and their power to influence the mortal coil is equally real. The gods have powerful tools to protect their worshipers and express their wrath, including clerics, avatars, angels, and other outsiders. It follows that these gods might also have more subtle ways to act on mortal events. Certainly their ability to express religious desires to their worshipers through clerics can mold the shape of societies. If a goddess makes it known apple trees are holy to her, communities that depend on her protection will plant and maintain orchards of apple trees. Seen in this light, a religion's tenets can easily be interpreted as instructions to make the world a pleasing place to the god.

One common religious concept is that of a holy day -- a time of ceremony and special deeds proclaimed by the deity. For most gods however, holy days don't normally help remold the world. Certainly some holy days can be viewed as reminders for when it's best to undertake a given activity ("The god Arr demands one quarter of the fields be reaped by the feast of Harvest Day!"), and some may be nothing more than an excuse for the faithful to gather and enjoy themselves. Indeed, some gods may wish a happy population simply because that is a pleasing change to the world in their eyes. But the remaining holy days seem useless in the grand divine plan.

In a game where magic is real, this need not be the case. The gods can easily be viewed to have the power to make certain days *different*, and these differences can be expressed in game terms. Since most games have numerous deities, many of whom oppose one another, each god is assumed to be able to affect the world only a few times in a year. These become holy days -- times when the god's worshipers know it is auspicious to undertake difficult tasks, and when the agents of other divinities know it is wise not to disturb the worshiper's important ceremonies. A list of possible holy days and the game effects of each allow a GM to quickly and easily incorporate this idea into a campaign.

A GM may make these holy days and their effects common knowledge among the players, or keep some information hidden. Some religions and cults may consider their holy days to be secret. If players know holy days have real power, but don't know when these days are for a death cult, they may think twice about raiding an annual ceremony (or at least wish to gather more information, leading to additional opportunities for adventure). Players who know when holy days are, but have no specific knowledge of the game mechanics of these days, may grow intrigued when their fire spells work best on holy days to fire gods, and their summoned animals are particularly ferocious on the holy days of a druidic divinity. This can add depth and mystery to a campaign, and give players another dimension of the world to explore.

Holidays and Competing Religions

One potential problem with this system is how to integrate it into a campaign setting with different regions holding different cosmologies. If the Greek Pantheon is worshiped in one country and Buddhist monks are predominant in another, it seems odd for the monks to be concerned about the power of pyromancers on Apollo's holy Sun Day.

One way to handle this is to make holidays regional, depending on the beliefs of the local population. Thus Sun Day, a holy day to Apollo, may only have real power in places where Apollo is actively worshiped (or at least recognized). This can make for interesting games of religious politics, as the priests of a given deity have a vested interest in spreading his worship to new lands. The power of a holy day (see below) could also be tied to the number of worshipers he has, making the conversion of new faithful an important part of the mystic power of a given clergy.

It's also possible to decide the holy days are not caused by the gods, but by astrological conjunctions the gods take

advantage of. In this scenario, the day devoted to the Sun occurs at a given time, and every religion with a sun-god claims it as their holy day. In this case the monks are concerned about the power of pyromancers on Sun Day, but they may attribute it to the action of some local pagan god, rather than far-off Apollo.

A third option is for holy days to only apply to the faithful of that god's religion. In this case worshipers of Apollo gain the listed benefits on his day wherever they are, and worshipers of other gods gain no benefit. Of course not all the benefits are geared around this assumption (why would Earth elementals ever worship an Air god, as they only suffer for it?), but a GM can easily work around this. He may have holy days be assigned per pantheon rather than a specific divinity (thus all Elemental gods are of the same pantheon, and have one holy day dedicated to each element in a year), or rework the benefits to be more creature-specific.

The Power of Holy Days

Each holy day is listed as having a minor, intermediate, and major effect. These effects are cumulative -- on a day with major effects, the intermediate and minor effects also apply. Bonuses from holy days stack unless they are given a specific bonus type (in which case they follow normal rules for stacking).

The rarer the day, the more powerful its effect should be. Thus if our theoretical Sun Day occurs once a week, its minor effect should be used. If it's a monthly feast (perhaps corresponding to the first week-end of the month) the intermediate power is appropriate. Only holy days which occur no more than once a season should use the major effects. A GM may also decide to have holy days have different effects based on location (perhaps Sun Day is a monthly feast, which uses its minor effect outside the Greek kingdoms, its intermediate effect within them, and its major effect in the city of Apollis, which is dedicated to the god).

The holy days are all listed below so they can be randomly determined. A GM may either use this to decide where to place them on a calendar, or in games where a calendar isn't kept, randomly determine if a holy day is near, then roll to determine what it is. This can also be useful for a quick check of holy days in foreign lands if PCs are traveling in lands the GM hasn't fully developed.

All of the following holy days are based on standard **d20 System** domains, tying them closely to the powers of clerics. A GM can easily add new holy days tied to a deity's portfolio of concerns, or even on classic fantasy tropes (days holy to the moon, or silver, or a particular creature).

All these powers are only active during the holy day (usually defined as lasting from midnight to midnight or dawn to dawn, depending on the religion). At the end of the day, all bonuses end and those unused are lost.

Holy Days

Air

Minor: All spells with the Air descriptor are cast at +2 caster level.

Intermediate: All creature's flying abilities have their maneuverability increased by one class. Creatures that already have perfect maneuverability have their fly speed increased by 10 feet.

Major: All creatures with the Earth descriptor suffer a -2 morale penalty to all attack and damage rolls, skill and ability checks and saving throws.

Animal

Minor: All animal-related skill checks (Handle Animal, Ride) and Animal Empathy or Wild Empathy checks gain a +1 bonus.

Intermediate: All creatures of the animal type gain a +1 bonus to their natural armor.

Major: All creatures of the animal type gain a +2 bonus to all attack and damage rolls, skill and ability checks and

saving throws.

Chaos

Minor: All spells and abilities that have a percent chance to be effective (such as *displacement* Or *confusion*) add +10 to all percentile rolls.

Intermediate: All creatures with lawful alignments suffer a -1 morale penalty to all attack and damage rolls, skill and ability checks and saving throws.

Major: All spells cast from magic items (including wands and staves) have a 10% chance of acting like an ability from a *rod of wonders*, instead.

Death (Evil)

Minor: All creature's chance to stabilize when bleeding to death is reduced to 5%.

Intermediate: All creatures of the undead type gain a +1 bonus to all attack and damage rolls, skill and ability checks and saving throws.

Major: All undead count as double their hit dice for purposes of being turned.

Death (Good)

Minor: All spells of the necromancy school are cast at +1 caster level.

Intermediate: Any creature that dies cannot be raised as an undead by spells of less than 6th level or creatures with fewer than 13 levels or hit dice.

Major: All turn undead checks are made as if the turner is +4 levels higher.

Destruction

Minor: All objects have their hardness reduced by 2.

Intermediate: All saving throws made to avoid hit point damage suffer a -1 penalty.

Major: All damaging attacks deal +1 hit point.

Earth

Minor: Creatures with the earth descriptor and worshipers of the earth god have their DR increased by 2/--. Such creatures with no existing DR gain DR 1/--.

Intermediate: All creature's burrowing movement rate is increased by 50%.

Major: All creatures with the Air descriptor suffer a -2 morale penalty to all attack and damage rolls, skill and ability checks and saving throws.

Evil

Minor: All spells with the evil descriptor are cast at +1 caster level.

Intermediate: All creatures with good alignments suffer a -1 morale penalty to all attack and damage rolls, skill and ability checks and saving throws.

Major: All creatures with evil alignments gain a +2 morale bonus to all attack and damage rolls, skill and ability checks and saving throws.

Fire

Minor: All spells with the Fire descriptor are cast at +1 caster level.

Intermediate: Existing fires take twice the normal time to extinguish, to a maximum of an additional ten minutes.

Major: All mundane and magic fire attacks deal +2 hit point of damage.

Good

Minor: All spells with the good descriptor are cast at +1 caster level.

Intermediate: All creatures with evil alignments suffer a -1 morale penalty to all attack and damage rolls, skill and ability checks and saving throws.

Major: All creatures with good alignments gain a +2 morale bonus to all attack and damage rolls, skill and ability checks and saving throws.

Healing

Minor: All creature's chance to stabilize when bleeding to death is increased to 50%.

Intermediate: All spells with *cure* in the name heal an additional 1 hit point per die.

Major: All spells of the *cause wounds* line deal 2 fewer hit points of damage per die (minimum 1 per die).

Knowledge

Minor: All divination school spells are cast as +2 caster levels.

Intermediate: All Knowledge skill checks and Bardic Knowledge checks gain a +2 bonus.

Major: All research done on this day (including researching and learning spells) counts as 5 days worth of work.

Law

Minor: All skill checks made in furtherance of a crime (potentially including Hide, Move Silently and Sleight of Hand) suffer a -1 penalty.

Intermediate: All creatures with chaotic alignments suffer a -1 morale penalty to all attack and damage rolls, skill and ability checks and saving throws.

Major: All mind-affecting spells are cast at -2 caster levels, and all saving throws against them gain a +2 bonus.

Luck

Minor: All creatures may add a +1 luck bonus to one roll made on this day.

Intermediate: All luck bonuses are increased by 1.

Major: All creatures may reroll one d20 roll made on this day, taking the better of the two rolls.

Magic

Minor: All castings of the spell *detect magic* have double normal range and duration.

Intermediate: All spell penetration checks gain a +2 bonus.

Major: All spells are cast at +1 caster level.

Plant

Minor: All plant-related skill checks (including profession: herbalist and Wilderness Lore or Survival) gain a +1 bonus.

Intermediate: All creatures of the plant type gain a +1 bonus to their natural armor.

Major: All creatures of the plant type gain a +2 bonus to all attack and damage rolls, skill and ability checks and saving throws.

Strength

Minor: All Strength ability checks (but not skill checks) gain a +4 bonus.

Intermediate: All Strength-based skill checks gain a +2 bonus.

Major: All creatures with a 16 or greater Strength gain +2 enhancement bonus to Strength.

Sun

Minor: All light sources shed light in a 25% larger area.

Intermediate: All saves against spells with the fire descriptor suffer a -1 penalty.

Major: All spells with *sun*, *light*, *fire*, or *flame* in the name, that produce fire or light, are cast a +3 caster levels.

Travel

Minor: All Constitution checks made for a forced march gain a +2 bonus.

Intermediate: All overland movement is increased by 25%.

Major: All terrain penalties to overland travel are reduced by one step (from trackless to road or trail, and from road or trail to highway).

Trickery

Minor: All illusion school spells are cast at +2 caster levels.

Intermediate: All Cha based skill checks gain a +2 morale bonus.

Major: All Wis based skill checks suffer a -2 morale penalty.

War

Minor: All successful attacks with a weapon deal one additional point of damage.

Intermediate: All creatures fighting with an ally adjacent to them gain a +1 dodge bonus to AC.

Major: All morale bonuses are increased by +1.

Water

Minor: Creatures with the water descriptor and worshipers of the water god gain a +2 bonus to all Reflex saves

Intermediate: All creature's swim movement rate is increased by 20%.

Major: All creatures with the Fire descriptor suffer a -2 morale penalty to all attack and damage rolls, skill and ability checks and saving throws.

Pyramid Review

Sprawl Survival Guide (for Shadowrun)

Published by [FanPro LLC](#)

Written by Rob Boyle, Elissa Carey, Drew Curtis, Lance Hawvermale, Eleanor Holmes, Adam Jury, Robyn King-Nitschke, Peter Taylor, Alexandre van Chestein, and Jakko Westerbeke

Cover by Jim Nelson

Illustrated by Dave Allsop, Eric Desideriu, Marko Djurdjevic, Chris Lewis, Larry MacDougall, Klaus Scherwinski and Karl Waller

144-page b&w softcover; \$24.99

The recent run of releases for the *Shadowrun RPG* has tended to focus on the "Gee-Whiz!!" factor of the Sixth World. They have also been accompanied by a campaign of interlinked scenarios that have tied into events of 2062 and 2063, so that [Dragons of the Sixth World](#) worked as a complement to [Survival of the Fittest](#) and [Wake of the Comet](#) involved the shadowrunner player characters in the events described in [Year of the Comet](#). Not so the latest sourcebook for the game, the *Sprawl Survival Guide*, which takes a look at the everyday aspects of life in the North America of 2063 from both inside and out of the shadows.

Unlike most *Shadowrun* sourcebooks, which should never fall into the hands of the players, both players and GMs can use the *Sprawl Survival Guide* as it presents them with a handle on life in the Sixth World, all given in a number of differing voices. These voices are not the commentary common to all *Shadowrun* sourcebooks, which is delivered by the on-line denizens of the Shadowland BBS -- though they are still there -- but rather more authoritative ones delivered in a more journalistic style. Of course, the mundane particulars of any game world may not be appetizing to all players, or indeed every GM, but for those of us in the know, the mundane can be good, the mundane can be interesting, and the mundane can be ripe with roleplaying possibilities.

The format for the *Sprawl Survival Guide* is the same as for other *Shadowrun* sourcebooks and there is a pleasing lack of errors in both the typography and layout. The illustrations are sparse and in places a little too cartoon-like, though the pieces by Larry MacDougall really stand out as the best on show here.

The book is broken up into four chapters, the last providing new and relevant game information, again which the players can reference as much as the GM -- unlike other *Shadowrun* supplements. The first chapter is entitled "Living in the Sixties" and has been lifted from the pages of the "Looking Towards 2064" issue of *LiveWire* magazine.

Published on April 30th 2063, this has been posted to the Shadowlands BBS to be dissected and commented upon what is an overview of the state of modern life. This is actually a corporate piece directly aimed at the wage slave or wannabe wage slave. It looks at the state of the art home for the middle class and its climate-controlled environment, and its facilities (electronic, media and even their cleaning bots), before going out into the jungle of the great urban sprawls. Places to stay, travel, shopping, personal finances and an explanation of how credstiks work, and entertainment including nightlife, music, Tridees and Simsense, sports, corporate events, advertising and sports are all covered. Also detailed is how a "System Identification Number" or SIN works, how the law applies to both those with a SIN and the SINless without one (in answer to the latter, it applies to the SINless badly), before it goes on to look at

the religious and social mores of 2063. This is very much a change of pace from compared to recent *Shadowrun* supplements, where the voice is invariably that of someone within the Shadows rather than that of someone outside of it. "Living in the Sixties" provides lots of little details that be used to add color to a campaign, whether to a player character's domicile or that of an NPC, or just to a campaign in general. In this, the chapter also works as a companion and extension to the contents of the *State of the Art 2063* supplement.

The second chapter takes on more worldwide point of view to explain the ins and outs of travel beyond the 'runner's local 'burbs, not just the next town, but also the next nation and the next continent over. This is not just by ordinary means, but also the methods favored by those who must travel more surreptitiously along with their gear. The second part of this chapter is entitled "Global Report," and provides a good rundown on some of the global hotspots that might be potential sources of work and rumors for runners of all calibers. Each entry serves a good starting point for these various locations, ranging from Auckland and Calcutta to New Monaco and Buenos Aires. However, they deserve further expansion and support to be given them in future supplements.

The third chapter is written from a more personal point of view, though no less journalistic. In "Life on the Run," a young journalist decides to investigate the seamier side of life in 2063. Including interviews conducted with those in the biz, and those opposed to it -- mostly recorded without their knowledge -- plus a set of VoxPop, along with the journalist's personal recollections. These are well written and should help the prospective player grasp the basics of the game they are about to play in.

The last chapter expands in the main upon the main *Shadowrun* rulebook, plus the *Matrix* and *Rigger 3* sourcebooks. It provides rules for dealing with the electronic items within and about an average wage slave's apartment as described earlier in "Living in the Sixties." This includes home telecom systems (and also street dataterms if the runners happen to be in the kind of upscale neighborhood where they do not get vandalized) plus their household drones, mostly cleaning drones. These are accompanied by a gruesome image of a cleaning drone attempting to vacuum up a corpse, but these rules will no doubt be the source of some clever use of the various types of drones.

Perhaps the most fun aspect of the *Sprawl Survival Guide* are the expanded guidelines for designing a character's lifestyle. In the core book, these are simply packaged as a particular type with a set price for maintaining it from one month to the next. Under these new rules, a player can select factors for area, comforts, entertainment, furnishings, security, and space that when added up provides a total number from which can be determined a character's lifestyle costs. These can be further modified with edges, such as "Easygoing Landlord," "Manaline/Power Site in the Basement," and "Roommate from Heaven," and Flaws, such as "Ambush Friendly," "Gnomes Under the Floorboard" (characters lose small and shiny things, plus their socks with ease), "Living with Parents," and "This isn't Sam's Pizza" (the home LTG is associated with another business). These are added up to get a percentage modifier that can reduce or increase a character's lifestyle costs. Though these rules are optional, they really are worth using, as they are not only fun, but also ripe with possibilities from which the GM should be able to extract plenty of game situations.

The *Sprawl Survival Guide* serves as an excellent introduction to the basics of life in the Sixth World, one that both the GM and players should enjoy reading. Both experienced and the new GM will want access to this supplement as it will enhance the game, while players will want the introduction and the room to detail their characters' lifestyles. While the mundane nature of this supplement might prove uninteresting for some gamers, the *Sprawl Survival Guide* definitely earns its place both on the *Shadowrun* GM's shelf and within *Shadowrun* canon.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Pick

Crooks! (for Mutants & Masterminds)

Published by [Super Unicorn Design Studio/Green Ronin Publishing](#)

Designed by Erik Mona, Kyle Hunter, & Sean Glenn

Edited & Developed by Erik Mona, Rob Smolka

Art by Axel Ortiz, Andrew Hou, Arnold Tsang, Brian Stelfreeze, Corey "Rey" Lewis, Cully Hamner, Ed Tadem, Eric Canete, Heather Martin, Jake Parker, Jason Martin, Karl Waller, Kyle Hunter, Leonard Kirk, Ramon Perez, Sean Chen, & Steve Scott

Maps by Christopher West, Robert Lazzaretti

128-page full-color hardcover; \$27.95

With the proliferation of superhero games, especially those geared toward use of the *d20 System* and the OGL, your champions of law and justice are going to need more bad guys to beat on. You're going to need, simply, **Crooks!**

The Super Unicorn/Green Ronin cooperative effort (for the OGL) is a rogues' gallery of scum and villainy for the *Mutants & Masterminds RPG*, with some annoyances and faceless mugs thrown in for good measure. The city of Arcadia has its fair share of problems when it comes to super-powered sleaze, and these some-odd three dozen plus enemies are ready to be dropped into any campaign.

Each villain comes with a tiny box that lists his (or her, or its . . .) vital statistics like age, height, true identity, and, most critical for the heroes since they'll be on the receiving end of the power blasts, power level (they range from level-1 losers to the 21st-level powerhouses that always seem to have a spare doomsday device and a thirst for vengeance).

Some are loners like the super-fast super-Nazi Blitz; or the wrestler-turned-mutated-freak Spasm, whose body is an ever-changing tapestry of blood, bones, and pain. Others are linked up to other names in this book or (occasionally) the original *Mutants & Masterminds* rules. Sovereign is a tough and tusked alien leader, an outcast from his people who sees himself heading a new empire at our end of the galaxy. He calls upon the multilingual Waymaker to herald his forces and demand surrender when he descends on his next conquest. The Earthman Sulemain, with a cask of demon spirits at his side, makes sure Sovereign has plenty of planets to plunder by offering the use of his geometrically perfect crystals to teleport armies wherever he pleases.

Other groups enjoy even tighter knitting. The Clique consists of teenaged girls with a mad-on for clothes, a bohemian lifestyle, and the intermittent affirmation of grrrl power. The animal-themed Bestiary wants payback against the government that tried to kill them for knowing too much about a mysterious archaeological dig. And the globe-spanning Unitrol, advertising itself as an alternative to the United Nations, offers Third-World nations a chance to live the good life -- when "revolutionaries" conveniently pop up in their ranks, they need only give up their control and their coffers, and eliminate all parahumans within their borders.

Otherworldly visitors such as the beautiful and rotting Carrion Queen try to give our world a taste of death, but some, like Vagabond, whose villainy is tempered by the fact that our world is just a better place to be given his oppressive home dimension, are less villains than just fish out of water (fish with the power to travel through time, mind). Still others are just a good hook to bigger adventures, like Tag Team. These streetwise graffiti artists, with the ability to make spray paint do everything from disintegrate concrete to shapeshift inanimate objects, don't have the stones to go toe-to-toe with any but the greenest superguys -- but they're only one of many NPCs here whose abilities are a gift courtesy of the mysterious Mr. F.

Each entry has a bit of background on the person, some flavor text on their powers and how they use them in a fight, how the GM might be able to put the character to work in a game, and a block of game stats. Several entries also have Capers, a sidebar that offers a quick adventure hook, the sort of things the villain can be expected to do or the kind of heists they're likely to pull. Some also get a few lines about their special equipment, headquarters, or vehicles.

To populate the panels of your comic-book exploits, GMs get a passel of low-level thugs and mooks. These are the faces in the crowd that make up goon squads and useless minions the heroes always have to mop the complex floor with before the mastermind brings out the big guns. There are ninja, mercenaries, and soldiers for paramilitary groups like Unitrol, as well as expendable homegrown terrorists and activists with more slogans than brains. For the mystical enemies, there are supernaturally inclined critters like vampires, demons, and zombies.

The gamemaster gets a couple of sections bookending the supervillain entries; these are intended to help him bring the funny books to life in his game. There's a primer on the history of parahumans from World War II to the present, describing the several ups and downs they've suffered throughout the decades. GMs wishing to set a game in another time period will have a clear idea what things were like in Arcadia during that timeframe.

The back of the book has a section on new rules and extras for use in the game. Players can play the villains (or play reformed ones as heroes). New feats offer neat new effects (the Motif feat, for example, gives you a bonus to perform capers with a particular theme, like crimes carried out on national holidays). Variable Effect is a new catchall power that creates different effects on the fly, activated with Hero or Villain Points. There are expanded rules for Devices, more Weaknesses, and a template system (now your speedster can also be one of those werewolves from the front of the book). A quick and easy system for deciding what happens to captured villains turns a trial into a few dice rolls. These determine whether they end up at the Big House, and how long it will be before they return to vex the heroes.

The niftiest addition is a system for crisis levels. Using points gained from beating villains, heroes can alter the conditions of the game world -- sort of like the parameters system from Mayfair's *Underground RPG* -- to improve things or even change the style of game play if the group is feeling that motivated. Is the setting sliding into dystopia? Use some points to improve social conditions. You can raise the public's opinion of superheroes, making it easier for them to work with the populace. On the other hand, this system also offers the chance for failure on the part of the good guys to lead to the complete destruction of mankind

While *Crooks!* occupies a standard niche in the progression of releases for a superhero game line, the book isn't a half-hearted whack at a villains collection, built just to fill customers' expectations. The characters all have fresh, colorful backgrounds, and the volume works as a whole. The many connections among different foes make the city of Arcadia come to life. No one character need exist in a vacuum unless the GM wants it that way. Not only does the book offer ways to match this release to the core rulebook and its characters and organizations -- or those of your own campaign -- each personality has its own areas of deliberate ambiguity so plots and connections can be made to fit events in your game.

The book makes some bad font choices that work against the text in places. The vital statistics blocks have Ks that look like Hs and Gs that could be Cs, and these stats are written painfully small in hard-to-read colors. Only the odd pages are numbered, and they're written small enough you almost think they don't want you to know what page you're on. And a few of the logos are so stylized you'd think they were a word balloon. On the other hand, the artwork is done by recognized names from the comics biz so most of the character portraits are terrific, ranging from Ramon Perez's simplified "Ambush Bug" style to Sean Chen's smooth four-color masterpieces. There's even a brief-but-enjoyable nine-page comic book piece at the beginning that, instead of being page filler, tells a good story while at the same time

establishing the relationships and motivations for some of the figures from the rest of the volume.

Crooks! is a great resource for GMs, even if they're not using the ***d20 System*** or the OGL; it's that easy to customize, and chock full of good ideas. These are solid designs for use with any game, and with only minor drawbacks, GMs will soon find the book's utility doesn't end with what's printed inside.

--*Andy Vetromile*

The Navies of Kralorela

by Mark Galeotti

This article is development work for the Kralorela book series -- the final version may be different. It may also appear in *Men of the Sea*, the future Sailors' book.

Kralorela is not a renowned maritime power, for its ships rarely travel far beyond the so-called Harmonious Waves, the waters that wash its shores. However, its fleets are mighty and varied, reflecting the interests of the empire.

Kralorela has three great navies, each manifesting as a War Dragon. **The Peaceable Embrace of Divine Amity** is responsible for patrolling the inland sea known as Suam Cho, while the **Vigilant Expression of Imperial Caution** controls the coastal waters as far as Koromondol. Both navies contain a mix of vessels, from the great turtle-barges whose decks are fortresses, to flotillas of smaller junks. The turtle-barges are mighty battle platforms, huge oared barges designed so that they can be lashed together to form floating islands on which mighty rituals can be enacted and men can fight as if on land. The largest barges even have their own unique cults. Some say that the larger turtle-barges have zombie oarsmen, although it would be difficult to distinguish such undead crew from the dazed and driven convicts generally used. A favored tactic is to harry corsairs and intruders with junks and oared dragon-boats, which seek to bring *hangzu* [marines] to boarding range. Many marines use *hsunchen* magic to transform themselves into orcas to reach or even ram enemy ships. Eagle *hsunchen* are also favored as scouts and raiders. Meanwhile, as many as a thousand *duzhe* [lectors] on board such a floating island read out the fearsome Imposition of Correct Order on Maritime Disharmony. From his flagship's pagoda, the fleet's commanding exarch can then shape the waters to his will. Impious interlopers may be smashed on suddenly dry sea beds and then the mangled wreckage washed far out to sea on a mighty tidal wave that nonetheless gives obeisance to each of Godunya's Bridges as it safely passes beneath.

Even when becalmed in the fogs of the Kahar Sea, Kralori sailors rely on the distant clangor of the great brass Presence Bells that dot the Kralori coastline to remind them of their homeland. The rather smaller **Vigilant Envoy of Imperial Attentiveness** is crewed by heroes, criminals, free-thinkers, and other misfits, because its duties may take it even out of range of these bells. This navy ranges far out to sea, often escorting merchants and emissaries to Vithela or even the barbarian West. As such, instead of lumbering turtle-barges it relies more on larger junks, primarily the five-sailed wave-tiger but also ships of more adventurous designs. Its present exarch, Lord Tanzhou Seven-Lung, is especially eager to use his new fire-lizards (squat junks bearing banks of crude rockets) and fire-wasps (manned rocket-boats that streak across the waters in a suicidal rush to ram enemy vessels).

Kralorela also has a huge merchant fleet, although most such ships merely ply the waterways of the Suam Chow or Kralorela's mighty rivers, which are choked with all variety of junk, barge, sampan, and punt. The typical Kralori *shuishou* [sailor] is thus a low-prestige professional working in relatively safe conditions for a modest income (tariffs are strictly controlled by the Office of Agreeable Transaction). They affect outlandish earrings and left-hand tattoos, and many learn the distinctive Hopping Sea Crane martial art, which apes the rolling gait of an experienced mariner. Since all barbarian shipping is confined to the port of Lur Nop, there is also a specialized trade in superior Kralori goods to that city for export and of entertaining foreign trinkets from it to the rest of the empire. In order to minimize the risk of pollution, the task of dealing with barbarian merchants in Lur Nop is entrusted to the Yellow-and-Yellow Shippers, a clan of notoriously close-mouthed merchants whose lucrative monopoly must be repurchased every fifth year. There are, however, more audacious Kralori merchants who travel to the East Isles, Teshnos, and even Teleos. While wealthy, they are regarded with scorn and derision by many of their peers.

Sample Magic Keyword for Kralori Sailors

Thrunhin Da, the Blue Dragon of the Deep

Thrunhin Da is the great Blue Dragon of the Deep, Queen of the Kahar Sea and mother of the zabdamar mermen. She is also known as Harantara when she appears not as a dragon. In that form, she was the daughter of Hangyath the Three-Browed and the gentle water goddess Ivaro. No shrinking innocent, she assisted in the drowning of her kidnapped brother Palachath's captor, the antigod Kratapol. She bore the god Metsyla (ruler of Abzered) to Angen the Green, and was then courted by the storm god Kahar, who won her by learning Perfect Stillness. When Angen's watery kin destroyed Abzered in their fury at the union, she and Kahar escaped and fought back. The other sea gods surrendered or were subdued one by one, until Thrunhin Da and her peaceable husband acquired overlordship over what is now the Kahar Sea.

Entry Requirements: None.

Abilities: Communicate with Zabdamar, Deep Swimming, Devotee of Thrunhin Da *or* Initiate of Thrunhin Da, Mythology of Thrunhin Da, Sense Way in Fog, Soul Vision.

Virtues: Constant, Unforgiving, Wise.

Affinities and Feats:

Appease Sea Dragon -- Appease Storm with Kowtow, Honor Sea Dragon ritual, Mist-Thinning Eulogy, Sense Approaching Storm.

Shiphandling -- Fortify Oarsmen, Hold Course, Know Bearing to Nearest Kralori Coast, Master Water, Wrangle Rudder.

Secret: Majesty of the Waters (Acts as an affinity, with the feats *Breathe out Fog*, *Breathe Water*, *Dispel Storm*, *Raise Waves*, and *Smash Boat*. No feats may be improvised from the affinity, although others might be discovered through heroquests.)

Other Side: Thrunhin Da and her husband reign in splendor in the Coral and Cosmos Palace, deep under the Cobalt Water Dome in the Summer Land Heaven. From there, her worshippers can pass to the Golden Age or to the palaces of any of the other Dragons.

Note: The *Honor Sea Dragon ritual* feat has a similar effect to Dormal's Opening rituals, allowing the ship to pass safely on the waters without triggering the destructive effects of the Closing.

Hero Cults of Thrunhin Da

Most worshippers of Thrunhin Da who live a life on the sea also worship one of the Ninety-Nine Waterfarers, maritime heroes of Kralori culture. They generally select one who is most relevant to their own role on board ship or else who is linked with the waters that they sail. Some examples include the following:

Eru the Riverboatman

Affinity -- Riverboat Sailor (Boat through Mud, Hold Patch, Part Reeds).

Jing Ji the Rigger.

Affinity -- Rigging (Knot Rope, Strengthen Rope ritual, Surefoot Climb, Swing on Rope, Untie Knot).

Po Keng

This hero mastered the ways of the Rozgali Sea.

Affinity -- Sail Rozgali Sea (Greet Ludoch, Know Rozgali Ways, Smell Typhoon on Wind).

Younger Lu

This hero provides no magic but teaches the Hopping Sea Crane martial art.

Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Creating and Saving the World in Three Easy Sessions

I run few gaming series with the intent of having it be an indefinite, long-term, 'til the stars burn out kinda game. Instead, I tend to run them as a miniseries, perhaps with the possibility of expanding it into a long-term game later.

This has a number of advantages:

I get to try out lots of games, systems, worlds, and settings that I otherwise might not get around to. Let's face it; there are more snazzy RPG settings out there than I'll ever be able to flip through, let alone run for any length of time.

I can also try out house rules or different systems. If I have a beloved game system or world, but I'm looking to tweak some elements (or try a new system altogether), a miniseries lets me explore those without the stakes being *too* high. This was the technique I used during a mid-1990s *Star Trek*, when I used ***Fudge*** rules alongside FASA's ***Star Trek*** skill names, since FASA's system seemed incompatible with my style (and Last Unicorn Games had foolishly decided not to exist for five years yet).

There's a lot less pressure in a miniseries than an ongoing campaign, so I generally feel free to try things I otherwise wouldn't. I find more resistance to outlandish plots in an ongoing game than a miniseries (such as, say, starting an adventure by having the players escape from the Bad Guy's prison, or having them "wake up" in a haze from some kind of mind control, just as they hear about the Emperor's assassination).

They're satisfying. Unlike campaigns that just sputter out due to other obligations and complications, miniseries have a definite beginning, middle, and end. This allows for interesting storyline resolution, and can make even risk-averse players take more chances; after all, if they don't accomplish their goals now, they may never get another chance!

And, perhaps the biggest advantage for me currently, **miniseries are the ideal means for me to try out new players**, lest I commit to an ongoing campaign with people whose gaming styles are incompatible with my own.

I've fallen into this trap before; I've invited people to be part of an ongoing campaign without fully realizing what I was getting into. And once a player is part of an ongoing campaign, I personally have great resistance to getting rid of either him or his character. ("Okay; when we left off last time, you were in the bottom of Le Dungeon Indéniable, and you were deciding . . ." "Waitamminute; what happened to Carl and his character?" "Carl isn't here, and Stabby the Assassin was et by wall gnomes when you weren't looking. We'll speak no more of them.")

But I can put up with anyone for two or three sessions. And if run a miniseries with six players, and forget to invite two of them back for an ongoing campaign based on that miniseries, then so much the better!

On the flip side, there are a number of downsides:

Commitment: For some reason many players I've tried to recruit are resistant to the idea of a miniseries. I suspect it's because much of the effort that goes into playing in an RPG - character history, emersion, and the like - is at least as difficult in a miniseries as an ongoing campaign, only the players know they probably won't have their characters for very long. If you're going to invest in creating a snazzy character, why do so for a game you know will be limited?

(As a random digression, I'll actually turn this on its side and use it as a selling point. The limited scope of a miniseries allows players to create different characters; if a player usually makes, say, brooding loners, perhaps they he can try out a bard/entertainer-type for a change. The stakes - and emotional investment - aren't as high! It's fun watching the light bulb go off above players' heads when I mention that.)

Derailability: (Okay . . . somewhere Noah Webster's turning in his grave; it's his fault for dying.) In an ongoing campaign, it's almost impossible for my players to completely derail a campaign; I can always guide things back on course after a few adventures, and very often the derailment can *become* a new campaign focus. But in a miniseries, there are generally two possibilities: heavily constrained, or complete derailment. If the PCs decide not to investigate

the Emperor's assassination but instead decide to steal a spaceship and sell ice cream star-to-star, then the carefully scripted three-session adventure you had planned can become entirely moot, unless you're willing to beat the players with a broom until they search the Emperor's body for clues.

In general I get around this one by making it clear out of game to the players that, c'mon, there's a certain linearity in miniseries; go with it. (And then I'll often have a section of the miniseries that's *completely* freeform, where the PCs need to come up with what to do next entirely on their own. That's always interesting for players more accustomed to nose-pulling convention games.)

Things I try to keep in mind when crafting a miniseries:

Pacing: In a miniseries, I consider the time I have to establish my tone and pace is *much* less than in an ongoing campaign. As a result, I'll usually start out the game as fast as possible, emphasizing whatever themes will be played out. The stakes don't need to be high, and very often it helps if they *aren't*, but I still try to give the players an idea of what it's about ASAP. Thus if it's going to be a miniseries centered on political intrigues and manipulations, then I might start the game at a noble's birthday party, informing the PCs that they accepted a sizable bet to determine who at the party the noble is having an affair with. In the *Exalted* miniseries I ran, I basically started the PCs out with:

"The giant bear is directly across from you in the pit. The bad guys whose camp you infiltrated surround the outside of the pit, and the old man whose advice you were following has just been gutted by the bear. You were following him; he was the only one who knew the full extent of the plan. However, as the bear approaches, you know it would be dangerous to reveal your *true* nature now. Roll for initiative."

The *Exalted* game was about cinematic combat, difficult choices, and figuring out what the heck was going on. In both examples, the stakes for success or failure are meaningful but not all-consuming, and the challenge isn't so great that the PCs need to break much of a sweat. Instead, that initial scene set the tone for the rest of the miniseries, with a microcosm of the greater story.

This isn't an essential method, but - especially with new players - I've found it invaluable to give them clues as to how to handle the adventure.

Plot: With a standard adventure, I'll generally have a strong idea of how the adventure will begin and how it will end, with the middle being fuzzy. In a miniseries, I tend to take this further; I'll usually know how I'm (hopefully) going to start and end each session, with *really* firm ideas for the series beginning and the series ending.

Rules: If I'm running a game system I've never used before, I'll generally try to keep it simple, with most plot points and climactic moments stemming from player decisions and roleplaying instead of dice rolls. After all, it's pretty lame to ruin a four-hour gaming session with a climactic battle that I mess up because I don't know what I'm doing rules-wise.

If possible, I'll also try to prepare a "cheat sheet" of the rules for the players as well. After all, if it's my first time playing a game system, it's probably *their* first time as well. (Of course, in my nightmares, I learn that several of the players are gurus of the game system I chose, waiting to pounce leopard-like on any mistakes I make.)

In all, miniseries give me a lot of flexibility to do the kind of gaming I like. I can try new systems, I can meet new players, and I can run storylines and adventures without the prison of an ongoing campaign. While they have disadvantages and limitations - and can't match the power and splendor of a good long-running campaign - miniseries can provide a satisfying and worthwhile experience.

This, of course, assumes the miniseries isn't *Amerika*.

--Steven Marsh

Australian Aboriginal Magic

by David Morgan-Mar

Australian history is not a commonly used setting for roleplaying games. Most gamers are unfamiliar with the details of both Australian prehistory and recorded history, so the potential for original and intriguing adventure in a stone age setting or the European colonial era has mostly been overlooked. Australia's history is, of course, just as rich and interesting as that of other continents, and a little research can go a long way when presenting games to players just as unfamiliar with the setting.

An integral part of a game set in historical Australia is Aboriginal religion, mysticism, and magic. This article describes Aboriginal magic, as it is the aspect of Aboriginal beliefs most likely to be utilized in a game. A full description of Aboriginal religion would be prohibitively long, so only a brief introduction to necessary concepts is given.

The most important decision in an Australian campaign is whether Aboriginal magical effects are real or not. Either way, the Aboriginal tribespeople will believe in them. In a realistic campaign, some abilities, although mundane in origin, may *appear* magical, certainly to Aborigines and possibly to Europeans unfamiliar with the art. In a fantastic campaign, the magic is well and truly real.

Introduction to Aboriginal Religion

Aboriginal religions are intimately tied to the concepts of spirits, rituals, and magic. The basic principle is that spirits are eternal, existing in the past, the present, and the future equally. Humans -- and animals, plants, landscape features, and phenomena such as wind and fire -- are temporary incarnations of spirits which have always existed and will continue to exist after the material form is gone. These beliefs form the foundation of all Aboriginal religions.

Spirits have an original, primordial form, possessed during the Dreamtime creation. A spirit not currently incarnated exists only as a formless entity in the eternal Dreamtime. (The Dreamtime is more akin to a spirit world or "astral plane" than a literal "time.") Such a spirit is incarnated as a new human at the moment of conception. All humans therefore have an associated primordial form, or *totem*. A person's totem is more than just a symbol; it is an essential aspect of their being. Someone with a goanna (a type of monitor lizard) totem is as much a goanna as an actual lizard sunning itself on a rock. The totem thus represents the person and can be used to refer to that person. A totem symbol can also be used in artistic representations and magical rituals to refer to a person with that totem.

Historically, this state of affairs was natural and self-evident to the Aborigines. Belief was unquestioning -- it was known to be true with the same certainty that night follows day. Indeed, in most documented tribes there was no linguistic differentiation between the concepts of belief and knowledge. Skepticism was unknown until Europeans introduced the concept along with their ideas on religion.

A Magical People

Australian Aborigines traditionally believe that all of their people possess some magical powers. In general, these are minor powers, not consciously controlled, and with little effect on daily life. A typical example is seeing the totemic symbol of a person in a dream. This indicates that something is to happen to the indicated person, or that person will do something significant to the dreamer. A more specific interpretation may be supplied by one trained in magic -- a *karadji* (see below). All Aborigines who have undergone the tribal initiation rituals granting adulthood can also perform thought transference, love magic, and sometimes sorcery (all described below), but most powers are restricted to the use of *karadji*. Non-Aborigines -- i.e. people who have not undergone a tribal initiation -- do not possess any magical abilities.

The distributions of magical powers across the Australian continent, and the manners in which the rituals are performed, are immensely varied. Not all tribes practice all of the powers listed, so GMs who wish to restrict access to some of the powers may use this as justification.

Karadji

Karadji is a term taken from the Dharuk tribal language and refers to Aboriginal "medicine men." These people combine the roles of doctors, wise men, religious leaders, and sorcerers in Aboriginal communities. To people of the tribe, and to themselves, they are imbued with special knowledge of the Dreamtime which allows them to perform magical rituals for the benefit of the tribe, or the ill of their enemies.

Karadji (the plural is spelled the same) are always males who have undergone a special initiation into the deepest secrets of the Dreamtime. They hold a place of status and power in the tribe and are respected and admired despite their somewhat aloof nature. Apart from this, they are not treated different from other male tribe members. The *karadji* participates fully in the daily life of the tribe, hunting, taking part in group ceremonies, marrying, and having children. In effect, the *karadji* is simply a normal man with a more highly developed awareness of the powers present in all Aborigines.

The sheer normalcy of the *karadji* is worth noting. In other tribal cultures it is common for people with conditions such as epilepsy to be selected as shamans, or for shamans to seek mystic knowledge via drugs or violent dance. None of these apply to the *karadji*, who is a paragon of his tribe and practices his art through quiet contemplation, application of knowledge, and deliberate decision.

Each tribe will have at least one (possibly more) *karadji*, since he is essential to the well-being of the tribe. His main role is to maintain good relations with the spirits of the land and the dead, the Rainbow Serpent and the sky-being, and *karadji* of other places. This ensures good weather, food supplies, and peaceful relations with neighboring tribes.

The Importance of Rituals

Rituals are an essential part of the *karadji's* art, but they are easily misunderstood by non-Aboriginals. For example, a healing ritual might involve removing a "poisoned bone" from the patient's abdomen. The *karadji* palms a bone beforehand and uses sleight of hand to "extract" it from the patient, displaying it with a flourish to observers. European observers might interpret this bit of deception as charlatanry aimed at making the audience believe something magical has occurred. The *karadji* himself, however, earnestly believes that the deception is a necessary part of a truly magical ritual. The sympathetic nature of the magic is such that making people believe in it is a crucial component of getting it to work.

The *karadji* believes in his own magic, of course. When a *karadji* falls ill, he has no hesitation in calling on another of his profession to heal him. He knows that the ritual involves sleight of hand, but he also knows that this is part of what makes the magic work and so expects his comrade to heal him by performing it. If a cure fails, it means the *karadji* was summoned too late, or the patient had broken a dire taboo, or the spirits of the dead did not wish to be

Everyday Aboriginal Magic

Many tribes define a mapping of various body parts to classes of people, such as an arm corresponds to fathers, while a foot represents sisters. Anyone who feels an involuntary twitch or muscle spasm can concentrate briefly, then be certain in the knowledge that a specific person from the indicated class will arrive soon. This, and the dream revelations mentioned in the main text, are seen as normal events, evidence of the connection between living people and the spirits of the Dreamtime.

GMs running Aboriginal campaigns may wish to incorporate such minor magics into their games. While precognitive knowledge is problematic in most campaigns, there are enough limits on these effects to avoid most difficulties. First, they cannot be consciously controlled. Any precognition is entirely at the whim of the GM, so can occur only when the GM wishes to use it for dramatic effect. Second, the interpretations are vague. A wallaby seen in a dream might represent a person's totem, or it might simply be a wallaby. An arm twitch might indicate one's own father, or grandfather, or might simply be caused by a mischievous spirit. Such symbolism can also be used by the GM as the method of implementing some exotic abilities such as danger sense.

deprived of the company of the patient's spirit. These reasons are generally accepted by the tribe, providing the *karadji* explains them convincingly.

In a non-magical world, all this can be explained in psychosomatic terms. If Aboriginal magic is real, however, then this is simply the way it works. Bypassing a sleight of hand meant to be part of a ritual weakens the magic, probably causing it to fail. And outside forces can sometimes be too strong for a *karadji*'s magic to overcome.

Becoming a *Karadji*

Tribal elders and the existing *karadji* select young men to be trained as *karadji*. The selection is made on the basis of the youth being thoughtful, enjoying the company of the elders, and showing an interest in the tribal lore. Being the son of a *karadji* is an advantage, but not a determining one. In some cases, the youth will have experienced a spirit vision or noticed other powers manifesting in his presence. Some aspirants deliberately seek such visions by sleeping in isolated or magical places. The visions must be interpreted by a *karadji* as significant to count in favor of the boy's selection. In general, an existing *karadji* does not choose his apprentice unilaterally -- it is a decision of great import made by all the elders.

Once chosen, the postulant is trained in the lore necessary for him to perform in his future profession. At some point in this training, he undergoes a special psychic experience, which validates his skills and admits him to the position of *karadji*. This experience is overseen by existing *karadji*, who perform a ritual around and upon the postulant. This ritual is an enactment of the Dreamtime experience of the *karadji* initiation, an experience which seems real to the postulant, caused by the spirits around him.

The exact form of the initiation experience varies from tribe to tribe, but most share remarkable similarities. Generally, spiritual beings perform alterations to the postulant's body. Most often, this involves an abdominal incision, through which magical substances known as *maban* are inserted. *Maban* is usually quartz crystals, but tektites and mother-of-pearl are also used in regions where they are found. The wound is magically healed without scarring. Either during or after this procedure, the postulant is taken to the sky-world to interact with the spirits of the Dreamtime and of the dead, in an introduction to the powers the ritual will grant him. Often he will be assigned a small number of spirit familiars, taking the form of his totem, who will assist him in his work.

Variations on this experience include: *Maban* being rubbed and "sung" into the body without requiring an incision (south- western and north-eastern New South Wales); the intestines being removed and replaced with *maban* (Sydney region); organs and bones being removed and cleansed before being re-inserted (northern Western Australia); little rainbow snakes being inserted along with *maban* (Kimberley region); *maban* also being inserted into the wrists, ankles, and other joints (western South Australia). In coastal regions the subject enters a trance while these ordeals take place, while in most of the interior of the continent this spiritual journey is considered a literal death followed by the rebirth of the postulant as the new *karadji*. In a few regions, such as the Kimberley, the Rainbow Serpent descends from the sky and swallows the postulant, while in western Queensland he is killed by being pointed at with a magical bone. The ritual performed by the supervising *karadji* in such cases includes that of mourning the dead.

In a realistic campaign, these experiences are visions seen in the trance state brought on by fasting and the rigors of the ritual. The postulant has been conditioned by being told what to expect. In a more fantastic campaign, the procedure may take place literally. GMs running such a *karadji* initiation ritual may wish to use the event as a prelude to planned events in the campaign, perhaps running the ritual as an entire gaming session involving communication and interaction with the Dreamtime spirits.

Following the initiation ritual, a new *karadji* novice learns more details of his craft from the tribal elders and current *karadji*. He is not yet fully qualified and must usually wait a full year before first exercising his new powers. If this taboo is not kept, the power of the *maban* will desert him and he will be unable to perform as a *karadji*.

If a tribesman might seek guidance from a *karadji* on the meaning of a dream or other premonitory event, the GM can prepare a suitable statement in advance, couched as cryptically or as plainly as desired. If the GM knows the neighboring tribe will attack tomorrow, he can give an accurate and helpful warning, whereas if the events depend on player actions he can be more vague.

Magical Rituals

The following rituals are described in a generic fashion for use in any game, but are ordered and given statistics for use with the spirit magic system from **GURPS Spirits**. In all cases, the GM should customize any necessary details, such as the time required for the ritual, based on the description, if required. Notes are also given for how these abilities may be played in a realistic campaign, where magic does not work.

GURPS Mechanics

In **GURPS**, initiation into Aboriginal adulthood confers an advantage that may be called Aboriginal Initiation. It is worth 2 points, and is equivalent to Ritual Aptitude 5 (Path of the Aboriginal People only) (see p. SPI75). Such initiation is a prerequisite to learn the Path of the Aboriginal People, and to perform all of its rituals.

Initiation as a *karadji* confers the advantage Karadji Initiation, worth 5 points and equivalent to Ritual Aptitude 5. It is a prerequisite to learn the Path of the Karadji. *Karadji* also learn skills in Theology (Aboriginal), Sleight of Hand, Diagnosis, Weather Sense, Psychology, Fire Walking, and possibly Hypnosis as part of their training. A typical *karadji* will also likely possess some of: Charisma, Empathy, Reputation, Status, and Strong Will.

Non-Aboriginals may be able to learn Aboriginal magic, but will require the appropriate initiations. Aboriginal Initiation may be granted in rare cases, and will require an Unusual Background (Accepted as a member of a tribe), while *Karadji* Initiation is unlikely ever to be granted to a non-Aborigine.

The Path of the Aboriginal People

This path is available to any Aborigine who has undergone tribal initiation into adulthood.

Love Magic

Defaults to Path of the Aboriginal People

Love magic is commonly practiced by all adult Aborigines. The ritual is designed for two distinct purposes: To attract a marriage partner; or to attract a partner for a sexual liaison, possibly extra- marital. In any one geographic area, the same basic ritual is used for both purposes, but is performed publicly or privately as befits the intent. A few common forms of the love ritual are: singing over a piece of hair from the desired mate; dropping a string tied with feathers into the mate's basket; unwinding a string from the mate's campsite to one's own, then reeling it in; or performing a ceremony with a small bullroarer carved with two snakes and the totemic mark of the desired individual. Such rituals are said to induce irresistible desire in the target. Public rituals may attract a marriage partner through flattery and the expectations of the audience if there is no real magic, while failures of the private ritual are not discussed.

Sorcery

Defaults to Path of the Aboriginal People-4

Sorcery is the use of black magic to make a person sicken and die. Any Aborigine wishing to kill another person can use sorcery. Sorcery rituals vary but are often long and complex. A common example with minor variations is given here.

First the sorcerer must prepare in advance by observing certain taboos. While doing so, he prepares a pointing bone, carved from a ritually cleaned and scraped human, kangaroo, or emu femur, or sometimes simply a stylized stick. In some cases a string is attached, connecting to a small receptacle. During the ritual, the bone is ceremonially pointed at the victim, who is usually not physically present. Depending on the local tradition, this ritual either causes a poisoned bone or other object to enter the victim's body, or draws out blood, kidney fat, or the person's spirit into the receptacle. Either way, the victim now becomes sick. The bone may be buried, wrapped in emu feathers, for several months, resulting in a long illness. If the bone is heated by fire, the victim's condition becomes worse and when it is finally

burnt the victim dies.

There are many variations on this across the continent. Other notable methods of sorcery include enchanting a spear to inflict a lethal wound at the slightest scratch; creating a magical powder from the ground bones of a woman or a dried placenta, which is then either introduced to food or placed on the ground where the victim sleeps; making an effigy of the victim, either sculpted out of clay or beeswax, or made of tied grass or paperbark, which is stabbed or burnt. In some cases an object associated with the victim is required -- hair, nails, urine, food scraps, or anything belonging to the victim.

The victim of a sorcery attempt becomes aware of his problem when he becomes sick. Often the victim falls ill upon learning that he is the subject of sorcery -- sorcerers will actively try to make the victim aware that he has been targeted. An Aborigine who believes himself the target of sorcery can sicken and eventually die from no causes discernible to modern medicine apart from psychosomatic ones. Modern medicine thus has no cure and the victim's only hope is to obtain the aid of a *karadji*.

Thought Transference

Defaults to Path of the Aboriginal People

Aborigines can communicate by mystical means over long distances. In a typical example, a tribesman standing on a hill wishes to summon a friend, out hunting on the plain below, perhaps a mile or more away. He concentrates and, when his friend turns to look at him, says softly, "Come here, quickly." His friend does so.

In a realistic setting, this sort of communication is accomplished by subtle shifts in body posture, which Europeans overlook in their search for obvious gestures. In a fantastic game the power is real and might be used to send more complex messages, even to someone looking away or hidden behind a landscape feature (assess penalties for such extended uses).

- The Path of the Karadji

This path represents a deeper understanding of and connection with the spirit world, and is only available to people who have undergone the initiation ceremony to become a *karadji*.

Fast Traveling

Defaults to Path of the Karadji-2

Karadji can run at tremendous speeds for long distances without tiring. They can also appear almost instantly in another place after disappearing suddenly. Being tribal wanderers, most Aborigines naturally display good walking and running endurance, as well as camouflage and stealth skills which could contribute to European bewilderment. The powers of *karadji* in this field may stem from suggestive self-promotion and European exaggeration.

Healing and Easing of Death

Defaults to Path of the Karadji

A *karadji* will usually only be called on for healing purposes when it is clear that an illness is magical or spiritual in nature -- caused by the actions of a malevolent person or spirit. Injuries and mundane illnesses are tended to by the elder women of the tribe, who will administer standard herbal remedies.

Once a *karadji* has been summoned, he examines the patient. An experienced *karadji* knows the signs of various types of illness and the likelihood of recovery, given proper treatment. If he is confident the patient can be made to recover, he performs the healing ritual in front of witnesses. This usually involves ceremonial sleight of hand or mime to "extract" a poisoned bone, stick, stone, or "bad blood" from the patient, or to call for the wandering or stolen spirit to return. The patient gains confidence from this display of power and a renewed will to recover.

If, however, the *karadji*'s prognosis is that the patient will likely die, the ritual is different. It is a ritual to contact the spirits of the patient's departed relatives and learn why they wish to be rejoined with the patient. The *karadji* relays the spirits' messages to the patient, explaining that they are preventing him from performing the healing. He cries and bids the patient farewell, then summons the patient's relatives and friends to do the same. They comfort him in his final hours and so the *karadji*'s job of easing transition into the spirit world is done.

Karadji Sight

Defaults to Path of the Karadji

A *karadji*'s power of sight is not limited like most people's. He can see things at great distances, or which are hidden from view. He can look inside and through people's bodies and minds, and can see a person's thoughts -- not only current thoughts but those of the past as well. The reading of minds is considered an aspect of this visual power by the Aborigines. Such sights are usually produced by deliberate meditation, or perhaps a dream ritual in sleep, but may also come involuntarily. In a realistic game this is a manifestation of the *karadji*'s wisdom and empathic perception of human relationships and the environment. With real magic, the *karadji*'s spirit or totem familiar travels and allows the *karadji* to see distant places. In either case, it is a power beyond the ability of the average tribesman.

The Magic Rope

Defaults to Path of the Karadji-3

At initiation, a *karadji* is imbued with a magical rope which resides in his body. It is invisible, but able to be extracted and used at any time like a real rope. The rope is typically used to support the *karadji* in the air, or from a tree in an impossible position. It can also be used to reach upwards and ascend to the sky-world to commune with the spirits that live there. In a realistic setting this is merely a conceit promoted by the *karadji* and believed by the tribe (and probably by himself, though in a less literal sense).

Rain Making

Defaults to Path of the Karadji-4

In a land where drought is common, the power of rain-making is an important one. A *karadji* usually consents to making rain only when the tribe agrees it is necessary. A typical ritual involves singing over mother-of-pearl or small white stones to attract the attention of the Rainbow Serpent. The *karadji* performs sympathetic actions such as spitting or drawing blood and letting it drip on the ground. Some *karadji* use their magical rope to climb to the sky and obtain rain directly. In a world without magic, the *karadji*'s insistence on waiting for the right time to perform this ritual is based on good weather sense.

Ritual of Inquest

Defaults to Path of the Karadji

Death is the passage of the incarnated spirit which is a human back to the spirit world of the Dreamtime. Such a spirit may later be incarnated again, but the immediate loss is mourned with an outpouring of grief by the tribe.

Death is seldom regarded as entirely natural, except for the aged. The usual assumption is that death is caused by an active agent, either a spirit or by sorcery. Even when the immediate cause of death is, say, a crocodile attack or a fight, it is assumed that a hostile being has magically arranged for the victim to be in the "wrong place at the wrong time." Accordingly, deaths are normally followed by a ritual inquest to determine the guilty party. This involves examining the ground around the grave site or parts of the victim's body for mystical signs, and interpreting them. Often a totem is indicated, which might refer to a group of people. In many cases the identification of a group or individual responsible is enough -- emotions have cooled during the lengthy rituals and knowledge may be all the closure required. Revenge takes place rarely, and may lead to ongoing feuds or inter-tribal warfare.

The Strong Eye

Defaults to Path of the Karadji

The strong eye is the ability to see spirits, of the living and the dead. In some traditions this power is used to diagnose the sick, since spirits sometimes wander freely or are drawn from the body by sorcery, thus causing illness. More commonly it is used after a death by sorcery, to divine the murderer. The *karadji* uses his strong eye to look for the spirit of the dead person around the murderer, or the spirit of the murderer around the victim. Without magic, the *karadji's* knowledge of the tribal group dynamics may suggest a suspect. It is likely that someone who wished ill of the dead person, but did not take conscious action against him, will come to believe he *unconsciously* caused the victim's death and, if accused by the *karadji*, will not profess innocence. In a magical campaign, the strong eye is naturally even more reliable.

Strong Thought Transference

Defaults to Path of the Karadji-2

This is a stronger version of Thought Transference. The *karadji* typically fixes the gaze of a subject with his and bends the person's will to his own. The subject can be made to behave responsibly rather than carry out mischief. This can be played as assertion of authority or simple hypnotism, or it can be a fully-fledged magical form of suggestion, with the possibility of using it for evil.

Walking on Fire

Defaults to Path of the Karadji-4

The skill of fire walking, known to exist in our mundane world, is practiced by *karadji* as a demonstration of magical power. Related to this is the more mystical ability of projecting flame from the body, setting fire to objects at a distance. It is difficult to justify this in a non-magical campaign without resorting to some deliberate trickery, but it could be a real ability in a fantastic setting.

Using Aboriginal Magic in a Game

Aboriginal magic can be used in two styles of game: pre-contact stone age, and European colonial. Resources for a stone age game can be found in ***GURPS Dinosaurs*** and ***GURPS Low-Tech***. Possible campaign themes include the struggle against nature and the harsh climate, conflict with neighboring tribes, exploration of new territory, or trading with other communities.

A colonial campaign will most likely pit Aborigines against Europeans as the major source of conflict. The Europeans have access to higher technology, so the Aborigines might need the benefit of their magic. ***GURPS Age of Napoleon*** and ***GURPS Old West*** are set in the appropriate time period, so can be used as guidelines for technology and colonial attitudes, though they provide no information on Australia. The excellent adventure "The Son of Cheeroonear" ([Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#)) is set in colonial Australia and could provide a starting point for a campaign.

An interesting campaign could be built around the first contact of stone age Aborigines with colonizing Europeans. Communications difficulties, misunderstandings of intent, and potential hostilities will occur initially. As the Europeans settle in to the strange new world, they will face crop failures in the unfamiliar climate and will need to negotiate for help from the natives. Amid this tapestry, many stories can be told: the missionaries aiming to learn from the tribes and teach them Christianity; the explorers breaking new ground and coming across new tribes; the natives simply trying to understand it all and using their magic as a means of preserving their world.

Further Reading

- Berndt, Ronald M. and Berndt, Catherine H. *The World of the First Australians* (Aboriginal Studies Press, 1988). A comprehensive overview of Aboriginal traditional life by two of the preeminent authors in the field.
- Cowan, James. *Mysteries of the Dreaming* (Prism Press, 1992).

- Elkin, A. P. *Aboriginal Men of High Degree* (University of Queensland Press, 1977). Extensive information on *karadji* and Aboriginal magical beliefs and practices.
- Mudrooroo. *Aboriginal Mythology* (Aquarian, 1994).
- *The Last Wave* (Peter Weir, 1977). In this enthralling film, Richard Chamberlain plays a modern-day Sydney lawyer dealing with a case of modern law clashing with Aboriginal tribal law. The incessant rainfall creates a dark and disturbing atmosphere when he discovers active tribal magic at work and a prophecy of Armageddon by water.

Parallel Plots and Multitrack Games

by William H. Stoddard

Movies and television are one of the most common models for running roleplaying games. Sometimes it's the content that's the model, with campaigns set in the world of *Star Wars* or *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*. Sometimes it's the style, with "cinematic" games that offer fast-paced action and hypercompetent, colorful characters. But sometimes it's the vocabulary and the storytelling technique. If a roleplayer says "cliffhanger" or "fade to black" or "special effects," everyone understands what that means in a game setting.

But there are other cinematic techniques that aren't exploited in games as often . . . and some of them can be useful additions to a GM's repertoire. One of these is cross-cutting. In film, this means that the camera follows one character or group of characters through a number of actions, and then another camera follows another group of characters through a set of parallel actions. The point of view shifts back and forth when one group's actions depend on the results of another group's actions, or when one track has reached a point of high suspense.

Roleplaying gamers are cautious about this sort of thing. "Dividing the party" is usually considered bad; everyone has seen horror movies where the character who goes off alone becomes monster bait. And many players dislike having sequences where their characters aren't involved in the action. But there are payoffs for running games with multiple plot tracks, for a GM who's willing to learn the techniques involved.

Problems to Be Solved

The biggest single issue raised by multiple plot tracks is making sure everyone gets play time. The big payoff of roleplaying, for most people, is getting to describe their characters' actions or speak their lines. There's no more effective way to produce unhappy players than making them sit and watch while somebody else's characters do everything. Theater and film give us a lot of expressions for this: upstaging, being in the spotlight, having camera time, and so on. To run a multiple-track game, a GM needs to keep track of who's on camera, and how long, and shift the point of view to other characters. Ideally, every character should have extended camera time in every session; most players can tolerate going short in one session, but two in a row is asking for trouble.

Of course, single-track games aren't a total cure for this problem, either. Many gamers have experienced sitting through long sessions, not getting to say or do anything, because their fellow gamers who talk faster or louder or know the GM better are getting in first. Multiple-track gaming can actually help solve that problem; sending a less vocal player's character off alone can help the character emerge into visibility and give the player more play time.

The other big problem is making the game interesting to players whose characters are not involved in the current action. Some players enjoy watching what other players do, especially if the other players are good roleplayers (or suffer entertaining mishaps!); some find it tedious. Two basic guidelines will minimize the strain on such players' patience:

- Keep it short! (At least until the players are used to crosscuts, and until the GM has tested the players' tolerance.)
- As much as possible, have separate action sequences affect the fate of the other players. If Fred's thief or ranger is sneaking into the enemy camp to overhear their plans, it's a lot more interesting than if he's going to church to confess and receive the sacraments. (Though perhaps not any more entertaining, depending on how good Fred's roleplaying is.)

For players with known levels of tolerance for separate action, various approaches are possible:

How Far Can You Go?

Solo Mission. One adventurer (or a small group) has to descend into a pit while the others hold the ropes, or visit a noble patron and brace him for funding. The separate action lasts only until the specific task is accomplished. This is an easy sell, if it's done infrequently: the solo mission is obviously relevant to the team's overall goals, and it's a special case that doesn't come up very often. Many players will enjoy the extra challenge once in a while.

Prologue. Before the campaign proper starts, each character goes through an introductory sequence that shows how he got involved in the team and/or the plotline. Players gain familiarity with the world and with each other's characters. White Wolf Games strongly encourage prologue sequences in most of their game systems, and they work well in character-driven or storytelling campaigns. Given the assurance that everyone will be together when the prologue ends, many players will find this a natural extension of character creation, especially if character survival through the prologue is guaranteed (usually a good idea).

A Day in the Life. As a special exception in a continuing campaign, give the players a session devoted to their characters' personal business. If they want to stay together, they can; if they want to wander off by themselves, they can do that too. Everyone gets equal camera time, whether their actions are important or trivial. This is a way of getting to know the characters better, and of lowering the tension, especially after a major conflict. Strongly action-oriented players may not enjoy this; others often find such sessions memorable, especially if they have only one in a campaign.

Tactical Division of Forces. Put the characters in a situation where they have to accomplish two or three things at once, forcing them to split up. Follow each subgroup as they pursue their separate goal. If possible, divide each subgroup's action into two or three phases, and crosscut to the next group in between tasks. Among other advantages, this gives the GM a little more time to think about how to handle each group's adversaries or challenges! This is an action-oriented approach to dividing the party; the main issue is whether the players trust that splitting up won't get their characters killed by excessively challenging foes.

Branching Campaign. It actually is possible to run an entire campaign where all the player characters never get together, or where they do so only in the final confrontation (assuming the campaign is planned to terminate at a specific point). For this to work, the player characters have to have a common focus of attention; possible examples are a goal they are all pursuing (perhaps as rivals), a problem they all have to solve, or a fairly small area they all inhabit. Each character's actions should affect the other characters in various ways and make the times when they do meet meaningful.

This is the hardest kind of multitrack gaming, not least in keeping the attention to various player characters in balance. If the player characters aren't all together, they probably won't all be doing interesting things at the same time; the GM needs to watch for players who are getting skipped and think of situations to inflict on them. The GM also needs to watch for actions of one player character that affect another player character; for example, a police officer's raid on a sacrificial ritual conducted by worshippers of some dark elder god could result in a new investigative assignment for a reporter.

Keeping Secrets

One of the big questions about running separate action sequences is whether the players whose characters aren't involved should get to watch. A common practice is to say to one player, "Let's step outside," and then privately resolve the character's actions, telling the other players only whatever results their characters see. This works neatly for solo missions, but in a branching campaign, it's awkward to spend every moment of play with some players in a waiting room while others are in the GM's office.

One somewhat radical answer to this is not to try to do things privately. Let every player witness everything that happens to other characters. Players have to understand the difference between what they know and what their characters know, and not push at the boundaries to gain advantages . . . or be willing to back off when the GM or another player spots them doing so. But in return, they gain a fuller view of unfolding events; in effect, they get to see the whole movie, not just the scenes shot by one camera. This is particularly important for "day in the life" sessions,

where much of the enjoyment is seeing what kinds of things other adventurers do when they're not adventuring.

One trick that can help with this is to have each player run two or more characters -- perhaps one main character and the sidekick or confidant of another player's main character. This increases the fraction of play time that each player (as opposed to character) is on camera. And if a player's two characters have different loyalties, the player is less tempted to be partial to one side in a conflict. This approach isn't quite the same as the troupe-style play that *Ars Magica* pioneered, but certainly is compatible with it.

The "no secrets" style isn't for everyone; a few players can't or won't maintain the separation, and others find it distracting to do so. Since a branching campaign almost has to rely on this style (at least in tabletop games; a live action game with multiple GMs is a different story), it's best not to start out at that level. Run something shorter term such as a "day in the life" episode and see if the players like it.

Ideas

So suppose you want to follow this approach in a campaign. What kinds of things could you do? Here are a few specific examples:

Masquerade. The player characters' employers or patrons have identified the source of many recent troubles: a hidden conspiracy of wealthy aristocrats, crime bosses, powerful wizards, or whatever else fits the setting. But they need more information before they can strike back. One of the player characters is asked to assume a false name and seek recruitment as a new agent. Naturally, if anyone uncovers his real purposes, he's in deep trouble.

Circus of Madness. A classic superheroic motif is sending a hero team to the circus . . . as performers. In a superheroic world, there is a traveling circus that's more than it seems; it's run by mutants, or ancient mystical beings, or someone else with mind control powers. Some members of a superhero team either go to it voluntarily or are led there by a trail of evidence. They get their memories erased and take their place in the circus as performers (in the freak show, for the more exotic ones). Eventually they'll regain their memories, or their teammates will come and get them out; but once the framework is established, it's a perfect chance for a "day in the life" session with the heroes living different, "might-have-been" lives.

Succession Wars. The ruler of a medieval kingdom has just died, and his heirs are disputing the right to succeed him. As a campaign episode, this can draw in a group of adventurers as agents or allies of one or more factions. As a campaign theme, perhaps the adventurers are the heirs, or the heirs and their best friends. For a simple example, a two-person campaign might have one person portraying the son of a dead king and the trusted advisor of the king's successor, his younger brother; another person might portray the successor himself and the son's best friend and confidant.

Aftermath. Civilization is collapsing, and Roman Britain has been left on its own. One of Rome's legions is abandoned there, cut off from pay and any higher command structure, and struggling to survive; and Britain's native Celtic aristocracy, partly romanized but still with their own traditions, are reclaiming the right to rule Britain in their own name. Heroes in both factions are involved in a common story, based on a common catastrophe, and they'll certainly affect each other, but they may not have the same agenda for Britain's future.

Merian C. Cooper

by James L. Cambias

History

Merian C. Cooper's life was a **GURPS Cliffhangers** campaign. Born to an affluent family in Florida in 1893, he spent a couple of years at the Naval Academy before going into journalism. When the U.S. began expanding its armed forces in 1915, his National Guard unit was called up and Cooper was selected for training as a pilot. He saw service in Mexico, and then in France after the U.S. entered WWI. In September 1918 he was shot down behind German lines, and the Armistice found him still in a German military hospital recovering from severe burns to his face and hands.

The very next year he went to Poland with the American relief operation there, then helped organize the volunteer Kosciuszko Squadron, fighting in the Polish war against Soviet Russia. It was in Poland that Cooper met his lifelong friend and collaborator Ernest B. Schoedsack, who was there with the Red Cross. Cooper commanded the aviation unit at the siege of Kiev in 1920, but later was captured by the Bolsheviks and imprisoned in Moscow. With two other Polish officers, Cooper escaped and made his way to Latvia.

After his stint in Poland and Russia, Cooper went back to journalism as a reporter for *The New York Times* in 1920-21. His particular beat was eastern Europe and the Middle East. After finishing work at the *Times* each afternoon Cooper spent hours at the American Geographic Society headquarters in New York, poring over maps of exotic lands and learning techniques of mapping and surveying.

The following year he joined Captain Edward Salisbury's expedition to the Indian Ocean, where he and Schoedsack planned their own journey to a remote region of Iran where traditional nomad tribes still preserved their ancient migratory way of life. They raised funds to make a movie of their expedition, and contacted the explorer (and occasional spy) Margaret Harrison to come along. The film they made, *Grass*, was released by Paramount in 1924 and immediately established Cooper as a hot property in Hollywood.

Cooper and Schoedsack went to Thailand for their second movie, *Chang*, about elephant herders in the jungle. He met Prince Yugol, younger brother of the King of Thailand, and they remained friends for decades afterward. After *Chang*, the pair went to the Sudan and Ethiopia to film *The Four Feathers*.

After *The Four Feathers*, Cooper took a break from moviemaking and switched to the aviation business for a time. He invested a lot of what he had made from his movies in a new company called Pan American Airlines. He served on the board of Pan Am until 1936.

In 1931 Cooper returned to Hollywood as Director of Production for RKO Studios. There he made dozens of movies, including his masterpiece *King Kong*. His frantic pace slowed in 1933 after a heart attack, and he left RKO in 1934 to go on a year-long honeymoon with his new bride Dorothy Jordan. On

Other GURPS Settings

GURPS Traveller/GURPS

Space: With a few minor alterations, globe-trotting moviemaker Merian Cooper can become a star-hopping holo documentary producer. Turn his flying skills into Astrogation, Piloting (starship), and add Vacc Suit for a spaceworthy Cooper. He could be a veteran of the Imperial Navy or Scout Service. Either way, he can turn up in any starport bar looking for some old friends willing to join an expedition.

GURPS Time Travel: It's a safe bet that the man who brought the world King Kong would jump at the chance to get footage of real live dinosaurs. A slightly redesigned Cooper could be a video producer risking life and limb in any number of past eras. Change his aviation skills into Parachronics and give him Area Knowledge for lots of past times and places. Alternately, use the historical Cooper described here as the leader of a 1930s Weird Science time travel expedition.

Illuminated Cooper

Cooper's connections among America's business elite make him a natural operative for the Anglo-American Insiders or the

his return he made a few more pictures for RKO, and put together the immortal dance team of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers.

In 1935 he left RKO and worked for David O. Selznick, producing many of John Ford's great Westerns. He also got involved in the company developing the Technicolor film process.

With the coming of war in Europe, Cooper sold his aviation interests and rejoined the Army Air Force in 1940. He spent a year traveling as a civilian before officially reenlisting in early 1941. Assigned to India, he flew refugees out of the areas occupied by Japan, then became the intelligence chief for the Army Air Force in China. In 1943 he was transferred to New Guinea, and was aboard the battleship *Missouri* for the Japanese surrender. He ended the war as a colonel but became a Brigadier General in the Air Force Reserve in 1950 upon retiring.

During the 1950s Cooper produced more John Ford movies, and helped develop the wide-screen Cinerama process. He got a special Academy Award for his many innovations in the field in 1952. He retired from the movie business after 1960, and remained fairly active until his death in 1973.

Encountering Cooper

Merian Cooper's globe-trotting habits and wide circle of acquaintances mean he can turn up almost anywhere and meet almost any characters in a **GURPS Cliffhangers** or **Atomic Horror campaign**. As late as 1968 he traveled widely.

In the campaign he can function in several different roles. His business connections at RKO and Pan Am make him suitable as a Patron -- while the resources at his disposal are relatively modest, he has substantial "reach," making him worth a base 15 points. His strong loyalty to friends means he's perfectly capable of leading a rescue expedition himself if characters working for him get into trouble. During World War II he could be commanding PCs doing special reconnaissance or espionage work.

More independent characters can have Cooper as an Ally or Contact -- as a Contact he probably should count double because he has a foot in both Hollywood and the aviation industry. He could even be a player-character in a historical game.

Merian C. Cooper in GURPS

Lived 1893-1973.

ST: 10 [0] **DX:** 12 [20] **IQ** 12 [20] **HT** 12 [20].
Move 6.

Advantages: Ally (Ernest B. Schoedsack, 150-point character, quite often) [20]; Charisma +1 [5]; Composed [5]; Contact (David O. Selznick, studio president, fairly often) [4]; Contact (Juan Trippe, president of Pan Am, fairly often) [4]; Contact (Lowell Thomas, newsreel journalist, fairly often) [3]; Courtesy Rank 4 (Captain, US Army Air Corps Reserve) [4]; Patron (Jock Whitney or RKO Studio, powerful individual/group, quite often) [20]; Status 2 [10]; Versatile [5]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10].

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Gentleman's) [-10]; Hard of Hearing [-10]; Reduced Manual Dexterity -2 [-6]; Sense

Gnomes of Zurich. In this light, his film expedition to Iraq and Persia (the homeland of the Assassins) at a time when American oil interests were beginning to supplant British firms there is highly suggestive. It's also noteworthy that he was on an expedition exploring the Indian Ocean -- the very place he put King Kong's island home. Just how fictional was Kong?

It's also interesting to note that Cooper rejoined the Air Corps fully a year before Pearl Harbor, and immediately did a lot of traveling. With his Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian experience and his knowledge of photo reconnaissance, Cooper may well have been gathering intelligence for America's growing military. In a less prosaic campaign, Cooper would be a great operative for the nascent OSS to send after occult treasures or ancient mysteries. (He's a dead solid perfect commanding officer for an Asian-based "Detachment 23" campaign, as outlined in **GURPS Weird War II**.)

of Duty (friends) [-5]; Workaholic [-5].

Quirks: Bored by desk work [-1]; Congenial [-1]; Fascinated by new technologies [-1]; Never without his pipe [-1].

Skills: Administration (M/A) IQ [2]-12; Area Knowledge (East Africa) (M/E) IQ [1]-12; Area Knowledge (Eastern Europe) (M/E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Area Knowledge (Middle East) (M/E) IQ+1 [1]-13; Area Knowledge (Southeast Asia) (M/E) IQ [1]-12; Brawling (P/E) DX [1]-12; Diplomacy (M/H) IQ [4]-12; First Aid/TL6 (M/E) IQ [1]-12 [1]; Gunner/TL6 (Machine gun) (P/A) DX+2 [2]-14*; Guns/TL6 (pistol) (P/E) DX+2 [1]-14*; Leadership (M/A) IQ [2]-12; Mechanic/TL6 (cameras and projectors) (M/A) IQ [2]-12; Mechanic/TL6 (gasoline engines) (M/A) IQ [2]-12; Navigation/TL6 (M/H) IQ [4]-12; Naturalist (M/H) IQ [4]-12; Photography/TL6 (M/A) IQ+2 [6]-14; Piloting/TL6 (single-engine prop) (P/A) DX+2 [8]-14; Riding (Horse) (P/A) DX [2]-12; Savoir-Faire (M/E) IQ+2 [0]-14*; Strategy (land) (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-11; Survival (desert) (M/A) IQ+1 [4]-13; Tactics (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-11; Video Production/TL6 (M/A) IQ+2 [6]-14; Writing (M/A) IQ [2]-12.

*Gunner and Guns include bonus from IQ; Savoir-Faire includes default from Status.

Languages: Arabic (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-10; English (native) IQ [0]-12; Farsi (Persian) (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-10; French (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11; German (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-10; Polish (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-10.

Point total: 155

Equipment

On his expeditions, Cooper is equipped with a hand-cranked movie camera, a still camera, and a pistol. In Hollywood or New York he dresses like the successful businessman he is. He always has a pipe and tobacco.

This is Merian Cooper about 1930, a successful documentary director and explorer. His Hard of Hearing disadvantage reflects a common problem for open-cockpit fliers, and his Reduced Manual Dexterity is the result of serious burns during World War I. His languages are conjectural, based on places he spent considerable time in.

In the following decade his wealth increases to Wealthy and he gains a +1 Reputation as a well-known movie director and producer; he also gains his wife as a Dependent and his HT drops to 10. During World War II his wealth drops back down to Comfortable, he gains Military Rank 5, improved Strategy, a smattering of Chinese, and the Intelligence Analysis skill, along with a Duty to the Army Air Force.

After the war his physical attributes start to decline with age, but he regains his Wealthy advantage. At any time during his life he could have many more Contacts -- Cooper was extremely well-connected in many segments of society (the New York business world, old Southern families, Hollywood, the military, the aviation business, and probably others).

Class Action: The Cozener

"Trust Me On This . . ."

by Phil Masters

Adventurers' worlds are full of all manner of dubious characters, whose techniques and tactics range from the crude to the subtle. This article describes a prestige class for characters who choose to concentrate at the subtle end of the scale. In Elizabethan London, con artists were called "cony-catchers"; a "cony" is a rabbit, and also slang for a confidence trickster's victim, especially the sort of rural gentleman, up in town for the first time, who makes such tempting prey. This may be used as an alternative, more colorful name for the character class.

The Cozener Prestige Class

A cozener is primarily a confidence trickster and expert in non-violent crime. While many of these people are ruthless if nonviolent criminals, the category also encompasses clever spies, "honorable fixers" who use wits and cunning to balance out social injustices, and all sorts of professionals who specialize in greasing the wheels of society, sometimes even legally. In settings dominated by excessive laws and mutually hostile factions, a "cozener" may actually be an invaluable arranger, persuading other people to do what's in everyone's interests despite pointless rules or old suspicions.

Attributes

At first glance, cozeners may seem to be merely rogues, and most (though not all) started in that basic class, and share most of its attitudes and tendencies, albeit with a fast-talking, quick-witted sort of twist. However, a cozener has much more of a focus on intellectual, social, and verbal skills than on physical violence or snatch and grab. (Of course, surviving on the streets, and sometimes having to deal with angry victims who prove quicker than expected, a cozener may also possess some significant competence with weapons.) Cozeners may also become quite adept at other ways of turning a non-violent but questionable profit. They are adept at judging potential victims; because they not only rely on trickery for their livelihood, but risk extreme and often terminal retribution if they are caught, they are *especially* good at judging whether or not a trick has succeeded.

Background

Cozeners need a little bit of education and passable manners, so probably only a minority of them grew up in the lowest depths of the gutter. Failed priests, fallen gentlefolk, and witty street kids who somehow talked their way in and out of partial educations, can all end up in this career. While few have previously concentrated on raw combat skills, some have past training in arcane magic, having decided that they could achieve more by trickery and misdirection than by the hard work of mastering magical forces.

Personality

Cozeners have to have a knack for charming people, either by overt good manners and style, or by cultivating a more subtle aura of trustworthiness. The outright, ruthless criminals among them are cold-hearted manipulators whose behavior never reveals their true nature; others may be more genuinely likable and even possess some kind of private sense of honor, although it's unwise to trust them with your money unless you know them *very* well.

In settings where such things are significant, cozeners can be of any alignment, but their activities tend to the chaotic - especially if they are good. If they are lawful, they are usually also distinctly evil; a few of them are involved in organized crime of a sort. Good cozeners may either be highly skilled secret agents working for some specific faction,

or "Robin Hood" types using words rather than weapons to extract funds from the rich to help the poor.

Religion: In worlds where the existence of deities is taken as plain fact, cozeners mostly combine lip service to the formalities of faith with a nervous caution about the actual higher powers. However, they aren't great churchgoers, as a rule; being fully aware of the arts of verbal trickery, they tend to be cynical about the sayings and claims of priests. (Sometimes impersonating priests themselves, they mutter that it's too easy.) In a Christian-ruled setting, they go to church on some Sundays; in polytheistic fantasy worlds, they will worship whichever god seems to have the most flexible rules. Fortunately for them, in the latter case, they can often find trickster gods to revere.

Adventuring

Cozeners are natural adventurers -- of a sort. They don't much like fighting, but sometimes, in their uncertain world, violence is unavoidable. Anyway, a good, subtle scam may demand all sorts of prior preparation, or picking up the payoff may involve something complicated. Adventuring parties may welcome a cozener, if they decide that they can trust him; someone who knows how to talk his way out of trouble without violence, or who can raise funds by glib words and a sharp eye, can often be useful.

Table 1: The Cozener Level Progression

Lvl	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1	+0	+0	+1	+1	Judging the mark
2	+1	+0	+2	+1	Knowing the games
3	+1	+1	+3	+1	Reading the mark
4	+2	+1	+3	+2	Double or quits
5	+2	+1	+3	+2	Extra class skills
6	+3	+2	+4	+3	Trustworthiness (casual bluff)
7	+3	+2	+4	+3	Extra class skills
8	+4	+2	+4	+4	Trustworthiness (silent bluff)
9	+4	+3	+4	+5	Extra class skills
10	+5	+3	+5	+5	Trustworthiness (on sight)

Class Rules

The game rules for playing a cozener are listed below.

Requirements

To qualify for this class, a character must fulfill all the following criteria:

Literacy: The character must be literate.

Skills: 3 ranks in Appraise, 5 ranks in Bluff, 4 ranks in Diplomacy, 1 rank in Listen, 4 ranks in Sense Motive, 1 rank in Spot.

Abilities

Charisma is the key to success as a cozener, supported by Intelligence to run complex games, and maybe Dexterity for effective sleight of hand. A successful minority also have the Wisdom to know when to back off.

Race

Confidence trickery requires quick wits, charm, and some self-control. In game worlds where multiple races exist, half-elves, halflings, and gnomes may do well in this career, and half-orc cozeners may be able to exploit their own reputation for stupidity, but dwarves and elves *usually* lack the necessary flexibility and empathy with humans. Still, there are always exceptions to such rules.

Other Classes

Cozeners get along with rogues, but clever tricksters tend to secretly regard "ordinary" footpads and burglars as unsubtle thugs. They don't mind fighters and the like, providing that the fighters don't try to throw their weight around. They are prone to addressing clerics and other priests with too much cynicism (unless currently running a game on them), seeing them as the biggest professional liars of all, but may be persuaded to act otherwise. Cozeners treat wizards and sorcerers cautiously, as a potential source of great profit, interesting options, and deadly danger.

Health

In games using hit points, cozeners use d6 for their hit dice. In games using variant health systems, they should follow the guidelines for rogues (or the nearest equivalent).

Skills

The cozener's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Appraise (Int), Bluff (Cha), Diplomacy (Cha), Disguise (Cha), Forgery (Int), Gather Information (Cha), Hide (Dex), Innuendo (Wis), Intimidate (Cha), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Oratory (Cha), Perform (Cha), Pick Pocket (Dex), Read Lips (Int), Search (Int), Sense Motive (Wis), and Spot (Wis). As they advance in level, cozeners gain extra class skills; see below.

Skill Points at Each Level: 8 + Int modifier.

Weapons and Armor

Cozeners can employ whatever weapons and armor their previous classes made them proficient with. Although they quite often do wear at least light, simple weapons and armor, in case of emergencies, they don't *habitually* study combat beyond that (although a few acquire further proficiencies as feats, if only to look more credible when pretending to be gentlemen with swords at their sides). However, cozeners are keenly aware that heavy armaments tend to frighten off potential victims.

Special Abilities

Judging the Mark: All cozeners depend on being able to select wealthy, gullible victims. There's little point in conning a poor man, after all, and some targets require special care, or should just be avoided altogether. Thus, any cozener learns to size people up accurately at a glance. To use this ability, the cozener must observe the subject for a period equal to (16 minus levels in the cozener class) seconds, from within ten yards. Roll Sense Motive against a DC equal to the subject's Charisma to get a general sense of their personality and mood, Appraise (with standard DC values) to evaluate their clothes and any jewelry or similar they are wearing, Listen to identify their accent if they are speaking (base DC 12, modified for short or long speeches, background noise, etc., at the DM's discretion), and Spot to notice anything odd about them, any possible hints as to their origins, and whether they are wearing a disguise (DC at the DM's option). Any character can attempt this sort of thing with a little thought, of course, but cozeners do it quickly and almost automatically.

Knowing the Games: Cozeners know all about lying, and hence spot it more easily. From 2nd level onwards, a cozener can add half his level as a cozener to any Sense Motive roll which is made to oppose a Bluff attempt (but not for other uses of Sense Motive). The character may also add the same bonus to any other roll to recognize standard confidence tricks and similar lies, at the DM's option.

Reading the Mark: Cozeners have to learn to recognize whether or not their lies are being believed. At 3rd level, the cozener gains the ability to make a Sense Motive check *immediately* after making a Bluff or Diplomacy check, to determine whether the first skill used was successful, or whether the intended victim is just playing along. This is opposed by the victim's own Bluff check if the skill failed, or is DC 10 otherwise. (Other characters can try similar observations, but usually have to take a moment to assess the victim's responses; the cozener can tell straight away if the speech worked.) Note that most sensible cozeners will usually keep a lie going for a moment, even after it has failed, as this usually helps cover an attempt at escape or other backup plans.

Double or Quits: A cozener of 4th level or higher whose speeches are not believed due to a failed Bluff or Diplomacy check can attempt to turn the problem round and convince the victim that he was wrong after all, despite his suspicions. This permits *one* retry for failed uses of these skills, at a -5 penalty, contrary to the usual rules.

Extra Class Skills: Cozeners take their profits where they find them, sometimes even through honest employment, and learn a bit here and there about the way things work. At 5th, 7th, and 9th levels, a cozener can add any two skills normally available to other classes in the campaign to his list of class skills. He still has to pay skill points to learn them, but at the lower rate.

Trustworthiness: Practiced cozeners have such fluent, natural charm that they barely have to try to convince strangers of their honesty. At 6th level, the cozener can make another person trust him without saying or doing anything that looks at all like an attempt to inspire trust, just by manner; this requires a Bluff check with a -3 modifier. At 8th level, the cozener can achieve a similar result without even saying *anything*, at least directly to the intended victim, just by adopting body language and expressions which somehow inspire trust; the Bluff check for this is at -5. And at 10th level, a cozener can simply walk into a room and somehow have the strangers there immediately take him for an upright, honest fellow, albeit after making a Bluff check at -8. Note that none of this is magical; the victims get to make Sense Motive checks to oppose the trick, and they will change their minds (albeit perhaps unhappily) if presented with strong evidence of the cozener's dishonesty. They are simply induced to form a strongly favorable first impression.

New Skill

Oratory

This is the skill of delivering stirring or persuasive speeches to large audiences, holding people's attention, and convincing them to believe in (or fight for) you. It isn't actually magical, and can't convince people to do the impossible or to switch allegiances in the middle of a fight -- apart from anything else, the user has to speak more or less uninterrupted for some time to achieve a result -- but with a good enough roll, a fine orator can achieve impressive results.

Check: Roll once per short, simple speech (no more than about five minutes, and usually delivering just one straightforward idea), at the end. For longer or more complex speeches, roll after every five minutes, and again at the end, to see how the speech is going, and take an average of all the rolls at the end to assess the overall effect. The DC depends on the task in hand: 10 to hearten willing troops before battle, or to make a point to a mass meeting where most people broadly agree with you already, 15 to convince worried troops facing seemingly superior foes to rally and make a stand at some defensible point, or to make people who disagree with you at least *think* about your point of view, 20 to sway a large group over to your side temporarily or to make retreating troops rally in the face of the foe, and 30 or more to persuade a small force to make a near-suicidal charge or to induce widespread changes of political allegiance. Add +5 to the DC if your audience actively dislikes you, and +10 if they are on the point of throwing things at you. Public political or theological arguments may sometimes be resolved by opposed uses of Oratory.

Retry: If you fail with a short, simple speech, you may be able to try again (assuming that your audience hasn't turned physically hostile or wandered off), but with +10 to DC. If you roll a failure while making a longer speech, make an Int-based roll with DC 15 to realize; you can then either carry on and hope that your subsequent efforts compensate, or go back over the previous point in an attempt to improve your effect, re-rolling at +5 DC.

Special: If you have 5 or more ranks in any type of Perform skill related to speech or singing, you get a +2 synergy bonus on Oratory checks.

The Talented Mister Reilly

"James Bond is just a piece of nonsense I dreamed up. He's not a Sidney Reilly, you know!"

-- Ian Fleming, to Robin Bruce Lockhart, author of *Reilly: Ace of Spies*

There are those who say that James Bond is more than just nonsense -- that he is a living myth, as real as Superman or Sherlock Holmes or John F. Kennedy. But there's nothing but fiction written about him, people will protest. It's all romance and reverie, smoke and mirrors; Bond is just an invention. Of course, one could say much the same thing about Bond's putative model, Sidney Reilly, the "ace of spies." Except that Reilly seems even more fictional, even more of an invention, than Bond does. To resolve such a riddle, one traditionally begins at the beginning. Which Sidney Reilly invented . . .

"It should by now come as no surprise that the surviving Foreign Agency [Okhrana] records from this period contain no mention whatsoever of Salomon or Sigmund Rosenblum, or any name even close. Nor does his name, as either Rosenblum or Reilly, obviously show up in the massive and elaborately cross-referenced card index compiled by the Paris office right up to 1917."

-- Richard B. Spence, *Trust No One: The Secret World of Sidney Reilly*

Most biographies of Reilly give his "real name" as Sigmund Rosenblum, and confidently assert that he was born on March 24, 1874, in the city of Odessa, in the Ukraine. This depends jointly on the testimony of Reilly and the OGPU - two less than reliable sources. Rather more careful biographies, such as the Spence effort cited above (the only biography of Reilly written by a professional historian) tend toward the theory that Reilly was born Salomon Rosenblum in a provincial city of Russian Poland, perhaps Grodno, likely in 1874. However, as Spence admits in frustration, there is no solid evidence for Reilly's existence *anywhere* before he turns up in 1895 on a dock in Portsmouth, England, using the name Sigmund Rosenblum, with a small fortune in his pocket and some professional training in chemistry. The "Rosenblum" identity may be one that Reilly (who probably was a Russian Jew of some sort, although he also claimed Irish birth) borrowed from any one of the millions of refugees from Czarism who choked the ports and university towns of Europe in the late 19th century.

Reilly later claimed to have been sponsored by one Major Fothergill, whose life he had saved in [the Brazilian interior](#), where Reilly had fled after faking a suicide in Odessa to escape the Okhrana. Spence inclines to the theory that Reilly had hooked up with Russian anarchist sects either in Odessa or Paris, become a double agent, and then double-crossed the Okhrana and absconded with its payroll. Either way, he soon showed a remarkable affinity for duplicity, working with Polish bibliophile and antiquarian Wilfrid Voynich to "discover" unknown medieval manuscripts (chemical training being quite useful in forgery), romancing Voynich's wife Ethel (the daughter of the mathematician George Boole), and fingering the occasional anarchist for Scotland Yard.

All three hobbies -- art, adultery, and espionage -- stuck with him. Reilly collected art and rare books his whole life, with special attention to works related to Napoleon Bonaparte. He graduated from Ethel Voynich to one Margaret Reilly Callahan Thomas, and married her immediately upon the mysterious death of her elderly (and wealthy) husband, taking her grandfather's name as his own. During the pre-war era, Reilly traveled widely on the Continent, in Russia (where he bigamously married another man's wife) and China (where he may have gained the enmity of the [Black Dragon Society](#)), and eventually to the United States. These trips resembled nothing so much as a series of "long cons," enmeshing the criminal and espionage underworlds of three continents in mysterious arms deals involving several governments and the infamous "merchant of death" (and alleged Satanist) Sir Basil Zaharoff, who like Reilly seemingly had no past.

"It's sometimes easier to bribe armies than it is to shoot them."

-- Sidney Reilly (Sam Neill) in *Reilly: Ace of Spies*, "Gambit"

Through Zaharoff and his other connections, Reilly prospered in America, selling phony or antiquated arms to the Russian government, and hiring German spies to destroy them before the fraud was revealed. But the Russian Revolution changed all that; Reilly's old contacts were purged or exiled, and America's entry into the war energized

U.S. MID investigation into Reilly's scams. He had to fall back on his friends in the British government. By January of 1918, at the very latest, Sidney Reilly was agent ST.1 of the British Secret Intelligence Service (later MI-6). Ironically, almost the only hard facts we have about Reilly's life and career come from the four years he spent formally working as a British spy.

The pinnacle of that career came that summer -- Reilly was sent on a mission to evaluate the new Bolshevik government in Russia, and to get Russia back into the war against Germany. Working with Robert Bruce Lockhart, a British diplomat-spy, Reilly decided that Lenin and Trotsky would never fight the Kaiser, and plotted to suborn the Bolsheviks' Lithuanian bodyguard regiment using British silver. Reilly spent the summer planning his coup, scheduled for a Politburo meeting on August 28. Unfortunately, the meeting was postponed to September 6, and in the meantime, a radical named Dora Kaplan shot Lenin. The panicked Cheka moved against everybody, massacring thousands of people in a "Red Terror."

Authorities differ on Reilly's scheme. Previous Soviet histories maintain that the "Lockhart Plot" was a genuine threat to the Revolution; some modern espionage writers theorize that the Cheka had already penetrated Reilly's ring and used it as an excuse to launch its reign of terror. Whether the Red-sympathizer Lockhart (or his Soviet lover, who later became the mistress of Maxim Gorky) gave the game away, or whether Reilly's run of luck simply ran out, the man without a past very nearly changed the future of Russia, Europe, and the world. But in the meantime, he had to escape to Finland. Reilly worked for Winston Churchill in counter-Bolshevik schemes in Poland and the Crimea, and may have played some role in leaking the "Zinoviev letter" to the British press in 1924. Although it must have felt good to flex his old forgers' muscles, the ensuing scandal made England too hot to hold him. Reilly went back into the cold.

"The Bolsheviks at first wished to conceal his arrest but the English somehow or other found it out, and the Bolsheviks in order to escape the possible demands by the English of his release murdered him when he was taken out for exercise."

-- anonymous letter in MI-5 archives, dated Mar 9, 1927

The British government always steadfastly denied that Reilly's final mission into the Soviet Union was in any way official. (This attitude saved MI-6 a good bit of money, as Reilly's many wives tried in vain to claim pensions after his disappearance.) However, it's hard to believe that someone as clever as Reilly would actually fall for the crude "false flag" that supposedly drew him back into Russia to support a nominal counter-revolution, this time against Stalin. Be that as it may, Reilly probably left Germany for Finland in September of 1925, never to be seen again by Western eyes. Soviet sources reported Reilly shot on the Finnish border on September 28th. And also, executed for terrorism in June of 1927. And alive in Lubyanka Prison in 1932. His exit, it seems, is just as murky as his entry.

The official OGPU internal report (which dates the execution on November 5, 1925) never uses Reilly's name, calling him only "Prisoner # 73." Rather than a simple bullet in the prison, Prisoner # 73 was driven into the woods and shot in the back. According to the report, his body arrived at the morgue with a black bag over its head, effectively concealing its identity -- was Reilly a Bolshevik [Man in the Iron Mask](#)? Some evidence exists of an Englishman traveling under the name of "Rosenbaum" escaping from Shanghai to Hong Kong in 1938. The Gestapo had Reilly on their "Black List" of people to arrest in England in 1940. The last reported sighting of Reilly was in 1947, when he would have been 73 years old. Final rumors place Reilly in the hidden ranks of Mossad, or in the KGB operations against Britain, or simply living off his confidence games in South America. The man without a past had vanished into the future.

"Mundo nulla fides"

-- personal motto from Reilly's stationery

"Put no faith in the world," or, as Spence translates it more evocatively, "Trust no one." That was Reilly's personal motto, emblazoned on his stationery beneath a two-headed (two-faced?) eagle. Reilly became a universal joint in conspiratorial engineering, with contacts in all strata of Russian and British society (to say nothing of Germany, France, Japan, China, and the United States). Reilly knew the players in both the assassination of Rasputin and the murder of the Romanovs (and has been tagged as part of the conspiracy to rescue the latter, if such a conspiracy existed), and hinted that the truth in both cases was stranger than it seemed. He was present at the creation of two of the great forgeries of the modern era -- the Protocols of the Elders of Zion and the Zinoviev Letter (and if the latter

was not, in fact, a forgery, Reilly may have been the conduit for its transmission) -- plus, just perhaps, the [Voynich Manuscript](#). Reilly conspired with oil magnates in Persia, Japanese admirals in Port Arthur, and heroin kingpins in New York. He met fellow SIS informer Aleister Crowley in London in 1898, in Russia in 1913, and in New York in 1915. He was everywhere and anywhere.

His way was smoothed, first of all, by his Freemasonry -- both British spies and Russian revolutionaries had this brotherhood in common. But for Reilly, Masonry would have just been the tip of the conspiratorial iceberg. He claimed membership in the "League of the Enlightened," a shadowy group in Odessa (and elsewhere) that might have included Stalin and Lenin as its lodge members. Reilly's ex-wife Margaret described Lenin as an "illumine" in a 1931 letter to SIS; she claimed specialized knowledge of "certain facts" relevant to Reilly's disappearance. Was she hinting that the Illuminati stood behind both Reilly and the Revolution?

"To know another language is to possess another soul."

-- maxim of Charles V, as quoted by Sidney Reilly

Reilly spoke at least seven, and possibly as many as 11, languages with some fluency, perhaps including Hebrew, suitable for the kabbalistic manipulation of names. The kabbalistic value of ST.1 is 70, "silence," an excellent sobriquet for a confidential agent. Equally appropriately, the alias Reilly used most often, "Sidney George Reilly," adds to 710, which can mean "shadow" or "secret." Reilly himself seems more like a shadow, or perhaps an identity-shifting dybbuk, than he does a normal man. Still more interestingly, "Sidney Reilly" adds to 414, "azoth," the alchemical Mercury, ever-changing emblem of the god of lies and travelers. Perhaps Reilly, who once bankrupted himself to acquire Napoleon's signature, and hinted of descent from Napoleon's mistress, was a Hermetic tulpa sparked by Napoleon's bizarre Russian -- and Egyptian -- ambitions.

Fans of Tim Powers' *Declare* can only slaver in frustration at the fragmentary information about Reilly's seemingly magical escapes from Manchuria, Leningrad, and Berlin, and his mysterious doings along the Turkish borders in 1897, 1900, and 1905. With these peculiar connections to the Caucasus and Persia, as well as his nigh-hypnotic power over women, he resembles the mystic George Gurdjieff, who described the ascended master as "the One Who Knows." An apt description of Reilly, echoed by his superiors at SIS. Could Reilly (who studied the works of Gurdjieff's disciple Ouspensky) have been such an ascended master? Reilly associated closely with Polish Agharti-cultist Ferdinand Ossendowski, and claimed to have been initiated by a Chinese guru in Shenxi, one Tso-Lin, after fleeing Port Arthur in 1904. Would this explain his mysterious companion "Anna," described as a "woman in black" who never ate in public? Would it explain the mysterious visions of his third (or fourth) wife Pepita Bobadilla, who saw a "grim reaper" before his final trip to Russia; and of his paramour, the mystic Caryl Houselander, who saw him on the astral plane after his alleged death in Moscow?

"This is an astounding degree of confusion from the same general source [the Soviet records] over what should be a simple fact to establish. A man can die only once. Moreover, the OGPU dossier, in its current, edited form, contains a photo of a living Reilly allegedly taken in 1925. It is a picture of Sidney, all right, but one obviously taken years earlier . . . Men do not grow younger, either."

-- Richard B. Spence, *Trust No One: The Secret World of Sidney Reilly*

We are left with a mysterious man, of no clear nationality, who appears in England just before a time of global crisis. He goes under many names -- Sigmund Rosenblum, George Rose, Leon Rosenblatt, Pavel Relinsky, Constantine Massino, Sidney Roberts. He has ready money and chemical training; he seems to know everyone's history, and is accepted by the Masons as one of their own. He has mysterious contacts at the court of the Czars. He tries to avert a great Revolution, and is seen in visions afterward. He dabbles in the arts. He is part confidence trickster, part spy, part industrialist. He does not visibly age. He vanishes without a trace. [Saint-Germain](#), Ace of Spies?

The Marsh of Madness: NecronomiCon Tales

I was a guest at NecronomiCon in Tampa, Florida a few weeks ago (October 24th through the 26th, for those of you making your own Marsh timeline). This was due to a few fortuitous circumstances. First, I was already out of town in Orlando, visiting my parents for a vacation at the various Orlando Resorts Tied to Three Osculating Circles. And I realized that perhaps the only thing better than one vacation is *two* vacations; since Tampa was only an hour's drive away from Orlando, it seemed like the right con at the right time. Second, none other than Steve Jackson -- president of a well-known Austin-based RPG company -- was going to be at this convention. Seeing as how I've been one of his minions for almost four years, it seemed like a good opportunity to see him again for the second time. (This is especially true given that Steve had absolutely no recollection of our having met the *first* time . . . Clearly I make an indelible impression on all those I encounter.)

Anyway, I made it to Tampa for my first time ever on Friday afternoon. After having checked myself into the registration desk, I started to explore both the convention and -- after getting the urge for some lunch -- Tampa itself.

It was at this point that I discovered Tampa -- or at least the portion I was at -- consists entirely of Interstate. I also came to the painful realization how pitiful my navigational ability was; if I were a migrating bird, I would be the one burrowing into the Earth, convinced that this mythical "north" lay at most one or two miles further down. These two facts combined into a maddening automotive funhouse experience, where I would find myself driving in the wrong direction at least four times a day. Despite the fact that my hotel and the convention hotel were about one mile away, I suspect I spent six hours of the weekend looking for my next destination (my exit, my hotel, a McDonald's, a pawnshop without a waiting period for guns) and shouting expletives at my dashboard.

Anyway, the convention itself was a lot of fun . . . perhaps more fun than I was expecting, truth be known. I suspect this is because NecronomiCon, much like my beloved [Dragon*Con](#), is a mixed convention. Unlike a gamers-only con, this convention had gaming, genre authors, artists, and other goodies. Crossover conventions tend to have more diverse elements, such as women.

I played a game of the still-being-tested-and-revised ***Snits' Revenge***, where I got my butt whomped. For those unfamiliar with ***Snits' Revenge***, one of the elements of the game has one side searching for a game-winning piece of the other side's, sort of like *Stratego* as illustrated by Tom Wham. This led to a situation that I always find disconcerting in these kind of strategy games, where I know I'm going to lose *long* before my opponent realizes this. So the last 20 minutes of the game had me continuing to survive not by any brilliant maneuvers, but by his failure to roll the requisite "1, 2, or 3" necessary for him to reveal that he had chosen to attack the correct hidden target. It's an odd sensation, where my opponent was panicking (and other observers were assuming I was about to win), and only I knew the horrible truth.

I was a guest at three panels. My first one was about electronic publishing, where I do believe I made upwards of two relevant points. My second one was a "What's New in Gaming" panel, where there were approximately 8.46×10^{17} game-related guests relegated to a raised panelist platform designed for an absolute maximum of five people. This panel was noteworthy because of the fact I totally froze when asked, "What games have you liked in the past year?" (making me realize fully how little I actually get to *play* any games); I also made a few waves by disagreeing with *everyone* else on the panel on the final question, including the person sitting next to me who happens to sign my monthly paychecks.

The final panel I was a guest on had to do with magazine publishing, both paper and electronic. The person who was to serve as our moderator did not show up, so the rest of the panel decided that I should moderate it. For someone with only two previous panel experiences (one where I spoke twice and the other where I went "duh" or "wrong!"), this was really only one step shy of finding myself at another final exam without any pants.¹ Fortunately I *do* have buckets of experience in the mag biz (including a few drops on the paper side), so I actually think I did okay.

I attended one of the late-night dances, and came to the conclusion that I am *not* cut out for an anime-music rave. (I

also ended up feeling like a tomb-escaped dusty shambling Methuselah amid the younger dancers . . . which is not a good sign for my future boogious prospects.)

I tried participating in two LARPs. The first I attended didn't look promising due to bad luck on the GMs' part (although it was apparently salvaged into something pretty cool), while the second one was slightly more linear than a conveyer belt. (I eventually snuck out, which is not a classy thing to do and which I heartily recommend against. Unless the game is really bad.)

The art rooms were particularly well-stocked, with a lot of amateur and semi-pro artists. Alas, I was defeated on all three items I placed auction bids for, not that I'm bitter grr grr grr. There were also an unexpected number of pictures of dragons with kittens; I find this to be a disturbing trend, mostly because I'm not sure I like the symbolic ideal of dangerous, majestic evil mixed with dragons.

The dealer rooms weren't particularly large, but there was a surprising variety therein, with jewelry, gaming stuff, costumes, anime, books, weapons, and miscellaneous goodies. I didn't find any rarities or remarkably priced must-haves, which was sad for the treasure-hunter in me but good for my checkbook.

And, finally, on the last day, I got to play lots of games of [Are You A Werewolf?](#) I cannot express how incredibly fun this game was. The premise, for those who don't want to click the review, is that everyone is a villager, except for two players who are werewolves and one who is a seer (able to learn the truth about others). The object is for the werewolves to survive and destroy the villagers, while the villagers lynch someone everyday in hopes of finding the werewolf. The first two games were very bad for me, since I drew the Werewolf card and didn't know any strategies for survival. ("Steven can't stop snickering! *He's a werewolf!*") I was literally lynched in the first two minutes of each game.

But the fourth game . . . ah, the fourth game I was a werewolf again, and I'd figured out a strategy (which included, among other things, seconding the nomination that my werewolf partner was a werewolf). In short, we both survived and devoured the village, and I even ended up receiving the Overall Winner award from the moderator for that game.

(I ended up playing another five or so games, but I shan't bore you any further.)

For those of you able to attend a convention or otherwise amass a large group of people, I emphatically recommend that you try this game. It combines roleplaying, social psychology, strategy, and villager mutilation, all in a game that was enormous fun (when it's played right, that is . . . as I shall discuss in a future column). And, since a deck is only four or five bucks from Looney Labs (or free, if you'd rather download the rules and make your own cards), it's hard to come up with a reason *not* to give it a shot.

The staff and volunteers for the convention were top-notch, and even the occasional hiccup (such as our moderatorless panel) was trivial. This convention had a con suite which had the most scrumptious breakfast spread I'd ever seen: bagels, muffins, and cinnamon rolls. Mmm!

The victory from that one game of ***Are You A Werewolf?*** made me eligible for one of eight grab-bag drawings at the end, which I actually won. With that bag of loot I was able to trade with other winners, and ended up with, among other things, a bunch of cool ***Call of Cthulhu*** stuff.²

Which, ultimately, seems like a fitting ending to fun little shindig called NecronomiCon.

* * *

¹ Yes, that's a joke. However, one time I did incorrectly record the time I was to be at a crucial computer science final exam. So when I showed up an hour early, lemonade in hand (with which I acknowledged the instructor waiting in the doorway), I was informed that I was actually an hour *late*. It was quite humbling to go from totally confident to blind panic, struggling to finish the final in the remaining half-hour.

² Among the "cool stuff" was parts two and three of the ***Nocturnum*** series from Fantasy Flight Games. If anyone knows of where I can get part one, and/or if there are any differences between this series and the compiled ***Nocturnum d20*** book (besides ***d20 System*** stuff), I'd love to be [dropped a line](#).

Pyramid Review

Redline -- High Speed Road Duels In A Post-Apocalyptic Future (for d20)

Published by [Fantasy Flight Games](#)

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Illustrated by Ed Bouelle, Jim Brady, Allen Douglas, David Griffith, Chris Keefe, Patrick McEvoy and Scott Schomburg

64-page b&w softcover; \$14.95

Several RPGs have explored the post apocalypse genre over the years, most of them set some time after the new world ending events that are their origins. *Gamma World* -- derived from the [Metamorphosis Alpha RPG](#) and now having returned under the *d20 System* -- is probably the best-known example, but others such as DP9's [Tribe 8](#) and Palladium's *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles And Other Strangeness*-inspired *After The Bomb* campaign setting also fall into this category. Fewer games are set in the few years after the apocalypse; GDW's *Twilight 2000* is the best-known, other examples being FGU's *Aftermath*, Palladium's [Systems Failure](#), and *GURPS Y2K*. Of course, the most familiar of post-apocalypse movies has to be the *Mad Max* trilogy and it is this series that inspires the latest entry in this genre, *Redline -- High Speed Road Duels In A Post-Apocalyptic Future*.

A favorite of many gamers, the *Mad Max* films have had their influence upon gaming, notably the "Chassis & Crossbow" article for *Car Wars* first published in *Autoduel Quarterly*, and the *Operation Morpheus* and *Sydney: The Wilderness Campaign* supplements for *Aftermath*. *Redline* differs from all of these in that it is not so much influenced by the *Mad Max* trilogy as directly inspired, and that it is for the *d20 System*. Further it is the first in Fantasy Flight Game's Horizon line of self-contained genre books that require no more than the *Player's Handbook* or *d20 Modern* rulebooks. Much like Deep7's *1PG* titles and Politically Incorrect Games' GENREdiversion line, each Horizon book is designed as a diversion between other campaigns, or as the basis for a short campaign by itself.

Redline makes use of nothing more than the core *d20 System* rules and is compatible with the recent 3.5 revision of *Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition*. It is tightly and neatly laid out with no space wasted, and illustrated with a range of uniformly dark and grainy art that captures the feel of the genre perfectly.

The setting takes place a few years after the outbreak of a war that involved nuclear, biological, and chemical agents. Their effects linger on, seeping slowly through the environment and also sweeping occasionally across the landscape in furious rad storms and the like, collectively known as the "Creep." It affects people of all ages, but especially those who venture into the areas where it stains sites rich in salvage from the age before the war. What society exists often establishes itself near such places, as well as sources of water and fuel. The former is necessary for survival, the latter for the vehicles and trade caravans that keep communication and supplies running between settlements. Along the roads and routes run the marauding gangers, Muties, Red Zombies, Red Vamps, and Sand Sharks that threaten what little civilization that remains. Although there is no geographical setting as such, Australia is inferred in passing, but there is nothing to stop *Redline* being set in America or elsewhere. Of course, you may not get the killer mutant kangaroos or mutant racing camels in America that you do in Australia, though giant carnivorous rabbits are another matter.

As with other *d20 System* games, *Redline* replaces the concept of race with that of background, providing details of six examples. The Bornagain can provide answers to questions of a spiritual or religious nature, and while their answers might actually be spurious rubbish, their conviction can make them great leaders, natural speakers, and give them the

strength to smite mutants. Bygones have knowledge of the time before the apocalypse, whether by dint of age or access to records or libraries. Drifters wander the wastelands and have learned to survive its hazards. Ferals have abandoned what remaining semblance of civilization there is to survive by their instincts in the wilderness, knowing how to handle themselves and be sneaky, but not how to deal with machinery. The effects of the bombs have made Rejects big and dumb, immune to the effects of Creep and gifted with a savage nature or sharp bug eyes or crusty skin, but penalized with poor hearing or being myopic or inflexible legs. Savants have blocked off the horrors of the current state of affairs, focusing on a particular skill at the cost of others.

The six backgrounds fit seamlessly in with the five new classes. Marauders are naturally tough, rage-filled brawlers and thugs; Redliners are natural drivers at home behind the wheel; Riggers are gifted technicians and mechanics; Traders are characteristic wheelers and dealers as well as hoarders of goods to barter; and Walkers rely on their wits and stealth to make their quiet way through the wilderness. Each of these classes possesses a special ability that improves as a character experiences, the improvement being given as a better die to roll and add to particular skill checks. Thus the Redliner's Hard Core Driving ability adds to every Driving check from second level onwards, rising from 1d4 to 1d6 at 6th level, 1d8 at 10th level, and so on. The Marauder's Hard Core Fighting works the same way and adds to their melee attacks; Hard Core Repair to a Rigger's Build/Repair skill checks and so on. Both the backgrounds and classes are well-designed, possess a simplicity that gets to the heart of the genre, *and* it is easy to recognize them from their sources.

This simplicity continues with the skills and feats. While new skills are introduced, **Redline** reduces many also. Thus Appraise and Diplomacy becomes Barter, and Balance, Climb, and Jump become Clamber. Build/Repair is divided between simple and complex skills, the first for fixing the plumbing or a gun's magazine, the latter for the actual mechanism, a vehicle transmission or a field irrigation system. Chatter replaces Persuasion, Fake Out is the art of deception and knowledge comes as seven types -- Big Picture (philosophy, theology, logic and the twisted muddle they have become), Creep, Folks, Lay of the land (area knowledge), Olden (history), Subfarming (subsistence farming) and Tech. In general the new feats are geared to vehicle use and vehicle combat.

Equipment is roughly divided between the simple and the advanced. Whatever its age, a simple device has few moving parts if any, while advanced devices have many. For example, a simple firearm will fire one shot per round, while an advanced one will fire in bursts. For melee weapons, whatever its type and effect, it may not actually be of that exact type as described by the **Player's Handbook**, but an adapted item. For example, a golf club makes an effective club and a George Foreman grill makes a fetching flail. Melee weapons invariably come to dominate the game given the scarcity of ammunition.

Since this is a *Mad Max* inspired game, there is a full chapter devoted to vehicular combat. This is run at a scale of 50-foot squares as a tabletop game in which the map, not the cars trucks SUV, bikes and vans is the *moving* element. The idea is not to play the system on a map as per **Car Wars**, but as an abstraction in which speeds are relative between the various vehicles. They are treated to some extent as monsters, but ones that can be clambered onto and over, ridden in and on, all while providing a degree of protection to their occupants. Of course they possess an Armor Class value, but high attack rolls can inflict damage upon the target vehicles and their occupants at the same time. Vehicles can be fitted with weapons, from guns bolted to its body, crossbow batteries, spear guns, turret flails, and more advanced weapons such as machine guns, flame throwers, and tank guns. The rules cover most eventualities from maneuvers and losing control to making boarding actions.

The Creep comes in a wide variety of forms; it might be a gas, sludge, or ooze, a powder or metallic flakes, but it is still known as the Creep. It can appear as wind borne dust clouds or showers of rain, or in particular locations or zones. Some Creep is strong enough to linger on the bodies of those who enter the zones as well as on their possessions, such that they leave a trail of Creep behind them after leaving the zone. As characters grow increasingly contaminated, their chance of suffering mutations also grows. This is measured by points of contamination gained by failing saving throws and to a lesser extent making those saving throws against contamination. A new mutation is acquired each time a character's contamination points pass a threshold number equal to his Constitution score. The effect of reaching the sixth threshold, or six times a character's constitution, is to make a character nearly unplayable, and at the seventh threshold it will render them down into raw gloopy Creep!

Mutations can be determined randomly; there are 20 given each for the first two thresholds, with fewer for higher thresholds. Alternatively, mutations can be linked from one threshold to the next, as the Creep just effects one part of the body. Presented by a chain of mutations, this is an interesting method of handling the dangerous evolution of the Creep poisoned. Several of the mutations point to the wackiness of those at the heart of ***Gamma World***.

Since ***Redline*** is a genre book, the information about its setting is not geographically specific, instead dealing with its elements. This includes the folks you can meet -- warlords, gangers, zealots, rebuilders, nomads, savages, and survivors -- along with examples of each that also serve as scenario hooks; resources, water, food, fuel, artifacts, and salvage; and regions and their hazards. All of this points to a game that revolves around acquiring and trading scarce resources and salvage. The supplement is rounded out with a short section on four new monsters -- the Mutie, the Rad Vamp Template, the Rad Zombie and the Sand Shark, similar to the Bulette of ***Dungeons & Dragons*** and the Sep of ***Gamma World***. A list of creatures from the ***Monster Manual*** provides the GM with more encounters along with their threshold levels and there is nothing to stop the GM from plundering the very many other bestiaries available at their local gaming emporium.

There is a very pruned feeling to ***Redline***, the authors having stripped down to fit the game. In a minor way, this has led to just a pair of omissions. One is a lack of a character sheet, the other being the lack of a bibliography. Yes, it is obvious that ***Redline*** is the ***d20 System*** treatment of *Mad Max*, to which have been added elements of *Z For Zachariah*, *A Boy and His Dog*, and *Damnation Alley*, but further reading and viewing is always, *always* useful. And also true, the *Mad Max* trilogy lacked either Rad Vamps or Rad Zombies, their place in the game is legitimate and this game would not be half as much fun if they were not included.

Redline has plenty of potential use as well beyond its pages as a one-shot campaign. The most obvious is as a precursor to the ***Gamma World RPG***, while that game's tech sourcebook, ***Out Of The Vaults***, could provide all of the artifact and salvage ideas that a GM would want. Add in dinosaurs, say from the [Dinosaur Planet: Broncosaurus Rex](#) setting, and ***Redline*** could form the basis of a *Tales from the Xenozoic Age* campaign done ***d20 System*** style. And of course, it could be used in a campaign set in the Cursed Earth of Mongoose Publishing's [The Judge Dredd Roleplaying Game](#).

Redline, despite the two omissions given earlier -- the effect of which makes it feel slightly incomplete and a little overpriced -- is *near* perfect. It sets out to get in there, present a genre, and get out again without fuss or fripperies -- and this is exactly what ***Redline*** does. While there may be no *Mad Max* RPG currently on the market, this is the closest that any game or supplement currently gets to giving you one.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Pick

BANG!

Published by Mayfair Games and Da Vinci Games

Designed by Emiliano Sciarra

Illustrated by Alex Pierangelini

110 cards; \$10.00

BANG! is a raucous, quick-playing card game that recreates the melodrama and action of a classic spaghetti western film. This deadly shootout between the law and the outlaws is rife with close calls, mistaken identities, and vicious vendettas, all packed into about half an hour. For six or seven players, you will find few games so fun-filled and satisfying, as long as you are willing to spend a couple games learning its unique dynamics.

The deck is made up of 110 cards and requires nothing else to play; leave your dice and pads of paper aside. When random numbers are required, players reference the poker values on the corner of each card (10 of hearts, king of spades, etc.). Wounds are tracked by covering and uncovering the appropriate number of bullet symbols on one card with your character card. With this scheme, you'll rarely have to ask anyone to tell you how hurt they are -- just count the big, shiny bullets. The cards are illustrated primarily with some lively colored pencil sketches that effectively evoke the spirit of the cinematic West. They also sport titles and rules in Italian (the native language of the designer as well as that of the spaghetti western genre, of course) and English with the most complex rules illustrated via a language-independent set of symbols that works well once you've overcome a few confusing vagaries of the system. A handy reference card will clear things up quickly in your first play.

The game starts by determining each player's persona -- a combination of a character and a role. The four roles are Sheriff, Deputy, Outlaw, and Renegade. These determine the player's goals and their teammates: the Sheriff and his Deputies win if they kill the Outlaws and Renegade, the Outlaws win if they kill the Sheriff (in both these cases, even those who end up dead are winners if their team prevails), and the wily Renegade wants to be the last man standing. Since killing the Sheriff ends the game, this means the Renegade needs to let the Deputies and Outlaws whittle each other down until it's just him and the Sheriff and he can put the final bullet in his righteous nemesis. The key to making all this interaction really interesting is that only the Sheriff's role card is revealed when the game begins, and the true identity of the others are only uncovered when they are killed. Only by watching actions carefully (and making some judicious guesses) can the Sheriff sort out his Deputies from the Outlaws. It's no easy task, especially once everyone gets the gist of the dynamic after a game or two. Typically, everyone talks and acts like a Deputy, taking shots at their neighbors and collecting useful cards until an Outlaw finally takes the first shot on the Sheriff. Even then, a smart Renegade will keep playing innocent, protecting the Sheriff and hoping a Deputy or two gets eliminated before the Outlaws' assault is finished. Without the secret identities, **BANG!** would be an entertaining and action-packed diversion; with them, it becomes a deeper game of bluffing and second-guessing.

For a game that tops out at seven players, 16 character cards is pretty generous, guaranteeing a different spread on every deal. The characters -- bearing colorful names like Vulture Sam, Sid Ketchum, and the feared Slab the Killer -- each have a unique special ability, be it defensive, death-dealing, or deck-stacking. When combined with the four possible roles, there's not only a lot of variety, but also some fun characterization to be found in the combinations. Who'd have thought the meek Calamity Janet would turn out to be the treacherous Renegade? And who appointed Slab the Killer as Sheriff anyway?

Combat itself is a breezy and cleverly constructed affair, its greatest accomplishment arguably being how it quickly

makes the table feel like a dusty town square at high noon -- the site of an escalating firefight. The simple but original range rules provide an evocative sense of space, limiting shots by the number of seats between you and your desired target. The default gun of every player has a range of one; you can only shoot the two scoundrels who sit to your left and right. Better guns are drawn from the deck, played out in front of your character, and might provide a range up to five seats away which, even in the largest game, will let you hit everyone at the table (unless he happens to have a trusty stallion, which adds one to the normal range calculation).

Once you can hit your enemy, blasting away is as easy as playing a "BANG!" card. Defending yourself from such a shot is just as simple: a "Missed!" card played from your hand will cancel out a "BANG!" Other defenses are available, like the "Barrel" card which provides a chance (if you draw a heart-suited card from the deck) to send a BANG! ricocheting off harmlessly. This quickly resolved combat scheme, fueled by the commonness of BANG!s and Misses in the deck, paints an exciting scene as bullets fly willy-nilly, lucky cowboys barely avoid injury, and a concentrated round of fire on one victim can spell certain death if his hand is depleted of Missed! cards by the first shot or two. Getting hit doesn't just put you closer to death (and an exit from the game), but also reduces your valuable hand size limit; each turn you draw the number of cards equal to your current health score, which is never higher than four (five for the Sheriff).

All this excitement is spiced up by some handy, sneaky, and sometimes just plain devastating special cards. Characters can get thrown in Jail, the local Schoolmarm might seduce a trusty Winchester out of your possession, Injuns will interrupt the shootout with a raid of their own, and someone may whip out the Gatling Gun and spray the whole crowd with bullets. A lucky draw is a powerful boon in this game, although teamwork and enemy recognition is generally your most powerful weapon.

It can get a little chaotic, and it's not unusual at all for the Sheriff to tragically gun down a Deputy or for Outlaws to trim their own number early in the game when pot shots are flying. Being the Sheriff isn't all it's cracked up to be and can sometimes be downright frustrating. Getting hung up on the possible identities of the other shooters is easy to do, but not recommended when the game only lasts 30 minutes. When in doubt, a randomly doled out shot is more in the spirit of the game -- and thus, more fun -- than a hesitant or conservative play. In fact, hesitancy and an unwillingness to face the consequences of a blind guess can kill a game of **BANG!** quicker than anything else. It's best to keep in mind that the Old West is a place where lives are cheap, but bullets are even cheaper.

Interestingly, strategies for each role can change significantly with the number of players, since, for instance, the odds of having an Outlaw sitting next to you changes drastically when there's only two of them instead of three. Unfortunately, this also means that the difficulty for a given role, especially the Sheriff, is dependent on the number of players -- with six players the Sheriff faces the same threat as with seven, but with one less Deputy to back him up. Overall, **BANG!** plays much better with more players than with fewer. It's a drawback that is more forgivable when you take into account that many games work the opposite way. **BANG!** may not be your first choice when a few pals drop by for the evening, but it's a great quick party game, which is a true rarity.

It's a powerful package, especially for the \$10 price tag -- a fast, almost flippant, card game, elegantly designed with plenty of challenge and an evocative atmosphere. The cards are nice to look at, the variety of game situations is both broad and deep, and each endgame is almost guaranteed to be memorable -- all of which are great qualities in a game that you'll want to play again and again.

--Christopher Floyd

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



A Little Job for the Patrician

A *GURPS Discworld* Scenario

by Phil Masters

This scenario for *GURPS Discworld* also requires *GURPS Discworld Also*, as it involves one of the settings detailed in that book. It starts in Ankh-Morpork, and the PCs must have some reason to agree to undertake an unofficial mission on behalf of the Patrician, Lord Vetinari. Actually, most characters have a large number of such reasons (starting with a fondness for breathing, if push really comes to shove), but some are more specifically likely to get stuck with such missions than others. Fortunately, it's usually pretty easy to find excuses for involving PCs in this sort of thing.

If they should happen to work for the Watch, well, orders are orders, though it may seem most appropriate if they've done something to annoy someone official lately. (As if any PC would.) If they're criminally inclined, they may well have carried on this profession somewhere near Ankh-Morpork without ensuring that their relationship with the Thieves' Guild (or, in some extreme cases, the Assassins' Guild) has been properly formalized -- and the players shouldn't then be too surprised to learn that the Patrician has somehow found out all the details, whatever their characters think. In general, some kind of blackmail, favors owed or traded, or other excuse is pretty easy to come by in these cases.

So they get an invitation to come along to the palace and find out more about the task which they have found themselves volunteering to perform.

Prologue and Scene One

The PCs gather in the Oblong Office. This is a chance for them to introduce themselves to each other, if they haven't met before, and to talk, or at least to size each other up, although if they only meet in the office itself, they may feel slightly constrained by the fact that the Patrician is sitting behind the desk, going through some papers and apparently paying them no attention whatsoever. The GM may like to mention that a large red-haired Watch captain and an ash-blond Watch sergeant (looking slightly embarrassed and amused respectively) are standing at the back of the room, if only to act as a calming influence on the high spirits of some players.

Eventually, just after the last PC arrives and sits down, Vetinari looks up from his paperwork and begins talking as if all necessary introductions have already been made.

"You have all undertaken to do some work for the city, for one reason or another," he says, "and now is the time to discuss that work. Have any of you heard of a gentleman named Leonard of Quirm?"

It's likely that at least some of the PCs will be able to say yes to this (matching the fact that their players may have read the relevant books); the GM might permit IQ-2 or Appreciate Beauty rolls for anyone else to at least know Leonard's name and reputation as an all-round creative genius. (See *GURPS Discworld Also*, p. DA12-13, and novels such as *Men At Arms*, *Jingo*, and *The Last Hero* for details if the players or GM need help), but even if everyone claims ignorance, the Patrician will simply raise an eyebrow and say "Oh well, I'm sure that you can find out anything that you'll need to know."

"Unfortunately," Vetinari will continue, "some of Leonard's work -- his *intellectual property*, one might say -- has come onto the open market, despite his own wishes. It's all very incomplete, I'm told, but to avoid loose ends, it really does need to be recovered.

"It takes the form of a leather-bound notebook, full of Leonard's characteristic handwriting -- he writes as if in a

mirror -- and his very detailed drawings. It has been traced to a second-hand bookshop, whose owner now remembers selling it only recently -- to a nautical fellow named *Ruscoff Jomzring*, in fact. Mr Jomzring in turn was last heard of setting sail for the Brown Islands. Unfortunately, Ankh-Morpork law doesn't technically run that far, so we can't send any sort of *official* mission . . . but perhaps some public- spirited folk, who seem by chance already to have booked passage for a holiday in those parts, could look into this?"

Then he will look at the most reliable, trustworthy member of the party (who needn't be *very* reliable), and add "I think you may want to look after this." (He hands over a packet, containing some tickets and a sealed envelope.) "There are, I believe, some one-way tickets in there, and also a letter to our trade representative in the Brown Islands, asking him to make sure that you all get a return passage when you've finished your holiday."

Then, he turns back to his paperwork. If anyone tries to ask him further questions, he will be polite, straightforward, and terse, primarily suggesting that the PCs should be able to find out anything else important from whatever their usual sources might be.

The Ship

When the PCs look at the tickets, they will realize that their ship departs the next day, on the morning tide. (Just to keep them on their toes.) Specifically, they're being given (very) second-class passage on a ship named the *Indolence*. It's easy to locate down at the city docks, where the crew are doing plausible just-before-departure things. The PCs have those last few hours to sort themselves out and make personal arrangements. If any of them oversleep, well, someone from the Watch or the Patrician's Office will drop by soon enough to wake them up, and it's easy enough to catch up with the vessel in the first few hours of its voyage; it will be lurching stickily down the Ankh, after all. Getting aboard may involve a flying leap off a dock, mind you -- and falling in would mean, well, an encounter with the "waters" of that river.

This ship is mostly a cargo hauler. If anyone asks the captain or crew, or just scouts around, they can easily determine that there are no other passengers, and they will be told that it's carrying "Important cargo" -- here, the speaker taps his nose -- "much prized by people out there, or so we're told." Beyond that, any sailor will turn silent, seeking to maintain his nautical mystique. However, *if* the PCs push hard enough, which probably means sneaking below decks, the cargo turns out to be turnips and cabbages, for sale to the Ankhian community in Port Duck.

The trip to the Brown Islands (which are on the map of the Disc in ***GURPS Discworld***, p.DI22-3, and discussed in ***GURPS Discworld Also***, p.DA74-82) takes some three to four weeks. The GM should probably try to whip through this time as fast as possible, unless the players have specific (good) ideas for things to do, but GMs who so choose can always fill things out with a few gratuitous jokes about seasickness, suicidal albatrosses which have to be dissuaded from diving into the path of warrior PCs' weapons practice, sea shanties which don't rhyme, scan, or indeed make any sense, nautical jargon, and anything else that comes to mind.

It's also possible that some of the PCs will use this time to attempt to get a look at the contents of Vetinari's letter to the city's representative on the Brown Islands. This means lifting the (large, intricate, and carefully applied) wax seal from the envelope; characters with Streetwise or Administration skills will know techniques for achieving this, using a slim, hot knife, but it will probably require a roll against DX at a significant penalty. GMs can make it as hard as they like, within reason, and assess the results of failure as they see fit. In any case, even if they succeed, or use some other method (such as magic), all the PCs will find is a fairly predictable note, saying that these people (listed by name, complete with unflattering personal descriptions) are to be given passage back to Ankh-Morpork if they show up with Leonard's book in hand.

Optional scene: One little joke can be run near the end of the trip, and will work best if the players *haven't* investigated the cargo. As it makes its way past the first few islands, the *Indolence* is approached by a pirate ship. (One can tell by the terribly menacing flag, as well as by the multi- national crew wearing assorted colorful costumes with a lot of headscarves and tricorne hats, waving cutlasses, and talking especially impenetrable nautical jargon to their parrots.) Let the PCs work out their initial responses to this, while a few of the crew disappear below. Then, those crewmen reappear -- holding cabbages and turnips, which they wave at the pirates.

Exactly what follows can depend on whether the GM feels like running a fight scene, and whether the players insist on such things periodically. Most likely, the pirates will veer off with audible cries of disappointment and the odd apology -- "Should 'a known 'ee, lads, arrrh -- sorry ta have bothered 'ee." However, they may still come on aggressively, to the surprise and annoyance of the *Indolence*'s crew ("Stap me vitals, they must be desp'rate men, or much given to cabbages.") It's also possible that the pirate ship will pause for a while as the ruffians take a vote as to whether they are indeed such truly desperate men or not, giving the *Indolence* time to start fleeing, and any especially talented PCs (especially wizards) time to show off anything that might help them decide.

For that matter, if the players are the sort who aren't happy with *some* gratuitous violence, but the GM doesn't feel like running a full battle, they can fight a few rounds of combat, until the *Indolence*'s crew, pelting the attackers with cabbages and annoyed remarks, persuade them to depart.

(If anyone actually asks why the pirates should not attack just because the *Indolence* is carrying agricultural produce, the crew will shrug. "There's not much of a black market for root vegetables. Or so we're told. Arrrh.")

Port Duck

This bustling if slightly underdeveloped-looking town is described in *GURPS Discworld Also*, p.DA79-82, and the GM should describe the PCs' first sight of it in detail, mentioning the many shaky-seeming wooden houses and the incomplete fort overlooking the bay. Then, once the ship has docked and the PCs have recovered their land legs, they can start to explore, and eventually look for clues.

The GM (and the players) can spin this out for a while, or cut to the chase, according to taste. Obviously, tracing Ruscoff Jomzring is the task in hand; the PCs can try what they like, but a fair amount of hanging around in bars and making Streetwise rolls is probably inevitable. This can lead to various diversions, barroom brawls, and encounters with nautical characters with parrots, drunken expatriates dreaming of cabbages, Agatean tourist parties (all neatly and formally organized, and quite capable of trampling someone who falls over or is lying drunkenly in their path when they are looking to one side at something their guide has pointed out), crossbow- packing Agatean cops and gangsters, and other such features of the setting.

Some PCs might also seek out Ankh-Morpork's official representative in the city at this point. This is of course Lord Bulack (p.DA80-1), who will probably be off surfing on a nearby beach. Once located, Bulack will usually be amiable and may help a little, but Vetinari's letter doesn't actually tell him to provide assistance other than those return tickets, and there is a limit to what he can really do.

The Clue

Sooner or later, the PCs should be able to determine that Jomzring was last heard of working as a legman for someone called *Dooli the Arranger*, down at Brick's Café Ankh-Morporkian (p.DA82). Unfortunately, Jomzring isn't around any more -- something about trying to extract the recipe for blonde hair dye from an Amazon tribe on an outlying island. ("Poor chap. Poor chap. It's a very secret recipe, apparently. We don't like to talk about it. Well, *they* didn't like to talk about it . . . Amazon tribes, you know -- staying in to wash their hair is very important to them . . .") But perhaps Dooli can help?

The Bar

Visitors to Brick's will of course first be struck by its resemblance to the Mended Drum -- although it's slightly too new, clean, and tidy -- assuming that they are not first struck by Brick, or by one of the patrons. Once they're over any of that, Dooli, a dark-skinned fellow of Klatchian extraction, is easy to locate. He's a man who prides himself that he can arrange *anything*, and he is currently usually to be found conducting the Café's house band in an intricate, subtle, instrumental version of a traditional Sto Plains tune ("Gathering Rhubarb"). Once that's finished, he *can* be persuaded to help the PCs with information, but it will take cash, trickery, or perhaps some kind of appeal to his finer

sensibilities.

(If details are required, Dooli has IQ 13, other attributes 10, and the skills Conducting-13, Detect Lies-12, Diplomacy-13, Flower Arranging-14, Leadership-12, Merchant-13, Musical Composition (specialized in arrangements)-12/18, Musical Instrument (Piano)-14, Musical Instrument (Trumpet)-14, and Streetwise-13. Brick is an ordinary sedimentary troll whose skills are normally Brawling-12, Merchant-6, Streetwise-8, and 2-Handed Axe/Mace-9 -- but note that his troll brain is badly affected by the local heat, reducing his IQ and mental skills.)

What Dooli knows is that Ruscoff Jomzring traveled to Ankh-Morpork for him to acquire some books which a client wanted. The client's name is *Soso Sung*. If asked about this client, he shrugs and smiles. "Fellow has a place in the jungle a little outside town. Keeps to himself, mostly." (Really shrewd PCs might guess or determine that Sung did not request, or pay quite enough for, total anonymity. He was just plain careless in this.)

If the PCs aren't getting enough help here, one way or another, Brick the Troll will overhear something of the conversation and blunder in (to Dooli's mild annoyance). "Oh yeah," he says, "you sent Mr. Jomzring out to dat place inna jungle wid my many-an'-two cousins." If asked, Brick will say that his cousins were "big old-type trolls from der old country." (This extra clue isn't required, however; Dooli can offer quite enough help to be going on with, and the GM may prefer to keep some surprises in hand.)

Given this start, shrewd PCs may ask around and find out more about Sung from rumors. They can determine that he's a wealthy Agatean (as his name and activities suggest), and that he has an interest in getting people to bring him all sorts of Cool Stuff, but not much more. Sooner or later, a trip into the forest will be inevitable.

Out of Town

The trip to Soso Sung's house can be quite simple, although it may be hot and miserable. The GM may determine that the place is on or near the coast, in which case the PCs could take a boat.

The "house" is actually a fair-sized if rather flimsy pagoda in a small clearing. (There's also a small well nearby, and there *might* be other structures around, at the GM's option; see below.) It has several floors, linked by a narrow but rugged spiral staircase which runs all the way up the center.

Working from the bottom up:

The ground floor is of course the largest, and is divided into an entrance hall, a small kitchen, and a typically minimalist Agatean- style room where Sung receives visitors. The next floor up consists of two rooms, Sung's private dining room/library, and a small chamber for washing. (Leonard's book is usually shelved here -- along with dozens of other books and scrolls on various themes, albeit mostly related to engineering. There is no clear logic to the ordering, and searching would take burglars a while.)

The next room up is rather different, although the decoration is again very simple -- in fact, non-existent. An intruder who sneaks or peers in here in daytime is likely to get the impression that the floor is covered in boulders, at least until he catches the sound of very slow, deep snoring, and sees something move a little. In short, this is a troll dormitory; see below for details of the occupants.

Soso Sung sleeps on the floor above that, in yet another Agatean- style room, complete with a wooden pillow and a few chests filled with fine silk garments. Lastly, the top floor and room belongs to Igor (see below), with a straw-filled mattress and a rough wooden box acting as a dressing table, on which are perched some jars and pots. Intruders peering too closely at those should definitely be in for a fright check. Igors will be Igors, wherever they are.

(If anyone asks at any stage, the pagoda has no toilet because its occupants go outside for such purposes. No mystery, and no, the writer didn't forget.)

There's also a large basement, which is entirely occupied by Sung's workshop and the thing he's been building . . . but

we'll come back to that. If any PCs manage to sneak down there, they should be interrupted fairly soon by Igor, Sung, or a troll, though they'll get a glimpse of Sung's masterpiece first.

Optional Additional Feature

GMs who want to complicate things and throw in an additional problem -- which clever PCs or dramatic convention may turn into an advantage -- can add another feature to this site, thanks to Sung's habit of collecting Cool Stuff.

Specifically, the clearing may contain other structures. Most of these are small, but if the PCs investigate, one of them will prove to be a *big* pen. A very little more inspection will determine that this is occupied by something large, scaly, and toothy. The players, if not their characters, will recognize this as a dinosaur. One finds such things on lost tropical islands, if one looks hard enough.

See below for game details. It would take a great deal of determined PC ineptitude, or a particularly convoluted cunning plan, to release this creature immediately, but shrewd PCs may bear its existence in mind for later.

Entry and Encounters

Whether they knock on the door or sneak in, PCs will be greeted first by Igor, who is pretty typical of his kind -- except that he has implanted purple hair. (PCs who haven't met an Igor before might suffer a fright check.) He seems oddly pleased to see them.

"Ith about time. Have you got pitchthworks? No? No sense of tradition, thome people . . . "

He prefers not to talk about the hair, but if pressed, or if the conversation moves the right way, he may talk a very little about the mathter.

"He thase we all look alike to him, tho he hath to hath color- coding."

In truth, this is one of the many things that slightly annoy him about Sung (along with having to do virtually all the servant work around the house). He's a bit irritable, and planning to leave soon; he senses that this job is winding down.

Eventually, the PCs will meet the mathter, whether they break in and come face to face with him unexpectedly, or knock on the door and are invited in for tea. GMs should try and play this out without violence; if the PCs seem likely to stab first and talk later, some of the hired trolls might be around to deter them.

Soso Sung

Sung is Agatean, slim, with *very* androgynous good looks and a distinctive glossy black hair style; see below for his character sheet. He is evasive but polite -- except that he *will* always ask dwarfs what sex they are. If someone asks outright, he will admit (with a degree of polite circumlocution) that, yes, he does own that book. He will offer to sell it back for what he paid for it -- actually a fairly low price, \$400 (AM\$20) -- if *specifically* asked, "As I have now finished translating and transcribing the material." But he isn't giving up the content. (Whether the PCs regard this as a problem or not is presumably a matter for their consciences.) If anyone even hints that they might resort to violence, he will announce that "Your threats matter little. My masterwork is complete." He will not actually say what he wanted the book for, but if asked outright, he will offer to *demonstrate*.

(Well, he's going to anyway.)

The fact is, his main concern right now is to show off the wonderful machine which he's been building. The PCs are pretty sure to provoke him, one way or another. If they don't, well, the merchants in town have been overcharging him, and he has decided to take revenge.

("They think that I do not realize. Ha! Even an honorable aristocrat knows that five dollars for a cabbage is excessive. And not even a good cabbage. Well, now I will go and discuss the grocery bill, if you delivery boys will excuse me.")

The Rest of the Staff

Sung also has five trolls around the place, each with a different color of moss growing on his head; green, blue, orange-brown, black, and yellow-white. They are typical trolls -- see the character sheet below -- rendered especially stupid by the local heat and accustomed to jumping to Sung's orders. They're here primarily to provide a power source for Sung's great invention, but GMs can also use them for other purposes.

Sung's workshop is in that basement. The trolls will trek down there on command -- that is, when Sung decides to show off his creation.

The Mechanism in Action

Anyone in earshot at this point will hear a lot of clanging and bumping, and then a pause, and then a series of calls in deep trollish voices. Sung has the trolls well drilled, and they indicate readiness for action verbally:

"One arm troll, put it together!"

"Other one arm troll, put it together!"

"One leg troll, put it together!"

"Other one leg troll, put it together!"

"Troll inna middle, put it together!"

This will be followed by a lot more clanking and grinding. Then the cellar door will burst open, closely followed by the pagoda door (which will also lose its frame). Then Sung's machine will be on the rampage.

The Climactic Mindless Violence Scene

What Sung has built, based on the detailed drawings in Leonard's book, is nothing less than a five-troll-powered gigantic humanoid legged vehicle -- a walking statue. It's impressive in its way, though not without teething troubles. See below for the technical details. Sung himself rides in the head, steering it.

Sung will pursue anything in sight that has annoyed him recently, probably including the PCs, but he is *definitely* planning to head down and devastate Port Duck eventually. Fortunately, the design has a problem; putting five trolls together in a cramped metal box in tropical conditions gets very hot, very quickly -- hot enough for the trolls to stop working altogether. Hence, the mechanism will occasionally have to take breaks to cool down; Sung will try to steer it to the nearest river (or the sea) and make it lie down in some shallow part. After a few minutes, it will then be ready to return to the fray. (This will give it rust problems, of course, but not in time to help the PCs.) Exactly how often this heat problem kicks in is up to the GM; the best idea is probably to roll a few dice in secret, smile thoughtfully, and then apply dramatic license.

PCs can use tactics, ingenuity, brute force, or a dinosaur to stop Sung. (In the latter case, if the dinosaur wins -- rather than merely helping wear down the mechanism -- dealing with it afterwards is another question. But no PC would release a dinosaur without a plan to make it safe again later, to be sure.) Of course, it's also possible that they'll just run away -- but they're not going to get home very easily if Port Duck is stomped to splinters, so some kind of solution does seem required.

This should lead to a lot of running round the jungle, pursued by an inexorable if slow machine. Igor is likely to be around somewhere with a sack full of his possessions (and the odd valuable acquired in passing). He may make some

suggestions, such as using pitchforks. *"Ith traditional."*

The Wrap-Up

To come out of this ahead, the PCs will need to acquire the book, defeat Sung's machine, and get back to Port Duck intact. They probably won't be hailed as heroes there, but good self-presentation might accomplish something. Anyway, they can certainly use that letter (assuming that they haven't lost it) to get a trip home. They could even consider staying in the Brown Islands for a while, although it would be safest in that case to find a way to get the book safely back to the Patrician.

Major NPCs and Equipment

Soso Sung

ST 11; **DX** 13; **IQ** 15; **HT** 12

Speed 6.25, Move 6

Dodge 7, Parry 11

Advantages: Combat Reflexes; Composed (+2 to Fright Checks); Fashion Sense; Gadgeteer; Handsome ("Bishonen Look": +3 Reactions from both sexes); Hard to Kill +4; Literacy; Status 3; Very Wealthy.

Disadvantages: Broad-Minded; Curious; Obsession (building mecha); Reputation -3 (among Agatean aristocracy); Social Stigma (Overdressed Foreigner); Stubbornness; Xenophilia.

Quirks: Always polite, except when asking about a dwarf's sex; Assertively heterosexual (if anyone asks); Has a weird thing about color-coded hair; Subtly but intensely camp; Wears gold silk kimonos with red embroidery.

Skills: Abacus-15; Alchemy (Discworld)-12; Appreciate Beauty-14; Artist-14; Bow-10; Calligraphy-11; Detect Lies-12; Driving (Mecha)-11; Engineer (Low-Tech Mecha)-15; Fast-Draw (Katana)-15; Games (Shibo Yangcong-san)-13; Heraldry (Agatean)-14; Katana-15; Mathematics-13; Mechanic (Clockwork)-13; Mechanic (Primitive Machines)-13; Naturalist-13; Origami-13; Philosophy (Classical Agatean)-13; Research-15; Riding-11; Savoir-Faire-17; Tea Ceremony-13; Thaumatology-11.

Languages: Agatean-15 (native); Ankhian-15; Ephebean-14.

Notes: The "Bishonen Look" version of Handsome is described in *GURPS Mecha* (p. ME33); it indicates androgynous good looks which manage to be equally appealing to both sexes. If forced into personal combat, Sung uses a katana two-handed (p.CII26, or treat this as a fine bastard sword, and give him Two-Handed Sword-15), and he might sometimes wield a composite bow (actually a *daikyu*, for Japanese weapon fans).

Igor

ST 11 (13 in right arm); **DX** 11; **IQ** 13; **HT** 12/14

Speed 5.75, Move 7

Dodge 5, Parry 5

Advantages: Composed (+2 Fright Checks); Literacy; Modified Arm ST (+2, right arm only); Night Vision, Patchwork Man; Toughness (DR 1).

Disadvantages: Broad-Minded; Disturbing Voice; Hunchback; Sense of Duty (to employer, until things fall apart); Ugly; Unnatural Feature (purple hair).

Quirks: Waiting somewhat impatiently for mathter to be overthrown.

Skills: Axe/Mace-11; Architecture-11; Blacksmith-12; Carpentry-12; Mechanic (Clockwork)-13; Mechanic (Primitive Machinery)- 13; Running-10; Savoir-Faire (Servant)-14; Scrounging-13; Stealth-13; Weird Surgery-13.

Languages: Uberwaldian-13 (native); Agatean-11; Ankhian- 12.

Notes: If forced to fight, Igor hefts a hammer with his stronger arm.

The Hired Trolls (Rented Rubble)

ST 25; **DX** 10; **IQ** 8*; **HT** 14/18

*But currently with severe temperature problems.

Speed 6, Move 4.

Dodge 6.

Advantages: Sedimentary Troll; Disease-Resistant; Fearlessness +5; High Pain Threshold; Night Vision; Strong Will +1.

Disadvantages: Illiterate; Intolerance (dwarfs); Odious Personal Habit (Hitting People With Rocks: -1 reactions); Status -1; Struggling; Troll Brain; Ugly.

Skills: Brawling-11; Two-Handed Axe/Mace-10.

Languages: Ankhian-8.

PD 1, DR 4 (6 vs. crushing).

Notes: If they fight in person, the trolls will usually simply punch opponents.

The Mechanism

This is the sort of thing that happens when people get hold of more technology than is good for them, expressed in **GURPS Vehicles** terms. It takes the form of a 24' tall humanoid figure, with enough room in the head for a human operator, enough in the torso for three trolls all pedaling and cranking furiously, and enough in the legs for another hard-working troll each. The rest of the interior is taken up with chains, wires, cables, gears, drive rods, and cogwheels.

Subassemblies: Body +3, Turret (head: limited rotation) +1, two Arms +2, two Legs +2.

Power & Propulsion: Five 0.5 kW Muscle Engines (each require ST 25) w/2-kW legged drivetrain.

Occupancy: 1 NCS [Tur], 3 TCCS [Bo], 2 TCCS [Leg]

Armor: 3/10 (all)

Equipment

Arms: Arm motors, bad grip, ST 50.

Statistics

Size: 24'x11'x9' **Payload:** 2,700 lbs. **Lwt.:** 18,310 lbs.

Volume: 432.8 cf **SizeMod:** +4 **Price:** \$141,586 (AM\$7,079.30)

HT: 12

HP: 612 [Body] 174 [Tur] 354 [Arm] 309 [Leg]

Design Notes

As it's the creation of two Discworld technological geniuses, the tech level of this contraption is more or less indefinable. It has a TL5 Heavy frame, metal armor, and mechanical controls, the muscle engines are TL4, and the arm motors and legged drivetrain use the rules for TL(5+1) technology from **GURPS Steampunk** (p.STM72). Cramped Crew Stations for trolls (abbreviated TCCS) are 60 cf, 60 lbs., and \$200, while the trolls themselves are assumed to weigh 500 lbs. each.

For most purposes, this "vehicle" can be treated as a ST 50 creature with a Move of

gSpeed: 4 *gAccel*: 2 *gDecel*: 20 *gMR*: 1.5 *gSR*: 1
Low Ground Pressure, Off-Road Speed: 3.

Captive Tyrannosaurus

ST: 100, **DX**: 14, **IQ**: 3, **HT**: 15/50

Speed: 7.25, **Move**: 17

Size: 13

Dodge 7, **PD** 2, **DR** 3

Attacks: Bite for 5d+2 imp (reach C,1,2)

2 and the same Basic Speed as its driver. It can punch for 5d+2 cr damage, and has PD 3, DR 10. Use the operator's Driving (Mecha) skill in most cases when a roll is required; the arms have the equivalent of the Bad Grip disadvantage, giving a -4 penalty on many tasks including weapons use (but not punching).

This is a cinematic carnivorous dinosaur, more stop-motion than CGI. (Details are borrowed from *GURPS Dinosaurs*.) It's hungry, aggressive, and dumb as a rock; its redeeming feature is an active willingness to pick on things approximately its own size. It's about 30' long, including its tail, and weighs four tons. It's also an effective predator; all its sense rolls are 14. It does have a certain instinctive talent for tactics, and will use speed and agility against a lumbering mechanical opponent, running rings around it, jumping on its back, and using retreating dodges.

Master Twillik's Academy

An Adventure for the *Dying Earth* RPG

by Matt Riggsby

In addition to monsters, potent curses, and wily rogues, the *Dying Earth* contains a most ancient horror: secondary education. This adventure, which pits PCs against the faculty, staff, and students of a remote boarding school on a search for a legendary magical plant, is suitable for a group of Cugel-level characters.

Back To School

The PCs, who are certainly desperate rogues, acquire certain knowledge that an important item awaits them undisturbed at the ruins of a hilltop castle, the manse of Trael the Fat (a famously wealthy and gluttonous aristocrat), in the wilderness a week's travel from wherever they are now. Perhaps they are compelled to retrieve it by a magician they have offended. Perhaps they simply lost a bet. Whatever the reason, the item in question is a specimen of the garentum, an herb brought to Earth aeons ago from Alpheratz. The garentum exudes a healing sap, and it can be coaxed into forming lovely blossoms of enormous value. The garentum is said to await them rooted in the Well of the Blue Lady, which may be found on the castle grounds.

The trip is difficult; pelgranes and grues infest the woods, but safe lodging may be found at villages along the way. When they arrive at Trael's castle, however, they find it occupied. Instead of an overgrown ruin, the manse is in good repair and a large, well-painted sign over the gate reads "Master Twillik's Academy of the Naophian Quadrivium." The PCs' information is out of date; Master Twillik's grand-uncle established his school here over 60 years ago. Fortunately for them, if they decide to pursue their quest, there's a "Help wanted" notice pinned next to the main gate. Even if they don't want to pursue the treasure, they may want to rest and regroup for a while before heading back, and a few days of light labor might be just the thing.

As the PCs enter the gates, they will be given cursory questioning by Moch Haddox, the gardener, who also acts as an unofficial gatekeeper. Moch doesn't actually care what the PCs have to say for themselves and will, if asked, briefly answer any questions they may have. The school is in need of gardeners, and an assistant or two to the cook, nurse, and housekeeper. If they express any interest in specific positions, he'll direct them to an appropriate staff member (see Faculty and Students below). The school is desperate for staff, and so long as they don't appear immediately dangerous, the PCs will get the jobs.

The PCs will quickly gather that the Academy is a boarding school for children of wealthy parents. The old manse constitutes the core of the campus, but it has been repaired and extended considerably. The campus consists of a number of semi-detached buildings forming a complete enclosure around a courtyard; some are remnants of Trael's old stronghold, others fill in gaps along the line of the old curtain wall. From the north, going clockwise, the buildings include:

- **The Old Tower:** A five-story circular tower, containing individual rooms for the teachers and apartments and offices for Master Twillik and his assistant.
- **Long Hall:** A long two-story building. The lower floor is a large assembly hall set with long tables and benches, used for meals and presentations to the student body. The upper floor contains seven classrooms of varying sizes and a long, narrow room used as a studio for dance instruction. Long Hall is connected by sheltered walkways to Old Tower on one side and the refectory on the other.
- **Refectory:** This squat brick building contains the kitchen and a large cellar for storage.
- **Girls' Dormitory:** A round three-story structure built on the foundations of a long-destroyed tower, with a square addition protruding into the courtyard. Accommodations range from two large rooms on the ground floor sleeping 12 girls each to several small rooms on the top floor shared by two girls each. Older girls are assigned

to the smaller rooms, gaining a bit of privacy, if not any more actual space to themselves. The addition contains a large shared laboratory and an office for the Dean of Girls.

- **Stable:** An aging wooden structure, the stable and carriage house stands empty most of the time, but it is kept in readiness for the occasional notable visitor. PCs will be given accommodation here.
- **Library:** The library is an octagonal structure made from a now-decaying marble, once a shrine to an unknown deity and now converted to use as a repository of knowledge.
- **Gymnasium:** A long, narrow building crossing the line of the old curtain wall at an odd angle, protruding well away from the main campus. The gymnasium is divided into boys' and girls' sides, with large lockers containing appropriate to each side.
- **Short Hall:** Originally a cluster of small buildings which, through construction of new walls, has become a single structure. Short Hall contains nine more classrooms.
- **Boys' Dormitory:** A relatively new (and somewhat ramshackle) construction of wood and brick, the boys' dormitory repeats the girls' dormitory's pattern of large common rooms at the bottom and small, semi-private rooms at the top.

Outside the campus proper are a small garden shed (close to Short Hall) and a wide, deep crater used as a diving pool (near the refectory). The courtyard contains two wells, one of which is dry.

Although the wilderness around the school is hazardous, the campus itself is rather safe. Training with arms is part of the curriculum, and while individual students may be unskilled, they are together enough to intimidate the boldest individual monster.

The curriculum is the Naophian Quadrivium, a set of four subjects (each named for a primal nymph) including:

- **Physical culture (Ghazena):** Dance and callisthenics for all students, plus stilt-racing and archery for girls and fencing and diving for boys.
- **Geometering (Moana):** Arithmetic and geometry. Students draw a great many graphs and figures.
- **Poesey (Lametta):** Poetry, drama, and music.
- **Spiritual culture (Parsene):** Prayers and general moral instruction. Historical figures are often held up as exemplars of moral or immoral behavior.

In time, it will become clear that few of the students and faculty enjoy being at the academy. The students would rather be in their more exciting home cities than this tedious school. Being bored, they get up to mischief when not closely watched. PCs will find themselves subjected to disdain, practical jokes, and even, if they are attractive enough, naïve but dangerous flirtations from more precocious students. The faculty, knowing the difficulty of finding a paying job, are a bit more resigned to their lot. However, because they don't have wealthy parents sending armed carriage caravans for them over summer holidays, they nevertheless feel a bit trapped in their current position, and several would happily leave if they knew they could do so safely.

Faculty and Students

All told, there are about 150 people in residence at the Academy. They include:

- **Master Twillik (Intimidating 1.25~, Lawerly 1.5~):** Short, bald, officious, prickly, and precise, Twillik is the unquestioned master of the school. Except for Marzetta and perhaps Perulo, Twillik has no favorites and doesn't socialize outside of official functions, which is difficult in such a small community. He enjoys terrorizing the staff and students, pointing out small infractions in dress and deportment.
- **Marzetta, Master Twillik's secretary (Wary~, Ferocity 1.5~, Dodge 1.25~, Health 9):** Marzetta is pretty with her smooth, pale skin, violet eyes, and cap of short, black hair, but she is cold and distrustful of everyone but her master. A similarity of facial features suggests that they are related. Which they are, in a peculiar way. Far from being human, Marzetta is an unnatural hybrid of kree (a vicious lizard found far to the south) and Twillik's own flesh. Periodically, Marzetta sheds her skin and must consume a considerable quantity of human flesh and blood to regrow it.
- **Doctor Perulo, Dean of Boys (Obfuscatory 5, Lawerly 8):** A more boring man could hardly be imagined. If

one lets him, Perulo will go on for hours about obscure points of history and poetic structure in a droning monotone. Perulo is primarily responsible for the education and activities of the male students, but he also functions as head of the school during Twillik's rare absences.

- **Dame Selle, Dean of Girls (Eloquent 6, Penetrating 8):** Selle is head of girls' studies as Perulo is head of the boys, and quite possibly the best-read member of the faculty. Despite her prominent position, she feels ill-treated by Twillik and believe she, not Perulo, should be his right hand. Selle is reasonably pleasant if treated with respect, but has a sharp temper.
- **Maggo, the cook (Forthright 5, Contrary 7):** A ruddy, beefy man, shrewd Maggo keeps his eye on the account books. As a result, food at the Academy is served in sufficient quantities to keep one perfectly healthy, but no more. Maggo also takes a hard line against after-hours snackers. As a result, there's a strong student black market in small treats, and how best to raid the pantry is a frequent topic of discussion in the dormitories.
- **Illite, the housekeeper (Forthright 4, Pure-Hearted 4):** Illite is a small, quiet, pleasant woman charged with washing, sweeping, and all other aspects of taking care of the inside of the school which don't require heavy lifting (for hard work, the gardeners are called in under her supervision). She's a surrogate mother for many of the children, listening to their problems and offering well-meant advice.
- **Taulia, the nurse (Charming 5, Obtuse 3):** If Illite is a surrogate mother, big, blowsy Taulia is a surrogate favorite aunt. Taulia is loud but friendly; she is funny but hasn't a thought in her head. When she isn't telling silly little jokes, she's singing. Fortunately, she's got a passable voice.
- **Moch Haddox, the gardener (Forthright 6, Contrary 6):** Moch Haddox just wants to take care of the plants. He ignores both faculty and students as much as possible. He doesn't hate them (although he doesn't particularly trust them either); he just thinks they're more trouble than they're worth.
- **Botu-tsan, the librarian (Obfuscatory 6, Obtuse 1.5~):** Botu-tsan is very old, very slow, and very protective of his library. He is only seen away from the library at meals, and by the same token none are allowed past the gate to the stacks.
- **Teachers:** There are 16 teachers, four for each part of the quadrivium. Persuade styles are largely Eloquent or Obfuscatory, whereas rebuff styles are mostly Lawerly, with scores in the 4 to 8 range. Most have combat skills of no more than 2, save the resident swordmaster with a Speed or Finesse of 10.
- **Students:** There are 122 students, equally divided between boys and girls, ranging in age from 13 to 18. Their backgrounds range from mercantile middle class to venerable aristocracy, but all come from money. Otherwise, they are typical youngsters. Rebuff and Persuade scores cover the full range of possibilities with scores ranging from 2 to 8. If it matters, boys' attack styles are Speed, Finesse, or Caution; girls should only have Caution, but a few may provide surprises. At any rate, scores will be no higher than 4. In terms of personality, the students tend to take after their parents, who are often arrogant aristocrats. However, there will be a sprinkling of dutiful toilers, hellions, sensitive poets-to-be, religious zealots, flirts, dullards and so forth.

Hitting the Books

Wise PCs will pursue the fabled garentum carefully instead of attempting to dismantle the Academy while classes are in session. If they ask around, it will quickly become apparent that none of the students or staff have ever heard of the Well of the Blue Lady or the garentum. Finding the garentum will be a desperately difficult task.

The library may immediately suggest itself as a source of information, but there are considerable difficulties to using it. It is divided into two uneven parts: the open library and the stacks. The open library contains general reference works, a peculiar smattering of other books (ranging from technical works on phrenology to humorous poems in languages not spoken at the Academy), and an index to the stacks. Anyone may read books in the open library, but they may not be removed by students. No one, though, may enter the stacks but Botu-tsan and Twillik himself (Botu-tsan has firmly resisted efforts to appoint an assistant). Anyone wanting a book from the stacks must look it up in the index and present its index designation on a slip signed by a teacher to Botu-tsan, who sits at the gate dividing the libraries through the day. Botu-tsan then moves his creaky bones up and down the aisles, fetching the required books. The stacks are indexed according to a system only Botu-tsan understands. The shelves are supposed to be labeled according to his scheme, but he is lax in updating the labels.

Researching botany is unlikely to get them anywhere. If they can search the open library, they will find a book on the

Star of Alpheratz, a light-loving flowering plant of purely terrestrial origin, which is easily distinguished by its spade-shaped leaves and an unfortunate stench. No such plants are to be found on campus. If asked about plants from Alpheratz, Moch Haddox will mention the Star of Alpheratz but will not know where any may be found. But the question is academic; the Star of Alpheratz is, unfortunately, a purely terrestrial plant.

Researching the history of the castle may be a bit more fruitful, but difficult. Most of the students will deny any knowledge, although a few will indicate that one habitual troublemaker had recently complained of being assigned an essay on Trael the Fat as a punishment. Once identified, the student (Contrary 6) will initially deny the assignment but will eventually own up. He will remember little, save that Trael claimed to be born miraculously of four divine mothers (Ghazena, Moana, Lametta, and Parsene, as it happens). However, it was some months ago, and he threw the book he used for research into the latrine to protest his treatment. Characters desperate enough to track down the essay will find it, unread, among the papers of the teacher for whom it was written. The essay describes bloodier portions of Trael's career, including having enemies roasted and served at gala feasts and his employment of a fierce monster locked in the dungeons under the castle's storerooms. Characters who brave the latrine will eventually find the book with some parts still legible. They should be rewarded with the same information, with the additional item that the "monster" was from another world as well as the tale of a siege of the castle in which Trael and his followers defended the keep for a month before aid arrived.

Research into Alpheratz will prove extremely difficult. One or two of the teachers may be able to describe the location of the star in the sky and its position in certain constellations, but no more. The library index contains a book on Alpheratz. However, it's in the stacks, and since the PCs are neither teachers nor students, Botu-tsan won't fetch them books. They must either convince a student to get it for them or break into the stacks to find it themselves. Should they find the book, it will tell them nothing about the garentum itself. Rather, it details the feudal society of Alpheratz. Of notable interest is a section where it discusses the gem-like flowers borne by the stony Alpheratz vegetation and the ranks of the warrior-gardener caste who guard the precious gardens.

In the course of their research and veiled interrogation, the PCs are likely to stumble across all manner of rumors. They should hear several of the rumors here (the truth behind them is for the GM alone):

- *There is a treasure hidden somewhere in the school.* This is true (from the PCs point of view), but no two people will agree on where it is: the garden, the assembly hall, the potato bin, etc.
- *Arillio, the swordmaster, is a drunkard who regularly breaks into the school's small wine cellar.* This is mostly true; he only starts drinking once classes are done for the day, and he only *occasionally* breaks into the wine cellar.
- *Mistress Laepanna, an arithmetic teacher, is having a covert, improper affair with Doctor Perulo.* This is true. By way of keeping her options open, she is also having an affair with Maggo, who is in turn consorting with Dame Selle. Before taking up with Laepanna, Maggo had a liason with Mistress Phaerati, a teacher of poetry. There is little to keep one entertained at the Academy.
- *Moch Haddox is the true master of the school, a reclusive, eccentric wizard; Master Twillik is a magical automaton he uses as a puppet.* False, but a near miss.
- *Master Twillik keeps his school filled by blackmailing certain wealthy parents of Kaiin into sending their own children and persuading the parents of others to do the same.* This may very well be true, and could be an interesting side-issue.
- *There is a ghost who walks through the classrooms at night, moaning faintly.* False. Taulia is sometimes afflicted with a toothache and, unable to sleep, walks about where she thinks she is unlikely to be seen and unlikely to disturb anyone. She may have been seen from a distance in the dark and, clad in a flowing nightgown and cap, been mistaken for a spirit.
- *A tribe of grues lurks in the wilderness, picking off the unwary and plotting a massive attack on the school.* Largely false. There are grues in the woods, but they're incapable of organizing.
- *The Reverened Mistress Vanax, a spiritual culture instructor, subscribes to a different cult from Dame Selle and wishes to displace her.* This is true, and the feelings are mutual; she was hired by Twillik and Perulo over Selle's objections.
- *One of the students (the person repeating the rumor will point one out) is actually the illegitimate child of the housekeeper and a minor nobleman of Almerly; this is the only way the child can be close to the mother, and*

- tragically the student doesn't know about it.* There is such a student, but he has probably been misidentified.
- *There's a monster in the potato bin.* This rumor will be revealed with a smirk; sufficient persuasion will reveal that this is a school legend. An amorous boy will warn his intended that she needs protection from the monster in the potato bin and will attempt to whisk her away to a suitably "safe" corner.

A Closer Examination

Sooner or later, the PCs are likely to undertake a closer physical examination of the Academy campus. What they find depends on how hard they look.

The grounds feature two wells (one working, one dry) as well as the diving pool. A third well may quickly be found in Short Hall, preserved as the base of a small indoor shrine. If the PCs manage to dig through the muck at the bottom of the wells, they'll find colored marble statues of women: one yellow, one green, and one red. A clever character may realize that there may be yet another well covered by renovations. Particularly clever characters may realize that there is no known well in the keep, which would be the part of the castle most in need of an independent water supply.

A random search of the tower might lead them behind the well-locked door of Twillik's chambers to his private study. There they will find a well-stocked magical laboratory with several vats, each containing an immature variation of the Marzetta hybrid. Twillik will fly into a rage if his study is breached, but sticky-fingered PCs may find a number of magical adjuncts in his cabinets.

There is, in fact, a monster in the potato bin. A bit of investigation will reveal that, under several hundred pounds of potatoes, is a wood plank floor which will sound hollow if knocked. Under the floor is an ancient chamber containing two square stone slabs, each about two feet high and seven feet on each side. Pressed between them is a peculiar figure whose head, feet, and hands protrude from the sides. This is Gixgix (Forthright 5, Wary 7; his combat ratings are Cunning 9, Intuition 9 as soon as he's up to it), one of the fabled warrior-gardeners of Alpheratz. Between his elastic construction and the relatively nourishing air of Earth, he has survived here for an untold period of time.

Though fierce in appearance and initially suspicious, Gixgix is not hostile by nature. He is willing to discuss the matter of the garentum if the PCs undertake to release him. It will take some force, but the application of a few prybars, which may be found in the garden shed, can lift the upper slab enough for someone to pull him out. He will be too stretched out to move much on his own power, but if left to rest for a few days, he'll pull himself together.

Gixgix's story is this: he came to Earth to tend a garentum, given as a gift to an Earthly ruler by a mandarin of Alpheratz. He followed the plant as it passed from father to son for several generations until it was seized, along with the gardener himself, by Trael. Because Trael had taken the garentum contrary to the sacred conventions of Alpheratz warfare, Gixgix refused to reveal the secrets of making its gem-flowers bloom. Trael had him imprisoned in a small storeroom. Gixgix doesn't know how long he remained a prisoner (he spent most of the time asleep), but more recently, although still some years ago, someone else came to demand the secret of blooming the gem-flowers. Gixgix, who doesn't grasp Earthly lifespans, believes that it was an agent of Trael, but from his description it will be clear that the person in question is Twillik. Twillik has returned several times with tortures he hoped would coax Gixgix to reveal his secrets, but he did so in vain; Twillik's grasp of the biology and sensibilities of Alpheratz are as weak as Gixgix's grasp of Earthly matters. Finally, if he hasn't mentioned it yet, Gixgix will mention that the garentum grows in a well in the tower. It will resemble a thick vein of black rock more than an Earthly plant.

If they follow Gixgix's instructions, or if they decide to explore the tower on their own, they may discover the missing fourth well, hidden underneath more floorboards. The well is both wide (more than a man's height) and deep. If they climb down to the muddy bottom, they'll find a statue of a woman made from blue marble. If they haven't spoken to Gixgix, they may not notice the 12-foot-tall veins of black stone running along the inside of the well or realize their significance.

Unforeseen Perils

Tearing around the school during the day will be difficult. PCs will be expected to attend to their duties during daylight hours. Their masters will burden them with endless responsibilities, and they must contend with a horde of students who are used to taking their resentments out on those who they see as beneath them. It goes without saying that any actual assault or even overt threat on any of the children will result in immediate dismissal at best, and possibly the ongoing enmity of a parent. PCs working in the kitchen are in an advantageous position to obtain delicacies with which to bribe students, but will run afoul of the tyrannical Maggo if he finds out.

Once night falls, the school is full of covert activity: Doctor Perulo, Laepanna, Maggo, and Dame Selle may be found creeping about pursuing various liasons; Mistress Vanax might do the same in hopes of catching Dame Selle in rumored mischief; Arillio could be making another attempt on the wine cellar; Taulia might be suffering the effects of her toothache; and Marzetta may be on the prowl again. Marzetta is a particular danger to the PCs, since she and Twillik will regard them as expendable. Further complications are also possible. Any of the teachers may be afflicted with insomnia or sonambulism, and students might leave their dormitories for assaults on the pantry, innocent but amorous liasons, or practical jokes.

Graduation

Assuming the PCs find the garentum before they are turned out for poor job performance, eaten by Marzetta, or forced to flee a scandal, they must figure out how to get it out of the school. Through great effort, the PCs may be able to detach the stony plant from the walls of the well, dig up its fortunately shallow roots, and maneuver it out of the well. Doing so without Twillik learning of it, however, will be extremely difficult. If he learns of their efforts, he will have them ejected from the school forthwith and may covertly send Marzetta and her less developed sisters to attack them. Particularly clever PCs may think to ask Gixgix about the possibility of taking cuttings so that they don't have to take the entire plant with them. Gixgix may be persuaded to help them, but he will only do so if the PCs agree to undertake certain ritual procedures, and the transplanting will require substances which are in short supply around the campus.

With Special Guest Star X!

by Brian Rogers

Occasionally guests turn up unannounced. The heroes are in the middle of tracking down the weapons Lord Crustacean stole last week before his nefarious plan can come to fruition when Dr. Eerie's astral form crashes into their base begging for help. Suddenly their current concerns have to take a back seat as they help their friend find his stolen physical form. At other times the PIs have to leave their usual city of operation to track a killer onto someone else's turf. Now they're in a different city, where the law may be the same but the rules are a little different and the local maverick cops probably feel they have better things to do than help out the gawking rubes.

Most superhero comics take place in shared worlds, where each hero has his own book with its own discrete plots. Sometimes characters leap from book to book. These events are team-ups, and they are a main reason why comic books universes feel so wonderfully active and alive.

*"For those more familiar with conventional literature, try to imagine Dr. Frankenstein kidnapping one of the protagonists of **Little Women** for his medical experiments, only to find himself subject to the scrutiny of a team-up between Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot."*

--Alan Moore

Of course, this isn't entirely limited to comics: television shows are another media that can support shared worlds with the potential for overlap, and all of us are familiar with the concept in real life. Only people with a solipsistic worldview expect everything that happens to center on them. Thus while classic crossovers are best described using the example of superhero comics, a clever GM uses it anywhere to strengthen the sense that the game world is a real and active place. Foolish crossovers are needless distractions or part of an endless morass that prevents the series from developing any momentum.

Still, quirky and distracting as they are, they can be a great deal of fun.

"It's my third issue: time for an obligatory guest star!"

--She Hulk, cover of *She-Hulk* volume 2 #3.

The most common team-up is the appearance of another hero or group into the PCs' lives. These people turn up in the heroes' backyard, dragging their own plotlines and problems behind them. These have a standard structure, almost a buddy cop movie on fast forward:

1. The heroes are doing whatever they normally do when the visitor does something to attract their attention, from performing an apparent crime on their turf to trying to arrest them.
2. There is an obligatory misunderstanding which leads to a conflict between the heroes and the visitor. The heroes have the upper hand when this misunderstanding is cleared up.
3. The visitor explains what brought them into the heroes' backyard; this is always something with a certain degree of time pressure. The heroes, no matter how little they care for the visitor's ethics, tactics, origin story, color scheme, etc. feel obligated to acknowledge the old school tie and lend a hand.
4. The visitor works with the heroes to vanquish his foe or otherwise resolve his problem. If the visitor is a visiting team, the situation calls for the teams to split up into two groups: half local heroes, half visitors.
5. The visitor departs with the heroes having formed a close friendship, or at least a grudging respect. The heroes are then free to return to their own plots, but they may have made the visitor's adversary their own.

In the world of comic book publishing, these crossovers are 75% financial and only 25% plot. That three-quarters financial incentive serves as advertising for a title -- a first issue sells well because it's labeled "Issue #1," the second issue sales start to drop and then there's issue three, in which a big name superhero turns up appearing prominently on the cover. The hope is that fans of Omniman will pick up this untested "Amazing Men" title just to see Omniman and will get hooked on the new series. (This is also used on established series whenever flagging sales have ushered in a

[new creative team](#).) The remaining one-quarter is actually plot-related, cementing the book into the larger world, showing how the heroes interact with it, and perhaps laying threads for a the book's main story arc.

A GM can use these sorts of crossovers in the same way. In the first gaming session the heroes and their campaign are new and untested -- they're still learning how to [interact with one another](#). By the end of the second session the players and GM probably have the team dynamics hashed out to a workable level. That means it's time to see how the heroes interact with the larger world. Enter the crossover hero.

"This must be some kind of team up . . . so I guess I should lead off with the obligatory misunderstanding!"
--Valor, *Ambush Bug Nothing Special* #1

For some players just getting to meet the crossover hero a real thrill: shaking hands with Superman, trading quips with Spider-Man, and hearing their childhood icons say "you've got the right stuff" can really make a player's day. For these players, the point of the crossover is the second half, where they work together and part as allies in the good fight.

Other players aren't that sentimental. They want to know that their hero is just as good, tough, and powerful as any other, if not more so. For these players, the point of the crossover is the first half -- the one where they were kicking Wolverine's butt before someone worse popped up and they were forced to work together. Such players take joy in the fact that their PC's names on the cover means that they "win" the obligatory misunderstanding. While not immutable, the "it's your book/he's an NPC," concept puts you ahead of the game. This makes sense on a tactical level (you have the home court advantage) and on the marketing level (the new heroes have to look cool enough for readers to keep buying the book).

Finally, there are the players for whom the point of the crossover isn't the beginning or the end, but the middle: a chance to pump the visiting hero for information. These will be more common in supers worlds with conspiracies, secret histories, or other strangeness, or in games set in worlds where the players simply don't know the world yet. The visitor acts as an infodump, explaining to the players things that their PCs might already know ("I haven't seen anything this bad since earth was invaded by the Centauri-Plasm in '93." "Earth was invaded?" "It was in all the papers . . .") or things that they wouldn't. ("Do you really want to know [why](#) you have super powers?")

In any case, the GM should judge his players and pick the visitor accordingly: since this is the first contact the players have to the larger campaign, give them what they want. The GM's goal in a crossover is the same as the publishers -- keep the audience's interest. The players should finish the session more engaged in the game for having had a taste of the wider world.

"But defending a planet and cleaning up a city are two very different things . . . Gotham city isn't your turf. It requires a different approach."
--Batman to Superman, *Man of Steel* #3

Of course, sometimes the heroes will be the ones crossing over into someone else's adventures. This generally happens when events take the PCs on the road, where their concerns are suddenly in someone else's city. In general, this plays out exactly the same way as when a visitor comes into the PC's town, but the positions are reversed. Unlike the Third Issue Team-Up, these generally happen once the heroes have established themselves as being part of the greater universe. Another classic in this sense is the team crossover where the action starts in one title and concludes in the other. Both sides get a chance to shine fighting either a long-planned or totally improbable combination of their adversaries.

One thing to keep in mind on a meta-plot level is that in this sort of a team-up the PCs are appearing in the resident heroes' story. They are the visitors and the underlying theme and tone of the resident book can be quite different from their own. They should expect to be at a momentary disadvantage to the resident hero when the obligatory misunderstanding is resolved, but they may also receive a feeling of hero worship if the resident hero is young and experienced. In some ways being the visitors in a crossover brings a sense that the heroes have arrived. They're "It" now, either as the flavor of the month or as the continuity's new core series.

"Y'see, I was minding my own business when I, uh, sort of got shot into orbit. I would have been one way-out wallcrawler if you hadn't come along and zapped me back -- home? Holy Cow! I'm on the Moon!"
Spider-Man to Adam Warlock, *Marvel Team-Up* #55

Team-ups are usually special events, but for some heroes they're regular occurrences. Both of the major publishers have books dedicated to the concept of team-ups. In these, one of their popular characters teams up with a new or less popular hero every month, taking the idea of sales boosting crossovers to a whole new level. If Omniman is the hero of "Super Two-For-One," Omniman fans will pick it up every month and constantly see heroes from the publisher's other books. Maybe this will boost sales in the other books, maybe not, but it does keep characters visible. Some of these visitors have had their books canceled, and putting them in team ups keeps them under copyright and in the public eye. If their appearance in the team-up book does well, maybe they're ready for another shot at a title. And the central character? Well, he tends to get around a lot

So how could you use this as a campaign style?

If you have group that consists of a single reliable player and a group of not-so-reliable ones, have that player's hero be the star of a team-up title. Everyone else plays other new or returning heroes whenever they can attend. The core hero will quickly become a nexus point for the campaign world, and might do well to have some points in Contacts: Heroic Community and Weirdness Magnet to both explain and his exploit his having partnered with every other heroic type out there.

More common is the group that has a core of reliable players and one or two people who can only attend intermittently. This is a good group structure for modeling the adventures of a contract hero group such as private investigators, a team of mercenary do-gooders, or other agents moving from case to case. The core player group makes up the agency and the intermittent players are the special guest stars. Sometimes the agency won't have another heroic type as their client or contact (when none of the intermittent players turn up) but in most cases they'll have a revolving cast of other adventurous types pulling them into new scenarios.

Sometimes you have a stable player group, but one player just likes making new characters. While this can be a pain if you aren't prepared for it -- as soon as you structure a neat subplot around Mr. A, player becomes more interested in his new hero, Bee-Man -- it makes a great way to set up a team-up title. Just let your new-character-happy player go nuts, setting up one- or two-session plots that have some connection to his new character. Once the plot that started with Bee-Man's appearance finishes he flies off into the sunset. Next month, however, our core heroes meet Captain Sea in a battle against modern pirates. So it goes.

Such a team-up structure is a good way to balance screen time between the core players and the ones who can only make it once in a while: the core heroes are the focus of any advancing subplots, but the visitors are the focus of the team-up adventure. This keeps them from getting marginalized by the characters whose players are there every week, but their lack of any ongoing sub-plots prevents them from dominating the game themselves.

Of course, constantly developing the guest stars and their attendant plotlines can be a drain on even the most interested GM. One way to handle this is to harness the enthusiasm of the players: as stated above, some players just like developing new heroes. Such heroes will probably have their own hunters and dependants, and probably something of a backstory. The GM can just take that backstory and use it as inspiration for this session's plot. This partial ceding of world generation over to the players can be a good way to cultivate players into trying their hand as GM (they produce an idea, you show them one way it could be done) and it would certainly develop more interesting visitors for the team-ups.

Such player-generated team-up heroes has a synergistic effect with the regular team-up outcome of cementing the heroes in the larger world: by letting your players develop backstories for their visiting heroes, they take over some aspects of campaign creation. Once they've turned up in the game their history, enemies and plots are now a part of the game world, which can produce anything from a single wandering fugitive hero to a member of an international superspy organization fighting the mixed offspring of Moriarty and Fu Manchu (who all wear silly uniforms) to a member of an intergalactic super-team who just happened to be stopping by. Depending on how this backstory is received by the core players you can pick up on it again later or not. One of the joys of the comic book shared universe

is that only the parts that the creative team like filter from book to book.

Usually in the third issue.

Magic on the Cheap

Very Minor Permanent Items For *d20 System* Fantasy Games

by Owen K.C. Stephens

The *d20 System* assumes a specific level of magic is available in typical fantasy game. The balance of character classes to one another, as well as the ability of characters to handle encounters of their level, is dependent on close to this level of magic actually being in play. If character have significantly too much magic, encounters become too easy. If they don't have enough, not only are encounters difficult, many characters find themselves useless in certain encounters.

The core rules provide a table showing how much money in goods and coin a character should have at each level. GMs sometimes run into trouble at low levels, however, because it's difficult to give characters the right amount of treasure without either giving them numerous one-shot magics (scrolls and potions), or throwing in a single valuable permanent item the party can't divide evenly. There aren't that many cheap, permanent items, and once everyone has masterwork weapons and equipment, there's a gap before they can afford useful permanent items.

While there's nothing wrong with some one-shot items, they don't really build a character's total wealth in the long run. Once a one-shot item is used, the character has lost all its value. Minor magic items, however, can be sold for half their value, allowing a character to recoup half their cost when buying a more expensive and useful item. By giving characters minor magic items more regularly, a GM can more easily keep them in the appropriate treasure range, without handing out a major hoard each time characters go up a level. Such treasures also spice up low-level play, allowing characters to have new and unique items earlier in game play. They can also be made available to low- and mid- level characters who have taken item creation feats, but cannot afford the exp and monetary costs of more major items, and may not meet more obscure creation prerequisites.

For purposes of this article, cheap magic items are those priced at less than 2,000 gp, with a focus on those priced at 1,250 gp or less. Items with many charges (20 or more) are included despite not being "permanent," as they can be used much more often, and are likely to have charges (and thus value) left by the time a character wants to trade them in for better equipment. Many of the items presented below are useful even to high level characters, though often only in limited circumstances. For low-level characters, the bonuses granted by these items can have a real benefit, on par or better than with masterwork equipment, if not as good as more expensive magic items.

Greater Mastercraft

Though not technically magic, greater mastercraft items can make excellent low-level treasure. Greater mastercraft items are like masterwork, but even more so. Whatever benefit (generally a bonus or reduction in a penalty) a masterwork item gives, a greater mastercraft items has double that benefit. Greater mastercraft items cost as much as an average item, plus four times what it costs to make that item masterwork.

Thus a greater mastercraft weapon grants a +2 enhancement bonus to attack rolls, but none to damage, and costs 1,200 gp more than an average weapon. A greater mastercraft set of artisan's tool grant a +4 circumstance bonus to appropriate Craft checks, and cost 205 gp. Only items which have masterwork versions have greater mastercraft versions.

Greater mastercraft armor is an exception to the normal rule. Instead of giving double the bonus of masterwork armor, it increases an armor's maximum Dex bonus by +1 in addition to the normal masterwork bonus (lowering the armor check penalty by 1). Greater mastercraft armor costs 1,000 gp more than a typical suit. Thus a greater mastercraft chain shirt costs 1,100 gp, gives an armor bonus to AC of +4, has a maximum Dex bonus of +5, and an armor check penalty of -1.

Talisman Armors and Shields

Talisman armor is magically enchanted armor which is not powerful enough to grant an AC bonus by itself, but can do so in conjunction with a talisman shield. A set of talisman armor and shield together grant a +1 enhancement bonus to AC, which does not stack with enhancement bonuses from other armor or shields.

A suit of armor or shield does not have to be masterwork to receive a talisman magical aura, but it cannot have any other magical benefit. The cost of a talisman enhancement is 250 gp per item, and it can be done by character with either Craft Arms and Armor or Craft Wondrous Item. A set of talisman armor and shield never grant more than a +1 bonus to AC.

Rings

Hearth: Designed for people who spend a lot of time around hearth, campfires or forges, this ring grants its wearer fire resistance 1.

Faint abjuration; CL 1st; Forge Ring, *endure elements*; Price: 1,200 gp.

Language: Each ring grants the wearer the ability to understand one additional language. If the character wearing the ring is literate, he gains literacy in the language as well. Some rings grant two or more related languages, such as Abyssal and Infernal, or Aquan, Auran, Ignan, and Terran.

Faint divination; CL 1st; Forge Ring, *comprehend languages*; Price: 100 gp (1 language), 400 gp (2 languages), 900 gp (3 languages), 1,600 gp (4 languages)

Lights: A ring of lights can be activated as a standard action, creating four lights as bright as torches. The lights move as directed by the wearer (no concentration needed), though they must stay within 10 feet of each other and 110 feet of the ring wearer. They lights last until they exceed their range, or are dispelled by the ring wearer (a free action).

Faint abjuration; CL 1st; Forge Ring, *dancing lights*; Price: 900 gp.

Vim: These extremely minor rings are generally thin bands of silver, and are often given to noble children to help them with bruises and scrapes. The wearer of a *vim ring* gains 1 hit point. The ring must be worn for a week before this benefit is gained, and if it is removed it must be worn for another week before the benefit is restored.

Faint transmutation; CL 1st; Forge Ring, *virtue*; Price: 1,200 gp.

Rods

Deathbane: This is a simple rod of black iron two feet long. The wielder may activate the rod as a standard action, firing a beam identical to that of the *disrupt undead* spell.

Faint necromancy; CL 1st, Craft Rod, *disrupt undead*; Price: 900 gp.

Staves

Acolyte: These staves are made of polished white birch, and have a candle holder mounted at their end. They are generally carried by the most minor member of a religious procession, though they are also sometimes passed out to young crusading clerics. They allow use of the following spells:

- *cure minor wounds* (2 charges)
- *guidance* (2 charges)
- *mending* (2 charges)

Moderate varied; CL 8th; Create Staff, *cure minor wounds*, *guidance*, *mending*; Price 1,687 gp, 5 sp.

Student's: These simple staves of gnarled wood are often made by master mages for their apprentices, and are popular with young adventurers for providing minor offensive capabilities in damage types not common in lower level spells. They allow use of the following spells:

- *acid splash* (2 charges)
- *mage hand* (2 charges)
- *ray of frost* (2 charges)

Moderate varied; CL 8th; Create Staff, *acid splash*, *mage hand*, *ray of frost*; Price 1,687 gp, 5 sp.

Wondrous Items

Arcane Stones: These fist-sized rocks are smooth stones with a single rune ("sight") carved into one side. A character holding an arcane stone may *detect magic* at will.

Faint divination; CL 1st; Craft Wondrous Item, *detect magic*; Price: 900 gp.

Boots of Ducking: These plain buskins change color to match the style of the wearer. Anyone wearing them gains a +1 to +2 resistance bonus to all Reflex saves.

Faint abjuration; CL 1st; Craft Wondrous Item, *resistance*; Price: 350 gp (+1 Reflex), 1,350 gp (+2 Reflex).

Eldritch Spectacles: A pair of these spectacles is generally made from gold wire and greenish glass up to a quarter inch thick. Anyone wearing the spectacles can read magical writings as if under the effects of a *read magic* spell.

Faint divination; CL 1st; Craft Wondrous Item, *read magic*; Price: 900 gp.

Everbright Lantern: This small, ornate hooded lantern sheds light out to a 20 foot radius (and shadowy light out another 20 feet) without flame or the consumption of oil. When shuttered it is entirely dark, bursting into full illumination immediately when it is opened. Because there is no flame the lantern is cool, and may be clipped to a belt to shed light without being held.

Faint evocation; CL 1st; Craft Wondrous Item, *light*; Price: 900 gp

Gloves of Stoutness: These tight-fitting leather gloves are either plain brown or black, attaching at the wrist with a strap. Anyone wearing them gains a +1 to +2 resistance bonus to all Fortitude saves.

Faint abjuration; CL 1st; Craft Wondrous Item, *resistance*; Price: 350 gp (+1 Fortitude), 1,350 gp (+2 Fortitude).

Headband of Will: This simple band of black cloth has a single iron disk mounted to the front. The wearer gains a +1 or +2 resistance bonus to all Will saves.

Faint abjuration; CL 1st; Craft Wondrous Item, *resistance*; Price: 350 gp (+1 Will), 1,350 gp (+2 Will).

Iron Cup: This heavy iron cup is scarred and dented, with simply etchings of entwined snakes covering the outside. Any time a poisonous material is placed within the cup, or the cup is pressed against a poisonous creature or item, the cup turns slightly greenish.

Faint divination; CL 1st; Craft Wondrous Item, *detect poison*; Price: 900 gp.

'Prentice Gloves: These simple working gloves grant a competence bonus to one Craft or Profession skill. Most grant only a +1 bonus, but some (10%) grant a +2 bonus instead. Determine the Craft or Profession skill randomly.

Faint transmutation; CL 1st; Craft Wondrous Item, *guidance*; Price: 100 gp (+1 to one skill), 400 gp (+2 to one skill).

Reliquary: A reliquary is a small wooden box, often adorned with carvings and inlaid stones, designed to carry a holy relic. Though such relics may have powers of themselves, most are powerless bits of preserved flesh or scraps of metal, cloth or wood supposedly once belonging to a powerful religious artifact. The constant faith poured into a reliquary does give the vessels themselves real power, however. A character able to turn undead may do so one additional time per day if holding a reliquary.

Faint conjuration; CL 1st; Craft Wondrous Item, *disrupt undead*; Price: 1,250 gp.

Shirt of Comfort: The remarkable garment is extremely comfortable, giving the wearer some of the benefits when resisting situations of discomfort or fatigue. The wearer receives a +1 bonus to the following checks and saves: Swim checks made to resist nonlethal damage, Constitution checks made to continue running, Constitution checks made to avoid nonlethal damage from a forced march, Constitution checks made to hold your breath, Constitution checks made to avoid nonlethal damage from starvation or thirst, Fortitude saves made to avoid nonlethal damage from hot or cold environments, and Fortitude saves made to resist damage from suffocation.

Faint abjuration; CL 3rd, Craft Wondrous Item, *bear's endurance*; Price: 1,250 gp.

Pyramid Pick

My Life With Master

Published by [Half Meme Press](#)

Written by Paul Czege

Cover by William Terrell

Illustrated by Colin Theriot

64-page 7-by-8½-inch book in PDF format; \$8.95

The advent of the PDF format has given rise to both a number of publishers who wholly release in that format, and a proliferation of self-published games written by those who want to share their game with the hobby. Not possible without the Internet, this has coalesced into something of a sector of "Indie-RPGs," a counterpart to the mainstream of the hobby as much as the independent film sector is to Hollywood. This counterpart and the format is also the space in which to experiment and explore the nature of the RPG without the expensive costs of production, publishing, marketing and distribution. One such example of this is ***My Life With Master -- a roleplaying game of villainy, self-loathing and unrequited love***, published by Half Meme Press.

Originally released at Gen-Con 2003, ***My Life With Master*** is perhaps the most interesting RPG of the year. As the title suggests -- and if you did not pronounce it with something of a groan or moan in your voice, not to say a touch of Peter Lorre's role of Joel Cairo from *The Maltese Falcon*, then go back and try again -- ***My Life With Master*** is a game about roleplaying the minions of a Master or mistress. More specifically, and in the default setting for the game, they are the malformed, malnourished, and misunderstood servants that serve the desires, demands, and wants of their Master, resident to a middle-European town of the year 1805 (roughly). They are all that stands between their Master and the townsfolk, who are often the minion's victims in the course of carrying out their Master's orders, as well as a source of fascination for the minions; in the end, those villagers are a likely cause of the PCs' death and that of their Master's, as the townsfolk, sickened by his predations, storm his domicile -- pitchforks in hand and torches aflame.

Thus ***My Life With Master*** is a game set within the gothic horror genre, or at least, one small part of it. At first sight it appears to be a comedic game, as evidenced by the artwork that echoes that of Charles Addams, Edward Gorey, and even Tim Burton. Yet these references hint at a darker side to ***My Life With Master***. Yes, there are comedic elements to this setting, but it sidles further and further through melancholia into outright tragedy. The genre of the game is also enhanced by the layout of the game. Available as a 64-page 3.1 Meg PDF document, ***My Life With Master*** could easily be half this size had the author plumped for a standard layout. Instead the text is organized into a centrally placed single justified block of text on each page, leaving a swath of white to surround it. This does much to enhance the appearance, making it look something akin to a treatise or manuscript, as well as serving to improve the writing's accessibility.

Although a Master character is very much a NPC controlled by the GM, the players have just as much input in defining and conceptualizing his nature and wants. These are summed by his Aspect and Type, plus his Wants and Needs. Aspect is either Brain or Beast, the former indicating that the Master dwells in the world of thoughts, words or of sensation, and that he can be influenced by such worlds; the latter that he is physical in nature, influenced by primal, physical sensation and contact. In both cases they also indicate how a Master primarily influences the world. Needs are what a Master desires from the townspeople -- and will help define what each minion does for him as they pursue his needs, while Wants are what he desires from the outsiders. It is from this group that the Master desires recognition, so

that for example, the aging actor Bertrand Khurtzov may *Need* the blood of the young to maintain his youthful good looks, but *Want* the recognition of his great acting talents.

A Master can be one of four types: Feeder, Breeder, Collector, or Teacher. The vampire is the archetypal Feeder, Dr. Moreau the archetypal Breeder, P.T. Barnum the Collector, and Dr. Hannibal Lecter the Teacher. Their Aspect can also influence each Type, so that Dr. Lecter would be a Beast-aspected Teacher, while Dickens' Miss Havisham from *Great Expectations* would be a Brain-aspected Teacher. A Master is defined by two statistics that act as a balance to each other, but do not counter the other. They are "Fear," which measures a Master's hold over his minions, and over the populace of the town; and "Reason," how far this populace can slip free of the Master's hold over them.

Equally, minions possess a minimum of Statistics and Traits. The first two Statistics both empower and victimize a minion, "Self-Loathing" measuring how much a minion believes himself or herself to be a monster and "Weariness" how dissatisfied they are with their lot in life. Self-Loathing prevents a minion from resisting a Master's monstrous commands, while helping in carrying out violent acts against the townspeople. Conversely Weariness will help resist a Master's demands, but increase the possibility of failure and injury in carrying them out. They are simply defined by spreading three points between the two statistics, so that they can range from zero to three.

A minion's Traits reflect their monstrous nature in two simple statements -- a "Less Than Human" and a "More Than Human" one. The first is an excessively crippling disadvantage, qualified by an equally excessive exception, for example: ". . . is mute, except when singing hymns," while the second is a powerful and almost surreal ability, again with a limitation, such as "always charismatic and seductive, except between midnight and 2 a.m." In either case the GM interprets the effects of these Traits strictly to the letter of their meaning, and further, these effects trump the game's mechanics. For example, the minion Jorge, who "walks with a slow scraping shuffle from his clubbed foot, except when swinging from the ropes and rafters of the belfry," will always be caught by a pursuing town constable despite the wound in his leg; but should Jorge take to the tower, he will be able to escape.

A minion has two Connections each to a member of the town out of Love, a desire to protect or from a sense of curiosity. Much like the Tethers that keep a ghost returning to the world of the living in ***Wraith: the Oblivion***, Connections are a reason for keeping a minion going back to the town besides the orders of their Master. A Connection might be, "My eyes are those of the deceased portrait painter whose model still lives in the town" or "I love the little boy who plays ball in the woods" or "I want to protect the blind wet nurse who is the mother I never had," and for each connection, a minion has a Love score, which is initially at zero and therefore unrequited. As a minion makes successful overtures of Love to their Connections, they can gain Love Points and increase a minion's chance of resisting their Master's dark demands and of even breaking free from them. If their overtures of Love fail, a minion will suffer yet more Self-Loathing.

The core mechanics use a series of opposed rolls of dice pools to determine the outcome of an upcoming scene. A player describes what they want their minion to do during the scene -- carry out their Master's orders and perform an act against the townsfolk, resist their Master's orders or make an overture of Love to a Connection -- and these are then resolved according to one of three simple formulae. For example, if a minion wants to resist their Master, they roll their Love, minus Weariness against the Master's roll of Fear plus the minions Self-Loathing. The resulting value for both Master and minion are rolled on four-sided dice, with any scores of fours discarded and the rest added together; the highest score wins the contest and the scene is played out according to the outcome.

For some this may seem backwards, rolling to determine the outcome and then gaming it rather than the other more expected way around. But this is intentional, as ***My Life With Master*** is geared towards constructing a narrative structure that emulates its genre and drives the story to its Endgame, which almost cries out to be operatic in its denouement.

The mechanics are the game's engine that drives ***My Life With Master*** to this Endgame. Initially minions will find themselves unable to resist the commands of their Master as they lack enough Love for their connections. Once their Love grows, they have the chance of doing so, and should a minion successfully resist a Master, then the Endgame will come about. To counter a minion's high chance of failing their dice rolls, one of three types of bonus dice can be added if they make the appropriate emotional display. Another four-sided die is gained for Intimacy (perhaps shared

physical proximity, touching, comfort, or a gift of food), a six-sided die for Desperation (for example, begging for mercy or fighting for their very life) and an eight-sided die for Sincerity. This last emotional display is literally a minion opening himself or herself up to everyone to show their true character and is something that a Master is truly incapable of.

The Endgame is itself a series of scenes that culminates in the dramatic death of the Master at the hands of their now-treacherous minion. This occurs when the minion resists a Master's command, and the total of the minion's Love is greater than Fear plus their Weariness. The other minions have an opportunity to deal with their own scenes, inevitably leading to their violent death -- though other outcomes are possible -- after which the resisting minion gets to fight and defeat their Master. After this each minion has an epilog scene, the results of which can vary from the minion fleeing, being killed, or destroying himself; becoming a model member of society; or even becoming a force of Fear, a Master in his own right.

Despite the simplicity of the mechanics in *My Life With Master*, they are not as clearly written as they need to be, because the various values throughout the game change as dictated by the outcome of the narrative events. The GM will need to make a close read of the otherwise well-written text to help grasp how the outcome of a scene will alter a minion's statistics. The author does provide tips for running both the game and the Master, plus tips on creating interesting minions and how to effectively utilize the roleplaying hooks that both Master and Minion should give the referee. A solid sample of play is also included and this should help the GM cement his grasp of how the almost computer-program-like structure of *My Life With Master* should run.

This highlights how *My Life With Master* is a very different game from what might be found on the shelves of your local gaming store. From its setup it forces both player and GM along a very narrowly focused narrative structure -- that of the sub-game it is emulating. Outwardly both are roleplaying out a tragic opera over several sessions, but one in which the minions have some input as to when and what they can do in relation to the desires and demands of their Master. That is only up until the Endgame occurs. In a radical move, the minions have a greater relationship with their Master than with their fellow minions and this is reflected by the authors' description of *My Life With Master* as " . . . [A] game in which the player character minions are an ensemble of individual protagonists, not as a group working together, but independent characters whose stories happen to interact at time". Thus their scenes will rarely be with each other, something that not every player will find to be to their liking, and which at best can only be countered by having those players not involved in a scene take the roles of the NPCs involved. Indeed this could itself lead to a troupe style of game in which the players take the roles of a minion and another minion's Connections or of ordinary townsfolk. This though, lies outside of the scope of *My Life With Master*.

Underneath the tragic operatic play of *My Life With Master*, the participants are obviously playing out a series of relationships -- between Master and minion, minion and Connections, townsfolk and Master, minion and townsfolk and so on. There is an element of the abusive in those relationships, more so with the essentially dysfunctional -- and doomed -- Master, but primarily the nature of the relationship between Master and minion, and that of theirs with the townsfolk is one of co-dependency. An the ultimate aim for the minion is to break free of this co-dependent relationship by finding the Love outside of it through one or more of their Connections.

Given its highly structured narrative and form of play, and its emotional themes, this is not a game for everyone. There is a potential danger for those who are not mature enough to deal with these themes, despite the author handling them so deftly within the structure of the sub-game and narrative. The closed nature of the game does not lend itself to repeated play, but that is clearly not the purpose of *My Life With Master*. That said, anyone with an interest in roleplaying as more than just a game will find this to be worth their while.

Just as interesting is the fact that *My Life With Master* could be stripped of its genre and the mechanics replayed elsewhere. The most obvious and immediate example is that of Grima Wormtongue and his relationship with his Master Saruman from *The Lord of the Rings*, while any of the villainous sidekicks from the *James Bond* series of films would also do as examples -- though the character of Jaws from the films *the Spy Who Loved Me* and *Moonraker* shows a minion who gains Love for his connection and breaks free of his Master. Television series such as *Dastardly and Muttley in their Flying Machines* with Dick Dastardly, Muttley, Clunk and Silly following the orders of the Colonel, and *The Simpsons* with the relationship between Smithers and Charles Montgomery Burns also lead

themselves to the narrative structure of ***My Life With Master***.

Although not going to be everyone's cup of tea, ***My Life With Master*** is the most interesting roleplaying game released this year and perhaps the most challenging. It makes greater demands on the players and GM in terms of contributing to and building the narrative structure, and rolling for resolution prior to playing out a scene is further proof that this game is almost pre-plotted and acts as one more part of its program script. In terms of design and writing, ***My Life With Master*** shows an exquisite artistry in the way it neatly strips the game to its core and lays bare a tragedy in a way that none of the *World of Darkness* family -- this game's nearest set of neighbors -- have quite yet reached.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

Out for Blood (for d20 System)

Published by [Bastion Press](#)

Written by E.W. Morton

96-page b&w softcover; \$22.95

Vampires. In the core **d20 System** these are blood-sucking and energy-draining undead with very specific powers, weaknesses, and restrictions. However, there are a lot of vampire traditions, ranging from *Dracula* to Anne Rice's books to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* that present different flavors and versions of archetypal vampires that do not necessarily mesh with the standard core monster.

A number of **d20 System** sourcebooks have jumped in to offer variants or upgrades to the standard vampire. The **Ravenloft Campaign Setting** provided add-on age templates to power up vampires as they become ancient. **Denizens of Darkness**, the Ravenloft monster book, added a good dozen or so variant vampire or vampire-like creatures complete with age category modifications. Green Ronin produced **Fang and Fury**, a whole sourcebook on vampires, and Bottled Imp Games created **Lords of the Night: Vampires**. Kenzer's Kalamar setting introduced their variant in the adventure **Harvest of Darkness**, the **Book of Templates** had a fear vampire among its pages, and I even wrote two alternate vampire entries for **Gaming Frontiers: Monsters**.

Bastion Press enters the **d20 System** vampire field with **Out for Blood**, a three-part sourcebook with prestige classes, vampire variants or vampire-related creatures, and a campaign section of easily inserted organizations and general campaign advice.

Out for Blood is mostly a toolbox of vampire-related options to add to your campaign mix as opposed to a cohesive single vision view of how vampires are. For example, the monster section contains 18 variant vampires or vampire-like creatures, but there is no overarching story of how the various bloodlines originated or how they tie together. The individual components are there for a DM to pick and choose from to get the right one for the particular feel he wants for his campaign or for a particular individual villain.

The 18 prestige classes cover vampire hunters, vampire wannabes, vampire servants, and vampire class options. They mostly take vampire-related characters and file off the serial numbers to create classes. Some concepts are done more than once but with variations, such as the investigator mage and faux vampire concepts. The classes are:

- **Arcane Pathologist:** A skilled van Helsing half-caster focused on gentle repose and cure disease spells who can eventually use charmed victims to get into the minds of their charmers.
- **Blood Hunter:** Rangers who can track by blood spoor and get ranged weapon bonuses.
- **Deathguard:** Tomb guardian warriors who need little sleep, see in the dark, and smite undead.
- **Dubbelsauger:** Five-level vampire class that can establish sympathetic supernatural links to victims and drain them through this link.
- **Exterminator:** Warriors who gain bonuses against creatures of a type they have killed within the last 24 hours, designed to track down hordes or nests of similar creatures, not limited to undead.
- **Fist of Light:** Holy monks with turning and critical undead staking martial arts, plus Ki strikes.
- **Fortune Teller:** Gypsy fortune-telling class description but class powers as a Telepathic and Clairsentient focused psion with uncanny dodge abilities.
- **Gothic Pretender:** Creatures that have drunk vampire blood and gained some vampire powers and weaknesses.
- **Knight of the Dragon:** Vicious lawful evil knight warlords supposedly dedicated to a lawful good god who

eventually become undead. They get powers based off of inflicting harsh examples.

- *Knight of the Phoenix*: Reincarnated souls of good knight clerics from a lost civilization that fell to evil forces. They get 2/3 spell casting, full turning some extra domains, and warrior stats.
- *Kresnik*: Good divine full casters with wildshaping and magic fang abilities. Allows a cleric to turn into a faux druid with full cleric casting, essentially multiclassing without giving up spell progression.
- *Master of Sacrifice*: Evil full divine caster who gains a new blood domain and can do *Indiana Jones & The Temple of Doom*-style heart rippings.
- *Soul Catcher*: Positive energy clerics who can bottle up incorporeal undead.
- *Soul Collector*: Negative energy clerics with 3/4 casting who focus on death knells.
- *Vamp*: Another fake vamp, this one with sneak attack, charm, and biting abilities.
- *Vampire Seneschal*: Insane Renfield-like dominated servitor who can be a scrying device for his master and subject to emergency ranged draining by the master vampire who gains healing from doing so.
- *Vampire Slayer*: Buffyverse-style slayer, these warriors gain some bonus feats and specific anti-vampire powers.
- *Watcher from Shadows*: Full spellcasting skilled wizards (or other casters) with bardic knowledge about evil over a hundred years old. Reminiscent of the watchers in the *Highlander* TV show and the secret society in Anne Rice's *Tale of the Body Thief*.

The 18 new monsters include 10 variant vampire templates, a new type of spawn template, a half-vampire, some vampire-like creatures, elemental grave soil, incorporeal spirits, an iron maiden construct, and a positive energy beast template for vampire hunting wolves and such. The half-vampire is PC ready with only 1 HD and 0 ECL; their powers include *detecting undead* at will.

The vampires are all +2 CR and either +7 or +8 ECL with good bonus stats and feats, which is basically the same threat level of the core vampire. They have a wide variety of vulnerabilities, resistances, and attack form variations. Some have electricity resistance while one is only harmed by electricity; many are harmed by sunlight while some are immune; and there are different allergies and supernatural restrictions upon them as well as methods for destruction. Some need to attack by biting, others by claw or slam to drain, while the more deadly ones deal damage with touch attacks. Many require special methods of destruction or they will reform in their graves some days later. This is not taken to the level of esoteric specificity as some of the ones in *Denizens of Darkness* where, for example, a dwarven vampire requires staking on a natural stalagmite, but some will reform if holy water is not applied, while others can be prevented from reviving by impaling the heart, decapitation, or cremation.

Visually there are a good variety. Barbed tongue ones are physically monstrous aberrations; while the death ringer vampires are graphically gruesome, showing their death wounds -- the illustration shows a cloven headed one with exposed brain matter ripping into his own bloody wrist. The Kuang Shi are interesting Asian vampires based on demon possession that uses the best abilities of either the subject or the possessing demon before adding on the vampire template. The book presents a good variety to challenge a party, with increased necessity of researching specific foes for their particular weakness.

The organizations presented are nicely developed but still easily inserted into most standard campaigns easily. They include the Order of the Dragon with their history, current leaders, and current typical activities. The stories and traditions of the Knights of the Phoenix are still vague about what the old civilization was and who the evil that overcame them were, but there is plenty to work with and it sparked ideas for me about ancient high-magic reincarnation spells. The Shadow Kingdom, unfortunately, seems merely a light adaptation of the World of Darkness' Camarilla. A thieves guild (more like a gang) specializing in corpse procurement and the shadowy knowledgeable Watchers round out the organizations. Each of these can be independently inserted into a campaign, although advice is offered for how the various groups would likely interact. A quick 25 vampire adventure seeds, some notes on vampire lairs, and a few spells (mostly evil cleric ones) round out the volume.

In all, *Out for Blood* is a good fleshed-out toolbox for inserting a lot of different vampires and vampire elements to a DM's campaign.

--John Henry Stam

Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Play Right, Darn It!

Last week I mentioned the fun I had at NecronomiCon playing ***Are You A Werewolf?*** with a large group of people, and I recommended that everyone try the game. Savvy readers - or those who routinely pay attention to political speeches - will note that I did not offer any promises about the game. ("I guarantee you'll have fun!" or the like.) This was intentional; although I am certainly not above Barnum-esque showmanship to plug something I believe in passionately, I also have an aversion to flat-out lying unless it's absolutely convenient.

"But gosh!" I hear you cry. "Does that mean ***Are You A Werewolf?*** isn't a fun game?"

Not at all, O Disembodied Audience Member. In fact, it can be an incredibly fun time . . . if you play right.

And, indeed, if I'd written the column a week earlier, I probably *would* have offered some kind of mountaintop proclamation of said game's entertainment. But in the interim, something happened that colored my perception of the game.

I played it with other people.

So enthralled was I with my post-***Are You A Werewolf?*** high that, for days after the convention, I was spotted staggering down Monroe Street, reeking of printer's ink and asking passersby if they could spare a Seer card. Desperate to recreate my high, I showed up at our biweekly LARP two hours early with the hope of drumming up interest in a session. Eventually I did, in fact, manage to wrangle 11 others into a game. And, in fact, at least three of the others *knew* the game already, in its original incarnation as ***Mafia***. So we played.

And it stank.

But first, let me back up a second, and offer a sample transcript from the NecronomiCon sessions:

[Everyone stops clapping and opens their eyes]

Carl: All right; everyone who's a villager, raise your hand.

[Everyone eventually raises their hands]

Carl: Okay; well, it took Tan a few seconds longer to raise his hand there . . . that's not a good sign.

Tan: Have you ever noticed how quick Carl is to try to lynch anyone else?

Peter: I don't know if I can use this information, but I *did* hear Tan clapping arrhythmically . . . as if he were pointing to a victim!

Judy: I don't think you can use that . . .

Carl: Sure you can! I nominate to lynch Tan!

Peter: Second!

[And so on; Tan manages to escape the crowd's ire for at least a few more minutes . . .]

Flashforward to our Saturday night group:

[Everyone stops clapping and opens their eyes]

[Everyone points randomly at someone else; Chris is lynched without a word being spoken.]

The NecronomiCon games lasted about an hour apiece. The Saturday game lasted five minutes. I refused to feel guilt about people not having a good time, since I figured they'd stolen more than 300 seconds from me over the years.

I was flabbergasted. I didn't have much room to make them play "right" because I was acting as the Moderator, and frankly one of the appeals is the "anything goes" aspect of the game. But, dagnammit, they just weren't playing right!

I'm not sure how many of us fully grasp how important "playing right" is to the spirit of certain games. For example, I have read columns about computer programs that play the card game bridge (a game about which I know the basic rules, but am not an expert by any stretch). One common complaint I've seen about many of those programs is that they don't bid right; the intricacies of proper bridge bidding are fairly subtle, and it doesn't matter if the proper bid is reached ultimately if it did so in an inhuman fashion. (In poker, it's similar to the computer holding a royal flush, bidding one dollar the first round and then \$100,000 the second. Yes, \$100,000 may be the proper level to eventually bid, but not in *that* way.)

And, of course, there's playing right in roleplaying games.

The magic of roleplaying games really only works when they're played right. In a typical game there's so much that experienced players can take for granted, but that neophytes can get wrong, thus potentially making the entire experience pretty unenjoyable. Character creation, motivation assignment, scenarios construction, acting, probability analysis, and pizza-topping selection are just some of the myriad of decisions facing those who wish to partake of this hobby. If any of them go horribly awry, the whole experience can go to Helena Handbasket.

For example, I consider 1991 - when I went away to college, and thus had infinite free time unfettered by mandatory classes - to be the "official" beginning of my gaming life. But I did some gaming earlier, usually in school cafeterias or bus stops. Very early on, when I was deep in my Clueless Newbie stage (although after my era of "Gee, I happed to roll all 18s"), two of us had cajoled someone into running classic ***Dungeons & Dragons*** adventure ***Isle of Dread***.

In this adventure there's a plesiosaur in a lake with a ring of regeneration (which then - as now - was considered a pretty cool magic item). Now, our gaming group had no real idea what a plesiosaur was, but in the classic olde ***Dungeons & Dragons*** tradition we had stumbled onto the philosophy that if it had stats it could be killed.

So we killed it, with no regard to the technicalities of how to kill a creature in a lake (I guess we had the *really* long sword), nor dealing with a bloody huge aquatic dinosaur. And since the DM had let slip before the encounter that there was, in fact, a ring of regeneration in the critter's belly, we knew to attack it with a savage intensity usually reserved for Senate debates.

So far, we have not strayed too far into nutter land; strap in.

Now, we had successfully killed the ples- . . . pless-e . . . the thing, and had acquired the ring of regeneration. But there were two of us in the gaming party, and only one cool ring of power! How were we going to resolve this?

After several long minutes of furled brow and pudding-snack consumption, I hit upon a brilliant idea: Couldn't we just leave the area housing the thing-with-the-ring, and then come back? The adventure says it's in that area, so if we came back, it would still be there with another ring, right? Our DM mulled this over for a few minutes and determined there was nothing in the rules that prevented this, so he allowed it; minutes later, we had dead plesiosii and two rings of regeneration.

Clearly, We Did Not Get It.

In my defense, this was at an era when my classmates were sneaking swigs of their parents' Southern Comfort and licking toads, so I refuse to feel *too* much guilt.

Amazingly, our gaming group - nascent though it was - broke up right after that adventure. My memory is weak on the specifics, but I seem to recall that we had decided ***Dungeons & Dragons*** was a dumb game. I went back to my ***Fighting Fantasy*** books.

(As an aside, ***Isle of Dread*** has the distinction of being the most common adventure in our FLGS' Used Game bin when I worked there; we usually had 20-30 copies. Clearly many people had great difficulty parting with such a classic.)

I have other anecdotes about "playing right," but I think I'll keep them to myself for now. In all, I do believe most games have the power to bring hours of entertainment to their players. But many games require the participants to play "right" for the games to be as much fun as they can be . . . or, indeed, to work even at all. Hopefully game manufacturers will realize this, and remember that everyone has a "first game." Giving those players a fighting chance at figuring out how to play right can help ensure that everyone has fun.

* * *

As an aside, I had several people ask what the question was where I disagreed with my peers at NecronomiCon last week. Given the interest, I do believe I shall turn it into a column topic before year's end.

Feign interest and ye shall receive!

--*Steven Marsh*

Men In White

for *GURPS*

by Stephen Dedman

Scientists traditionally get a bad rap in the mass media -- depicted as nerdy and ineffectual, or insane and evil, rarely emerging from their white coats and ivory towers except to endanger their souls and possibly the world. While there are scientists whose ethics and sanity could be questioned, few have devoted their lives to adding up potential megadeaths on their slide rules while they wheel their chairs across labs full of bioweapons and unreliable robots. At least as many are young, fit, and prefer trekking through jungles and over cliffs in search of fossils, relics, good places to set up telescopes, and other clues to the mysteries of life.

In the interests of fairness, this article attempts to include all these types of scientists in this collection of NPCs. Some are suitable as Enemies or the "before" stage of a metavillain; others may be Allies, Contacts, Patrons, or even Dependents. Scientists do occasionally need rescuing from places most people would prefer to avoid -- but their abilities may also make them the ideal people to rescue PCs, particularly when they're being attacked by a radioactive amoeba the size of LA. They can also be used (with a little tweaking) when the GM needs a random group of scientists in any campaign: the board of the TSF or similar body, expert witnesses in a court case, hostages in a hijacking, explorers who've defrosted something man wasn't meant to know, or just the first people on the scene when a Martian cylinder lands near a university town.

Abraham Van Diemen

The soft-spoken son of a librarian and a music teacher, Abraham Van Diemen is modestly famous among his fellow biologists as a botanical illustrator and discoverer of previously unknown plant species. He's less successful as a teacher, and much prefers to be out in the field without even a packhorse as a companion. Unfortunately, his utter incompetence as a navigator means that he frequently becomes lost, and often unknowingly wanders into the territory of hostile Native American tribes. His usual reaction in a tight spot is to remove his false teeth; if that fails, he'll juggle rocks or cooking utensils. A surprising number of dangerous people have taken pity on him and directed him back to civilization, but sometimes he's had to run -- usually into even more dangerous places, picking up specimens as he goes.

Campaign uses: When Van Diemen fails to return in time for classes, his university hires a posse to go looking for him -- or they may try to preempt this by hiring the PCs as his minders. Alternatively, Van Diemen may be able to save the PCs if they are captured by a hostile tribe that has already learned to trust him: because of his knack for becoming lost, he may turn up unexpectedly in the most unlikely places.

Other settings: This version of Van Diemen is intended for an *Old West* or *Deadlands* campaign, but with only minor changes, he could become lost in any TL4+ world with some unexplored territory. Give him a time machine or a one-man starship, and the PCs could be searching for him forever.

Abraham Van Diemen (25 points)

Attributes: ST 9 [-10]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 14 [45]; HT 11 [10].

Speed 5.25; Move 5 (Run 6).

Dodge 5.

Advantages: Acute Vision +3 [6]; Charisma/1 [5]; Manual Dexterity +2 [6]; Pitiable [5]; Plant Empathy [5]; Reputation (+2, sometimes recognized, small group of people).

Disadvantages: Curious [-5]; Honesty [-10]; Loner [-5]; Obsession (discovering new plant species) [-10];

Overconfidence [-10]; Pacifism [-30].

Quirks: Always speaks quietly; Attentive; Incompetence (Cartography and Navigation); Thinks alcohol is only good for preserving specimens; Undiscriminating.

Skills: Administration-12 [1/2]; Artist-13 [2]; Boating-9 [0]; Botany/TL5-16* [8]; Climbing-10 [2]; Cooking-13 [1/2]; Ecology/TL5-12 [0]; First Aid/TL5-13 [1/2]; Fishing-13 [1/2]; Gardening-14* [1/2]; Gesture-13 [1/2]; Juggling-10 [1]; Naturalist-15 [6]; Research-14 [2]; Running-9 [1/2]; Savoir-Faire-13 [1/2]; Survival (Forest)-13 [1/2]; Swimming-9 [1/2]; Tracking-13 [0].

* receives bonuses from Plant empathy

75-point version: Cultural Adaptability [25], Disease-Resistant [5], Serendipity [15], and Single-Minded [5]; replace Attentive with Humble.

Gear: Pocket knife; Simple first aid kit; Telescope; Paper, pencils, paint set; Levis, shirt, overcoat, Stetson, shoes; Small backpack; Bed roll; Canteen; Mess kit; Personal basics.

Appearance: Unassuming, with tanned complexion, curly brown hair, brown eyes, and light brown wooden teeth; early 40s, 5'9", 140 lbs.

Dr. Alan Silver

Alan Silver found his first dinosaur bone on his father's Montana ranch when he was only five; since then, he's spent most of his time out in the open, searching for fossils -- not counting a few horrible months spent in the trenches during the Great War, followed by more months in hospital recovering from his wounds. He studied geology, natural history, and savate in France and England, but he was also learned as much as he could about military logistics and engineering.

Silver loves travel for its own sake, paying his way with poker when necessary, but everywhere he goes -- either looking for fossils or giving his popular lectures -- he gathers useful information about troop strength, military leadership, and anything else that might affect the outcome of a war. His hope is to protect the lives of civilians and American soldiers - by preventing wars, if possible, but failing that, by helping them to be resolved as quickly and bloodlessly as possible.

Campaign uses: Silver makes a useful ally or patron for the PCs, but even he may need rescuing occasionally -- especially if he's arrested on suspicion of espionage. Despite his noble aims, he might also become an opponent if he uses his influence to try to keep the US out of a war the PCs regard as just or necessary. The PCs may also be given the job of preventing him from smuggling some valuable relic out of its native land, or in a race to grab it first.

Other settings: With minor changes, Silver can fit into any setting where there is treasure to be found and a threat of war.

Dr. Alan Silver (100 points)

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 12 [20]; IQ 14 [45]; HT 12 [20].

Speed 6; Move 6 (Run 6).

Dodge 6.

Advantages: Cool [1]; Voice [10].

Disadvantages: Curious [-5]; Obsession (finding fossils) [-5]; Overconfidence [-10]; Pacifism (Self-Defense only) [-15]; Sense of Duty (victims of war) [-10]. Reputation: +3 as adventurer and scientist, occasionally recognized, most readers (large group); -3 as suspected spy, thief and smuggler, sometimes recognized, (small group). Total, 0 points.

Quirks: Unable to settle down; Likes flying, hates sailing; Distrusts military officers (reacts at -1); Likes women with foreign accents; Caffeine addict.

Skills: Administration-12 [1/2]; Anthropology-11 [1/2]; Archaeology-12 [1]; Area Knowledge (World)-13 [1/2]; Artist-11 [1/2]; Bard-15 [1]; Boxing-12 [2]; Cartography-12 [1/2]; Climbing-12 [2]; Diplomacy-14 [1]; Driving/TL6 (Truck)-12 [2]; Engineer/TL6 (Military)-12 [1]; Fast-Talk-13 [1]; First Aid/TL6-13 [1/2]; Gambling-15 [4];

Geology/TL6-14 [4]; Guns/TL6 (Rifle)-15 [2], (Shotgun)-13 [0]; Holdout-13 [1]; Intelligence Analysis-10 [1/2]; Karate-12 [4]; Knife-11 [1/2]; Language (Arabic)-12 [1/2], (English)-14 [0], (French)-12 [1/2], (Hindi)-12 [1/2], (Mandarin)-12 [1/2], (Russian)-12 [1/2]; Naturalist-12 [1/2]; Packing-11 [1/2]; Paleontology-15 [6]; Photography-13 [1]; Research-14 [2]; Riding (Horse)-11 [1]; Running-10 [1/2]; Savoir-Faire-16 [1/2]; Savoir-Faire (Military)-16 [1/2]; Scrounging-14 [1]; Sex-Appeal-13 [1]; Spear-10 [1/2]; Stealth-11 [1/2]; Strategy (Land)-11 [1]; Streetwise-12 [1/2]; Survival (Desert)-14 [1], (other)-11; Swimming-11 [1/2]; Teaching-12 [1/2]; Throwing-11 [1]; Writing-13 [1].

150-point version: Absolute Direction, High Pain Threshold, +1 to DX, IQ, and all skills (except Running and Sex Appeal).

Cinematic version (200 points): another +2 to ST, Combat Reflexes, and Daredevil to 150 point version. *Supers version (500 points):* to Cinematic Version, +2 to DX and ST and +1 to HT; Danger Sense, Immortality, and Trained by a Master; increase Karate and Boxing to 16, change Savate to Pao Chuan, and spend 10 points on Pao Chuan skills and maneuvers.

Gear: in the field, Winchester '94, trench knife; Ford Model T Truck loaded with adventuring gear. Wears heavy leather jacket, slouch hat, khakis and boots.

Appearance: Mid 30s, tanned complexion, black hair, gray eyes; 6'1", 170 lbs.

Edgar Westhill

Edgar Westhill's rise from obscurity to utmost secrecy began at the start of World War II, when he tried to enlist in the RAAF as a navigator or radio operator. He was found unfit for active service and assigned to the Pay Corps, where a perceptive officer discovered that his talents went beyond accountancy and chess and recommended that he be sent to Station X as a code-breaker. When the war ended and he was demobbed, he joined the London TSF (p.AH30) as an archivist and computer programmer.

As much as Westhill enjoys his work, he is quick to volunteer for any duty which gives him a chance to see more of the world (or better still, the universe). Though undeniably geeky, he has a quirky sense of humor, and has volunteered to be buried in the tomb of the unknown soldier.

Campaign uses: In a wartime setting, the PCs are most likely to be assigned to Westhill as bodyguards -- or assassins, if they're on opposite sides. Between wars, they may be able to call on his services to help crack codes or solve other mysteries.

Other settings: Westhill's skills will become even more valuable as computers become more important, and his technophilia may inspire him to buy as many implants and biomods as he can afford. In a *Cyberpunk* or later setting, he may be a powerful hacker -- either a valuable ally or patron, or a very dangerous enemy.

Edgar Westhill (25 points)

Attributes: ST 9 [-10]; DX 9 [-10]; IQ 15 [60]; HT 10 [0].

Speed 4.75; Move 4.

Dodge 4.

Advantages: Eidetic Memory [30]; Mathematical Ability [10]; Single-Minded [5].

Disadvantages: Curious [-10]; Epilepsy [-30]; Impulsive [-10]; Oblivious [-3]; Skinny [-5]; Unfit [-5]; Workaholic [-5].

Quirks: Alcohol intolerance; Forgets to eat; Loves crosswords and mystery novels; Mild phobia of dogs; Untidy, but fastidiously clean (has his best ideas in bath).

Skills: Accounting-18 [1/2]; Astronomy/TL6-13 [1/2]; Chess-17 [1]; Computer Programming/TL6-17 [1]; Cryptanalysis/TL6-18 [2]; Cryptography-13 [0]; Cryptology-13 [0]; Electronics/TL6 (Computers)-14 [1]; Intelligence Analysis-13 [1/2]; Language (English)-17 [0], (French)-16 [1/2], (German)-16 [1/2], (Russian)-16 [1/2]; Linguistics/TL6-13 [1/2]; Literature/TL6-13 [1/2]; Mathematics/TL6-18 [2]; Meteorology/TL6-13 [1/2]; Physics/TL6-13 [1/2]; Research-15 [1].

75-point version: Gadgeteer (Realistic), +2 to DX, and 5 points of Armory, Engineer, or similar skills.

Gear: Usually wears heavy overcoat with pockets stuffed with books and pens (DR 2), over old but clean suit. Later (TL7+ versions) will also carry enough gadgets (but not weapons) to count as medium encumbrance.

Appearance: Gawky, looks 20ish regardless of his true age. Pale complexion, untidy white-blond hair, light blue eyes; 5'9", 100 lbs.

Dr. Simone Brandt

Dr. Simone Brandt is a lab assistant at the TSF, a job she enjoys much more than teaching. Though attractive, she hasn't socialized very much since her fiancé died in a plane crash. Instead, she became terrified by the threat of nuclear war, and fascinated by the ability of some insects to survive levels of radiation that would quickly kill humans.

After many nights in the lab, Brandt believed that she'd discovered the chemical that enabled insects to survive, and extracted enough of it to test on mice, then on monkeys. When they survived with no apparent ill effects, she injected herself with the formula . . . and slowly began to metamorphose. Though she looked the same, she found that men seemed more strongly attracted to her. She began dating again, but when she tried to end a relationship with a naval pilot, he made the mistake of slapping her. She blacked out momentarily; when she revived, she found his corpse at her feet, stung to death by wasps.

Since then, Brandt has become more cautious, and better at reading people's intentions -- but she's also killed two would-be muggers and the lecherous dean of biology from a major university, and she's beginning to enjoy the feeling of power.

Campaign uses: The 25-point version of Brandt may be useful whenever the PCs need scientific assistance for defeating giant bugs, or hordes of ordinary sized ones, or a forensic entomologist to estimate how long someone's been dead. The more powerful versions might be a monster in an **Atomic Horror** campaign, or a superheroine or metavillain in a **Supers** campaign.

Other settings: With a little tweaking, the 25-point version of Brandt can serve as a generic scientist in any TL7+ campaign. A slightly modified 100-point version might fit into a **Cyberpunk** world as an industrial spy/assassin with bionics or biomods.

Dr. Simone Brandt (25 points)

Attributes: ST 9 [-10]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 14 [45]; HT 11 [10].

Speed 5.5; Move 5.

Dodge 4.

Advantages: Attractive [5]; Fashion Sense [5].

Disadvantages: Curious [-15]; Impulsive [-10]; Necrophobia [-10]; Workaholic [-5].

Quirks: Attracted to men in uniforms, especially military (reacts at +1); Collects amber jewelry; Incompetence (Teaching); Really hates being called "Honey"; Uncongenial.

Skills: Acting-12 [1/2]; Biochemistry/TL7-13 [4]; Chemistry/TL7-13 [2]; Driving (Car)-10 [2]; Ecology/TL7-11 [1/2]; First Aid/TL7-13 [1/2]; Genetics/TL7-13 [4]; Guns/TL7 (Pistol)-11 [1/2]; Nuclear-Biological-Chemical Warfare/TL7-13 [1/2]; Poisons-12 [1]; Research-14 [2]; Savoir-Faire-13 [1/2]; Sex-Appeal-10 [1]; Zoology/TL7 (Specialty: Insects)-19, (other)-13 [4].

100-point version: Berserk [-15]; Cast-Iron Stomach [15]; Control Animal/4 (Insects Only, -60%; can controls a 4-hex horde or 4 hexes worth of giant insects) [5]-13 [8]; Discriminatory Smell (Special Enhancement: can detect emotional state, +50%), (Special Limitation: offended by smell of insect repellents, -1) [23]; Gluttony [-5]; Hard to Kill/4 [10]; Pheromone Control [25]; Sanitized Metabolism [5]. For a more villainous version, replace Necrophobia with Bloodlust.

Supers version (Mantissa, 500 points): increase ST to 14, DX and HT to 14; Altered Time Rate/1 [100]; Clinging [25];

Elastic Skin [20]; Hyper-Reflexes [15]; Hyper-Strength [30]; Invulnerability (Radiation) [75]; and Resistant to Poison [5] to 100 point version.

Gear: White lab coat over fashionable costume; FN HP35 (at home); Radiation Suit, Geiger counter, rations, etc. in backyard fallout shelter; '42 Ford V8.

Appearance: Late 20s, light golden complexion, blonde hair in ponytail, green eyes; 5'7, 120 lbs.

Dr. Thomas Mernok

Thomas Radu Mernok fled from his native Transylvania at the end of World War II, graduated from Harvard with an economics degree five years later, and by 1957 was already one of the world's best-known economists, regularly consulted by politicians and think-tanks. His fame and influence increased over the next 40 years, but so did the number of his detractors.

As an economist, Mernok is almost as good as he thinks he is; it's just unfortunate that his model for a perfectly balanced global economy requires reducing the world's population by 80-90%. Mernok, however, sees this as a temporary setback, easily remedied. His expertise in other fields isn't as dependable, but many politicians and businessmen are swayed by his reputation and the force of his personality, and have supported some of his crazier schemes despite the objections of other advisors.

Campaign uses: Mernok doesn't think of himself as a villain or mad scientist, but he rarely thinks of people that he doesn't like as anything but numbers. He has cheerfully proposed using bioweapons to destroy the world's rice crops in order to increase the price of wheat and corn, burning down art galleries to collect the insurance, or making it legal to run down pedestrians in selected cities. The 100-point Mernok is worth -10 points as an Enemy, but he can also become a 15 point Secret Patron if the PCs are doing something that suits his ultimate goal.

Other settings: Mernok is designed for a modern-day *Supers*, *Illuminati*, *Espionage*, or *Covert Ops* campaign, but political puppet-masters with their own agendas are probably as old as politics, and are likely to survive into the far future. In a *Cyberpunk* setting, he may become the CEO of a free trade zone; in a galactic empire, he may be governor of a planet or entire sector.

Dr Thomas Mernok (100 points)

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 16 [80]; HT 11 [10].

Speed 5.25; Move 2.

Dodge 5.

Advantages: Contact (Business, skill-21, available on a 12 or less, somewhat reliable) [8]; Contact (Military, skill-21, available on a 6 or less, completely reliable) [12]; Favor (Political faction; Patron, very powerful organization, appears on 12 or less) [10]; Reputation (+2 to political supporters, small group of people, always recognized) [4]; Status +1 [0]; Tenure [5]; Very Wealthy [30].

Disadvantages: Bad Sight (nearsighted, wears glasses) [-10]; Bad Temper [-10]; Fanatic [-10]; Fat [-10]; Intolerance (all other races) [-10]; Greed [-15]; Jealousy [-10]; Megalomania [-10]; Reputation (-2 to political opponents, large group of people, recognized on 10 or less) [-3].

Quirks: Careful; Expensive tastes, especially in liquor and women; Likes most forms of instrumental music, but not singers; Mild agoraphobia; Paranoid drunk.

Skills: Administration-14 [1/2]; Area Knowledge (Washington D.C.)-19 [6], (World)-16 [1]; Chess-15 [1/2]; Conspiracy Theory-14 [2]; Diplomacy-14 [1]; Driving/TL7 (Car)-9 [1]; Economics/TL7-18 [8]; Genetics/TL7-12 [1/2]; Guns/TL7 (Pistol)-13 [2]; History-16 [8]; Intelligence Analysis-13 [1/2]; Performance-17 [2]; Politics-16 [2]; Psychology-14 [1]; Research-16 [2]; Savoir-Faire-18 [0]; Strategy (Ground)-13 [1/2]; Teaching-14 [1/2]; Writing-14 [1/2].

150-point version: Danger Sense [15]; Diplomatic Immunity [20]; Resistance to Poison [5]; and Voice [10].

Gear: Second Chance Standard vest under good gray suit; Walther PPK in briefcase; 5'8", 218 lbs.

Appearance: Jowly, inscrutable face, wavy silver hair and bushy eyebrows, dark blue eyes behind thick glasses.

Dr. Mai Kitamura, ME

Mai Kitamura claims to have chosen her specialization when she was an pretty intern because she was tired of patients making passes at her -- something that hasn't yet been a problem in the morgue. Her E.R. experience made her expert at identifying types of wounds, and after publishing some well-received papers, she was offered the position of medical examiner in a major city. After receiving death threats because of her testimony in a murder case, she was issued a kevlar vest and carry permit, and learned to shoot.

Campaign uses: Kitamura is a useful ally (and unfortunate choice of enemy) for any modern-day cop, superhero, or vampire-hunter. She may also be encountered at a dojo, bike race, or rifle range, lending medical assistance if needed. The PCs may be assigned as her bodyguards if she continues to receive death threats.

Other settings: A coroner with most of Kitamura's skills may be encountered in any setting from the Roaring '20s into the far future.

Dr. Mai Kitamura, ME (100 points)

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 12 [20]; IQ 15 [60]; HT 12 [20].

Speed 6; Move 6 (Run 7).

Dodge 4.

Advantages: Alertness +1 [5]; Cool [1]; Resistant to Disease [5].

Disadvantages: Curious [-5]; Dependent (girlfriend; Average quality, loved one, appears on 15 or less) [-36]; Workaholic [-5].

Quirks: Hates violent movies; Lesbian; Loves Mexican food; Macabre sense of humor; Skeptical of anything supernatural and paranormal.

Skills: Administration-13 [1/2]; Biochemistry/TL7-12 [1]; Brawling-11 [1/2]; Chemistry/TL7-12 [1/2]; Computer Operation/TL7-14 [1/2]; Criminology/TL7-14 [1]; Diplomacy-12 [1/2]; Driving (Car)-11 [1]; Genetics/TL7-13 [2]; Forensics/TL7 (Specialty: wound pathology)-20, (other)-14 [4]; Guns/TL7 (Pistol)-15 [2], (Shotgun)-13 [1/2]; Judo-12 [4]; Languages (English)-15 [0], Japanese-13 [1/2]; Law-13 [1]; Motorcycle-12 (2-wheeler)-12 [2]; Photography/TL7-13 [1/2]; Physician/TL7-16 [6]; Physiology/TL7-12 [1/2]; Poisons-13 [1]; Psychology/TL7-12 [1/2]; Research-15 [2]; Running-9 [1]; Savoir-Faire-14 [1/2]; Savoir-Faire (Dojo)-14 [1/2]; Sex-Appeal-13 [2]; Streetwise-13 [1/2]; Swimming-11 [1/2]; Thanatology-12 [1/2]; Writing-13 [1/2].

Maneuvers: Arm Lock-13 [1/2]; Knee Strike-11 [1/2].

75-point version: reduce HT and ST by 1, remove Resistant to Disease.

Gear: White lab coat over business suit and running shoes, or leather jacket, jeans, and boots; Second Chance Standard vest; Swiss Army Knife; Glock-17 (in car); Remington M870 (at home); unmarked police car; Kawasaki Ninja; forensics gear.

Appearance: Late 30s, compact muscular build, golden complexion, spiky short black hair, dark brown almond-shaped eyes; 5'2", 115 lbs.

Father Ramon Chavez, SJ

Ramon Chavez of the Society of Jesus is a devout Catholic who, like many other Jesuits, turned a fascination with astronomy and geophysics into an academic career. He teaches physical sciences and physical education at a small Catholic college in the desert, spending as much time as possible between vespers and compline in their small but well-equipped observatory.

Campaign uses: Chavez is designed as an ally for a **Horror** campaign, where the advantages of having a boxing

astrophysicist who can perform exorcisms should be obvious. He's unlikely to become an enemy unless he's convinced the PCs are doing something terribly wrong, but he may come to their aid (or vice versa) when they're stranded in the desert.

Other settings: With only minor changes (mostly to TL), Chavez may be found in any setting from the early 19th century to the end of the universe.

Father Ramon Chavez, SJ (75 points)

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 14 [45]; HT 11 [10].

Speed 5.5; Move 5.

Dodge 5.

Advantages: Charisma/1 [5]; Claim to Hospitality [5]; Clerical Investment/1 [5]; Collected [5].

Disadvantages: Compulsive Generosity [-5]; Disciplines of Faith [-5]; Honesty [-10]; Sense of Duty (all humanity) [-15]; Unattractive [-5].

Quirks: Distrusts electronics -- prefers optical telescopes, film cameras and analog watches; Responsive.

Skills: Administration-12 [1/2]; Astronomy/TL7 (Specialization: Planetary formation)-20, (other)-15 [8]; Bard-13 [1/2]; Body Language-13 [2]; Boxing-11 [4]; Computer Operation/TL7-13 [1/2]; Diplomacy-12 [1]; Driving/TL7 (Car)-10 [2]; Exorcism-11 [1/2]; First Aid/TL7-13 [1/2]; Geology/TL7-12 [1]; Languages (English)-14 [0], (Latin)-12 [1/2], (Spanish)-12 [1/2]; Mathematics-12 [1]; Mechanic/TL7 (Car)-12 [1/2]; Physics/TL7-12 [1]; Research-13 [1]; Savoir-Faire-16 [1/2]; Scrounging-13 [1/2]; Sport (Basketball)-10 [2]; Streetwise-12 [1/2]; Survival (Desert)-13 [1/2]; Swimming-11 [1/2]; Teaching-13 [1]; Theology (Catholic)-13 [4]; Tournament Law (Boxing)-13 [1/2].

100-point version: +1 to ST, DX, and Physical skills; replace Charisma/1 with Voice.

Gear: Priest's habit and hiking boots.

Appearance: Late 40s, rangy with broad shoulders, well weathered complexion, gray hair receding in widow's peak, blue eyes; 6'2", 155 lbs.

Jaya Seth

Jaya Seth came to Winterjewel as a rather plump and unattractive planetology major on a field trip. She left as a head in a cryo-case, after whisper wolves ambushed her and devoured much of her body. Instead of cloning, she opted for a total cyborg body that few predators would even sniff at. She also began studying kempo and improving her weapon skills then, after graduation, applied to the Survey Service.

Her record with the Survey Scouts is impressive, but not impeccable; she is terrible at guard duty, because of her absent-mindedness. When bored, she retrieves data files from her computer memory and spends her time reading. Her other hobby is using her micromanipulators to paint extremely small reproductions of artworks -- a talent that also enables her to forge travel documents when needed.

Campaign uses: Seth is designed to serve as a science officer in a starship crew, but she may also be encountered in startown trying to charter a ship for an expedition, or recruiting people for an expedition, or just trying to raise money for research by fair means or foul.

Other settings: With some ultra-tech weapons and more points spent on combat and law enforcement skills, Seth might be a useful ally for a superhero in a pre-TL10 world.

Jaya Seth (75 points)

Attributes: ST 19, Arm ST 15 [80]; DX 11 [10]; IQ 13 [30]; HT 12 [20].

Speed 8.69; Move 8.

Dodge 8. **Advantages:** Absolute Timing [5]; Basic Communicator with Medium-Range radio [16]; Eidetic Memory 2

[60]; Lightning Calculator [5]; Mathematical Ability [10]; Metal Armor, PD3 DR7 [40], reflective surface [2]; Microscopic Vision x100k [4]; Micromanipulator arms [15]; Night Vision with Radiation Detector [10].

Disadvantages: Absent-Mindedness [-15]; Curious [-5]; Nightmares [-5]; Overconfidence [-10]; No Sense Smell/Taste [-5].

Quirks: Broad-Minded; Incompetence (Poetry); Intolerance (Technophobes); Not interested in sex; Paints face and body (any color but red) on social occasions.

Skills: Accounting-18 [1/2]; Appreciate Beauty-11 [1/2]; Archaeology-12 [1/2]; Armoury/TL10-13 (Beam handguns) [1/2]*; Artist-13 [1/2]*; Astrogation/TL10-14 [1]; Astronomy/TL10-15 [2]; Beam Weapons/TL10 (Laser)-14 [2]; Computer Hacking/TL10-14 [1/2]; Computer Programming/TL10-15 [1/2]; Driving/TL10 (ATV)-10 [1]; Electronics Operation/TL10 (Sensors)-14 [1]; Engineering/TL10 (Robotics)-14 [1/2], (Stardrive)-14 [1/2]*; First Aid/TL7-15 [1/2]; Forgery/TL10-14 [1/2]*; Freefall-12 [4]; Judo-9 [1]; Karate-10 [2]; Literature-12 [1/2]; Mathematics-15 [1/2]; Mechanic/TL10 (Robotics)-14 [1]*; Speed-Load (Power cell)-10 [1/2]; Paleontology/TL10-12 [1/2]; Physics/TL10-12 [1/2]; Planetology (Earthlike)-16 [2], (other)-13 [0]; Philosophy (Zen)-12 [1/2]; Photography/TL10-13 [1/2]; Research-14 [1]; Savoir-Faire-14 [1/2]; Scrounging-14 [1/2]; Xenobiology (Terrestrial)-15 [2], (Hostile Terrestrial)-13 [1/2]; Xenology-12 [1].

Maneuvers: Arm Lock-10 [1/2]; Kicking-9 [1/2].

* Receives +2 bonus on skill rolls requiring very fine control.

100-point version: increase IQ, DX, and all skills by 1 OR increase DX and physical skills by 2 and add a concealed light laser torch to right arm.

Gear: Heavy Laser Pistol with variable beam and dazzle setting; Dinosaur Laser; Multiscanner; Electronics and Mechanics mini-tool kits; Utility Belt.

Appearance: Asexual shiny white-metal humanoid ("Omicron-15" General Purpose Humanoid Robot, p. RO119) with a bulging utility belt; 6' tall, 128.67 lbs.

Adventure Seeds

Chinese Take-Out (Cliffhangers): When Abraham Van Diemen fails to return from an expedition to the Russian-Chinese borderlands, Alan Silver and the PCs are paid to go looking for him. For Silver, it's a perfect opportunity to spy on both countries, and maybe even steal the collection of ancient skulls and alleged yeti scalp from one of the warlords.

Them Bones (Horror, Atomic Horror, or Supers): Father Gray, a priest accused of child abuse, goes missing. After Father Chavez asks the PCs to help find him, they find a skeleton with the bones picked clean, but without any visible bite-marks. Dr. Kitamura identifies it as Gray's, but can't establish either the cause or the time of death. Dr. Brandt says that insects would have taken weeks to strip bones that thoroughly, but witnesses claim to have seen Gray six days before.

Chavez and Kitamura team up with the PCs to investigate, but the closer they get to the truth, more likely they are to be next on the menu.

Purge (Illuminati, Supers, Psionics, or Cyberpunk): After Mernok leads a campaign calling for the conscription, detention or elimination of all metahumans (or psionics, or hackers, or the Cabal), MiBs are dispatched to round them up. The PCs and many of their friends, forced into hiding, are approached by former enemies who want to assassinate Mernok. Westhill has a scheme to discredit the economist and also wants the PCs' help, but his plan is less likely to succeed. Do the PCs try to save Mernok, or kill him?

Headhunters (Space): The PCs find themselves in a race against Silver, Seth and Kitamura to retrieve the computer from a Planetary Explorer robot lost in the jungles of Zelyoni. Both groups soon discover that Zelyoni is more dangerous and less uninhabited than they'd been told, and after finding the robot, they may need to team up to fight their way back to their landing craft.

Designer's Notes: GURPS SWAT

by Brian J. Underhill

It was a Tuesday. I was sitting at an Elmer's Pancake House on Hayden Island having lunch with Lieutenant Martin Rowley, former team leader of the Portland, Oregon Special Emergency Reaction Team (SERT). I'd started the interview with basic questions about tactics, weapons, room entry techniques, and was ignoring my omelet while hammering out notes on my laptop.

Lt. Rowley was telling me about recent SERT operations -- a barricaded suspect in a rural neighborhood that had built an "insulation nest" for himself in the attic to resist the 30+ tear gas grenades the team fired through his windows; the gunmen that took over the KOIN Tower in downtown Portland; a suicide-by-cop hostage situation at the Washington Mutual bank inside the Gateway Fred Meyer. The latter of the three had resulted in officers taking friendly fire as their teammates shot through the suspect and an intervening wall, putting one bullet in a teammate's hip, the others in body armor.

"So what happened here," I asked, pointing at the rough map he'd drawn on my legal pad, "after they spotted the suspect?" The suspect had been holding a woman hostage, and had her at gunpoint as two SERT officers rounded the corner next to him.

"Oh, they killed him," he said. He went on to explain how one SERT officer had grabbed the girl and yanked her to safety as the other continued to cover the critically wounded suspect, and how the officer with a friendly slug in his hip had vaulted over the teller's counter to get out of the way of his teammates.

He kept talking, but I wasn't really listening. I kept thinking about Rowley's words. *Oh, they killed him.* Just like that.

To me, **GURPS SWAT** had been nothing more than another **GURPS** book, a chance to create a roleplaying game to bridge the gap between **Cops** and **Special Ops**. A chance to run games loaded with tabletop tactics and big guns.

To Lieutenant Martin Rowley and the men of the Portland SERT, it was meant risking their lives -- and sometimes taking lives -- on every mission.

"Oh," he'd said. "They *killed* him."

From Sierra to Game Storm

I'd spent many years playing first-person shooter computer games, and both Ubisoft's **Rainbow Six** and Sierra's **SWAT 3** had gotten me thinking about running them as **GURPS** games. I leafed through my copy of **Special Ops** and went out and bought **Cops**, looking for solid information on how to run a SWAT campaign.

Not much there.

After weeks of research, I fired off an email to Sean Punch, asking if SJ Games would like to see a proposal for **GURPS SWAT**. His reply was less than encouraging, but he gave me the go-ahead. I started work on an outline, and put together a playtest for *Game Storm* in the spring of 2002. The game was a hit.

After several more con playtests, a lengthy proposal, and hints of a SWAT movie due out in the summer of 2003, **GURPS SWAT** got the greenlight.

I called in all the favors I could, hitting up a local hostage negotiator friend to hook me up with the Longview, Washington Tactical Response Team entry team. I randomly approached police officers in restaurants with questions that must have inwardly frightened more than one:

Brian: "Excuse me, I don't mean to interrupt. Can I ask you a couple quick questions?"

Unsuspecting Cop: "Uh . . ."

Brian: "I'm writing a book about SWAT, and I wondered what kind of deployment vehicle the local team uses. Do you know?"

Bewildered Cop, now raising an eyebrow: "Uh, no, not really."

Brian: "Is that Glock on your hip department issue, or do you get to choose your own?"

Suspicious Cop, laying a hand on said Glock: "Can I see some ID?"

Oh, yeah. Life as a writer is fun.

Finishing Up

Despite the occasional misunderstanding, my "random cop questioning technique" proved very fruitful. Many patrol officers know a surprising amount about their SWAT teams, and most were more than happy to answer a dumb writer's questions, once I'd showed them some ID, my **SWAT** contract, and a copy of **GURPS Cliffhangers** or something.

It was, in fact, the "random cop questioning technique" that led me to Lt. Rowley of Portland SERT. I had spotted a female cop in the Gateway Quizno's, in northeast Portland, and approached to ask her if Portland had any female SWAT officers.

"My husband would be the one to ask," she said, handing me her card and writing their home phone number on the back. "He was the SERT team commander for 10 years."

As the book came together, I learned more about SWAT than I could fit into the book, even after it got expanded from 48 to 64 pages. I went to gun shows, police departments, and donut shops; I made friends with patrolmen, motorcycle cops, negotiators, and entry personnel; I played with guns and gear, read books, and watched *The History Channel*. At one point I was even asked if I wanted to be flash-banged, but Steve isn't paying me enough for *that* level of reality testing.

As I write this, the playtest is winding down and the book is nearly finished. For weeks I've thought about Lt. Rowley and his men. For me, **GURPS SWAT** started out as nothing more than a diversion, a game. But through the course of researching and writing it, that changed. The men and women of SWAT aren't pixels or character sheets. There's no *restart* button or a GM encouraging them to create another character. They don't shrug off bullets; the officer at the Gateway Fred Meyer shooting still carries a slug in his hip to this day.

I've got a new level of respect for men like that. As I mention on the credit page of **GURPS SWAT**, it is to the men and women of today's SWAT teams that the book is dedicated. I hope it lives up to that dedication.

Additional Material

Because the book got bumped from 48 to 64 pages between drafts, not a lot ended up being left out. But as has become the norm for Designer Notes articles, here's a sampling of what got left behind. Thanks to Kenneth Peters for the Uzbekistan SNB writeup.

Uzbekistan SNB Counter-Terrorism Department

The National Security Service (SNB; former KGB) is tasked with hostage rescue, direct action, and unconventional

warfare missions against security threats. The agency formed a counter-terrorist (CT) brigade consisting of a command element in Tashkent and 12 assault teams spread throughout the country. They have the lead role in operations involving aircraft, the subway, and most government buildings (including nuclear sites). Each regional detachment consists of between 30 and 90 men, half of them actual field operators. The Tashkent headquarters group comprises over 350 personnel, including special explosive ordnance disposal teams and sniper/observer teams. SNB teams are not strictly police officers, but are often tasked with the same missions as U.S. SWAT teams. They are roughly analogous to the FBI HRT teams, but with more emphasis on direct action and support of military operations (including operations outside Uzbekistan).

SNB CT teams have priority access to military assets in the performance of their duties and can even request support from T-80 main battle tanks and Mi-24 attack helicopters. Individual teams have little in the way of organic transport and must request movement from other government services (use of city buses is common).

The SNB has acquired a significant amount of foreign gear for its personnel, including Level III body armor from a manufacturer in South Africa, Motorola radios (unencrypted) from the U.S., and EOD robots from Europe. Although not lacking in military hardware, the SNB does not have access to many items SWAT teams often take for granted, such as bomb suppression blankets, fiber optic devices, extendable ladders, and even door rams. Most door breaching is done using explosives, with an emphasis on tamped explosives and line charges.

SNB CT teams prefer the Izhmekh PM pistol (often fitted with suppressors, pp. MF15-17), TsNIITochMash SR-1 Vektor pistol (see *TsNIITochMash P-9 Gyurza*, p. MF19), TsNIITochMash KS-23 Drozt shotgun (p. MF21), AK-74 assault rifle (p. HT114), AK-104 assault rifle, and SVD Dragunov sniper rifle (p. SO114).

Mini-Campaign: Murder, Incorporated

The following is a sample linked-mission SWAT campaign. GMs may wish to intersperse unrelated missions as he sees fit, though some scenes should be played back-to-back to maintain a sense of urgency. The campaign is largely cinematic and is designed for a full-time metropolitan SWAT team.

Business as Usual?

The SWAT team is called on to serve a warrant on a suspected clandestine drug lab. Upon entry, the team discovers that the lab is not turning out anything so mundane as methamphetamines, but rather has been used for biological research. In the aftermath of the raid, investigators report that sufficient material was on hand to produce two biological weapons, but most of it remains. It is likely, however, that a single biological weapon has already been created. Weapons and equipment found on-site point to black market weapons dealers around town. Police mobilize to bring all of them in for questioning.

It's Who You Know

A tip from a black market weapons dealer links the guns used at the bio lab with Tomik Jozka, a Czech national now living in the U.S. and working as an investment banker. He is rich, and his home is in a very nice neighborhood. He has a wife and four-year-old daughter. The SWAT team is tasked with bringing him in for questioning; the event should be uneventful, though Jozka will protest vociferously. He pleads diplomatic immunity, but seizure of his computer and cell phone records link him to a substantial banking deal with city councilman David Ballantine. The D.A. refuses to move on Ballantine without additional information. Research will turn up basic information on Ballantine; he is a native of New York, who relocated to the PCs' city in March 2002.

Search and Seizure

The team is sent to intercept a major weapons shipment (at the local docks, a rural airstrip, or a major truck-stop) based on information discovered in Jozka's computers, PDA, etc. The shipment is heavily guarded by experienced

mercenary soldiers armed with some of the latest military gear. It will prove a tough fight for SWAT.

After the firefight, investigators discover a street address and GPS instructions to take part of the shipment to a warehouse owned by a Mexican import company. That company is, in turn, owned by a parent corporation -- Global Securities, Limited -- of which councilman David Ballantine is a majority shareholder. It is enough to convince the D.A. to make a move.

The Time for Vengeance

SWAT is called out to Ballantine's house (or penthouse downtown) and bring him in for questioning. He does not resist. Research (done now, or earlier) indicates that Ballantine lost his wife and children in the World Trade Center tragedy. He began calling for a full-scale war against Islam, but was belittled and soon found himself of the loop. He relocated in 2002 to start anew, and has been planning his revenge. The research reveals ties to anti-Muslim organizations, as well as emails to the various mercenaries around the region (including some the SWAT team encountered in the last mission). Extensive information about the upcoming International Peace and Goodwill Conference (to be held in two days) leads police to believe Ballantine was (is!) planning an attack on that conference. The delegates are already in town, most staying in a large hotel near the convention center where the event is to be held.

The Final Takedown

In an attempt to thwart Ballantine's plan, SWAT sweeps all surrounding airports, docks, train stations. The PCs' team is assigned to search a small commercial airstrip outside of town. What starts as a routine sweep turns deadly when they encounter heavily-armed mercenaries and the missing biological weapon. The bomb has been loaded onto a small plane that will attempt to take off when SWAT arrives. The weapon is equipped with an altimeter; once the mercs get it airborne, it will detonate if the plane drops below 200 feet (a safety measure in case the plane is shot down).

The mercs are going to bomb -- not the convention center -- but the nearby hotel containing the delegates. Notes and hotel information will clarify the details of the plan once SWAT has neutralized the mercs and the device.

Dr. Ludwig Javosky, Evil Genius

by Mark Gellis

Born in 1907, Ludwig Javosky was 10 when his father, a doctor in the German Army, was killed by British artillery. For years, he, his mother, and his two brothers endured poverty. His talents as a scholar were sufficient, however, to earn him admission to a prestigious university, where he studied science, and eventually took a doctorate in Physics and a second doctorate in Electronic Engineering.

By 1937, Javosky's fortunes had improved. Hitler was in power. His brothers had become officers in the German Army. Javosky's genius had attracted the attention of the Nazi government, and he was hired to head a secret "Special Tasks" research laboratory. Here, he and his team worked on projects that included computational devices, encrypted radio and telephone equipment, and jet engines. The late 1930s and early 1940s were a time of great personal satisfaction for Javosky.

By the end of the War, all that had changed. Javosky's brothers were both killed at Stalingrad. His mother, weakened by the shock, passed away in 1944. And Javosky had by that time realized that Germany was unlikely to win the War. If they had stopped in 1940, with France and Poland conquered, and come to terms with Britain and America, a Greater Germany might have stood forever, but now the Allies were committed to the utter defeat of the Nazi regime. But there was little sense in regrets and recriminations. Javosky continued to work for Hitler, but he carefully laid his plans for an escape should worst come to worst. After all, if he had learned anything from life, it was that in time the worst always came to worst.

He was disgusted by the concentration camps, but it was not because he was horrified by the incredible loss of life. The tragedies in his own life had left him rather callous. Why should he care about the millions who perished? Had anyone saved his father from being blown to bits? Had anyone saved his mother from dying alone in her house because the shock of losing two of her sons had broken her heart? Javosky did not wish misfortune on anyone, unless they had crossed him somehow; on the other hand, he could no longer bring himself to care very much if misfortune did befall them. Tragedy had made a stone of his heart. What annoyed Javosky about the concentration camps was simply that he thought they had been unnecessary; they were wasteful and stupid and a blot on the dignity of his country.

Just before the Allies entered Berlin, Javosky escaped to Argentina. He had kept very careful notes of his research and by 1946 had patented some of his inventions (the Nazi regime no longer needed them, so Javosky felt no guilt about using them to make himself rich). By 1950, he had sold enough of his inventions to industry to make himself quite wealthy. He purchased an estate near Corrientes, in northern Argentina, and began a new phase of his life . . .

The Javosky Project

Wealthy, and free to pursue his own research, Javosky turned to cosmology. He was attempting to develop a means to study the fabric of space and its various interactions with energy and gravity. He described it as "listening to the true music of the spheres." Eventually, he developed what he simply called the Detector, which allowed him to see how space was affected by gravity and energy, the myriad bodies of the distant universe engaged in an enormous cosmic dance. The device had little practical use, of course, but Javosky was endlessly fascinated. He became quite adept at reading patterns.

And then he noticed something. Invisible channels in space seemed to be opening and closing, as if someone or something was somehow disrupting space to form conduits between distant astronomical bodies. However, the location of the end points of these channels were bizarre. Some appeared to be in the middle of interstellar space. And others did not appear to be anywhere at all.

The breakthrough came when he changed the system. Using a six-dimensional matrix, instead of the conventional three-dimensional one, he could map the signals. Suddenly, it was clear to him that these tunnels in space were not

crossing interstellar distances but creating conduits between what had to be entirely distinct universes. Fascinating!

More important, the regularity with which some of the tunnels were created indicated that they were artificial rather than natural. Someone was opening those tunnels in space. And that meant he could do it, too.

He began by building the Communicator. He had seen enough of how human beings treated one another to know that to simply open a door to whatever world these creatures lived in might have unforeseen and disastrous effects. He would see if he could contact them first, find out what they were like before inviting them over for coffee and strudel.

In building the Communicator, Javosky discovered that channels between universes could only exist if there were portals (or receivers and transmitters for communication) at both ends. Unless someone was listening or transmitting, his Communicator would prove useless.

Javosky spent months exploring the cosmos with the Detector, mapping dimensional channels, a process that involved such complex mathematical calculations that they often left him exhausted and with blinding headaches, and listening on his Communicator for signals from other worlds. In time, he identified several broadcasts that appeared to be intelligent in origin. But they were so different, so alien. Buzzing and clicking and eerie musical tones. They were clearly languages, but translating them seemed an insurmountable task.

Those who knew him saw that he was changing. He had never been an overly friendly man, but he had become restless and irritable. He complained frequently of headaches. He also seemed unusually suspicious, even going to far as to claim that a new servant was really a spy for some enemy he refused to name. Eventually, the other servants convinced him that the boy could be trusted.

A young physicist working with Javosky suggested that the older man should take a few months off, that he was working himself too hard. The next day, the young man and his belongings were gone.

Javosky was not going to give up. During the war, he had used his abilities as a mathematician to break Allied codes. He took the same approach with the alien signals and, in the end, his efforts paid off.

The creatures called themselves the Ngszet. Javosky spent several more weeks listening to their buzzing and clicking voices, honing his translation skills, learning as much as he could of the nuances of their language. And then he sent a message of his own, and was delighted when they responded. For weeks, they corresponded. Finally, the aliens taught him how to build a Portal.

On October 17, 1954, Dr. Ludwig Javosky opened a doorway to another world. Once he saw what lay on the other side, he would never be the same again . . .

Javosky Today

Javosky is 6'1" and weighs 175 lbs. He is an imposing man, tall but a bit thin, with a narrow, angular face. He has fair skin, slightly curly silver-blond hair, and light gray eyes.

He owns a 1,000-acre estate on the Parana River near Corrientes (which allows easy access by river to larger cities to the south and is also close enough to the border that he could escape into Paraguay if he ever needed to do so). Most of the land is undeveloped wilderness. The estate has a large house, stables, a garage, a dock and a large boat house, and a staff of about ten servants. They are loyal, but some of them are also frightened.

The terrain surrounding the estate is dominated by the Parana river and the enormous Ibera marsh. It is warm and humid here. Local fauna include marsh deer, river otters, spoonbills, and caimans. Anglers (or anyone pretending to be an angler because they need a good cover story) will be pleased by the presence of the dorado, a large (about six to ten pounds, although some get much bigger) and aggressive fish (it eats piranhas) that lives in these waters. Javosky does not spend a great deal of time outdoors, although he does enjoy riding and boating when he has time for it, but he has spent nearly ten years in this country and knows it well enough that he could survive in the wilderness if he had to do

so. He is also a fair shot with both pistol and rifle. His weapons of choice are the Walther P-38 and the Karabiner 98k (pp. W92-95).

It is worth noting that the Parana River -- which runs for more than 2,000 miles through parts of Brazil and Argentina, and provides access to the cities of Ciudad del Este, Corrientes, Santa Fe, and Rosario before flowing into the Rio de la Plata near Buenos Aires -- would make a terrific setting for a wide variety of campaigns.

Using Dr. Javosky In A Campaign

There are a number of ways in which Javosky can be used in a campaign. First, one can simply use the story described above. The player characters get involved because they are either lost in the wilderness and blunder onto Javosky's property or they have gone to investigate rumors that the good doctor is involved in something very odd indeed.

The Big Secret is that the Ngszet intend to establish their own dimensional Portals in isolated regions of our world as staging points for an invasion so they can enslave the human race as food animals. An advance team has come through the Portal (located in Javosky's laboratory) and is presently camped out in the countryside near Corrientes while the aliens gather intelligence about our world. They have modified some of their communicators to transmit and receive on a short-wave band, allowing them to keep in touch with Javosky, who has a short-wave radio at the house. They also sometimes visit the boat house under cover of darkness so they can meet with Javosky.

They have told Javosky that they are collecting biological samples and have asked him not to inform the authorities because they believe humanity is not ready to accept the idea of life on other worlds. So far, Javosky believes them, and believes that eventually he will receive both wealth and fame for his part in contacting an alien civilization. For this reason, he is willing to do just about anything to prevent people from learning about the Ngszet or telling the authorities about them.

The GM should decide how much progress the Ngszet have made. It is possible they have not yet built any Portals of their own. If so, once Javosky's Portal is destroyed and the alien advance team is dealt with, our world is safe (at least until someone else builds a Portal). GMs who want a longer campaign should assume the Ngszet have completed at least one Portal, possibly more, that they may have moved one or more Portals to other places on Earth, and that through Javosky they may have developed additional contacts. As long as the real mission of the aliens remains a secret, many people will be willing to help them. Even if it was revealed that the aliens intend to enslave humanity, there are many people who would serve them in return for the promise that they will be spared.

The Ngszet advance team consists of ten individuals. They are skilled technicians and competent fighters, the alien equivalent of CIA field operatives. They are armed with gauss weapons (see *GURPS: Ultra-Tech* p. 53 and p. 126 and *GURPS: Space* pp. 75-78 for details) and survival knives (treat as "Small Knife," from *GURPS: Basic Set*, p. 206, if they are used in combat).

The Ngszet are actually collecting some biological samples while they make plans to build new Portals. They are also indulging in a little harvesting, ambushing humans and eating them when they get the opportunity. Local newspapers will have a few stories about odd disappearances. The Ngszet have been careful not to eat human flesh in the boat house itself, but a careful search of the river shore might reveal some remains (such as bones with very unusual tooth marks, unusual because they were made by giant insect mandibles rather than teeth) or pieces of clothing or jewelry that might identify a particular victim.

Obviously, PCs should not initially know about the Ngszet. There should, however, be subtle hints that Javosky is up to something. Perhaps some of the servants have seen things. They may be too frightened to do anything themselves (many of them remember the young assistant who disappeared . . . Javosky says he went to work at a university in Rosario, but they also saw the doctor taking a heavy burden in a tarp out to the river that night) but they may speak to the player characters about their suspicions. Some of Javosky's servants, of course, are quite loyal, believing that they work for an important man, and will try to stop any attempt to harm him or pry into his secrets. Of course, none of them know what the Ngszet are planning.

One interesting twist would be to have Javosky see the error of his ways and try to help the player characters. After all, it is one thing to be callous; it is quite another thing to be stupid. If Javosky figures out the Ngszet are killing people, it might occur to him that he could be next. The aliens no longer need him. They have agents on Earth and they know how to build their own Portals. So it might only be a matter of time before he is on the dinner plate, too. Javosky is very unlikely to switch sides, however, unless he believes he is in danger. He really does not care if anyone else is eaten. (It is important that one does not make Javosky too sympathetic, even if he ends up helping the player characters. He is a former Nazi, after all.) If the Ngszet believe he is going to betray them, they will kill him.

The Ngszet

The Ngszet are humanoid but insect-like aliens who stand about 4'0" and weigh about 75 lbs. They are covered with tan chitin. Their genitals are internal unless extended for mating, so it is usually impossible to tell if one is male or female. With their mandibles, bulbous black compound eyes, and short, stiff antennae, they look something like gigantic humanoid locusts; they resemble giant grasshopper-people. (This may require a Fright Check, depending on the individual.)

Their metabolism and internal organs are actually similar to reptiles, rather than insects; they have lungs and an efficient three-chambered heart. They are also cold-blooded, making them sluggish in temperatures below 50 degrees Fahrenheit; in temperatures below 32 degrees Fahrenheit they must roll vs. HT to avoid taking damage (p. CI101). Since Corrientes is at about the same latitude as Tampa, FL or Laredo, TX (that is, in their respective hemispheres), the temperature has not yet been much of a problem for them.

On their own world, they wear simple clothes, mostly one-piece coveralls of light synthetic fabrics. Ngszet on Earth wear human-style clothing tailored for their alien bodies. This is not a fashion statement but an attempt at camouflage; dressed this way, with broad-brimmed hats hiding their faces, one might at first assume they are children if they are encountered at night, in bad light, or in bad weather, or if they are seen at a distance.

Because they come from an alternate universe, rather than another solar system, their biochemistry is similar to our own and they can eat human flesh and gain nourishment from it. This is unfortunate, as they find human flesh delicious. Being utterly amoral creatures, they see nothing wrong with enslaving the human race and using us as food animals. They have already done this in a number of other alternate universes.

Ngszet are chummy and tend to travel in groups of four or five. As a result, while they are weaker than most adult humans, they can often overwhelm solitary individuals in a melee by sheer force of numbers.

The Ngszet can easily be adapted as alien adversaries for a wide variety of campaigns.

Racial Template For Ngszet

ST: -3 [-20] **DX:** +0 [0] **IQ:** +2 [+20] **HT:** +1 [10].

Advantages: Chitin (PD 2, DR 2) [56]; Faz Sense [10]; Night Vision [10]

Disadvantages: Chummy (With their own kind, at least) [-5]; Cold-Blooded [-5]; Intolerance (Total xenophobia) [-10]; Odious Racial Habit (Enslaves and eats other intelligent beings!) [-15]; Reduced Hit Points (-3) [-15]

Template Cost: 36

Additional Campaigns

The campaign can continue, centering on exploration after PCs have dealt with the Ngszet menace. Once Javosky and the Ngszet are vanquished, if the heroes do not destroy the Portal, they would be able to use it travel to other universes. Here, the GM has a great deal of freedom. Javosky spent years building and experimenting with the Detector, the

Communicator, and the Portal. It is possible that he opened doorways to other universes, perhaps even stepped through and did a little exploring himself. If the investigators find his notebooks, they will find notes on one world that developed Portals and then slipped back into savagery, perhaps because of some cataclysmic war or natural catastrophe. A few of their Portals are still working, kept functional by automated maintenance equipment. The native population is too scattered to make invasion worthwhile to the Ngszet, so they have left it alone. The GM will have to decide what Javosky learned about this world on his own and what he learned from the Ngszet.

There is also the universe from which signals of an eerie musical nature emanated; Javosky was never able to translate these signals and the Ngszet claim to know nothing about that universe.

And there is no reason why suitably skilled adventurers might not use the Detector to find entirely new worlds of which even Javosky had not dreamed.

Finally, it is possible to drop the Ngszet plot entirely. Javosky could have developed the Portal on his own, although this does raise his value as a character by quite a bit; p. STM44 suggests that a dimensional Portal would probably count as a 50-point invention and this means Javosky would have to have Electronics (Matter Transmitters)-25 [18]. If this is done, however, the GM can use him as a starting point for any alternate universe campaign one desires.

Other Time Periods

Javosky is designed for an **Atomic Horror** campaign, but using him in other settings is easy. Hardly any changes are required to use him during the **Cliffhangers** era or **World War II** except that he will be 10 or 15 years younger and working for Germany instead of living on his own estate in Argentina. There is no reason, after all, why the Javosky Portal could not be a secret Nazi project, with Hitler hoping to gain atomic weapons or other advanced technology from the Ngszet. Perhaps the mission would be to capture or destroy the Portal (and kidnap or eliminate Javosky) before the Nazis can do this. Here, Javosky would gain the Nazi regime as a powerful Patron, available on 12-, worth 60 points, although serving them would also involve a 10-point Duty disadvantage (the Nazis would often, that is, on 12-, demand that he work on some additional projects, possibly involving dangerous chemicals, radiation, kidnapping or assassination attempts by enemy agents, etc.).

If one wanted to run the Ngszet campaign in South America during the **Cliffhangers** era, one can assume that Javosky was born in 1885, that he had served Germany as a research scientist in World War I rather than fighting on the front, that his brothers had died serving their country in that war, and that his parents had both died in the influenza epidemic of 1919. This version of Javosky emigrates to Argentina around 1925 and makes contact with the Ngszet sometime in the 1930s. He would have a great deal of sympathy with the Nazi cause and, after Hitler comes to power, might be working on developing new equipment for Germany along with his other projects. He would be in contact with German agents working in South America during this period. This might even be the reason the player characters end up dealing with Javosky - - they might be investigating him or they might be following an agent who ends up on his estate. This version of Javosky would, after 1935, have some degree of the Age disadvantage, and Nazi Germany again counts as a Patron (and a Duty), but only on 9-, for a total of 30 points and -5 points respectively.

For a modern campaign (or a late Cold War one set in the 1970s or 1980s), one should assume that Javosky is born in 1940, with his father dying in World War II, his brothers serving as Intelligence Officers for East Germany and being killed during the Cold War by British or American agents, and Javosky himself working for the Soviets as a research scientist. Here, add Area Knowledge (Soviet Union)-16 [1], Computer Operation-16 [1], and Computer Programming-17 [1] to his skills. If the campaign is set during the Cold War, treat the Soviets as a 60-point Patron (and a -10-point Duty); the campaign might now involve Javosky developing his Portal for his Communist masters (who may or may not know what the Ngszet intend to do once they gain access to our world).

A modern day campaign would assume that, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Javosky would settle in South America and sell his talents as a technical consultant to the highest bidder (and make huge profits from his patents) while working on his Detector and Communicator. With the Internet allowing easy communication with clients around the world, he would be able to work for any government, corporation, or terrorist group without ever having to leave his estate. In any campaign set after 1990, this version of Javosky would have some level of the Age disadvantage.

"Technical" Notes

The devices described in this article are adapted from technology described in *GURPS: Ultra-Tech*. Anyone wishing to recreate these devices in their own campaigns should simply use the ones described in that book, keeping in mind that these devices provide access to other universes rather than to other places in our own universe. (Of course, there is no reason why they could not do both.)

The Detector and the Communicator should both be treated as versions of the Transtellar Tachyon Communicator (see *GURPS: Ultra-Tech* p. 37), as far as weight and cost are concerned; the Portal should be treated as a teleport booth or telegate in terms of weight and cost (see pp. UT117-118).

The reason for using these variant devices instead of those in *Time Travel* was to provide a limiting factor on the Ngszet; if they had parachronic conveyors, they would not need Javosky to build a Portal for them and destroying (or controlling) his Portal (and any others that had been built by the aliens) would no longer be a critical part of the plot. In fact, unless building conveyors was hideously expensive for the Ngszet, having this means to travel to other universes would have allowed them to quickly overwhelm our planet. While this might be useful if someone wanted to run a deeply pessimistic campaign, it was not what I wanted to do here. GMs are free to decide whether or not both Portals and parachronic technology function in any particular campaign (after all, just because the Ngszet never developed conveyors does not mean that no one else will).

Javosky's Portal can be used to search for other universes; the Ngszet design includes an integral Detector, Communicator, and hyperspace mapping equipment, so the process only requires some Electronic Operations rolls, with a penalty for using very unfamiliar equipment to be determined by the GM (also, all the dials, etc. are in German). If the Portal has been destroyed, but the original Detector is still intact, one could attempt to determine coordinates for other Portals. This, however, would require not only Electronics Operation rolls for the Detector to gather data but also require several rolls for Mathematics and Hyperspace Physics, at significant penalties, and with the whole process taking days or even weeks; the GM should determine if HT rolls are necessary afterwards to avoid migraines or more serious effects.

Ludwig Javosky In *GURPS*

ST: 12 [20] **DX:** 10 [0] **IQ** 16 [80] **HT** 11 [10].
Move 6.

Advantages: Ally Group (House and grounds staff, and laboratory assistants, Medium Group, 15-) [60]; Charisma +1 [5]; Gadgeteer [25]; Invention (Cosmic Communicator) [15]; Invention (Cosmic Detector) [15]*; Mathematical Ability [10]; Status +2 [5]**; Filthy Rich [50]

*Javosky pays no points for the Cosmic Portal because he did not invent it; he simply assembled it from instructions provided by the Ngszet.

**includes one free level from Filthy Rich

Disadvantages: Callous [-6]; Migraine (On 8-, only when working on complex problems involving six-dimensional geometry, -50%) [-5]; Paranoia [-10]; Secret (In league with aliens!) [-20]

Quirks: Keeps family photographs on his desk [-1]; Loves coffee [-1]; Loves strudel (and hired a German cook because it was impossible to find an Argentinean one who knew how to make good strudel) [-1]; Occasionally seduces attractive maids [-1]

Skills: Administration-16 [2]; Area Knowledge (Argentina)-16 [1]; Area Knowledge (Germany)-16 [1]; Astronomy-16 [4]; Boating-10 [2]; Cryptanalysis-17 [1]; Cryptography-15 [2]; Driving (Automobile)-11 [4]; Electronics

(Communications)-20 [8]; Electronics (Sensors)-20 [8]; Electronics (Matter Transmitters)-16 [1]; Electronic Operations (Communication)-15 [1]; Electronic Operations (Sensors)-15 [1]; Electronic Operations (Matter Transmitters)-15 [1]; First Aid-16 [1]; Guns (Pistol)-13 [2]; Guns (Rifle)-13 [2]; Hyperspace Physics-15 [4]; Intelligence Analysis-14 [1]; Leadership-17 [2]; Linguistics-16 [4]; Mathematics-18 [2]; Nuclear Physics-15 [4]; Physics-17 [6]; Powerboat-11 [4]; Research-15 [1]; Riding (Horse)-11 [4]; Survival (Swampland)-15 [1]*
* skills includes bonuses for Mathematical Ability, Charisma, etc.

Language: English-15 [1]; French-15 [1]; German (Native)-16 [0]; Ngszet-13 [1]*; Russian-15 [1]; Spanish-15 [1]
* treat this buzzing and clicking alien language as a M/VH skill

Total Points: 330

Pyramid Review

Zombies!!! 3.5 Not Dead Yet (for Zombies!!!)

Published by [Twilight Creations, Inc.](#)

Written by **Todd A. Breitenstein and Kerry Breitenstein with Mark Bordenet, Dr. Bedlam, Robert Yarborough, Tony Fryer and Steve Donohue**

Illustrated by **Dave Aikins**

50 cards and rules; \$9.99

The history of Twilight Creations, Inc's popular [Zombies!!!](#) board game reads like that of a cadaver, or even a bad zombie flick. It was originally designed and published by Journeyman Press, a division of The United States Playing Card Company. Their parent company's unfortunate decision to close them down left the game in limbo, but the designers resurrected themselves as Twilight Creations, Inc. and released several new games of their own, including the more broadly focused horror roleplaying/board game, [When Darkness Comes: The Awakening](#) and its various supplements and expansions, and the board game [Dante's Inferno](#). They also regained the rights to publish their original creation, **Zombies!!!**

Since then the game has not only won the 2001 Origins Award for "Best Graphic Presentation of a Board Game," Dave Aikins' work on the cards was, and continues to be simultaneously deliciously sly and gory, but also had its "love" (to steal a phrase from [All Flesh Must Be Eaten](#)) spread through another two supplements. Both provided more Map Tiles and Event Cards, the first [Zombies!!! 2: Zombie Corps\(e\)](#) adding an army base and special government "glow-in-the-dark" zombies, while the second, [Zombies!!! 3: Mall Walkers](#), answered every zombie fan's demand and added a shopping mall to the game. Neither changed the way in which the basic game is played, although with **Zombies!!! 3: Mall Walkers**, a smaller and shorter game of **Zombies!!!** could be played, being just limited to the halls and stores of the 16 Map Tiles mall.

With the release of **Zombies!!! 3.5 Not Dead Yet**, the way in which **Zombies!!!** can be played almost changes -- one half-change, the other not. Hence the designation, "**Zombies!!! 3.5**." There are no Map Tiles in this supplement, which describes itself as an "all event card expansion," the slim, flat book containing some 50 new cards and a set of new rules.

The new event cards are actually 25 pairs of identical cards, all graced with Dave Aikins' gloriously gruesome full-color artwork, and marked with a handy "Z3.5" to indicate the set they originate from. This last a useful feature that runs throughout the entire line.

If there is a common theme running through these 25 new additions, it is one of movement between tiles, both of players and zombies, as well as filling tiles with the latter. For example, "Did you hear that?" moves all zombies from one player's tile and onto an adjacent one; "They're Coming For You, _____" fills an opponent's tile with zombies and is nicely illustrated with a homage to the opening cemetery scene from *Night of the Living Dead*; and "What could possibly be behind that door?" has an equal chance of emptying a building of its zombies or completely filling it up. Other cards place a temporary blanket upon normal movement ("Too . . . tired . . . to . . . run . . ."), the use of bullets in combat ("No Guts, No Glory") and even on picking up tokens ("Power Outage").

Some enable direct interaction between one player's pawn and another's. "Lots of Running and Screaming" lets one

player steal the movement of another; "Why Don't We Go Some Place More Private?" allows a pawn to piggyback the movement of another; and "There You Are!" sends a player's pawn directly to the square containing the nearest opposing pawn. Conversely, some cards are playable under only certain conditions, such as "That's Not So Scary," which can only be played when a player only has a single Life and a single Bullet token left, giving that player another turn immediately. Samples of the cards from ***Zombies!!! 3.5 Not Dead Yet*** can be found on the publisher's [website](#).

Such limitations on card play may be one reason that players will not use them with the new rules found in this expansion. Simply laid out on a small sheet of heavy paper, the Customized Deck rules turn out to be rather short. They simply suggest a way around the huge mound that would result were you to combine every card from the basic game and its supplements into a single Event Deck. Instead, each player can select from the hundred or so designs available -- amounting to roughly 160 or so cards in total -- and design a 50-card personal Event Deck of their own. During a game each player draws from his or her personal deck rather than from the common deck as in normal games, but once this personal deck is exhausted, it cannot be reshuffled.

There are only a few limitations upon customized deck design, and these amount to restricting the number of a particular card allowed in a personal deck to just two, and one only from the list of six of the more powerful cards given on the back of these new rules. The only other restrictions are those decided upon before a game -- say, deciding not to use a particular card or cards from one expansion -- and those chosen by the players in the actual deck building process. During the tryout of these new rules, those cards containing fewer restrictions proved to be more popular.

But the real problem with the Customized Deck rules is the lack of cards. Even if you possess everything for the game it only gives some 160 cards, and that is only enough to build three 50-card personal decks, clearly not enough if there are four or more players and even less useful in light of the fact that ***Zombies!!!*** is designed for as many as six players. Even at a limit of the three 50-card personal decks, the choice for personalization is very restricted.

One half of ***Zombies!!! 3.5 Not Dead Yet*** does pretty much what the previous expansions have done -- add more Event Cards and push the scope of basic mechanics in an unexplored direction or two. This expansion adds more interaction directly between player pawns and between tiles. The other half, the Customized Deck rules, is an initial push upon the part of the designers' intention to shake the game up and move it in a new direction. As an option, they are different from what has gone on before, and do allow the players a little more input in deciding the events that can be added to the game. Yet radical they are not, and really, only those that own everything for the game are likely to get the most out of this option, and even then for a limited number of players. But then ***Zombies!!!*** has always been one of those board games with the capacity that allows its fans to tweak the mechanics. It is devotees of this aspect of the game that will get the most out of ***Zombies!!! 3.5 Not Dead Yet***, but to really and fully explore these new rules, the designers need to give us a lot more cards -- *a lot more*.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

From the Files of Matthews GenTech (for Silver Age Sentinels)

Published by [Guardians of Order, Inc.](#)

Written by Bruce Ballon

Edited by Mark C. MacKinnon

Artwork by Matt Harpold

32-page b&w softcover; \$9.95

It makes a good change of pace, seeing a book for a superhero game that uses something other than a parade of costumed freaks. *From the Files of Matthews GenTech* is such a collection, offering bizarre beasts with weird powers (and dual stats, for Tri-Stat and *d20 System*) to challenge the do-gooders of *Silver Age Sentinels*, Guardians of Order's superhero RPG world.

The book is a collection of ravings by Samuel Matthews, as he spews his venomous hatred for all things superheroic. Believing metahumans to be responsible for the death of his mother, he labors tirelessly in his lab to create hybrid monstrosities that spew some venom of their own. He takes parts and DNA from one animal and another and splices them together. He makes liberal use of genetic material stolen from superheroes, or reagents scored off the black market. Most of his handiwork is bound to him by dependence on a special serum that keeps severe, rage-inducing pain at bay.

Creature write-ups are paired with entries from Matthews' scientific journals. Each entry discusses a different type of superhero and a specific example of each. Matthews dissects the combat tactics of his foes, and investigates a weakness he can exploit with one of his mutations. The speedster Slipstream can move faster than the speed of sound, but not faster than thought, so the good doctor is prepared to sick the mind-scrambling Alpha Ape on him. If a hero's powers are psychic or depend on balance, they'll need to concentrate or stand upright -- something they can't do with Cackle the hyena-woman shrieking in their ear. Bricks -- the female ones, anyway -- aren't immune to the chemical charms of Valentino (a rat-skunk-man hybrid), and the light-absorbing murdermoth collective will blind most any hero.

Not every character in a category has the same vulnerabilities, of course, so Matthews makes suggestions as to how he (read: the GM) might modify his tactics or combine his creations to account for such blind spots. Once he's got a beast clawing at the inside of its cage, he comes up with a method for introducing it into the community that's sure to draw the attention of the intended super-victim. And for reinforcement, he has amorphous blobs and headless abominations, and his collection of godbeasts and (de?)evolving link-men.

There is another nice touch in the concomitant journals kept by the doctor's enhanced pet bear Montgomery as he gains self-awareness. It's a shame he isn't expanded for his own adventure instead of, ultimately, being left as one more critter entry at the back of the book. That's just a reviewer's greed . . . the sidebar is remarkably concise and poignant, and any GM worth his dice bag will be able to develop his own idea.

The diaries Matthews keeps for his grand plan -- the "Day of Wrath" -- are a little less rigid in their attention to style . . . or are they? Matthews is quite mad, that's clear, but he seems to lack a distinct voice. It's almost as though he's being written by committee -- one moment he's the erudite scientist, the next he's like a mob thug engaged in DNA

manipulation. It's not enough to break the character, but it's also unclear whether this is deliberate characterization or the author's difficulty in maintaining the tone.

Along the way, we're also made privy to Matthews' sick obsession with his partner in crime Alice, the Queen of Hearts. Once she's served her purpose, the doctor intends to make her his concubine, and there's some seriously icky material hinted at there. The twisted journal entries are in good company, with artwork shoved between the writings depicting the creatures in question. The descriptions will make your skin crawl, and the pictures aren't going to do much to put your mind at ease. They're thick, watery-looking representations by Matt Harpold, reminiscent of Christopher Shy. They lack that degree of sophistication, but they're what the book needs. A series of four-color comic covers wouldn't have served as well as these darker, more inscrutable shadows.

The adult material is surprising but not graphic. There are few editorial issues (though three spellings of Matthews is two too many), and everything is straight to the point. With no fat to speak of, ***From the Files of Matthews GenTech*** is a slim but weighty product with insight and evil enough to make serious headaches for your Silver Age Sentinels.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Soul Harvest (for d20 System)

Published by [Khan's Press](#)

Written by Garth Wright

85-page PDF download with b&w and color illustrations; \$6.95

The demons are coming! The demons are coming! In Terry Brooks' novel *The Elfstones of Shanara*, the heroes quest to turn back an army of newly unleashed demons set on conquering the world. Raymond E. Feist's *Serpentwar* saga opens with the remnants of a race forced to travel dimensionally because a theocracy allowed demons access to their world to prevent being conquered, and the demons quickly destroyed the entire world. A demonic invasion by the forces of evil can turn a campaign apocalyptic as hell is unleashed and runs wild.

Soul Harvest is a **d20 System** sourcebook set on providing a toolkit for demonic invasions and the mini-campaign setting of Sinder where a successful invasion has occurred. All of the discussion of issues raised by a demonic invasion, however, are tied into the specific cosmology of the world of Sinder. Individual elements such as the classes, spells, monsters, and groups can mostly be used in any campaign easily, but discussions of the various race reactions to the invasions, for example, are tied directly to the particular world of Sinder and its proposed history and cosmology.

In Sinder there is the Light and The Dark. Gods do not enter the picture, just two sides of Good and Evil (with neutrals and druids worshipping an incarnate nature earth goddess who does not intervene). There is one Hell (also called the abyss) at the center of the world deep underground where bad souls go upon death to be tormented by demons and devils. On the flip side there is one heaven where good souls go upon death.

All standard fiends are called demons, while all individual demon lord level fiends are called devils (who rule the demons). DMs are encouraged to use whatever **d20 System** sources they like for the endless variety of demons. All demons and devils can possess, make use of souls, and try to command evil creatures including sentient ones. If killed on the world, they just reform in Hell and can come back again and again.

Alignment is more important in Sinder than in normal **d20 System** settings. It is a binary decision at death whether you go to hell or heaven. Being evil means you might be dominated by demons anytime you meet them. Evil creatures, however, can gain power from aligning with demonic patronage and selling their souls. Also, the Light and the Dark reward those who follow their paths, granting random powers or blessings on high level characters, a little bit like the alignment rewards in *Dragonlords of Melniboné*.

Strangely, a dream plane is also a big part of Sinder, with a high proportion of the spells and feats as well as a prestige class and some templates devoted to the subject. The tie-in to demons is not readily apparent, it simply appears to be part of the world of Sinder.

The current timeline of Sinder is 50 years after the gates to hell were opened and the invasion began and succeeded. Most of the world's population has been killed in the overthrow, although devils keep groups of mortals alive in "flesh farms" to breed more new souls for their use and consumption. A few groups remain free and defiant in the post-apocalyptic world, trying to survive and salvage their lost world. Flesh farms are a great creepy idea that would also work for vampires, illithids, and others who prey upon sentient beings.

While several moral issues are raised, this sourcebook does not answer them. For instance, it states that after the invasion began the vulnerability of evil people being dominated was discovered, and paladins and clerics had to

grapple with whether they should kill people who detected as evil on sight. Some felt this justified instant death sentences, others felt it would not be good to kill solely for being evil instead of *doing* evil. In the end, the demons overran all the cities regardless of the positions taken. This does not answer whether this is an evil action that would strip a paladin of his powers, an important question for the DM to answer when PC paladins detect evil in the world of Sinder.

This comes up again when survivalist groups are described later in the book. One of them is a lawful-good-based religious military group that has prejudices against nonhumans, women, and arcane casters. They conduct witch hunts and genocide as well as practice torture on evil creatures to get them to accept the light before killing them quickly before they can backslide. Justifying the paladins in this group is an exercise left to the DM.

A new core class is introduced -- the vampiric mage. They know spells as a sorcerer but power them through draining life forces (3hp/spell level) from the closest living creature. Unwilling victims get a will save of 10+level+Con modifier, with success meaning no hit point damage and the casting is foiled. This provides the mage with an incentive to either have willing donors at hand and use minimal spells, or position themselves alone near their foes and unleash their most potent spells every time.

Another 11 prestige classes flesh out the different survivalist groups and paths of dark power in Sinder. A couple follow the fighter format of giving plenty of class appropriate powers or options to choose from at each level, so you can make individual dwarven hellstormers, with different dwarven war powers and different wielders of sapphire who have different arcane supernatural abilities to choose from. One of the classes, the fiend-touched, establishes relations with demons and gains power over those they have sex with, earning this product a mature audiences warning for its content.

The classes are:

- Apocalypse warrior, supernatural dark champions spawned by the upcoming end of the world
- Avenger, paladin-esque bigoted witch-hunters for the Light
- Dream Weaver, master of dream manipulations (with a good color picture evocative of Neil Gaiman's *Sandman*)
- Fiend disciples, high powered demonic servants with 8/10 spellcasting, full BAB powers, and eventually becoming a fiend
- Fiend Slayer, chosen by celestials they smite fiends and gain some other fiend targeting powers
- Fiend-touched, slightly magical (1/2 spellcasting) fiend companions with sex-related powers
- Hellstormers, dwarven crusaders who stand against the encroachment of hell on earth
- Perditionite, clerics who bring back soulless, alignmentless bodies to fight demons
- Planar rider, bonds with mount that gains the ability to plane shift
- Raider, member of a mercenary band that survived the invasion, they gain death attacks and bonus stealthy and specific weak warrior feats along with warrior BAB
- Wielders of Sapphire, arcane order dedicated to fighting demons, they use gem foci that tie into an array of class powers they pick from in addition to full casting

The prestige classes show both a good connection to the world and are decent classes on their own.

The monster section has seven demons and templates for dream and nightmare creatures, devils, demonically touched mutants, a form of undead for those slain by magic, and one for the shell that remains after a soul is removed but a body keeps going. Of the demons, the fiend mother is a neat Cthulhu-esque huge tentacled horror that can consume living creatures and spit out fiendish versions of ones it has eaten. Also of note are lesser succubi, a 1 HD variety that appear as comely mortals, do not register as any alignment, can dominate at will, and drain levels and souls through sex; they have an ECL of +3 which seems low combining their powers with the normal demon immunities, resistances, and telepathy. The devil template advances a demon to double its hit dice, gives massive ability boosts, natural armor, DR, and immunities for turning normal demons like a balor into an epic demon-lord powered devil. The demonic mutant is interesting because it allows advancement as a class gaining deformities and demon-themed powers.

The book finishes off with some adventure seeds for gaming in Sinder. These complement the advice in the beginning

about how to use demonic invasions in your campaign and how to have powerful PCs struggle against the onslaught and survive if you play through the conquest.

In all, there are nice elements to ***Soul Harvest***, with the prestige classes and some of the monsters standing out. It falls down as a general toolkit because while it raises a number of issues, it only deals with the specifics for the nonstandard world of Sinder. Sinder is interesting but not detailed enough to use "out of the box" as all you have are the interesting post-apocalyptic survival groups and the ideas of hostile demons everywhere along with a few flesh farms, it is left to the DM to flesh everything out.

--*John Henry Stam*

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Class Action: The Scholar

Master of Knowledge

by Phil Masters

Knowledge is very often important; even if it isn't, some people get very obsessed with it. Such individuals are the natural denizens of libraries and colleges, spending years of effort reading and debating to locate, reconcile, and refine facts, for specific uses or just because they are interested. The best of them are very impressive people indeed, in their specialized way; they combine intensity of study and discipline of thinking with breadth of interest and curiosity.

Such individuals may not always seem to be natural adventurers (although the pretentious among them are prone to saying that they are on the greatest adventure of all), but their specialized abilities can sometimes prove *very* important. This article presents a new core class to represent the expert in pure knowledge.

The Scholar Class

The scholar is a true intellectual -- someone for whom study and learning are the whole point of life. Gamers may think that this simply means high levels of certain skills, but the process of acquiring and refining knowledge shapes a character in many subtle ways.

Other standard *d20 System* classes, such as the wizard and the cleric, may well be quite learned people, and the expert NPC class can be used to represent a workaday sort of book-learner, but the scholar class has the unique concern with knowledge for its own sweet sake that justifies its name. Ironically, this unworldly narrowness of focus can lead characters to acquire deep or unusual knowledge which may prove invaluable to practical adventurers.

Attributes

Scholars read as much as possible about their fields of interest, study other sources of information when they are available, and discuss what they learn with each other and anyone else who will listen. They also work as teachers, for the money, out of a sense of duty to scholarship, or as a way of finding new people to discuss their ideas with. When they need another source of income, they often find employment where specific aspects of academic knowledge or just plain literacy are important -- keeping accounts or other records, translating foreign languages, and so on. They are generally poor in combat (though not necessarily totally useless), but they may pick up all sorts of odd knowledge and skills in passing.

Background

Scholars often claim to be members of a great brotherhood of learning, although their rivalries and feuds can be bitter, and they may also owe allegiance to other groups. In many medieval or Renaissance-style settings, most start by learning from a single teacher, but advancing in the class means attending some great university. Progress in academia beyond a basic level may sometimes mean taking at least partial religious vows, and some noted scholars are also priests.

Personality

Scholars may well be obsessive, and some become socially inept as a result, but others are amiable, chatty characters who appreciate good company and fine art. Although not usually physically violent, and often strikingly broad-minded, scholars can become embroiled in ferocious academic disputes, or simply display open disdain for less learned folk.

In settings where alignment is significant, scholars tend to be intensely aware of the underlying philosophies, and may often discuss them at length. Some take such subjects *extremely* seriously, dedicating themselves to ideals such as freedom, order, justice, virtue, or the triumph of strength; others regard these things as abstract matters of no great concern to themselves. In game terms, scholars can be of any alignment, although most, being tidy-minded characters who like quiet lives, tend slightly towards law. Few tend to be *strongly* evil, less out of any natural virtue than because the opportunity to behave very badly doesn't fit with the scholarly lifestyle.

Religion: In worlds where the existence of deities is taken as plain fact, most scholars regard it as only sensible to pay due respect to superior beings. However, they tend to be analytical about their beliefs, insofar as that is safe (and sometimes even if it isn't). The wiser ones usually seek out land where their own specific beliefs won't get them into too much trouble. In worlds with complex pantheons, they usually worship gods of knowledge or truth (or quite often, simply whatever their parents worshipped).

Adventuring

Scholars don't, as a rule, go looking for adventure -- but when you are the only person qualified to discuss some subtle, obscure, and potentially important topic, sometimes excitement comes to you. Also, adventurers who feel the need to be very knowledgeable on specific subjects may choose to pursue multiclass careers, as scholars and something else.

Table 1: The Scholar Level Progression

Lvl	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1	+0	+0	+0	+2	Bonus Language
2	+1	+0	+0	+3	Obsessive Focus, Bonus Language
3	+1	+1	+1	+3	Academic Allusions, Broad Reading (-3)
4	+2	+1	+1	+4	
5	+2	+1	+1	+4	Intense Debate (+1)
6	+3	+2	+2	+5	
7	+3	+2	+2	+5	Obsessive Focus
8	+4	+2	+2	+6	
9	+4	+3	+3	+6	Broad Reading (-2)
10	+5	+3	+3	+7	Intense Debate (+2)
11	+5	+3	+3	+7	
12	+6/+1	+4	+4	+8	Obsessive Focus
13	+6/+1	+4	+4	+8	
14	+7/+2	+4	+4	+9	
15	+7/+2	+5	+5	+9	Intense Debate (+3), Broad Reading (-1)
16	+8/+3	+5	+5	+10	
17	+8/+3	+5	+5	+10	Obsessive Focus
18	+9/+4	+6	+6	+11	
19	+9/+4	+6	+6	+11	
20	+10/+5	+6	+6	+12	Intense Debate (+4)

Class Rules

The game rules for playing a scholar are listed below.

Abilities

Intelligence is the defining feature of the successful Scholar, ideally supported by Wisdom, which is useful when deciding what ideas to pursue, judging the value of conflicting sources, or giving advice to those who seek it. (Scholars

like to claim that their studies bring wisdom, even to students who lack it at first.) Other abilities are rarely considered important, although Charisma can be handy in teaching or academic disputes.

Race

Members of most "PC races" can become Scholars. Elves are famous for their lore (albeit as much from personal experience as from reading), and half-elves may pursue such interests in an attempt to fit in with the thoughtful elves among their relatives. Dwarves may have a few specialized scholars in the depths of their mountain fastnesses, who *may* cooperate (rather cautiously) with their human counterparts. Gnomes and halflings are less given to sitting down and reading -- the latter especially are energetic, practical folk -- but any large enough group will include some who discover a love of learning, for its own sake or for the sake of good stories. Only the barbaric, tribal humanoid races may disdain pure learning entirely; half-orc scholars must surely be rare.

Other Core Classes

At the worst, scholars regard other, more venturesome classes as thugs and ruffians, and are regarded in return as feeble and detached from reality. However, when an adventurer needs some crucial snippet of specialized ancient lore, or a scholar needs guards and assistants for some field research, the two perforce come together -- and anyway, in many settings, scholarship is quite widely respected for the insights it brings to religious debate, navigation, magic, and other important fields.

In any setting with scholars, a few of them will decide that they enjoy getting out and about, testing their theories and digging up new facts; multiclass scholar-adventurers are always possible. Scholars may enter the priesthood for social reasons and then rise in the cleric class, or pick up basic knowledge of magic in the course of their studies and then gain a few levels as sorcerers or wizards.

Health

In games using hit points, scholars use d4 for their hit dice. In games using variant health systems, they should follow the guidelines for whichever class has the poorest ability to survive damage.

Skills

The Scholar's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Alchemy (Int), Appraise (Int), Bluff (Cha), Decipher Script (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Forgery (Int), Heal (Wis), Innuendo (Wis), Knowledge (Int), Perform (Cha), Poetry (Int), Profession (Wis), Search (Int), Sense Motive (Wis), and Use Magic Device (Cha).

Skill Points at 1st Level: $(8 + \text{Int modifier}) \times 4$.

Skill Points at Each Additional Level: $8 + \text{Int modifier}$.

Weapons and Armor

Scholars aren't usually supposed to get into fights, but in fact, many university towns are notorious for brawls between locals and scholars ("town and gown"), and in worlds without reliable law enforcement, few people get by without having to defend themselves occasionally. Hence, Scholars are proficient with the club, dagger (all types), light mace, and quarterstaff, and with any *one* of the longsword, rapier, or short sword. They are not proficient with any type of armor, nor with shields.

Starting Cash

A character starting at 1st level as a scholar starts with the same level of funds as a sorcerer or wizard.

Special Abilities

Bonus Languages: A scholar gains use of one extra language for free at 1st level, and a second at 2nd level. The DM may limit these bonus languages to those standard for scholarship or scholarly discourse in the setting; for example, in Renaissance Europe, the options might be Arabic, Aramaic, Classical Greek, French, Hebrew, High German, Italian, or Latin.

Obsessive Focus: A 2nd-level scholar may define any one Knowledge Skill as his field of intensive specialization. He gains +1 to all skill checks with this subject, and is *not* limited by level in how many skill points he can spend on it. Every five levels thereafter (at 7th, 12th, and 17th level), the scholar may define another Knowledge Skill as another such Obsessive Focus.

Academic Allusions: From 3rd level onwards, a scholar may add half his level in the class (rounded down) to any Innuendo skill check, to send, receive, or intercept messages -- but only if all the other people involved are scholars of at least 2nd level. This reflects the fact that subtle scholarly references can be woven into the secret communication.

Broad Reading: Scholars read -- a *lot*. This is mostly reflected in their skills, but the breadth of their studies means that they also pick up snippets about virtually anything else that is mentioned in books. Hence, from 3rd level on, a scholar may attempt an *untrained* use of any Knowledge Skill which may, in the DM's opinion, be covered by relatively ordinary book available in the scholar's culture. (If the only text on the subject is hidden in the library of a secret temple in a faraway land, the scholar won't know anything about the subject!) This roll is at a penalty of -3, rising to -2 at 9th level and -1 at 15th, and the scholar cannot take 10 or take 20 on the roll.

Intense Debate: Scholarship isn't quite the pure pursuit of unambiguous truth which some scholars like to claim; there are always conflicting theories, which must be settled by more-or-less formal debate. This discussion may be even subject to highly formal rules. Advanced scholars usually argue by wrapping opponents up in nit-picking logic, burying them under a mass of references, or reducing opposing ideas to absurdity. The benefit is that really thorough debate *does* enable scholars to resolve difficult questions.

In game terms, a 5th-level scholar gains a +1 bonus to any skill being used to settle a verbal dispute over a question of knowledge or interpretation. This can sometimes include use of Bluff, Intimidate, and Sense Motive skills, as well as use of appropriate Knowledge skills to produce relevant facts. This bonus rises by 1 for every 5 levels which the scholar gains, to +2 at 10th level, +3 at 15th, and +4 at 20th. Furthermore, and more constructively, if a group of characters get together to "brainstorm" a problem, and spend at least 30 minutes discussing it, the *total* Intense Debate bonuses for every scholar involved who possesses a relevant Knowledge skill are added to *every* skill roll made by members of that group relating to the subject while the discussion continues.

New Skill

Poetry (Int)

They may say that they are inspired by a Muse of Fire, but in honest moments, good poets confess that their works result as much from perspiration as from inspiration -- and this is the skill that they must master by hard work. It grants the ability to produce poetry which a moderately cultured character will accept as worthy of the name.

Check: Roll once per poem (or per chapter of long poetic epics). A short, informal poem takes a few minutes to compose, a sonnet takes 1d6 hours, and longer works take weeks or months. The result of the roll indicates the quality of the verse. Results less than 10 produce doggerel, fit only to be discarded; a result of 20+ is good work, and 30+ is technically breathtaking, perfect in rhyme and meter. Users of this skill cannot take 20, and if they take 10, the result is dull, formally correct verse of no artistic value.

Working in haste takes a cumulative -2 penalty for every 10% reduction in time taken, to a minimum of two minutes per line. Taking longer gives no bonus, but merely counts as a retry.

Retry: Yes, as often as you like, but from the third attempt onwards, you take a -5 penalty as boredom and over-familiarity with the subject take their toll.

You may also take as long again to revise a poem after spending at least a week away from it. Roll again; if the result is better than before, then the poem improves to the new value. However, if the new result is 10 or worse below the previous value, the poem's quality drops by 2, as you tinker with it too much.

Special: Untrained use of this skill is possible, but a little difficult for anyone who doesn't pay a lot of attention to poetry. Untrained characters who don't have levels in a class for which it is a class skill suffer a penalty of -3.

"C" Is For "Cookie" -- Or "Catastrophe"

It's Thanksgiving as I write this, the annual American tradition borne of a magazine editor's desire to create a holiday whose citizens all stuff themselves with poultry and pie. Earlier today I was preparing for my annual "bum dinner off friends" ritual, opting to remain local since my family lives either 500 or 1,000 miles away, depending on which family I am not visiting.

Anyway, I don't like to go to these affairs empty-handed, so I set out to make something for the hosting household. Last year I went to the same friend's, and brought a couple loaves of homemade bread and ice cream. The bread was a hit, though the ice cream was not, since the freezing process left something to be desired, crafting a dairy dessert the consistency of overly soft pudding.

(Long-time readers will recognize this paragraph as the cue to let you know that I will, honest-to-Gumby, tie this into gaming shortly.)

This year I wanted to do something different, and decided to make a batch of chocolate chip cookies. I was using a recipe taken from another friend, whose cookies are the stuff of legend.

Now, this friend in question was also out of town (a 750-mile drive, should I instead decide not to visit her), and I was going it alone on this first-time recipe. Now, I recalled talking with her previously, where she would make references to "double batches" or "quad batches" of these cookies; these phrases obviously referred to the iterations of the recipe in question, with the infamous "quad batch" reserved for those times when she would bake enough cookies for her entire office. Or, say, Ecuador. Well, I decided that I would make a double batch, since this - if I could get the recipe to turn out - would make a nummy big trove of cookies. Sure, the double batch would be a bit more unwieldy to work with than a normal, but I figured I could handle it (despite my never having baked cookies before that didn't come out of a tube).

So I doubled the recipe, and started prepping the cookies.

I had a realization about midway through, somewhere between mixing a Herculean amount of sugar, brown sugar, butter, and shortening and adding seven cups of flour:

The recipe she gave me was already doubled.

Everything in the recipe was already some even multiple of two: two eggs, two-thirds a cup of butter, and so on. As I thought back, I realized that I never saw her make anything *less* than a double batch. So it would make logical sense for her to give me the recipe that was most convenient for her, which was a double batch.

By the time I realized it, however, I was knee-deep in the baking process; there was no turning back, unless I wanted to waste the ingredients I had already used. And so I baked. And baked. And baked, pausing only briefly to deal with the repercussions of having hacked at magical dancing brooms with an axe earlier in the procedure. Anyway, I was an hour late to dinner because of the excess preparation and baking. I also ended up making 48 cookies in total, each the size of a compact disc.

So as I thought about this -- mulling over the column I would be writing later and grasping for a topic through a tryptophan haze - I pondered: What if this recipe had been, instead, the ritual necessary to save the world?

I mean, all kinds of adventures revolve around a precise ritual or recipe necessary to accomplish Something Big. And this recipe needs to be followed to the letter by the Good Guys (or Bad Guys).

Perhaps the most obvious and famous example is from the movie *Army of Darkness*, where the protagonist Ash forgets and misspeaks the precise words he needs to complete a ritual, thus bringing about darkness and evil, and ensuring he would never be called upon as a cast member for a remake of *The Day The Earth Stood Still*. But there are other

rituals; they're often common in computer RPGs ("You must assemble the five parts of the Fooble Chamber . . .") or glossed over in adventures. ("The PCs need to make a Stop Darkness roll to complete the ritual.")

But what if it's not that simple? What if the ritual has some hard decisions that need to be made? What if the fate of the world falls down to a *guess*? The cookie recipe called for brown sugar, but our store only sells light brown sugar or dark brown sugar; which one did the recipe crafter mean? Suppose a ritual calls for "blood from a cat," without any further guidance - Tabby? Tiger? Tigger? In a pinch, will a few drops of catgirl vitae do?

What happens if the recipe goes wrong? In my case I ended up with twice as many cookies as I'd intended. What if a ceremony was necessary to rid an area of evil taint, and it was accidentally "doubled"? Could the formerly cursed kingdom be "tainted" by extreme good, causing pain and injury to anyone who isn't unrealistically pure of heart? Suppose the Forces of Evil are shunted back to their dimension, only to create a breach into the opposite Dimension of Good; the heroes might be in the odd situation of needing to complete an *evil* ritual, just to keep Judgment Day from coming early?

These kind of incidents need not be limited to a fantasy setting. Envision a pirate treasure map, measured in "paces" - if you knew the burying pirate was incredibly short, how do you adjust the pace? (What if the captain's mate already adjusted it for *his* leg length?) In modern or science-fiction settings, it's arguably even *more* likely for instructions to go awry; while magical rituals have the wiggle room of "It's *magic!*", the laws of physics are notorious for unforeseen consequences from incorrectly followed orders. A Mars lander crashed not too long ago because of a [mix-up](#) between English and Metric units. The lack of a [hyphen](#) also brought a rocket to a disastrous end. Mix in a little pseudoscience, and suddenly your attempt to fix the time stream results in a temporal satellite crashing into a field of chaos butterflies.

Cinematic heroes are called upon all the time to fix problems, often by following some procedure. But directions can be difficult to follow in ideal circumstances; when the stakes are high, the odds of something going wrong may well increase also. So if you're looking to shake up the usual "complete the ritual, save the world" plot, consider making the hows and whats of the ritual itself important; just because it was written by a wise sage in a tower doesn't mean it's foolproof. If nothing else, the heroes may end up with too many cookies.

Klaatu Varata Berliner.

--Steven Marsh

The Seven Lovely Sins

by Elizabeth McCoy

***Author's Note:** Despite being couched in **In Nomine** terms, this organization is quite portable to other settings. All it requires is a powerful, frequently ruthless, and likely corrupt group that meets on a regular basis and rotates the people responsible for organizing the party. Players can be members of the group, their security, their enemies, or random bystanders (innocent or not) who get caught up in events. Adventure seeds and suggestions for some other genres follow the **In Nomine** ones.*

Just as Malakim have their Eighth Virtue (see **You Are Here**), so do Lilim have a floating "party and family reunion," called, traditionally, "The Party," "The Family Reunion," and, most formally, "The Seven Lovely Sins."

The Seven Sins, unlike the Eighth Virtue, is decadal -- it's generally held about every 10 years (give or take a year for extenuating circumstances). Also unlike the Eighth Virtue, there are traditionally seven organizers. This is not a hard and fast requirement, of course, but it is traditional: with that many people on the "ConComm" -- as the Vapulan Daughters often call it -- private grudges are less likely to be settled by a sister with too much power. ("Oh, you haven't gotten that little Discord problem settled? I'd never have gotten the All-Oyster-Buffer arranged if I'd known you were still . . . sensitive. I'm sure you'll stop hiccuping pearls soon.")

Organizing the Seven Sins is both a status job and a pain in the neck, depending on a Lilim's personality and current jobs, tasks, and Geases. Some Lilim seek the job out, while others get stuck with it via a well-placed Geas or unofficial debt that they owe someone else.

The responsibilities of the organizers are assigned with formal wording. For example, saying "Tabitha will take Lust, while Lillian is Sister Gluttony" doesn't mean that Tabitha is a Lilim of Lust, and Lillian a Servitor of Haagenti -- it just means that Tabitha is in charge of providing the entertainment while Lillian has to get the refreshments set up. Naturally, if there are not seven Lilim on the committee, some will have to double up.

It should also be noted that the Seven Lovely Sins committee is supposed to arrange the event with the maximum amount of favor trading and the least amount of actually *paying* for things. It's considered gauche to write a check -- unless the money was acquired via favors, that is. There's no penalty, per se, for using mundane means to set things up; if you get caught doing that, your sisters will just laugh at you for a few decades and make snide remarks about "the sister who has to *work* for a living."

Other Bands, or humans, are permitted to attend if they are in the company of a Lilim. Princes and Princesses are naturally permitted to go where they will, Lilim date on their arm or not. Hell's lesser nobility might or might not get in -- it's said that when a Duke of the War attempted to crash the party, he was ejected by the Princess of Freedom herself. It's also rumored that Lilith once brought an incognito Archangel Marc to a Seven Lovely Sins gathering . . .

Non-Lilim are, however, definitely second-class guests (unless they're Princes). They're likely to be shooed off to the bar while sisters "do girl talk" -- i.e., deal-making -- or quietly auctioned off as gigolos or courtesans to Lilim siblings. In general, the Seven Lovely Sins is one of the few places outside the Guildhall in Hell where Lilim are in the majority. And Lilim like it that way. There is no stigma attached to coming unattended.

In deference to the longer duration of the hiatus between Family Reunions, most of them will last two to three days. (One was arranged at a hot-springs resort and lasted a full week, each day with entertainment devoted to one of the traditional seven sins!)

A typical Seven Sins will draw anywhere from a few dozen to a few hundred Lilim, depending on location, duration (not everyone stays the full time), and who got invited. The more sisters there, the more status accrues to the organizers, provided it's not a total disaster with angelic raids.

The Organizers' Titles

The following three are the minimum that a Seven Lovely Sins event is deemed to require.

Gluttony: Responsible for catering and one of the simplest of the duties. Sometimes the location of the event gets designated to Sister Gluttony. (If there's no Sister Covetousness or Sister Envy, Sister Gluttony is expected to be the "neutral party" of the Seven Sins.)

Lust: Responsible for providing any live entertainment (male strippers are popular, no matter how much the Tempters claim they only attend to keep in touch with their sisters), and often the location of the event. (If there's no Sister Pride, Sister Lust usually handles check-in as well, unless Sister Wrath isn't feeling overworked.)

Wrath: Security. Sister Wrath organizes bouncers and any other security measures required. She may handle check-in, in the absence of a Sister Pride, if she thinks she can handle it and her other duties. Typically, it's passed off to Sister Lust.

The following are not as vital, but make things easier.

Sloth: Since Lilim need a place to lay their heads (or at least a private room for private deals) for the two to three days the Family Reunion will last, Sister Sloth is in charge of finding a location. Superficially the easiest job, this is complicated by the "pay no money" ethic. Rarely, Sister Sloth will also handle check-in -- if she's bribed enough.

Covetousness: This Daughter is responsible for "holding the pot," either literally if there is actual gambling going on, or figuratively if there are any deals made which require a neutral third party. If she's arranged for a full gambling room (with cards, dice, roulette wheels, etc.), then she's expected to share duties with Sister Wrath for security and spotting cheaters.

Pride: Ironically, Sister Pride is the catch-all gopher for the group. This puts her either in the role of "Cinderella," running around doing the scut-work, or provides a wonderful opportunity to get her sisters owing her unofficial favors. Or both. She handles check-in at the Reunion proper, and is expected to provide little tokens which can be kept as souvenirs (a cross between event badges and party favors).

Envy: Sister Envy is primarily responsible for communications between the organizers, and being a central source of data for the Sisterhood as to the whereabouts and date of the Seven Lovely Sins this decade. (The latter is often delegated to Sister Pride.) Her duties also include making sure that the other Sisters are providing the basic requirements of entertainment, refreshments, and housing. At the event proper, she's the primary coordinator and Lilim to go to if something goes wrong. (If there is no Sister Covetousness, Envy is also deemed responsible for being the neutral party.)

In Nomine Adventure seeds

Demonic

- The PCs are all on the "ConComm," and have a scant decade to get everything in order and send out the invitations, while still preserving their own Roles and accomplishing their own duties. Enough said. (Yes, this demands an all-Lilim cast, or at least enough Lilim that they can "hire" the rest of the PCs as gophers for their projects.) For more urgency, one of the ConComm has been called away suddenly to another full-time task, and has called in a Geas (or bargained extremely well!) to have the PC Lilim take over her job at the last minute!
- The Game has heard that Sister Wrath has a plan to frame a high-ranking Asmodean at the Seven Sins (perhaps

Staciel, Demon of Intrigue; perhaps someone else; perhaps Staciel is the one rumored to be doing the planning!). They want a team to infiltrate the event and follow the target around. When whoever-it-is makes her (or his) move, the PCs are expected to A: thwart it, B: provide testimony to clear the target's name, and/or C: take the would-be framer captive.

- It was a bad idea to have three Vapulans, two Nybassians, and a Lustie with a furry fetish on the "ConComm." They've arranged to have the Seven Lovely Sins at the same hotel and same time as a science fiction convention. Is this a social disaster, or a grand opportunity for mayhem disguised as SFX and costumery? Well, the world is what you make of it . . .

Either, or Both

- A 10-Force Kyriotate has managed to jump into the party, and is bouncing around, causing minor havoc. So far, it hasn't grabbed anyone with a Force Catcher, and Sister Wrath isn't sitting still and waiting for that to happen. The PCs are, naturally, on the security team. (Or this can be a solo-session for the Kyriotate . . .)
- This year, the Eighth Virtue and the Seven Lovely Sins . . . are in the same city. In fact, they're both downtown, in hotels across the street from one another. (For even more tension, they're in the *same hotel*!) This was discovered far too late to actually change the location safely. Fortunately, Sister Pride has managed to make a deal with the coordinator of the Eighth Virtue: See no Evil, Seek no Evil, Smite no Evil. The Lilim don't go harass the blackwings, and the Malakim don't go hunting for greenies. PCs are either the committee, or recruited by Sister Wrath to keep the Daughters out of trouble.

Angelic Seeds

- A newly-redeemed demon was a lackey of Sister Covetousness for this decade's Seven Sins -- a Lilim of Mammon. The ex-demon swears up and down that the Mammonite Daughter is going to auction off a real live angel to her sisters as a slave, one who was thought dead. (The *truth* is . . . that the Lilim certainly believed it when she told her minion about it.) The angelic team must infiltrate the event and spirit away the prisoner. Can they accomplish this without being captured themselves, in a rural resort, surrounded by several dozen Lilim, whose personal power ranges from newborn Daughters to ancient Duchesses?
- The Bright Lilim in the group (or an NPC, if necessary) receives an invitation to a forthcoming Seven Lovely Sins, by means that suggest the invitation was sent by someone who doesn't know she'd redeemed! Is it a trap? (If they do the sensible thing and hand this up to a Seraph of Judgment or Revelation, then it'd better be carefully worded, or not a trap . . . at least according to the sender.) This is, of course, a priceless opportunity to spy on Lilim gossip, identify demonic vessels, and scout for redeemable Lilim. Now, how many of the group can the Bright manage to smuggle into the party as escort(s), entourage, pets, or luggage? (Better make sure that Malakim are ordered not to blow the group's cover, and that no one leaves explosives in a public place.)
- In a flip to the Game-seed above, Judgment has heard that there is a collaborating *angel* attending a Seven Sins. (How? That's Dominic's business. Probably by interrogating someone. Really.) This angel is high-placed and previously had a spotless record. Which angel is it, and is it due to free will or Geas? That's what the PCs have to find out. First, though, they have to discover when and where the convention will be held, and figure out how to wrangle invitations or crash the party. (This also works for any other Archangel, sending a team in to take care of "internal matters" *before* Judgment gets wind of it. It might be most discomfiting to Servitors of Creation to have to police one of their own who *has* somehow "turned traitor" without yet Falling!)

Other Adventure Seeds

Crossovers

These are ***In Nomine*** crossovers, pitching humans -- or other beings -- into the divine and infernal War. It can be played for horror quite easily by emphasizing the inhuman abilities and mindsets of the beings involved. Do they shoot someone who purrs, "You needed to do that; remember I let you kill me"? Do they fire and fire at a slender beauty queen who Just Keeps Coming And Doesn't Die? Does someone vanish from a locked room when their back is

turned? Alternatively, it can be played as suspense, comedy (best in a one-shot), or a deliberate introduction for a crossover campaign as Soldiers. (Which doesn't really rule out the horror potential . . .)

- **GURPS Cops** officers have gotten a tip-off that a number of known criminals will be attending some kind of "family get-together." A sting operation is sent in to discover and bust the place if they catch people breaking laws against prostitution, illegal gambling, underage partners, and anything else they can discover. (Is that a demon of Lust in a 14-year-old vessel? Is that a Lilim betting its services, next to the roulette wheel? Did Sister Wrath's pet "look the other way" police contact call in sick at just the wrong day, so she's unaware that the cops *aren't* going to let the party go un-remarked?)
- **GURPS WWII** spies report that there will be some kind of strange party going on in the middle of Nazi territory. With a partial guest list, this looks like a great place to -- you guessed it -- spy, learn information, kidnap people, rescue people, assassinate people . . . Of course, at this party, the rumors of secret Nazi demon-summoning rituals are vastly *underestimated*. On the other hand, the player characters may have access to more weaponry.
- Considering the similar parallels between **In Nomine** characteristics and those of **Big Eyes, Small Mouth**, Pretty Warrior SpangleStar and her Shooting Stars might be at home sneaking into the mansion where the Seven Sins is being held! Can they rescue their animal mascot, Princess Pony, from the racetrack where she's been pitted against I'm Going To Hell, the Lilim Demon of Gambling Debts?

Variants

- In a Cyberpunk campaign, this affair takes place inside computers, of course. It's a party for elite netrunners; if you can't hack in, you don't belong. (The theme may still require *everyone* to have a superficially female image!) Naturally, aside from whatever forms of electronic debauchery the GM permits, there will be deal-making and trade in illegal goods. Rival factions may be just as dangerous as law enforcers, and Sibling Wrath will have its work cut out for it.
- For **Transhuman Space**, the party's sponsors must provide . . . *suitable* bioshells for the guests, to help preserve their anonymity. Consent is optional, of course, but some people want the equipment back in good condition. Security will have the additional task of making sure that no one's doing anything *too* destructive in their loaner body -- or too traceable back to the group!
- For fantasy or modern horror, vampires are the obvious choice -- but who says that the Unseelie Court doesn't have gatherings now and then? They'd be hidden away, sure, but you have to get your supply of "toys" brought in from somewhere, and that leaves clues to discover, or cover up.
- Another fantasy option, suitable for many **d20 System** worlds as well as **GURPS'** Yrth, suggests that perhaps dark elves and the usual breed aren't so different as they'd have you believe. Every decade, there is a Rite of Passage for those who've reached a suitable age. It might be quite a shock for a PC to be indoctrinated into the Elvish Illuminati, and learn the point-ears' *true* opinion of their short-lived companions. (But will the promises of a life-long loyalty spell upon the rest of the group sway the PC's mind?)
- Alternatively, take the above. Hint at elvish involvement. Use dwarfs instead, underground masters of their pointed-eared minions. (This option will probably work well for **Hackmaster**, as the final confrontation *must* be in the middle of a deep, boobytrapped dungeon. And yes, it *is* an all-female group of organizers . . .)

Shadow Wolves

for *GURPS*

by Hans-Christian Vortisch

"In brightest day, in darkest night, no evil shall escape my sight, for I am the Shadow Wolf."

? Motto of the Shadow Wolves

The Shadow Wolves are a unique unit of the Bureau of Customs and Border Protection (CBP). Formed in 1972 as part of the U.S. Customs Service, the Shadow Wolves are exclusively Native Americans with an exceptionally specialized skill set: the 21 members (two supervisors and 19 agents, two of them women) are expert trackers. The unit is headquartered in Sells, Arizona.

Their main job is to track smugglers transporting contraband (mostly drugs such as marijuana) over the U.S.-Mexican border on the Tohono O'odham Nation Indian Reservation (the second largest reservation) a few miles west of Tuscon, Arizona. The Shadow Wolves originally all came from the Tohono O'odham tribe (p. OW61), but today they include Chicasaw, Kickapoo, Kiowa, Lakota, Navajo, Oglala Sioux, Omaha, Pima, and Yorock.

The trackers learned their skills from their elders and while hunting or herding free-roaming farm animals. They refer to tracking as "cutting sign" or "checking spore," and are exceedingly adept at it. They are reported to "hear" things that are silent and to "see" things that are invisible -- at least to urbanites. While usually tracking in pairs, they work like a pack of wolves; once one finds a trail, he will call in the others. Backup is also available in the form of tribal police, border agents, and customs officers. They are exceedingly effective; the Shadow Wolves net an average of 60,000 lbs. of drugs every year, more than a third of the entire amount of confiscated illegal drugs in the whole of Arizona.

Since 2001, Shadow Wolves have also been to several countries in South America and the former Soviet Union (including Estonia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan) to train local border agents and police to prevent smuggling -- not the least of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons.

Typical monthly pay of a Customs Patrol Officer is \$3,300.

Customs Patrol Officer "Shadow Wolf"

75 points

Attributes [10]: ST 10 [0], DX 10 [0], IQ 11 [10], HT 10 [0]

Advantages [35]: Alertness +2 [10]; Code of Honor (Police) [0]; Legal Enforcement Powers [5]; and 20 additional points in Acute Hearing [2/level], Acute Taste/Smell [2/level], Acute Vision [2/level], Alertness [5/level], Animal Empathy [5], Combat Reflexes [15], Contacts [varies], Fit [5], Patrons [varies], Police Rank 0 to 2 [5/level], or Strong Will [4/level].

Disadvantages [-30]: Duty (15 or less) [-15]; and 15 additional points from Addiction (Tobacco) [-5], Alcoholism [-15], Bad Temper [-10], Bully [-10], Cannot Harm Innocents [-10], Insomnia [-10 to -15], Intolerance [-5 to -10], Overconfidence [-10], Overweight [-5], Secret [varies], Sense of Duty [-5 to -10], or Stubbornness [-5].

Primary Skills [42]: Area Knowledge (Tohono O'odham Nation Indian Reservation) IQ-2 [2]-10; Brawling (P/E) DX+1 [2]-11; Criminology (M/A) IQ [1]-11; Driving (Automobile) (P/A) DX [2]-10; First Aid (M/E) IQ [1]-11; Guns (Light Auto) (P/E) DX+1 [2]-12*; Guns (Pistol) (P/E) DX+1 [2]-12*, Guns (Rifle) (P/E) DX+2 [4]-13*; Hiking (P/A) HT [2]-10; Law Enforcement (M/A) IQ [1]-11; Orienteering (M/A) IQ+3 [8]-14; Stealth (P/A) DX [2]-10; Survival (Desert) (M/A) IQ [2]-11; Tracking (M/A) IQ+4 [10]-15; Writing (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-10.

* Includes +1 bonus for IQ

Secondary Skills [13]: Camouflage (M/A) IQ [1]-11; Climbing (P/A) DX [2]-10; Fast-Talk (M/A) IQ [1]-10; Holdout (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Intimidation (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Running (P/H) HT [4]-10; Streetwise (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-10; and either Motorcycle (P/E) DX+1 [2]-11 or Riding (P/A) DX [2]-10.

Background Skills [5]: A total of 5 points in Administration (M/A), Animal Handling (M/A), Computer Operation (M/E), Guns (Shotgun) (P/E), Handcuffing (A), Language (Spanish or a Native American language), Psychology (M/H), Scrounging (M/E), Spray (A), or Traps (M/A).

Equipment: Camouflage uniform with a gray feather on one shoulder (silent reminder of a dead officer and the dangerous nature of the job), tropical boots, and a floppy bush hat (see p. SO103 for these items).

Weapons include a 9×19mm Glock 17 pistol (p. HT108) with two spare magazines and either a 9×19mm H&K MP5A5 submachine gun (pp. C64, HT116, SO117, and SW00) or 5.56×45mm Colt M16A2 (pp. C64, MF22) or Steyr AUG A1 assault rifle (pp. HT115, SO115) with three or more spare magazines -- officers have been shot at by both drug smugglers, fugitives, and the [Mexican army](#). All shoulder arms fire single shots or three-round limited bursts only (p. MF19).

Other equipment includes a loadbearing vest (p. SO105), 3-quart Camelbak hydration system (p. SO105), binoculars (p. CV40), flashlight (pp. C67, SO108), night vision scope (pp. CV45-46, MF14, and SO110), global positioning system (pp. CV35, SO108), handcuffs (pp. C67-68), latex gloves, and portable radio (pp. C62, CV39).

Vehicles include [pickup trucks](#) and Polaris 4×4 ATVs (the latter having almost completely replaced the horses used previously). Sikorsky UH-60A Black Hawk helicopters (p. SO124) of the CBP Special Aviation Unit in Tuscon are available for support.

Campaign Ideas

The Shadow Wolves can be used in a fairly straight-forward [Cops](#) campaign, either on their own or coordinated with DEA or [FBI](#) agents on some special case. Such cases can even be unrelated to their primary task of preventing smuggling, but require their specific skills. They have safely recovered children who wandered in the desert, and might do similar things with murderous fugitives or Things from Outer Space that crash-landed somewhere in the border area . . .

However, what if the Shadow Wolves have more in common with wolves than just the name, the way they operate in a "pack," and their excellent tracking abilities?

Here are some variations on the theme:

Wolf Inside

The most obvious avenue would be to make the Shadow Wolves shapeshifting werewolves of the "good" type. They would simply be officers with more options -- more powerful, less vulnerable, and especially more adept at tracking prey . . . of course, in such a campaign, the stakes should be higher. Instead of Mexicans smuggling marijuana or illegal immigrants, the Shadow Wolves could be matched by supernatural foes. See the Benandanti in [GURPS Shapeshifters](#) for an example of such a race of werewolves in the service of good. Sergeant Angua von Überwald (p. DI79) of the City Watch in Ankh-Morpok, despite the difference in tone and setting, is a pretty good example for a werewolf wearing a police badge.

Wolf Totem

They can hear a cloud pass overhead, the rhythm of your blood. They can track you by yesterday's shadow. They can tear the scream from your throat.

-- Poster blurb for *Wolfen*

Wolf has always been one of the more powerful totems in Native American legend and lore (p. OW71). Wolf is the hunter. Wolf is the warrior. In a [Horror](#) campaign, the Shadow Wolves could be in league with the wolfen, wolf spirits in the form of large wolves preying upon the weak and defenseless. Depending on the campaign, the stats of normal wolves (p. BE82) or certain werewolves (p. H00) could be used for the wolfen.

In an essentially "good" campaign, their CBP superiors could know of this connection, the Native American agents harnessing the wild spirits in the interest of law and order, helping them to track down criminals (and, perhaps, getting the occasional bite . . .). However, due to the likely unwillingness of the wolfen to openly cooperate with "The Man," their superiors probably have no clue who they are working with. The Shadow Wolves might still have harnessed their wild soul mates, preying on "evil men" in order to protect their pack (their tribe, their nation).

Alternatively, either the Shadow Wolves or the wolfen might have a secret agenda, perhaps to bring back the old ways (like the Wendigo werewolves in [Werewolf: The Apocalypse](#), p. WTA106), or simply to survive.

For a darker atmosphere, the wolfen could be *mai-coh* (p. SH9), evil wolf spirits that use the Shadow Wolves as a cover for their evil deeds against humans.

Homo Sapiens Lupus

In [Technomancer](#), the Shadow Wolves could be *Homo Sapiens Lupus*, one of the rarer chimeras. In fact, considering that the reservation lies within Trinity's Shadow (p. TM6), it is very likely. The Shadow Wolves would not only benefit from the unique abilities bestowed on their race by the unleashing of mana by the Hellstorm (especially their markedly improved senses), but almost certainly also attract the odd wizard into their ranks.

Relevant spells would include Find Direction, History, Pathfinder, Plant Sense, See Invisible, See Secrets, Seeker, Seek and Create Water (to survive in the desert), Sense Life, and Trace.

Homo Sapiens Lupus

25 points

"Wolf people" are humanoid with distinctive canine features, such as a muzzle, sharp teeth, pointed ears, a furry body, and a tail. They are stronger, larger, and far less common than Coyote chimeras (p. TM53).

Attributes: ST +1 [10], HT +1 [10].

Advantages: Acute Hearing +2 [4]; Discriminatory Smell [15]; Fur (Very thin) [0]; Magery 1 [15]; Penetrating Call [5]; Sharp Teeth [5]; Speak with Animals (Canines and Wolves, -30%) [11]; Ultrahearing [5].

Disadvantages: Dependency (Mana, common, constantly) [-25]; Lunacy [-10]; Social Stigma (Minority Group) [-10]; Vulnerability (2d from silver and DN) [-10].

Cowboys and Indians

The thinly populated area of the Tohono O'odham Nation Indian Reservation has been used for illegal border crossings ever since the creation of the U.S.-Mexican border by the Gadsden Treaty in 1853. Consequently, with some tweaking (mainly concerning the official attitude towards Indians, who historically were not granted U.S. citizenship until 1906), the creation of the Shadow Wolves could be pushed back in history.

In an [Old West](#) campaign set in the 1890s, the trackers could try to prevent Chinese immigrants from entering the USA. In a [Cops](#) or [Cliffhangers](#) campaign in the 1920s or early 1930s, they might be employed to enforce the

prohibition (p. C11) and prevent smugglers from transporting tequila over the border . . .

References

[*Customs Trackers*](#).

Wheeler, Mark. "[Shadow Wolves](#)." In: *Smithsonian Magazine*, January 2003.

Wolfen (Michael Wadleigh, 1981).

Freight Leads to Suffering

In a recent discussion with [Warehouse 23](#) Manager Michelle Barrett, we found ourselves disagreeing over the usage of one particular freight shipper over another. These are the kind of minutia discussions you can have when you're both in charge of shuffling boxes from one person to the other, as she is at Warehouse 23 and I am at my Day Job.

Some of her complaints about this company centered on usual shipping difficulties: boxes taking too long to get there, things sometimes getting lost, and so on. (I argued that *our* customers liked the stomped-on-by-gorillas frivolity of our deliveries, but I don't think she was swayed.) However, she began her complaints by saying that, "Our local driver will not get it through his head that we are a business which means that 1) he needs to deliver before 6 P.M. and 2) it is not appropriate to leave a \$1,000-product order sitting on our front doorstep on a Friday evening."

Now, my experience with this shipper was completely the opposite of Michelle's; sure, we have had a few hiccups along the way, as we have had with any shipper. But I realized something; whereas Michelle's local representative for this shipper seemed mostly incompetent, *my* local shipper was an Elemental Force of Shipping Goodness -- he was responsive to calls, worked to pick up our packages promptly, solved problems we hadn't realized before they became an issue, and just generally went above and beyond the call of duty. Obviously the difference between the Austin and Tallahassee branches were considerable.

(Hey, you, yawning in the back! Wake up! I'm tying this into gaming shortly . . . honest!)

Anyway, in talking with some *other* mail-order folks regarding their shippers, I noticed a trend. Most people said something along the lines of:

1. Shipper X sucks, and I refuse to deal with them.
2. I say this because of one bad experience . . .

I don't think there's anything wrong with this; my Day Job stopped using one popular shipper for four years because of a disastrous experience in the late 1990s. However, it got me to thinking about various other reactions I've seen, especially as they tie to the gaming industry.

In my (admittedly limited) time in this business, both as a retail monkey and a gaming guru, I've run into this phenomenon a lot:

- "Game Store X sucks, because one time I was there and was ignored . . ."
- "RPG System Y sucks, because I was in one awful game with someone one time . . ."
- "Gaming conventions suck, because one time I went to one that wasn't fun, and . . ."
- "LARPs suck, because one time I was with a bunch of posers who . . ."
- "Gamers suck, because one time I knew this stinky guy who . . ."

Now, most multinational shippers can probably withstand any small company's boycotts. But given how small and tight-knit the gaming world is, I wonder how much damage even a few incidents like this can do to the community.

There's a marketing theory called "viral marketing." The idea is simple; if you can get certain key people enthused about your product -- or tailor your product so that those people like it -- then those people will spread word about it, using their status as "key person" to boost the product's appeal. (One marketing campaign had researchers asking kids, "Who's the coolest kid you know?" When they had the name of a child, they went to that person and asked the same question. They knew they were at the top of a ladder when the person said, "I am." Those were the alpha kids.) Really, this is an elaborate codification of a concept we're all familiar with -- some people's opinions carry more weight than others. When President Kennedy confessed that he loved the James Bond novels, that endorsement had a significant impact on Bond book sales . . . much more so than a similar level of enthusiasm from Bart Basementdwellers.

Once you realize this, it stands to reason that the opposite is also true; if the right people can spread good words about

a product, the wrong people can spread bad word about it as well.

This is all a long-winded way of saying that I wonder how much of the gaming industry is at the hands of a small number of people or events . . . events that we may not have any control over. Could one belligerent game shop owner despoil an entire region for new gamers? Can a surprisingly small group of too-fanatical fans be keeping some game from being more popular? Would a cross-company "Don't Be a Jerk to Newbies" campaign sow the seeds for future growth?

I have some anecdotal information based on my own experiences. For example, when I was in charge of ordering game in our Friendly Local Game Shop, there were a few small press games that I promoted the heck out of because I loved them so much. In talking with one of the companies (I can't remember which one . . . I think I was trying to get promo material for a holiday sales campaign), I learned that our one store was responsible for 10% of the total market of the game!

In another incident, there was a collectable card game being demoed at a local convention. The cards looked interesting enough, and the premise was reasonably fresh despite the glut of CCGs coming out at the time. There was a brisk line of those partaking of demonstrations, and on the outside it looked like great publicity for the game. However, there was a problem. The demonstrator was using his long-time experience and expertise to utterly defeat all comers. And he wasn't gracious about it. ("This is how you play the game. Ready? Let's go. Ooooooh! I win; you lose! Buh-bye!") The game had some slight success early on, although it *never* reached any level of popularity in Tallahassee; when it died a year later, I wondered if it wasn't because of this one demonstrator, convincing person after person that the game wasn't fun.

So, for those looking to glean lessons from this, I would note two things:

- Just because you had a miserable time at one game or another doesn't mean that you should necessarily write it off altogether. Unless you can assuredly separate the experience from the game itself, you may *really* hate the former but not the latter; if you find yourself with the opportunity to try again, you may want to give it a shot.
- If you're a fan of the gaming world, remember that your words and actions may have more weight than you realize. For example, if you run a smaller press game with enthusiasm and vigor, you might end up boosting its popularity in your area significantly; given the print runs of some games, as few as a dozen or so of the right dedicated fans might be single-handedly responsible for a game's survival or failure.

And if you're a shipping company, please don't crush any of my packages in retaliation for this column . . . especially if it's filled with gaming goodies.

--Steven Marsh

Coming Soon

Gin and Chthonic

*"This day in pomp she takes her leave of all;
Already has she made the tour of Smithfield,
Rag-Fair, Whitechapel, and Clare Market: Now
To broad St. Giles's she directs her steps."*

-- Henry Fielding, *The Deposing and Death of Queen Gin* (1736)

The death of Queen Gin, it turned out, was greatly exaggerated. Not so her power. For the better part of half a century, she ruled London with joy and terror alike. She brought lovers together, raised high the poor, and slaughtered those unlucky enough to cross her path, all with the impartial madness of a Dionysian Maenad. From "broad St. Giles," she stretched out her arms to clasp the largest city in the world to her poisoned breast. And it all began with a shift in the wind.

"The cry of wickedness, I mean excessive drinking gin, and other pernicious spirits; is become so great, so loud, so importunate; and the growing mischiefs from it so many, so great, so destructive to the lives, families, trades and business of such multitudes, especially of the lower, poorer sort of people; that I can no longer doubt, but it must soon reach the ears of our legislators in Parliament assembled; and there meet with . . . effectual redress."

-- Sir Daniel Dolins, Chair of Middlesex Quarter Sessions (1725)

The "divine wind" of 1688 blew King William of the Netherlands into power in England, and he brought with him not only a taste for Dutch gin but a burgeoning war with France. A patriotic ban on French brandies, and a lucrative market for excess grain, combined to open London's throats to gin. Opening a gin-shop needed no license, no apprenticeship, and no graft to the Royal Company of Distillers, who lost their monopoly in 1690. And London went mad for the stuff. Gin-sellers became ubiquitous throughout the city, as did stiffening drunks. An emblematic sign on a gin-mill in Southwark boasted "Drunk for a penny, Dead drunk for twopence, Clean Straw for nothing." Tens of thousands of small distillers cranked out an endless stream of hooch, feeding an endless stream of poor people with no other prospects, which fed an endless stream of lascivious behavior and sudden wealth, especially for single women. So, naturally, the government tried to ban it.

Although a first attempt in 1726 went nowhere, an even more stringent law passed in 1729. It, too, had no effect, so the government tried ever-harsher measures in the Act of 1733, finally banning the retail sale of gin outright in the Gin Act of 1739. Despite the record numbers of prosecutions and convictions by both corrupt constables and "untouchable" crusading magistrates like Thomas De Veil and Henry Fielding, the gin trade continued unabated. In fact, gin consumption increased (along with contempt for the law, double-dealing informants, organized crime rings, and the other predictable side effects of drug wars) and Parliament ceased enforcing the Gin Act at all in 1739. The Gin Act of 1743 reversed course, lowering license fees, effectively criminalizing informants, and putting an excise duty on distillers. To everyone's surprise, the law worked -- taxing legalized gin raised money, lowered street crime *and* gin consumption, and took criminals out of the gin business.

One final Gin Act in 1751 massively increased the duties on distillers, driving the trade firmly into respectability. Gin drinking continued to decline by over 75%. In her book *Craze*, Jessica Warner blames price increases and poverty; in his more engaging *Gin*, Patrick Dillon alludes to the newly bourgeois "spirit of the times" -- both agree, however, that after 1757, the Gin Craze was over. England would not consume that much gin again for over a century, by which time the population had tripled. In per capita terms, the average Londoner in the 1730s probably drank four or five times as much gin as a modern Briton does, with the additional handicap of a much lower body weight and income. So, what were they drinking, exactly?

"Mother Gin was of Dutch parentage, but her father, who was a substantial trader in the city of Rotterdam . . . came to settle in London, where . . . he married an English woman, and obtained an Act of Parliament for his naturalization."

-- from the anonymously-published *The Life of Mother Gin* (1736)

By modern law, gin must contain extract from juniper berries, which is where its name comes from -- *jenever* being

"juniper" in Dutch. One Franz de la Boe (also known as "Dr. Sylvius"), a doctor in Leiden, first flavored distilled spirits (which date back to the 1100s and the "Devil's School" at Salerno) with juniper in 1650, well after the Dutch distillery industry got started. The original Dutch genevers were triple, or even quadruple distilled before being infused with juniper -- potent stuff. Most gins (then as now) also have coriander seed; other botanicals commonly used in gins include angelica root, ginger, nutmeg, orris root, sweet orange peel, and aniseed or licorice root. The most common "Old Tom" style English gins during the period of the Craze included glycerine and sugar syrup, for a punchier mouth feel (to say the least). The clear, dry, astringent gin that writers and other modern folk enjoy descends from a Plymouth distillery variant from the late 18th century, still with us as Plymouth Gin.

"Beer Street and Gin Lane were done when the dreadfull consequences of gin drinking was at its height. In Gin Lane every circumstance of its horrid effects are brought to view; in terrorem nothing but Itleness, Poverty, misery, and ruin are to be seen; Distress even to madness and death . . ."

-- William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty* (1753)

But punchy and nasty as "Blue Ruin" or "King Theodore" may have been, its taste was not what drove social reformers to ban it. Gin was blamed for crime, poverty, and death -- and modern demographic research bears the last of the three out. During the last three decades of the Gin Craze, London enjoyed good harvests, cheap bread -- and an unprecedented death rate, especially for children. Stories of gin-soaked women endangering children spread through the press. One Judith Defour, drunk on gin and encouraged by a chance-met stranger, strangled her child and left her to freeze to death in January 1734. In 1736 the *Daily Gazetteer* told the tale of Mary Estwick, who drunkenly watched her child roast in the fireplace. (The parallels with modern "stoned babysitter" urban legends are astonishing.)

Anecdotes and songs about nursemaids and mothers quieting their children with gin abounded. Other writers worried about the effect of gin on nursing mothers, and on the babies who drank gin with their mother's milk.

The great artist and propagandist William Hogarth depicted the horrifying spectacle in his 1751 print [*Gin Lane*](#), prepared for the campaign to pass the Gin Act that year. A syphilitic crone drunkenly allows her baby to fall to his death -- in the background, a madman impales a child on a pike and a naked woman is lowered into a coffin. A skeletal bard looks on as London convulses and destroys itself, all under the inverted cross of the pawnbroker, which surmounts even the church. (The steeple visible in the print is that of St. George's, Bloomsbury, for you Hawksmoor fans.) Hogarth was drawing a scene anyone could see, the riotous squalor of St. Giles' Rookery, the center of London's gin trade. Not only gin, but the Great Plague of 1665 spread out from St. Giles', as did conspiracy. Five Jesuits executed for the Popish Plot of 1678 lie buried in the churchyard of St. Giles-in-the-Fields.

"[St. Giles] there found a pit, and a little well, and a fair hind, which without doubt was purveyed of God for to nourish him, and at certain hours ministered her milk to him. And on a time servants of the king rode on hunting . . . espied this hind, and they thought that she was so fair that they followed her with hounds, and when she was sore constrained she fled for succour to the feet of St. Giles, whom she nourished. . . . [A]nd when the hounds were on the place whereas the hind was, they durst not go forth as they did before, but then they all environed the bush for to see what there was, but that bush was so thick that no man or beast might enter therein for the brambles and thorns that were there. And then one of the knights drew up an arrow follily for to make it afear'd and spring out, but he wounded and hurt the holy man, which ceased not to pray for the fair hind."

-- Jacob de Voraigne, *The Golden Legend* (1275)

So let's look a little closer at St. Giles, while we're in his neighborhood. "Giles" was used as a name for both men and women in the medieval era; it has been backformed into a variant on "Jules," although St. Giles himself was supposedly actually named Aegidius, which is Latin for "goatskin" or "kid." (In medieval French, "Aegidius" becomes Egilles, apparently.) Although he probably never existed, Giles' cult was very popular; he was the patron saint of beggars and blacksmiths. Thanks to his arrow wound, he was the patron of cripples; thanks to his intimate relations with the deer, he watched over nursing mothers. That whole deer story reeks of Greek myths such as Artemis and Orion, or Actaeon and Diana. (Intriguingly, Princess Diana died on St. Giles' Eve). Even moreso, Giles recalls the Irish myth of Oisín, whose name also means "kid" and is also the son of a female deer, and is also hunted down by hounds.

Pursuing Giles ourselves, we reach his feast day, September 1, opening a month of some significance in our pilgrimage. By the Celtic "tree calendar," the month is Muin, sacred to vines and brambles and intoxication. (St. Giles'-in-the-Fields traditionally offered a "cup of charity" to beggars and the condemned.) September is also the month of

sapphire, to keep this on a relatively gin-soaked level -- and more significantly, it's the month when juniper berries ripen. Before the reformation of the calendar, St. Giles' Day coincided with the "Barleysel" harvest feast in rural England, letting us meet barley coming back the other way, on its road to the distillery. And September 29, 1736, of course, was the day the Gin Act went into effect.

"The Exit of Mother Gin . . . has been enough bewail'd by the Retailers and Drinkers of it . . . Such has been the Lamentation, that on Wednesday Night her funeral Obsequies was perform'd with Formality in several Parishes, and some of the Votaries appeared in ragged Cloaths, some without Gowns, and others with one Stocking . . ."
-- London Daily Gazetteer, Oct. 5, 1736

On that day, in Bath and in Bristol, and in many parishes across London (especially including St. Giles'), distillers and their customers staged full-dress funerals for "Madam Geneva," the spirit (as it were) of gin. This embodiment of gin, also called Queen Gin, or Mother Gin, resembled nothing so much as the old image of the witch, a crone crouched over her basket of mysterious elixirs, offering delight and poison -- often in the same bottle. In *Craze*, Jessica Warner suggests that this witchcraft imagery led to an urban legend of gin-drinking old women spontaneously combusting, as fire and witches met again. The cackling hag on the steps of St. Giles' in Hogarth's print may well depict Madam Geneva herself, a queen of corruption stretching back to Hecate (whose sacred days fall in the midst of September) and forward to the brothel-keeping "Mother Gin-Sling" from von Sternberg's bizarre noir *Shanghai Gesture*.

*"Fierce as Armenian tigers Shrews that bawl,
Subjoin'd in love, GIN taught to Catterwal;
GIN taught 'em to revive the Bacchian rite
To dance stark-naked the Black Joke and White . . ."*
-- from the anonymously published *Mother Gin, A Tragi-comical Eclogue* (1737)

And if so, perhaps Mother Gin has an even darker side. Reformers wrote that gin "murders infants in the womb," just as Lilith did. Was the mysterious woman (intriguingly, never found) who urged Judith Defour to kill her baby another such manifestation? Lilith, after all, strangled her tiny victims. Does St. Giles' patronage of breast-feeding somehow mask a darker deity, whom women placate in fear, rather than supplicate in love? The preacher Thomas Wilson's words about Madam Geneva, "How many have unhappily drunk this deadly Poison with their Nurse's Milk!" can apply equally to the Lamashtu, a Babylonian spirit with poisoned breasts, whose milk kills nursing babes. As Lamia, she moved through classical Greece and Italy; as the eerily-named Jenny Greenteeth, she "drowned" the babes of medieval goodwives -- and as Queen Gin in the 1730s, she helped to kill three quarters of London's children before their fifth birthday. Mother Gin, the hag with poison in her breasts, may also have something in common with the murderous "wicked stepmother" from such fairy tales as "The Juniper Tree." Juniper was a bramble plant that masked the gateway to the Otherworld, and its burning (again with the burning) "drove away" witches. Or did it simply weaken their patroness Mother Geneva, along with the slaking of her "liquid fire" by the Acts of 1743 and 1751?

Gin, and death, and the fetid rookeries of London's East End find their final echo in 1888. Jack the Ripper, a myth even stronger than Mother Gin, stalked the streets, killing four gin-soaked whores between St. Giles' Eve and the end of Madam Geneva's unholy September. ("Old Woman's Summer," to the Polish immigrants in Whitechapel.) The Ripper killed his last victim, Mary Kelley, on November 9, St. Theodore's Day -- a tribute to "King Theodore," one of Queen Gin's many market pseudonyms? Although the Ripper worked in Whitechapel (some miles to the east of Mother Gin's old haunts), there were threads and trails he might have followed. Liz Stride was, after all, married in St. Giles'-in-the-Fields, and Polly Nichols lived for a time at the St. Giles Workhouse. Many of the anti-gin reformers, such as James Oglethorpe, William Hogarth, and the tireless Thomas De Veil, were Freemasons. (Although the suggestive "one stocking" at her funeral suggests that Queen Gin, too, had her Masonic court.) Was the Ripper summoned by the Masonic London police to hunt Madam Geneva down in her new Whitechapel haunts, and dilute her gin with blood? Did well-meaning authority once more call up a greater evil than it sought to put down? Did the shadow of the Gin Acts fall knife-sharp, carving up a prostrate -- and now motherless -- London? Or does Madam Geneva still survive, in some East End council house or squat, watching with her thirsty eyes the babies at play? Cheers.

Designer's Notes: Transhuman Space: Broken Dreams

by **Jamais Cascio**

There are, for me, few more appealing tasks than coming up with plausible and interesting scenarios of the future. It's something I do professionally as well as in my gaming life. Since the mid-1990s, I have worked as a scenario designer, a kind of strategic planner that focuses on future environments for present-day organizations (ranging from tiny non-profits and start-ups to global corporations and governments). Part of this work entails talking with very smart people about where they think the future is headed, paying close attention to emerging ideas and technologies, and thinking about the implications of all of these potential changes.

I'm also a long time roleplaying gamer. A few years ago, I started running a **GURPS** game set in a near future populated by technological and social changes that, through my work, I had come to believe would shape the 21st century and beyond. It was a world of sentient computers, radical biotechnologies, and nanomachines. It was fairly dark, and definitely not traditional sci-fi. When I first heard about **Transhuman Space**, I had a moment of *deja vu*; while the scenario was clearly original and new, it had significant parallels to what I had been working on. Although I had never done professional game design, I started looking for ways that I could contribute to the development of the series.

I couldn't imagine a better first game book for me than **Broken Dreams**.

The theme of the book -- the darker side of the **Transhuman Space** future -- was immediately intriguing. While many readers find the main **Transhuman Space** scenario somewhat disturbing, it is a far more optimistic vision of the next 100 years than many futurists would describe. The climate is bad, but not devastatingly out-of-kilter; terrorists have access to more dangerous technologies, but the world has avoided significant attacks; machines are intelligent, but in a way that (by and large) enhances human capabilities rather than completely replacing them. Moreover, the traditional future dystopias of the cyberpunk genre are out of place here.

The immersive cyberspace of that genre is missing, as well. In most respects, the information technology in **Transhuman Space** is fairly prosaic, with plausible improvements over current systems. One area of development is the realm of intellectual property. **Broken Dreams** includes rules for accessing, controlling, and hacking the intellectual property rights systems commonplace in 2100, as well as a discussion of pervasive advertising (and adviruses). One section, dropped for space but included below, provided some options for GMs wishing to add complexity or detail to the means by which the adventurers access the global web.

Getting Online

Web service providers, or WSPs, are the gateways through which a user's virtual interface implant, wearable augmented reality system, or hand-held cybershell gains access to the web. In most of the developed world, this access is uniform, inexpensive (or free), and easy. For the most part, typical web users need not worry about their WSPs, which tend to function as reliably as any other utility service. Adventurers tend not to be typical web users, however, and may wish to take advantage of the strengths and weaknesses of alternative service providers. They are also likely to travel to more exotic locales, some of which use non-standard web access technologies.

Most computer systems are designed to have constant wireless access to the web. Cybershells need to be authenticated and identified, however, and this is where WSPs come in. In their most basic form, web service providers supply a unique web identification for the digital system and a rudimentary check to make sure that the computer is who it says it is. Other forms of authentication may be required for access to other systems (see Fifth Wave, p. 124-130).

In parts of the world with a single (usually official) WSP, basic authentication is typically the only level of service available. In areas with competing WSPs, however, providers will often have additional features beyond simple identification. Some may provide free virtuality node services (see p. FW30), virus filtering, or remote data storage

facilities; the more expensive services often tout security and (relative) anonymity as key selling points. Larger corporations will sometimes offer private WSP access for employees. Entirely private webs (with or without connections to the broader global web) are commonplace, usually requiring specialized hardware for connection.

With few exceptions (most notably Kazakhstan and Iran), commercially-available cybershells and other web access hardware use global standards, and will have no problem contacting the web wherever wireless networks are available. Global web service providers can be reached across all Fourth and Fifth Wave nations (except the Transpacific Socialist Alliance, where access is usually blocked by other nations). Third Wave countries (particularly those referred to as "transition states" in *Broken Dreams*) may not have the necessary cross-connection agreements in place; in these cases, the visitor's infomorph will automatically negotiate a temporary web access connection using the country's free service.

Most Earth governments provide very basic service at no cost to citizens, and at very low prices to visitors. These free WSPs usually have little intrinsic security, no virus or advertising filters, and no added features. Users of these services must acquire appropriate security software on their own. Computer Hacking attempts against systems connecting to the web via a free WSP will be at +2 in addition to any other modifiers. Access fees for non-citizens are usually fairly low, averaging about \$5/month.

There are a number of competing global WSPs available to citizens of Fourth and Fifth Wave nations; many of these also provide service in the more populous off-world locations. All can handle the usual web functions, but each provides its own unique additions to the standard package. Subscription fees are generally reasonable. It is possible for a single user to subscribe to multiple services, although most computer systems may only connect via one WSP at a time. The ability to connect to multiple WSPs adds 10% to the cost of digital hardware for each added channel.

The top five global WSPs in January, 2100 are:

- *WOW! (World On the Web)*: WOW! is aimed at consumers looking for a step up from free utilities. WOW! is very popular, and usually holds the number one or number two spot in terms of current users. Its added services include 10 free hours of digital kingdom access per month and somewhat weak advirus filtering (eliminates need to have advirus filter running on cybershell; treat as one upgrade generation behind, fails to filter on a 17 or 18). \$30/month.
- *HANWEB*: Originally specializing in Asian-language services, HANWEB has worked over the last decade to build up a following in Europe and the United States. The main competitor to WOW!, it slipped from the number one spot recently because of persistent hardware difficulties (on an 18, a HANWEB user will lose web access for 3d minutes; check once/day). HANWEB management is beginning to suspect internal sabotage. Services include 15 free hours of digital kingdom access and standard advirus filtering (eliminates need to have advirus filter on cybershell; fails on 18). \$35/month.
- *Bundesnet*: In 2098, Germany privatized its state-run WSP, which quickly became one of the more popular service providers in Europe. Bundesnet is now seeking to expand to other parts of the world, and has achieved a measure of success in the nations of the Pacific Rim Alliance. Bundesnet offers little in the way of extraneous services aside from advirus filtering (as HANWEB) and an aggressive policy of seeking out and eliminating Free Memes (see p. FW122). \$25/month.
- *ProReality*: Aimed at professionals, ProReality emphasizes security and virtual services, at a price. Computer Hacking attempts against systems connecting to the web via ProReality are at -2 in addition to any other modifiers, and any Computer Hacking attempts coming *from* systems connecting via ProReality are at -1. ProReality subscribers have unlimited access to virtual conference room services and standard advirus filtering. \$100/month.
- *Aegis*: Based in Australia, Aegis claims to have the best security features of any WSP. Computer Hacking attempts against systems connecting to the web via Aegis or from systems connecting via Aegis are at -3. Aegis provides standard advirus filtering, but no virtual services. \$50/month.

On additional WSP of note is Mainliner. Not well known, it is nonetheless popular in certain circles. Its security features give a -1 to any Computer Hacking attempts against Mainliner-connected systems, but its real attraction is the built-in advertising filter. Those who connect to the web via Mainliner rarely see any advertisements; the effect is the

equivalent of running ad-filter software. Advirus filters are also standard. Aimed at technology and information professionals, Mainliner also claims to have one of the fastest networking systems available. There are persistent rumors that Mainliner is a front for the Transpacific Socialist Alliance; there are also persistent rumors (usually not among the same people) that it's actually run by the CIA. \$200/month.

Dr. William Winthorpe Whipporwill

for 1920s Call of Cthulhu

by J. Edward Tremlett

*"Yes, **suh**. I can proudly relate that I did indeed stand at the side of the esteemed, late Dr. Carlton as we strode shoulder to shoulder through the ancient halls of King Wikkiwakkiwookie of the Island of Dagon. And I only wish that mah dear friend -- may God rest his noble soul -- could be here today, so he could share in the telling of what we found . . . of which this ancient crown -- the Crown of the King of the Fish People, I would remind you -- is the least bit!*

*"And I would wager that were he here today, he could tell of the dire importance of funding to mount yet another expedition. Yes, **suh** . . . "*

* * *

The 1920s were rife with con artists, flim-flam men, and hucksters, all trying to exploit the gullible, the credulous, and the lost with new philosophies, "ancient" secrets, and suspicious cure-alls. In that sense, the tragic figure of Dr. William Winthorpe Whipporwill -- ne William J. Simmons -- isn't too different from his other contemporaries.

However, mixed in with the usual flim-flam, astute Investigators may notice that Dr. Whipporwill adds a few words of interest into his carnival barking. They are dreaded, abhorrent words that they may have already heard, or else might learn something of in the future, and then have cause to wonder how much that con man at the county fair knew . . .

A sad man with the gift of gab -- and a few connections to the Mythos -- Dr. Whipporwill makes for an interesting piece of local color for 1920's Investigators to encounter.

Background

Dr. Whipporwill was born William Jasper Simmons in Jacksonville, North Carolina. He is among the last, sad remainders of a family that was once well-off, but lost it all to the Civil War, hard times . . . and, as some would say, a family curse.

The Simmons once held a handsome corn plantation, well within view of the Ocean. William's grandfather, Balathazar, had settled it after a few, profitable years of working as a sailor in the South Seas. He owned many slaves, all of whom were treated kindly and with true Christian compassion.

No one knew why Balathazar had made the change from sailing to farming; he used to say that if he'd stayed with his ship another three years, he might have been able to make three more plantations. But every so often he would start from his bed, afflicted with bad dreams he would confide to no one. There were certain logbooks in his library that he let no one -- not even his wife -- read, saying that there were some things in the strange, unchristian world that no one should ever have to see.

But however he came into the trade, Balathazar had a good sense of how to make money from it; between the money they brought in, the investments they'd made, and the grace of God, the Simmons were one of the more successful families in Jacksonville. They raised several fine children -- including William's father, Marcus -- who then married well and brought their own children into the world, too. William's birth in 1860 was cause for a family celebration; his eldest sisters would sometimes reminisce at how many people were there, what they wore, what they ate, and how proud Grandpa Balathazar seemed to see all this. It was almost as if he were relieved at something.

And then, a year later, the South seceded. When North Carolina finally joined its fellows, all of Balathazar's sons went off to fight in it. He lost every one of them but Marcus at the battle of Bentonville, and the strain sent his wife to her deathbed. The sudden, horrid loss broke his mind. He ran into the Ocean, begging God to take him home. And God must have heard, because they never did find his body . . .

Marcus -- who came home from the war missing a leg -- did his best to hold onto matters. However, he didn't have his father's sense for making money, much less how to hang onto it, and the plantation's fortunes dwindled. They had to sell the property when Winthorpe was seven and a half years old, and took up residence in a smaller, but still stately home in downtown Jacksonville.

His father went into shipping by day, and crawled into the bottle by night. He was really only good at handling the latter, but he somehow made just enough money to keep his five sons and two daughters in clothes and food. His children followed into the new family business once they were old enough, and his sisters -- put to work at bookkeeping -- were able to turn the family's finances back around.

William was bright, and shared his late grandfather's interests in nature, the sciences and exploration. He read and reread every single book in his Grandfather's old library, writing his own marginalia and even creating his own book on local insects. He could often be found combing the coastline and the woods for things of interest, such as old rocks, fossils, and other *strange* things that floated ashore. He also developed a knack for rhetoric -- one that often got him into trouble when his speech exceeded his manners.

Once he was old enough to learn a trade, William was taken and put to work in the shipping business. Given his talents at writing, his father let him join his sisters at bookkeeping, instead of sailing with his brothers. William was not pleased with this, as he wanted to go out "exploring" like his grandfather must have done. He spent his days pretending to work, and daydreaming of the far-off, amazing places he'd read of in his grandfather's logbooks.

His father's decision proved to be fortunate for him. When he was 16, his four older brothers all died when their ship was wrecked at Cape Hatteras. His mother became a babbling wreck and his father crawled even further into the bottle, not bothering to even pretend to work anymore. So his older sisters took immediate control of the family's finances, and decided that William -- the last son -- should attend college. Getting William into the University of North Carolina in Raleigh, was difficult, since he'd hardly attended school. However, his intelligence and book-learning -- plus, one supposes, a reasonable family donation to the college -- brought him in. He became a model student, applying himself to his studies in Natural Sciences, and going on to receive a Masters Degree.

Unfortunately, William was his father's son, and also developed a love of the bottle. Just after turning in his papers to apply for Doctoral studies, he got blind drunk and made several "ungentlemanly" suggestions to an attractive, young lady. It just so turned out that she was the daughter of a major contributor to the University, and a lifelong friend of the head of the Life Sciences department. William was promptly expelled, and the department head saw that he was blackballed as well; Any potential employer asking for a character reference received the worst kind possible sort, and any other doctoral program that asked for his information got the same. After a few abrupt and brusque rejection notices came his way, William realized that his Masters Degree was all but useless.

He knew that he could not return home; his sisters would be distraught, the shock might kill his mother, and his father would probably kill him. So, once his money ran out, he wrote home to ask for a sizable amount, claiming that he'd managed to get a position west of North Carolina and would need funds for travel. He had intended to make his lie the truth, but there would be no doing that with what he'd done thus far. So he stumbled through town after town in the South, taking odd jobs where he could and drinking his money away.

After spending nearly all of his cash, and wondering what to say to his sisters to get more, strange luck reared its head. He chanced across a medicine show's demonstration and, realizing that this was most likely a con, asked a lot of pointed questions about what was in the little bottle. When the show was over, and his questions unanswered, he went up to the proprietor to demand some answers. Instead, he got an offer to help bark for the show.

"You sound like you know what you're talking about," the fellow said: "So you can make this all sound real. How about a 50/50 split?"

With no better prospects available, and dreading having to lie to his family once more, William said yes. He learned quite a few tricks of the trade from his newfound friend, and together they made a reasonable profit from the "cure-all" business.

That was more than 40 years ago. Since then, William -- who's taken to calling himself William Winthorpe Whipporwill, among other aliases -- has been making a name for himself in just about every dodgy scheme southeast of the Mississippi. He's been a barker for several medicine shows, the "professional viewpoint" for many frauds, and the impresario for any number of other con jobs that have required someone with a scholarly bent.

He's also had to do some time in one jail or another for fraud, which led his family to discover the trail of lies he made. They promptly disowned him for his disgrace. He tried to come back home and ask for money of his sisters once, but discovered that they'd removed all traces of him from any family photos, and thrown his things away. The only thing they'd kept was his grandfather's library, which they handed to him on his way out the door: the sight of his handwriting in the books was too much for them to handle.

Since that awful day, Winthorpe has been hanging around Raleigh and Jacksonville in the hopes of somehow redeeming himself in his sisters' eyes. But so long as he continues to do what he does -- and there's really no danger of that stopping anytime soon -- this will remain an impossible quest. His sisters close their curtains when he ambles on by and pray he doesn't come up the steps to ask for money again.

And every so often, his parents' graves are visited by a sad old man who drops a rose on each, stumbles for something to say and, finding nothing, walks away quietly, sipping from a hipflask all the while.

Using William

The doctor makes for a good source of red herrings for Investigators. He lends his "credentials" to something maybe once or twice in every six months in one Southern state or another. These scams run the gamut from medicine shows to tacky "discoveries" which, when looked at, turn out to be pure fakery dressed up with large words (some of them could have a Mythos connection, of course).

He has other uses as well: in spite of his phony doctorate and drunken demeanor, he still has his scientific knowledge and skills, and is quite an expert in Natural History. He also has an amazing gift for flim-flam, which would make him a wonderful ally to have in case the Investigators need to convince someone of something rather . . . outlandish. His services won't come free, but money -- or, more preferably, liquor -- can secure immediate help.

On a related note, he knows the location and passwords for every speakeasy, basement bar, and gentleman's club in North Carolina, which may come in extremely useful at times.

Mythos Connections

William's only knowledge of the Mythos comes from his Grandfather's log books, which he read after both his paternal grandparents passed away. Balathazar Williams wrote down the islanders' tales of fish men from the sea who took human wives, and the strange children that resulted from such couplings. However, William has always regarded them much in the same way that he took stories of fairies and old Native American legends: amusing tales to make hay out of while trying to make a buck.

And then there is the matter of the family curse. Balathazar was convinced that one of the islanders' priests put a hex on him, which was what prompted him to leave the seas and take up farming. Losing almost all his sons to the Civil War convinced him that the curse had followed him onto the land; had he been living when William's brothers all died at once on Cape Hatteras, he would have suspected the curse was at work there as well.

But what if the curse was not bad luck, but a change in his bloodline? Consider that all but one of Balathazar's

children were lost to the war, and not more than a few scraps of each came home for burial. Also consider that all but one of Marcus' sons were lost in the crash on the cape, and none of their remains were ever found in the wreck. There is no way of knowing what truly happened to them.

Is it possible that Balathazar's male children carried the potential to change into the same fish-men that he heard those tales of? Could all the children have come into the change around the same time, somehow, and faked their deaths in order to go rejoin the sea? Were Marcus and his only surviving son William somehow genetic throwbacks, who carry the gene but will not make the change?

Maybe, even now, Dr. Whipporwill is being watched by strange, aquatic eyes as he rambles down the beaches of Jacksonville. Maybe his family takes some kind of strange, alien pity upon him, and arranges for items of interest to "wash ashore." And maybe the Investigators realize that these items are much more than what Dr. Whipporwill says they are . . .

Name: "Dr. William Winthorpe Whipporwill" -- ne William Jasper Simmons

Born: 1860 in Jacksonville, N.C.

Age in 1926: 66

Occupation: Charlatan, drunk

Degrees: Masters of Natural Sciences, University of North Carolina, Raleigh.

STR 12 **DEX** 12 **INT** 17
CON 9 **APP** 12 **POW** 14
SIZ 14 **EDU** 20 **SAN** 55

HP: 11

Damage Bonus: +1d4

Skills: Accounting 20%, Anthropology 37%, Archaeology 23%, Bargain 55%, Biology 59%, Chemistry 27%, Credit Rating 15%, Cthulhu Mythos 02%. Dodge 40%, Drink himself blind 85%, Fast Talk 55%, Geology 53%, History 46%, Library Use 65%, Natural History 80%, Other Language: Latin 67%, Other Language: Spanish 30%, Other Language: French 40%, Persuade 85%, Spot Hidden 25%

Spells: None

Tomes Read: His grandfather's logbooks contain strange tales of the South Sea islands, including some rather suspicious glimpses of Deep One interaction amongst human villagers. (San Loss 1/1d6; Cthulhu Mythos +2%; One week to read; No spells)

Weapons: Fist/Punch 55%, 1d3 + 1d4, .25 Derringer 35%, 1d6, cane 40%, 1d4 + 1d4

Mental Disorders: Alcoholism

Description: The good Doctor is both tall and stout, standing around 6'3 and weighing about 270 pounds. He wears iron-gray muttonchops and has bushy, expressive eyebrows. He tends to wear dark, somber suits, using suspenders to hold up his ample waistline, and a tophat covers his balding pate. All this adds up to give him a rather imposing appearance -- one that doesn't totally evaporate when he's drunk.

Items Carried: broken, silver pocketwatch on a long, silver chain; a gentleman's cane he uses to pound the floor for emphasis while talking; tin hip flask full of bootleg whiskey; rusty .25 Derringer; a large magnifying glass; pocket-sized "ancient artifacts" of dubious origin; a bottle of "Doctor Wilbur's Cure-All"

Income: Between \$5000 and \$2000, depending on how many scams he can pull off that year.

Savings: None.

The Two-Times Unfortunate Encyclopedists of Barbaric Deviltry

for *HeroQuest*

by Mark Galeotti

"Let the new world understand the failings of the old."

It is a fact beyond question that the land and people of Kralorela are uniquely blessed and that the rest of the world is inhabited by barbarians, devils, and figments of an over-active imagination. However, voices have been raised in disputation even in the Hall of Tranquil Harmony as to the precise degree to which the Kralori are so blessed. Thus, the Abbot of the Phoenix Terrace Monastery took it upon himself to send a picked delegation of monks out into this imperfect realm to chronicle its very imperfections and above all the false, partial, and self-deluding knowledge of the world around them. Their task is to complete an encyclopedia of the tales and flawed knowledge of the barbarians, but they know that this is more than a life's work. Every season, they send a new caravan containing their latest writings and reports back to the monastery.

The monks are doubly unfortunate. Not only have they effectively accepted exile, but it has been decided that this is not a mission that ought to be entrusted to or required of any who have a close relationship with the Divine Draconic Powers. Thus, none of the Encyclopedists have true dragon magic, although they are able to recognize its traces in others. Seeking novelty and imperfection and attuned to draconic powers, it is hardly surprising that they have come to Dragon Pass. They have been there for over a decade, but appear to be nowhere near completing their research.

Although these monks are not without their own physical and magical defenses, they use the wealth they receive regularly from Kralorela to hire locals as guides, interpreters, guards, and bearers, calling them the Mister Barbarians. This is a practical necessity, but it also allows them to carry out their second, secret role. The Kralori giant hero Kui Hui is recruiting for his "War of Stupidity against Ignorance," in which select foreigners (the "Stupid") will battle the hordes of the Kingdom of Ignorance. The Encyclopedists are one of many secret recruiting parties. They find those whose skills, magic, or hidden draconic affinities suggest that they may be assets for the war; then persuade, entice, or trick them into travelling to Kui Hui's great mustering points along the Kralori border. Heroes may well be recruited into the Mister Barbarians as a first step towards inviting them to join the War.

Common Names: Those Eastern Weirdoes with the Deep Pockets.

Form: Wandering scholar-monks.

Cultural Origin: Kralori.

Cultural Context: Curious yet superior travelers and scholars, with local mercenaries.

Ideology: "We are here to chronicle the errors of the barbarians, that we may appreciate Kralorela's wondrousness."

Look and Feel: Curious, charming, and patronizing scholars.

Purpose: To record and assess barbarian knowledge; to secretly recruit warriors and heroes.

Headquarters: Although they set out from the Phoenix Terrace Monastery, the Encyclopedists are an itinerant group, with no home. As they would say, "the entire barbarian world is our monastery."

Reactions: Most people are bemused by the Encyclopedists -- however, their willingness to pay well for local

assistance means that they are usually greeted with enthusiasm.

Resources

Leader: The Egregious Jiung, whose whisper is as commanding as a warlord's shout.

Renowned Members:

Master Seventeen Quills Blue, the chief scribe, who seems to be writing and sketching every waking moment.

Pin Don, who speaks a little of every language known (and a few not yet known).

Master Two Heron, the unfailingly polite yet unconquerable martial artist.

Membership: The Encyclopedists number the propitious figure 49. When one dies or is otherwise removed from their number, a new recruit arrives within a week, mysteriously dispatched months before from the Monastery.

Other Contacts: The Encyclopedists have no formal contacts outside Kralorela, although their desire for knowledge and travel and their willingness to share information (about their travels, not Kralorela) has allowed them to make connections with many other scholars.

Organization

The Encyclopedists have a rigid hierarchy, from The Egregious Jiung (and Sharan Cho, the band's guardian) to the other senior Blue Hat Masters, through the middle-ranking Yellow Bonnets (who do most of the record-keeping), and down to the novice No Hats. The "Mister Barbarians" come at the bottom, where all barbarians should. They are treated with polite disdain, although Mister Chief Strongarm and Mister Chief Strongback (head of the guards and porters, respectively) may be afforded a degree of respect.

Encyclopedist Membership Keyword

Membership Requirements: Selection by the Abbot of Phoenix Terrace Monastery.

Mundane Abilities taught: Cope with Barbarian Ways, Get By in Barbarian Languages, Literate, Martial Arts (any one of a variety of bizarre Kralori forms), Polite Smile, Walk Tirelessly.

Typical Personality Traits: Curious, Patronizing, Superior.

Magic: All of the Encyclopedists (even the No Hats) are devotees of either Vashanti (see the "Homeland: Kralori" article that appeared in Pyramid on *date*) or his subcult of Ho Den Ho the Observant (*affinities:* Literacy, Observation, Precedent). Only these full members benefit from the guardian being's magic.

"Mister Barbarian" Membership Keyword

Membership Requirements: Appear relatively trustworthy and useful at whatever job the Encyclopedists need done at the time.

Mundane Abilities taught: Basic Kralori Commoners' Manners, Pidgin Kralori, Work Hard.

Typical Personality Traits: Any.

Magic: None taught or prohibited. Mister Barbarians do not gain the benefits of the guardian's magic.

Sharan Cho (Guardian)

At first glance, most assume that the band's guardian is just one of their number. However, the Venerable Sharan Cho

is actually an otherworldly ally. He is the manifested soul of the Kralori ambassador to the Second Council at the time immediately before Nysalor was born (about 1250 years ago). He is still bound to Glorantha as a result of the consequent spiritual pollution. His form can be destroyed, but he invariably reappears within a week, cackling and rueful. In life, Sharan Cho was sedate and serene, prone to peaceful meditation. In part, he believes it was this passivity that led to his failure, and he now consciously seeks to be more active and life-affirming. He laughs and cries a great deal, tells off-color jokes, and freely berates friends and foes alike. The monks' tolerance of such unusual and unseemly behavior is often one of the first clues for outsiders that Sharan Cho is not what he seems to be.

Method: Manifestation.

Form: An ancient but spry Blue Hat Master, leaning on a twisted peachwood staff.

Communication: Sharan Cho may speak in flawless Kralori or -- entertainingly accented -- any other tongue. However, he often lets a laugh, glower, or whack with his staff do his talking for him.

Guardian Requirements: Never pass up an opportunity to point out the entertaining inadequacies of barbarian societies, albeit in a friendly and tolerant manner. Every year, produce a poem, calligraphic composition, or painting commemorating an aspect of Kralorelan perfection and present it to a suitable barbarian in the hope of spreading enlightenment.

Functions:

Awareness -- Sense Draconic Virtue. (Sharan Cho can see whether barbarians are *kralo-nei* -- "Kralori inside" -- and thus potentially worthy of acceptance into the Finest People, or *hei-doh* -- "Useful Idiots" -- and thus prime candidates for recruitment for the War of Stupidity against Ignorance.)

Blessing -- Affirm Kralori Superiority. (Sharan Cho is equally comfortable presenting a convincing case during a debate or whacking some Encyclopedist experiencing temptation round the head, with loving sternness.)

Defense -- Negate Barbarian Magic. (Sharan Cho simply claps his hands with a command to "stop this foolishness," and all non-Kralori magic in the area must resist this power [no multiple target modifier is applied] or be interrupted. This effect is momentary -- it briefly dulls enchanted swords and banishes daimones, but after a moment the sword regains its magic and the daimon can return. However, the resumption of magic may be little comfort to the barbarian who was fighting some ravenous beast or flying.)

* * *

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More Budget Treasures

by Owen K.C. Stephens

This article presents yet more permanent items with costs below 2,000 gp, focusing on those with costs of 1,200 gp or less. It is a continuation of the ["Magic On The Cheap"](#) article, and the items presented can be used in the same ways. They can also be used in games designed to have a lower level of prevalent magic (so more powerful items are very rare), or in games with very high magic levels (as minor items that even commoners can afford).

Adorned Items

Though not technically magic, adorned items can make excellent low-level treasure. Adorned items have had great skill and care taken to increase their aesthetic value. This is not a simple matter of adding gems and precious metals (the cost of which should be tracked separately), but high quality sculpting, etching, needlepoint, embossing, and similar techniques for adding beauty to an item without changing it's basic material or properties. Any amount of money may be spent on adorning an item, though 50 gp to 150 gp per item is fairly standard.

A character with many adorned items looks better, and has an advantage when making an initial impression. This is represented by a competence bonus to Diplomacy checks made to affect an NPC's attitude for the first time (future Diplomacy checks made with the same NPC have no bonus, as the initial impression is over). A character with 50 gp of adornment gains a +1 bonus, a character with 200 gp of adornment gains a +2 bonus, a character with 450 gp gains a +3 bonus, and a character with 800 or more gp gains a +4 bonus.

Making an adorned item works just like making masterwork items (price and construction time is handled separately with a DC of 20 for the adornment). It generally takes a separate Craft skill to adorn an item (Craft: Metal Etching to adorn weapons, for example).

Quality Items

Though also not technically magic, quality items can make excellent low-level treasure. Quality items are like masterwork, but have different benefits. Quality items that are stout gain +1 hardness and a 10% increase in hit points (minimum +1). Quality items that are sheer have the same uses as normal items, but weigh 25% less. Each quality added to an item costs as much as making that item masterwork, or 50 gp, whichever is greater. An item can have multiple qualities and be masterwork, with all costs calculated from the base cost of the item.

Thus a set of quality sheer half-plate has all the game stats of normal half-plate, but weighs only 37.5 pounds and costs 750 gp. A masterwork, quality sheer and stout greatsword is +1 to hit, weighs 6 lbs., has a hardness of 11 and 11 hit points, and costs 950 gp. A quality sheer silk rope weighs 3.75 lbs. and costs 60 gp.

Making quality items work just like making masterwork items (price and construction time is handled separately with a DC of 20 for each quality to be added). In many campaigns, it would be appropriate to have the secrets of construction quality items held by a particular race or guild. Thus only dwarves might know how to make stout weapons, while elves have the techniques for making sheer rope. In such cases, a character must learn these secrets before attempting to construct such items.

Campaigns using the Greater Masterwork rules from the "Magic On The Cheap" article should also treat the construction of such items the same way, with a Craft DC of 25.

Talisman Bows and Arrows

Talisman bows are magically enchanted weapons which are not powerful enough to grant an attack or damage bonus by themselves, but can do so in conjunction with talisman arrows. A set of talisman bow and arrows together grant a +1 enhancement bonus to attack and damage rolls, which does not stack with enhancement bonuses from other bows or arrows. Any style of bow or crossbow (and corresponding arrows or bolts), or even a sling and sling stones, can be made as talisman items.

A bow or arrow does not have to be masterwork to receive a talisman magical aura, but it cannot have any other magical benefit. The cost of a talisman enhancement is 500 gp for the weapon and 10 gp for each piece of ammunition. Like magic ammunition, talisman arrows, bolts, and stones are destroyed when fired, even if they miss their target. Talisman items can be created by character with either Craft Arms and Armor or Craft Wondrous Item. A set of talisman bow and arrows never grant more than a +1 enhancement bonus.

Rings

Garbing: A character wearing a *ring of garbing* may change his clothing to be of any style and type he wishes, including cleric's vestments, or an artisan's, cold weather, courtier's, entertainer's, explorer's, monk's, noble's, peasant's, royal, scholar's or traveler's outfit. Jewelry and similar non-clothing items are not added or changed, but the style, cut, color and decoration of the clothes is entirely at the will of the ring's wearer. If an item is put in a pocket that ceases to exist, it falls to the ground. Though this does not add any bonus to a character making a Disguise check, it may prevent the character from taking any penalties.

Faint conjuration; CL 1st; Forge Ring, *alter self*; Price: 1,800 gp.

Restfulness: The natural heal rate of a character wearing a *ring of restfulness* is increased as if he were one level higher. Thus the character recovers one additional hit point after eight hours of rest, and one additional point of nonlethal damage per hour. If the character gets 24 hours of bed rest, he gains 2 additional hit points.

Faint conjuration; CL 1st; Forge Ring, 5+ ranks of Heal; Price: 450 gp.

Timeliness: A character wearing a *ring of timeliness* always knows what time it is (to the nearest second), how many hours it is until dawn or sundown (whichever is next), and the date (according to the calendar of the spellcaster who created the ring). The wearer may choose to be alerted when a set amount of time has passed. This alert is silent to anyone except the ring wearer, though it is loud enough to awaken him from mundane slumber.

Faint divination; CL 1st; Forge Ring, Wis of 15 or higher; Price: 450 gp.

Vicious Blows: A character wearing a *ring of vicious blows* gains a +1 or +2 luck bonus to attack rolls made to confirm a threat, making it a critical hit. This has no effect on normal attack rolls, only those to confirm a threat.

Faint divination; CL 1st; Forge Ring, *true strike*; Price: 1,000 gp. (+1), 4,000 gp (+2).

Rods

Auras: A *rod of auras* is a glass or crystal rod a little more than two feet long that glows with a dim illumination (less bright than a single candle). A character holding the rod who casts *detect chaos*, *detect evil*, *detect good*, *detect law*, *detect magic*, *detect poison*, *detect secret doors*, *detect snares and pits*, or *detect undead* causes the auras or objects revealed to glow lightly. This allows observers to gain the same information as the spell caster, though spells that take several rounds to reveal data (such as *detect magic*) still take multiple rounds to reveal a specific object and its strength.

Faint divination; CL 1st, Craft Rod, *detect magic*, *faerie fire*; Price: 1,800 gp.

Dowsing: A *dowsing rod* is a wooden forked stick, two to three feet long. The wielder holds the forked ends, and may find water by following the tugging of the rod. It guides the wielder to the nearest natural source of potable water within 440 feet (including underground springs, but only if the actual water of the spring is within range). If no natural source of potable water is within range, the rod points to the largest concentration of potable water in range (including water in barrels, waterskins, and so on).

Faint divination; CL 1st, Craft Rod, *create water*; Price: 900 gp.

The North: A rod of the north always points north when held.
Faint divination; CL 1st, Craft Rod, *know direction*; Price: 900 gp.

Staves

Staff of the Sproutings: These simple staves are generally made from a single, flexible branch of a small tree. They are made by senior druids to pass out to younger members of a circle. The spells bound into such staves are selected not because they are used often, but because they are needed only rarely, but are important when they are. Because they can depend on the staves for such moments, young druids can prepare other spells they use more often. The staves allow use of the following spells:

- *detect poison* (2 charges)
- *flare* (2 charges)
- *purify food and drink* (2 charges)

Moderate varied; CL 8th; Create Staff, *detect poison*, *flare*, *purify food and drink*; Price 1,687 gp, 5 sp.

Wondrous Items

Animated Abacus: This minor item is identical in appearance to a standard abacus, save that it has a curved handle on one side made of bone or ivory. When held, the abacus automatically performs mathematical calculations spoken by the holder, instantly performing addition, subtraction, division, multiplication, and finding square roots. Up to 10 numbers at a time may be named by the holder, then called up later ("the amount of gold in the group fund," "the number of orcs we've killed," and so on).

Faint divination; CL 1st; Craft Wondrous Item, *prestidigitation*; Price: 900 gp.

Crimson Shirt: These magic shirts are a bright red color, and are generally unadorned with trim or patterns. The wearer of a *crimson shirt* automatically makes any roll or check to stabilize on the second round of bleeding to death. This does not allow a chance to prevent bleeding if one is not normally allowed (such as when struck by a weapon of *wounding*), but it does mean the character will not bleed to death from mundane injuries unless dropped to within 1 point (1 round) of death.

Faint conjuration; CL 1st; Craft Wondrous Item, *cure minor wounds*; Price: 900 gp.

Gripping Gloves: These tight-fitting leather gloves have black palms that seem to be coated in tree sap, though they leave no residue on other objects. A character wearing these gloves gains a +1 enhancement bonus to Climb and grapple checks, and to checks made to resist being disarmed.

Faint conjuration; CL 1st; Craft Wondrous Item, *bull's strength*; Price: 1,800 gp.

Pearl of Power, 0-Level: *Pearls of power* are covered in the *DMG*, but the price for a 0-level pearl is not. Such pearls are also more easily constructed, because of their very minor power level.

Faint transmutation; CL 1st; Craft Wondrous Item, creator must be able to cast 0-level spells; Price: 500 gp.

Porter's Boots: These heavy leather boots always seem worn, even when newly made. Anyone wearing the boots has his carrying capacity increased as if his Strength were 1 to 3 higher. This is an enhancement bonus, and does not stack with additional carry capacity gained by a standard enhancement bonus to Strength.

Faint conjuration; CL 1st; Craft Wondrous Item, *bull's strength*; Price: 500 gp (carrying capacity 1 higher), 1,000 gp (carrying capacity 2 higher), 2,500 gp (carrying capacity 3 higher).

Quill of Endless Ink: These flamboyant writing tools are always made of a colorful feather, generally taken from a parrot or peacock, and always at least a foot long. They can be used to write on nearly any reasonably flat and solid surface, including paper, cloth, stone, metal, wood, and glass. The writing appears without benefit of ink, and does not fade or rub off (though it can be removed with an *erase* spell).

Faint universal; CL 1st; Craft Wondrous Item, *arcane mark*; Price: 900 gp.

Slick Cloak: A *slick cloak* always appears to be made of silk or high quality linen. It is smooth to the touch, but does not feel oily or slippery until a character wearing it is grappled or stuck in a tight spot. The cloak then makes the character slippery granting a +1 to +4 circumstance bonus to all Escape Artist checks the character makes.

Faint conjuration; CL 1st; Craft Wondrous Item, *grease*; Price: 100 gp (+1), 400 gp (+2), 900 gp (+3), 1,600 (+4).

Sparkling Switch: A *sparkling switch* appears to be a small, flexible length of willow wood or similar material. As a standard action, a character holding the switch can cause a tiny spark of fire to appear at its tip. This can be used to light easily flammable materials (such as prepared fires, candles, torches, and lanterns). A character may use the switch to make a touch attack, which does one point of fire damage. The switch is too light for a character to do physical damage with it or gain a Str bonus to the damage done.

Faint evocation; CL 1st; Craft Wondrous Item, *burning hands*; Price: 900 gp.

Universal Instrument: A *universal instrument* can take the form of any masterwork musical instrument small enough to be carried easily by a Medium creature. Thus it can be a masterwork lute, fife, flute, horn, lur, lyre, mandolin, pan pipes, recorder, shawm, tabor, or trumpet, but not an alphorn, floor harp, kettle drum, or piano.

Faint alteration; CL 1st; Craft Wondrous Item, *summon instrument*; Price: 1,200 gp.

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Illustrated by Calvin Clamp, Mario Fiorito, David Esbri Molines, Chris Pepper and Ursula Vernon

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Now under new management and bearing a new logo, with its very first release, the all-new Hogshead Publishing Mark II heads in a direction that under its previous management probably would not have been considered. Not only is ***Crime Scene: Police Investigation*** a supplement for the ***d20 System***, it also marks the inauguration of a series of sourcebooks that will explore different aspects of the world of law enforcement and organized crime. Hogshead has already followed this supplement up with ***Crime Scene: The Mob***, and many more are in the works.

Crime Scene: Police Investigation is not strictly speaking the first ***d20 System*** treatment of law enforcement, but it is the first *straight* treatment. The other is far more satirical in nature, being [The Judge Dredd Roleplaying Game](#), Mongoose Publishing's first RPG licensed from the pages of the British weekly comic *2000 AD*. ***Crime Scene: Police Investigation*** is also and only a treatment of purely American law enforcement at city, county, and state level; Federal law enforcement will be covered in the forthcoming ***Crime Scene: The Feds***. That ***Crime Scene: Police Investigation*** focuses on American law enforcement explains why an English publisher has written this supplement in American English, though it does feel rather odd.

Overall, though, the look and feel of ***Crime Scene: Police Investigation*** is decent enough for a first time release. It is lightly illustrated and the included scenario is the only part of the supplement in need of another proofread as it feels rather rushed. Although the book's table of contents does a reasonable job, an index would have been more useful. It also lacks a bibliography, and even though ***Crime Scene: Police Investigation*** is a game, it should have backed up its research with sources, and lists of further reading and watching.

At its core the book presents six new classes: the Cop, the Trooper, the Deputy, the Detective, the Crime Scene Investigator, and the Criminal Psychologist. Both of these last two allow players to take civilian roles alongside those of the police, though even the civilian Crime Scene Investigator will have some police training. The Criminal Psychologist is also only allowed at the GM's discretion, as few police or sheriff's departments have the resources to hire one, let alone have one on staff. All of the characters start off at first level, but the default rank within the game is that of Sergeant. This allows the PCs a certain degree of autonomy in conducting their investigations and also to begin specializing in particular areas of police work. There are no Prestige Classes in ***Crime Scene: Police Investigation***, but characters can multi-class without restriction to reflect extra training or reassignment.

To account for their previous experience, characters can also select a Starting Department. They provide either two ranks in a pair of skills, such as the Bluff and Surveillance skills for the Vice Department; or a feat and two skill ranks such as the Appraise Suspect Feat and two ranks in the Counseling skill for the Juvenile Department. Despite these bonuses, there is a disparity between a character's initial police rank and the beginning level. First level characters feel very weak and unskilled, and even more so in combat with only a six- or eight-sided die's worth of Hit Points.

Perhaps the default starting level should have been raised to second or third level to better model a character's career

and time on the force, where it takes several years for an officer to attain the rank of sergeant. In addition, had this been allowed for, there would have been room in ***Crime Scene: Police Investigation*** for campaigns focusing on less experienced characters and the GM to run more street-orientated games.

A multitude of new feats and skills are provided to support both characters and campaigns, all of which are professionally related. The new skills include Analyse Narcotics, Autoshop (the ability to search vehicles), Computer Operations, Counseling, Crime Scene Recording, Dog Handling, Drive: Chase and Tailing, Evidence Analysis, and so on. Medical Assistance replaces the Heal skill, and the Police Interrogation skill provides a legally acceptable method getting information from a suspect or witness, while the Interview is its more benign counterpart.

The new feats start out with the basic Driving License feat, which can be taken multiple times to cover competencies with airplanes, helicopters, boats, and motorcycles as well as ordinary cars. The Chemical/Microscopic Analysis, Collecting Evidence, Crime Scene Hazard (spotting dangers inherent to a crime scene), Finger Print Taking, Handwriting Analysis, Take Charge (of the crime scene so that evidence is not lost), and Walking the Area (to spot a scene's most important evidence) feats all support the collection and analysis of evidence, while the Bribery and Informant Handling feats help a cop deal with their street contacts.

The only feat to work differently is that of Promotion, which can be taken multiple times to advance a character from sergeant to lieutenant to captain, as well as also to sheriff. This last is only available to the deputy character, and all of the promotion feats are allowed at the GM's discretion.

Crime Scene: Police Investigation is relatively light on rules, mostly making slight adjustments to certain aspects of combat. Armor Class is retained, rather than armor providing a degree of damage reduction as in other modern-set **d20 System** games. Even more anachronistic is the fact that characters gain a bonus to their Armor Class as they rise in level. The other alteration is the way in which automatic gunfire is handled, requiring the roll of multiple six-sided dice when the characters are letting off more than single shots. This is in addition to the roll to hit, and although these new rules seem to work, they feel clumsy and add an extra complication to the running of the game. In comparison, the rules for car and other vehicle chases are quite simple.

Better still is all of the source material to be found in ***Crime Scene: Police Investigation***, which provides a thorough look at the job that the police do, their procedures, and the limitations the law places on their duties. This covers jurisdiction, constitutional rights, Miranda Rights, and the need for a warrant before and after a crime scene is secured. Also discussed are both large and small municipal police departments and the County Sheriff's Office at the level of local law enforcement, plus state law enforcement. For the municipal department, two types of organization are suggested: the centralized model based on that of the LAPD, and the decentralized model of the NYPD. Besides suggesting how a GM might create a police department for his own campaign, the limits or jurisdiction of this department and its resources are given, and also how it interacts with other organizations and its jurisdiction. This comes right up-to-date with the recent founding of the Department of Homeland Security.

The "Scene of the Crime" is a basic primer for devising (on the GM's part) and investigating (on the player's side) the scene of a crime. This, and the book in general, are not aimed at devising convoluted mysteries, but more solid, down-to-earth crimes and misdemeanors. Though no crime is ever exactly the same as the next, the procedures are, and this is what the section covers. Those GMs wanting more depth will have to wait for the forthcoming ***Crime Scene: Forensics***, which will also be useful if the GM wants to run a *C.S.I.*-style campaign. Additionally, there are notes on handling interrogations and hostage situations, useful not just for law enforcement orientated campaigns.

For the GM there is another pair of character classes -- the sheriff and the SWAT Officer, plus a set of atypical NPCs ready for use. The book also includes a scenario, "Tragedy at Cutter's Creek," which is set in a small Pennsylvania town, and suited for either a small municipal police department or a sheriff's office. The town is suffering from an economic decline, and is not known for its high crime rate. So it will be a big surprise when a case of a missing teenager reveals a dark and nasty secret. Although decently done, the actual writing of "Tragedy at Cutter's Creek" does feel very rushed. Finally, the supplement is rounded out with a pair of appendices, one covering the contents of the various kits the characters will have access to, such as the Crime Scene Kit and the Trace Evidence Kit; and the other, a list of Police parlance and codes.

For the first book from a new publishing team, ***Crime Scene: Police Investigation*** is solidly done and augers well for future releases. It is not perfect, however, and the main problem lies in the implementation of the ***d20 System*** rules -- the first of these being the disparity between a character's starting rank and their starting level, the second the handling of armor class, and the third, the rules for automatic fire. They add another complication to the game, and GMs may want to tinker with them to get them right, or use rules from another ***d20 System*** game.

Yet these problems aside, the book is full of interesting information that can be applied to any modern-set ***d20 System*** game, or indeed any modern RPG. There is little in the way of advice on running law enforcement campaigns, but since they are among the easiest of genres to emulate and the media is full of examples to draw upon, this is not so much of problem. Of course, the GM will need to tone down any cinematic elements of such a source to achieve the realistic style of ***Crime Scene: Police Investigation***.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Xcrawl: Sell Out! (for d20 System)

Published by [PandaHead Games](#)

Written by **Brendan J. LaSalle**

Art by Chris Appel, Ed Ball, Allyson Brooks, Marcio Fiorito, Brian Laframboise, & Bob Stevlic

192-page b&w softcover; \$24.95

For the last year, *Xcrawl*, PandaHead's roleplaying game of extreme dungeon sports in a Romanesque world, has concentrated on The Games themselves -- those forays into man-made crypts and labyrinths. The sourcebook for the North American Empire, the larger setting in which The Games take place, is due out this winter, and they've begun to bridge that gap with *Xcrawl: Sell Out!*, the sourcebook for the business of being involved with the crawls.

The full rules of Xcrawl are laid out, or at least as full a set of rules as one can give and not have your sourcebook sound like a set of stereo instructions. What's legal in play? What magics are allowed? Each increasingly lethal division is described, starting with the "let's-pretend" elementary school Action League and finishing up with the majors, Division I (the level at which the big kids play) and Unlimited (a level shown favor by the Emperor because it lets him execute dissenters without public censure).

We learn the attitudes of the different races concerning The Games. Dwarves claim it's an insult to real adventurers, though many enjoy the guilty pleasure. The aloof elves see only fleeting glory in it, but their works are among the most cherished weapons a crawler can carry. And for the put-upon halflings, it's a way to rise above their stigmatized place in society while giving covert assistance to others of their race seeking a better life outside the NAE. The spectators also fall into categories, like the Primitives, who respect only those participants who limit themselves to "real" fantasy gear; the Monsterphiles, who root for the creatures in the dungeons; the Anarchists, who know The Games for the bread-and-circuses pacifier of the populace they really are; and the Non-Believers who think the whole thing is faked.

Past the fans, there's material about a crawler's life in and out of the game. Your alignment (and what it gets you) may change depending on whether you play a face or heel and what you're like in person. The Fame stat introduced in the core book can now be a lasting thing with permanent Fame, and it can be spent in new ways for benefits (getting a good table, or maybe charming your fellow dungeon denizens). There are rules for multi-signature moves -- those spectacular crowd-pleasing stunts associated with a single player can now be performed by the whole team for extra Mojo Pool points and bonuses to the crowd's reaction.

Other little details are added to extend the sports theme further still. In the closely guarded world of the NAE, how do they view raising someone from the dead magically? Now you'll know. What effect does being a crawler have on your day-to-day life? You may find your immune system is now dependent on magic for healing, and the horrors you've witnessed may leave you with one of those thousand-yard stares.

The new prestige classes close the gap between the crawl and the NAE. The Agent promotes his clients while the Bodyguard protects his. The teams can now have a Coach to train them, Groupies to support them, a Scrambler who protects them by making himself a tempting target, and a Superstar who acts as the Captain America of the Xcrawl world. Players can choose to be a Free Agent, picking and choosing with whom he will work, and the Paparazzi (with

the new Photography skill) depends on them for a living.

Some of the new feats are about the Fame rewards or improving your statistical ratings in Xcrawl, but most are about playing better, harder, or faster, allowing you to work through the pain or giving you bonuses in specific dungeon situations.

One of the big (ahem) selling points is the inclusion of a statistics system. Now you can track your performance to see how well you did in a crawl, how you stack up against other crawlers, and how your stats change depending on the dungeon and Dungeon Judge. Classes fall into broader categories; the Launcher, for example, is the team's ranged weapons expert, while the Spiritbrace is whoever serves as the party cleric. You mark off combat actions on the special record sheet provided. Some events are worth more to a particular class (disarming traps boosts the rogue's numbers), and there are bonuses for each class (in case your Spiritbrace lays the smack down on several zombies in a row). You can even be penalized for things like Delay of Dungeon. These numbers are tallied and plugged into a formula to get your statistics.

By far the bulk of the book is merchandising and marketing your character, and the economics of being a star. Want an action figure line for your crawler? You can do that. T-shirts, too, plus mugs, games, and dolls with suction cups on their hands. You can get a sponsor for your crawl -- wear their logo or use their gear, and they'll help pay your way through a dungeon. Make appearances at car shows and be the spokesperson for a new line of SUVs. All that money lets you buy fab new mansions and dress in style. And the prizes . . . oh, the prizes you can score during the dungeon crawl. Stereos, shoes, equipment, and a lifetime supply of Power Apps (with the awesome power of apricots). And what would an RPG supplement be without some swords and monsters?

The creatures range from the cute (the gremlin-like whammies -- an in-game nod to the game show?) to the fairly bland (the bloody, shifting plasma wench) to the confusing (the dark retcher and its retched offspring). There are a couple of distressing sorts (like the thoroughly despicable grimholds) and the amusing death piñatas -- if you thought the monsters guarding the treasure were tough . . .

The gear lists are fairly creative, including as they do items like the mascot costume, the sacrificial knife, and the cheerleader's outfit. There are delightful magic items -- a pen that helps you sign autographs, a watch that warns you when the paparazzi are about -- though it would have been nice to have them paired up with the mundane gimmies instead of placing them deeper in the book. The really nice magic items are much prized in the repressive NAE. Former stars' jerseys, the world's only known magical gun . . . in some cases, even the trophies given out for the crawl championships are possessed of strange powers. If you want to customize your magic items, there are new special abilities to layer on like the power to hit one opponent but damage his partner.

Trouble is, treasure accounts for a lot of the page count. If you think dragon hoard tables are big . . . there are nine pages of random prize lists (and name generators for the sponsors) the GM can roll for his dungeon. Keeping in mind that it's a different setting (modern fantasy), tables like these can replace the more esoteric treasure tables from traditional *Dungeons & Dragons*, but does the referee need a list of random kitchen appliances? And will that have more meaning in the game than flavor text? The restaurant generator is amusing, and useful to any GM who easily gets stuck for a name, but if you're not running a hastily generated pickup game at a convention it may not be worth that page.

This doesn't include the random person tables. That's another five pages, all for people that, by the writer's own admission, are only walk-ons (and to make things worse, they point out you'll probably have a workable idea of the person with just a couple of the possible rolls).

Another nod to the outside world: There's a thumbnail of 101 companies of the NAE. It's good trimming and the individual entries aren't overlong by anyone's definition, but it would have been nice to see fewer of them and more advice on making use of them in the game -- a few adventure seeds, some corporate names perhaps -- but as it is these won't be more than a footnote in the GM's narration without more work.

How much detail is too much detail? Once the sponsorships start rolling in, you'll have to keep track of how many decals you can visibly apply to your armor. Added bookkeeping, sure, but someone may ask. A quick primer on

approximating incorporation in the game? At least it doesn't take up as much space as some of the other extras. There are 10 pages of ads at the back, most for real upcoming PandaHead products -- good, entertaining ads, but ads nonetheless. The book is only divided into four thick chapters, but the lack of a table of contents is offset somewhat with an index.

The writing positively sings in places, though the editing needs some serious tightening. Ed Ball's artwork dominated the core rulebook, but fortunately other artists have had a bigger hand in the sketches for this volume. Their contributions are less stylistic, but also less jarring and impenetrable. The fake ads are still fun and set a tone, and the artwork doesn't steal too much away from the writing.

Sell Out! is a fairly breezy book that does more to convey atmosphere than expand playing options. Those looking for rules and crunch aren't going to walk away empty-handed, but the book dances along a fine line between offering new in-game options and being a gateway product for the NAE book. The vast array of charts and tables plus the endless lists all subtract from a certain measurable utility. The stat system is a good idea and the execution is fairly simple, but -- despite not requiring brain-busting attention to detail -- it may seem superfluous or, to some, annoying.

PandaHead has provided an exhaustive resource that brings the world of Xcrawl to vivid life. Alas, ***Sell Out!*** attempts to serve two masters, one of them in absentia, and so is a purchase better left until after the ***North American Empire*** gets its own book, allowing ***Sell Out!*** to shine like it deserves.

--Andy Vetromile

Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Ask Not For Whom the Bell Tolls

Funerals, Wakes, and Memorials

by [Riina Stewart](#)

Roleplayers are no strangers to in-game death -- characters kill people, people around characters die (often by violence) and in many games the main characters themselves are haunted by the specter of imminent death. Funerals, however, are less commonly played out, missing out on all the potential pathos, depth, excitement, mystery, horror, and opportunity a good funeral can bring. Why dump your NPCs in an unmentioned shallow grave when you can have all the fun of sending them off in style (and throw a swath of plot hooks into the bargain)?

Just what can you do with a funeral?

As in literature, a good scene in a roleplaying game is one which *does* something -- one which furthers the plot, adds depth to the characters, creates interest and excitement, or otherwise adds to the feel of the game. Funeral scenes can fulfill a range of functions.

Providing Closure

The most obvious use of a funeral in game is the same as the main purpose of memorial celebrations in real life -- to provide closure. The death of a long standing NPC can be made more meaningful by allowing the heroes a chance to reflect on the life of the deceased. The death of a PC would in most cases warrant some kind of memorial, and if the player of the departed character is up to it, a funeral can bring a sense of closure to the loss. Funerals, however, don't necessarily need to involve the end of friends, families, and allies. The send off of an enemy has interesting possibilities, if circumstances are such that the PCs might attend.

Creating Theme, Mood and Atmosphere

Funerals, in general, are sad, intense affairs -- the one place in the lives of most people where death is made preeminent and where large groups of people come together to grieve. With few exceptions a funeral will darken the tone and add a sense of sorrow to a game, bringing all the characters face to face with their own mortality. Funerals are obviously an excellent choice for creating mood and atmosphere in a horror game, but they can also be used to add a somber note to nearly any campaign. Even a comedy will become blacker for the introduction of jokes about death.

Introducing Secrets

Many memorial services involve some kind of discussion of the life of the departed individual, and this is a wonderful opportunity for the GM to reveal all sorts of formerly hidden information. This can range from simple characterization (e.g. the dead girl built model ships, and always dreamed of owning a full size sailing vessel; the kindly old man was once an explorer of the farthest reaches of space), or they can be important clues (if he was a surf lifesaver in his youth, why did he get caught in that rip tide?), or even momentous plot revelations (he was the *brother* of Edmund the Bloody). Don't forget that the eulogy is only one source of information -- hints and clues can take all sorts of guises. For example, unexpected guests can reveal whole areas of a person's life -- such as when a group of vagrants come to send off a woman who spent her every weekend down at the local soup kitchen; or when the church slowly fills with knights from an order the PCs didn't even know existed.

Introducing New NPCs

Funerals often bring together people who have never met, from old friends to long lost relatives of the departed, they are one of the few social occasions that people usually make an effort to attend. These people could take the form of strange new contacts (such as that unknown order of Knights), or they could be potential firm allies. If foul play or violence was involved in the person's death and the PCs are inclined to retribution, a dear friend or relative may vow to aid the PCs to achieve revenge. If it was a PC who died, this may be a good opportunity to introduce the replacement. Of course, if it looks as though the PCs were responsible for the death, perhaps that friend or relative is vowing to wreak revenge on *them*. Finally, a new NPC could be unrelated to the funeral at hand -- perhaps someone visiting the grave of a long dead loved one who shares a moment of grief with a character, or a cemetery or funeral house attendant could be seen acting strangely. Perhaps someone has simply chosen to speak to the PCs at the funeral because it is the only place they could be sure of finding them; what if they arranged the death for that very purpose?

Enemies, Villains and Confrontations

There are usually a lot of rules surrounding behavior at funerals, and one of those is an emphasis on seemingly restraint. It is often not appropriate, for example, to start a screaming argument, or come to blows, in the presence of the casket. This, of course, presents a wonderful opportunity for an unusual confrontation with an enemy. Perhaps the villain of the game comes to gloat -- if the cultural context is appropriate the PCs may well have to restrain themselves to hushed murmuring through gritted teeth, and if they *do* lose their cool it will be so much more shocking.

Conversely, grief sets emotions running high, and a funeral might be an ideal place to let go of the usual social restraints and give the PCs a chance to let their hair down with some dramatic yelling and screaming at an enemy they have had to be polite to for the whole campaign. For more ambiguous enemies, a funeral can provide a brief moment to set aside differences as all of them mourn the same person, despite their former conflict, giving you a chance to humanize a long-term villain. (For this to work it is best that the villain not seem to be responsible for the death!) State funerals are often well attended, and social restrictions are more closely observed, so they make a nice place to force a peaceful (or at least restrained) interaction between the PCs and someone they would normally assault on sight. Finally, as hinted above, a funeral is a good place to introduce a new antagonist who seeks retribution from the PCs for the death of someone dear to them. This could be perfectly reasonable (maybe the PCs actually *did* kill them), understandable but misguided (they blame the heroes for dragging them into danger) or totally unwarranted (they wrongly believe that they killed them). Depending on their reasoning this could introduce several different kinds of plot, ranging from the PCs trying to clear their name, through an attempt to make restitution, to a life and death struggle with a nemesis hell bent on revenge.

Demonstrating Cultural Detail

Funerals are excellent demonstrations of local culture. Don't forget to take this into account when planning a funeral scene -- memorials of the dead take many different forms depending on where and why they are held. Religion is often concerned with death, so this is a good place to demonstrate religious details. This can be subtle (the details of a Greek Orthodox funeral differ from those of a Lutheran one) or extreme (perhaps the deceased is respectfully carved up and fed to vultures, as has been the real-world practice in some parts of Tibet). The social status, occupation, and culture of the deceased can also have a profound effect. To list just a few possibilities it could be a military funeral, a ship burial, a cremation (open or in a crematorium), an Irish-style wake (replete with raucous singing, music, and drinking) or perhaps an ancient Egyptian affair with weeks of ceremony. Even small things can be very relevant -- in some countries it is so important to have an open casket that even severe facial injuries will be covered by flowers if any of the face is at all intact. Other traditions, such as what constitutes mourning clothes (black? red? white?), or how freely people can show their grief are also worth considering. If the game in question is a fantasy or science fiction affair this is a chance to go all out with truly alien customs and ceremonies.

Plot Hooks and Unusual Circumstances

It's Your Funeral

Things can take a mysterious or downright weird twist if the dead person isn't actually dead at all. Perhaps they faked their own death for some reason. For example, vampires or other immortals might do such a thing regularly in order to avoid suspicion about their lack of ageing; and there's nothing to say that they wouldn't turn up in disguise, just to see what people do. Perhaps the person in the casket is not actually dead -- poor medical technology can lead to horrifying mistakes, but more dramatically it could be a Romeo-and-Juliet style affair with a poison that feigns death. The latter can be a lot of fun in melodramatic genres such as swashbucklers and romances. Then of course the concept of being buried alive can be profoundly horrific (it certainly inspired Edgar Allan Poe, as seen in *The Cask of Amontillado*). Last but not least, perhaps the funeral is that of one (or all) of the PCs. They could have staged it deliberately (and who could resist seeing what people did at their own funeral?), or it could be a genuine mistake. Tales of a ship lost at sea or a house burnt down could eventually result in a funeral for missing heroes, and what more dramatic time to have them finally return home than in the middle of their own funeral?

Funerals of State

The death of a head of state, or other important personage, is usually attended with a great deal of ceremony, and can offer very different opportunities from a smaller family affair. First of all, many (or even most) of the mourners will have had no personal relationship with the deceased, so for the most part only a few of the people in attendance will be genuinely struck with grief (and those real mourners can be used to great effect to make the others seem shallow and callous). Secondly, there will likely be a large number of attendees -- and that number makes a strong statement about how the dignitary was viewed by the public. A 10-mile-long stream of mourners waving pictures, flowers, and candles is usually the sign of someone who was greatly loved by the people. Likewise, the ceremony will be attended by other socially and politically important individuals, presenting an opportunity for well placed PCs to network, meet dignitaries and generally further their social position. If it is the funeral of a head of state, it can herald the end of an era and the beginning of a new one. If the heir is already chosen, this may be their first public event, and if there is some doubt about the succession the funeral will likely cover an undercurrent of intense intrigue.

You Can't Take it With You

The dead generally no longer need their possessions. Even in cultures where people are buried with wealth, there is usually more left behind than is ceremonially sent to the afterlife. What this means, of course, is that when anyone dies, there are often a lot of things at stake for the potential heirs. Squabbling over an inheritance can make an excellent framework for funereal intrigue -- and the more there is to inherit, the more potential heirs are likely to be involved. Such arguments can be petty or profound, and all sorts of interesting twists can be added by a will that leaves everything to someone unexpected (charity, or a beautiful young mistress, or an unknown illegitimate child). With the heightened emotions of a funeral all sorts of heated discussions could occur at the back of the church, or behind a partially closed door. And, of course, implications of foul play can be leveled at relatives who seem too ambitious, or foul play itself could follow the death as potential heirs start eliminating the competition.

Murder, Bloody Murder

Funerals are a great place to start a murder mystery, if the death is under suspicion, but there's also nothing to say that the death toll can't rise during the memorial. As previously mentioned, a funeral can serve as the backdrop for nearly anything, and both murder and suicide would not be out of place. People at funerals are often extremely upset, and an attempt at suicide by someone who intends to join the dearly departed could provide a tragic scene for the PCs to either witness or try to prevent. For the height of melodrama, mourners can throw themselves into the grave, or onto the pyre. Likewise, blame or greed could easily lead to a sudden killing. For example Lois McMaster Bujold's book *Cetaganda* revolves around an investigation of the mysterious death of a servant at the funeral of an Empress. In this kind of situation the funeral could provide the ideal starting point for an entire story, allowing the introduction of all the major NPCs right from the start, and overshadowing everything with the influence of the original dead character.

Voices from Beyond the Grave

Excellent mileage can be had from dead NPCs, and funerals are a good setting for their introduction. It is tempting to

view the dead person as a prop, but never forget that there are still many interesting ways to characterize them and have them add to the plot. First of all, the dead character may have left instructions for things to be read (or played) in the event of their death. A letter written before their demise (or some other recording such as a video) can introduce all sorts of interesting hooks, from hints as to what lead to their death, to great tasks they wish to see carried on after they're gone. Interaction with such letters or contrivances can be highly poignant (as their dreams and wishes, now come to naught, are revealed) or extremely frustrating (if their letters introduce certain malicious plans which no one can now revenge). Of course, it is possible that the dead person has left extensive instructions with a loyal servant or friend, which they are to carry out after their death -- giving the players an insight into the dead person's personality through the filter of their ally. In the right kind of game there really could be voices uttered from beyond the grave -- as the troubled shade arrives at their memorial service to accuse with a silently pointed finger, or to utter terrible prophecies.

Things to Consider When Running Funerals

The kind of preparation needed to run a funeral varies depending on what you want to do with it. If it is a simple memorial, conducted on the side of the road by a band of travelers, then you can likely let the PCs do most of the talking, and need only determine the contents of the dead man's pack and pockets. On the other hand, a funeral of state requires as much preparation as any party or social event. You will need NPCs, and few interesting scenes that the PCs can interact with (so they don't have to passively listen for hours), and an interesting eulogy. Depending on the effect you wish to achieve, you can actually write the eulogy (or part of it if it's long) and read it out as a grief struck NPC. Take care not to bore the players with long speeches -- this technique is most appropriate when you are using the eulogy to reveal important information. Conversely you could describe the general feel and content of the eulogy, and move on to more relevant things, such as an argument with the dead woman's lover. Of course, it's always possible to have one or all of the PCs speak at the funeral, which can help involve the players in the scene. This is an excellent choice when the dead person was also a PC or was an NPC very close to the main characters; similarly it is an interesting way to involve a highly placed PC with good public speaking skills in an affair of state. If you expect your players to actually speak, rather than tell you what they say, it is probably best to give them some prior warning so that they can prepare their speeches in advance.

Other considerations involve the number and type of mourners -- a funeral full of genuine mourners will feel very different from one full of people paying lip service. As an extreme example consider Neil Gaiman's *The Wake* (from the Sandman series), where everyone in the world sleeps and dreams of the funeral of the King of Dreams, also attended by angels, demons, gods, and spirits of every kind. The number of mourners can be very telling -- a funeral where the PCs are the only ones there could create a deal of sympathy for the departed (and allows the old tale of the millionaire who no one loved, who has left his entire fortune to whoever signs the register). Cultural detail is also important for such an event, and it is worth considering whether the ceremonies in use are appropriate to the culture of the dead person -- a traveler could be given rites that have nothing to do with their actual beliefs. On a similar note, it is wise to try to fit the feel of the funeral to the rest of the game. A generally sedate game suddenly interrupted by some of the theatrics and melodrama described above could come across as very disjointed; and supernatural horror has its place, but isn't appropriate everywhere.

Finally it is important to consider the wishes and limits of the players when running something like this. Players who are extremely upset about the death of the character (especially if it was their PCs) may not want to linger over the details of the ceremony. Likewise it would be crass to run such a scene for a player who is in mourning for a recently departed loved one in the real world. Be sensitive to such things before confronting your players -- funerals generally evoke far more emotion than a death which is swiftly passed over. Which, of course, makes them a wonderful tool for making a game more interesting and intense.

Designer's Notes: GURPS Shapeshifters

The Xigana: An Alien Race Outtake

by Robert M. Schroeck

GURPS Shapeshifters was perhaps the most difficult project I've undertaken, for a lot of reasons, but in the end it came down to the editing. I always write too much, it seems -- whether it's enthusiasm or a broken word count widget, I don't know, but I'm always seem to be 10% over the target word count.

Shapeshifters was no exception.

In the course of developing the book, I came up with a lot of weird and fun ideas, almost as many as the playtesters did. I wish I had had the space to give every one of those ideas the expression they deserved. As it was, I had to cut a lot of my personal favorite shifter types just to wedge the book into 100,000 words. Perhaps someday *Pyramid* readers will learn about the Bioprobes, or the Teilanar, or the Sleeping Werewolf, or the new version of the Were-rat I was working on right up until the last minute. Perhaps. For the moment, though, I'll content myself with sharing one of my favorites among the races that got cut, one designed to demonstrate a very, very odd variety of shapeshifting.

The Xigana

*Lemme tell ya one thing, kid, don't **ever** come on to a Xigana woman.*

*Nah, their men ain't jealous. Hell, the men pay hardly any attention to the women as women, if'n y'know what I mean. Now, Xigana women, they're real easy to look at, if you're not a Pure Earther fanatic, but you make one move on'em, and they'll spear you, like, with their eyes. It's like you stop bein' people to them, that you've sunk **below** animal and down to dirt.*

Coldest damned thing I ever seen.

--Overheard in Rohvin's Place, Eridani Free Port

Cool, Collected, Sophisticated . . .

Among the races of the civilized galaxy, the Xigana are known for their sophistication, their fashionable aloofness, and their taste for tropical resorts and homes. Natives of a planet with a large axial tilt, they escape the fierce, frigid winters of their homeworld by moving to the warmest locales they can find, where they invariably find their way into the *ne plus ultra* of society. This isn't always the upper classes -- but it is always somewhere both low-key and intense. Xigana are frequently patrons of the arts; those who aren't are often the artists themselves, or at least their agents and promoters. A poor Xigana is a rare sight, which many feel is some small recompense for the fact that their race is dying out.

What the Xigana go to great pains to hide from the rest of the galaxy is that they are a metamorphic race. Much as earthly creatures like the weasel/ermine change color with the onset of winter, the Xigana change *form* in response to sustained cold weather -- from humanoid omnivore to great, shaggy carnivorous quadrupeds. This (to them) betrayal of their exalted status as sentients is more than an embarrassment, it is an obscenity, for humanoid Xigana are sterile and virtually non-sexual -- only their beast forms are capable of reproduction. Their entire culture is based around denying this aspect of themselves, and as a result, the Xigana are a dying race.

Xigana

10 points

Attributes: ST -1 [-10]; DX +2 [20]; IQ +1 [10].

Advantages: Appearance (Beautiful) [15]; Manual Dexterity +2 [6]; Reputation +1 (Stylish Sophisticates among the Galaxy at large, all the time) [5]; Voice [10]; Were-form (Two External Triggers [see text] -40%; Slow Change -25%) [20].

Disadvantages: Chauvinistic [-1]; Dying Race [-10]; Intolerance (Beings who are open or casual about sexuality) [-5]; Intolerance (Hairy or reptilian races) [-5]; Odious Racial Habit (Snubs non-biped, non-mammal, and small sophonts) [-10]; Parthenomania [-20]; Proud [-1]; Racial Secret: Dimorphism [-10]; Staid [-1]; Sterile [-3].

Racial Quirks: In denial about their shifting Prefer temperatures of 65° F or higher, and go to extremes to stay warm; Vegetarian [-3].

Skills: Performance (Mating Ritual) at IQ [2]; +2 to Savoir-Faire [1].

Taboo Traits: Carousing, Sex Appeal.

Xigana Predator/Fertile Form

Attributes: Enhanced ST +12 (No Fine Manipulators) [88]; DX +3 [10]; HT +4 [45]; Extra Hit Points +4 [20].

Advantages: Acute Taste and Smell +4 [8]; Alertness +5 [25]; Cast Iron Stomach [15]; Claws [15]; Damage Resistance +1 [3]; Discriminatory Smell [15]; Four Legs [5]; Penetrating Call [5]; Sharp Teeth [5]; Thick Fur [29]; Ultrahearing [5].

Disadvantages: Bestial [-10]; Dull [-1]; Horizontal [-10]; Innumerate [-5]; Mute [-25]; No Fine Manipulators [-30]; Poverty (Dead Broke) [-25]; Presentient [-20]; Sleepy (50%) [-10]; Social Stigma (Barbarian) [-15].

Skills: Climbing at DX [2]; Scrounging at IQ [1]; Stealth-DX+1 [4]; Survival (Arctic, Mountains, specialized)-IQ+1/IQ+7 [6].

Template Cost: 155 points.

Were-form Cost: 55 points.

General description

Xigana (the word is both plural and singular) are a race on the far end of the humanoid scale. Slender and smooth-skinned, they are deceptively fragile in appearance. Their skin color tends ranges between ivory and a pale blue, and their eyes are generally blue, green or golden. Xigana are completely hairless, without even eyebrows or eyelashes.

Their long, delicate fingers are tipped with thick, almost horn-like nails which both males and females carve and paint. Their mouths and noses protrude into something close to, but not quite, a snout. They have broad, flat (some say an herbivore's) teeth, but rarely smile.

Xigana are mammalian, the females possessing breasts similar to a human's.

Determine a Xigana's humanoid height normally for his ST; their weight is 20 pounds less than human normal for their height. In their four-legged "wintershape," their body weight remains the same as their humanoid form, and they measure about 40% of their humanoid height at the shoulder. The Xigana wintershape has thick, shaggy fur, a more prominent snout and ears, and distinct claws. Fur color will match the "summershape" skin color, or, less frequently, be a shade or two lighter; eye color remains the same.

Ecology

The Xigana are native to Gyrris, an earthlike planet fourth from its yellow G-Type star, with a gravity of .9 G. Gyrris has a 27-hour day, and orbits its sun every 510 of its days. Its surface is split equally between land and ocean, but the shorelines vary wildly with the seasons.

Gyrris has an axial tilt almost double that of Earth, which results in extreme seasons that seesaw between conditions almost unimaginable to humans, despite the fact that the planetary average temperature is almost exactly the same as Earth's. Its weather patterns are wild and chaotic, and a large percentage of the planet's water is caught up in its endless storm cycles. Winters on Gyrris are bitterly cold and wracked by almost constant blizzards; summers combine the temperature of Death Valley and the humidity of a swamp with daily thunderstorms, punctuated by frequent monsoons and hurricanes. Its polar ice caps expand and recede visibly over the course of the year.

The Xigana's niche in their world's ecology is roughly equivalent to humanity's on Earth, even excluding the obvious parallels between intelligent species. Their shape-changing biology is not unique -- more than a dozen other species on their homeworld (most of them unrelated to the Xigana) shape-change in response to the cycle of seasons. As might be guessed, Gyrris attracts a large number of xenobiologists and other researchers.

The Xigana's change, like that of the other shifters on Gyrris, is environmentally triggered. If a humanoid Xigana is exposed to temperatures below 40° Fahrenheit for at least two hours, a change to wintershape begins; if there is a potential mate present at the same time, the individual will also feel a compulsion to begin a mating ritual (see below). Predator-form Xigana have an opposite trigger: two or more hours' exposure to a temperature of 70° F or higher returns a Xigana to the humanoid form. The shift between forms takes about one Gyrrisan day, during most of which the individual remains active (though sluggish). The final four hours of change, though, completely incapacitate him.

Because of subtle nutritional and hormonal requirements, a Xigana should go through at least one pair of changes per year. Failure to do so has no immediate ill effects, although apostate Xigana medical researchers (whose work has long since been suppressed) believed that regular changes could prevent certain varieties of cancers and several other diseases that operate by systemic disruption.

Reproduction

Wintershape females are always fertile; couples mate for life and do not stray when in predator form. Gestation lasts 200 days, during which the female's body produces hormones that prevent reversion to summershape should the weather change; the production of these hormones tapers off approximately six weeks after giving birth.

Xigana offspring are born exclusively in wintershape, in litters of two to four. "Pups" are able to walk and function within three weeks of their birth, although this precocity does not carry over into summershape; in fact, Xigana children take longer to learn to walk on two legs than most biped species, possibly because of their ingrained quadruped instincts. They do not gain the ability to take biped form until they are six weeks old.

Xigana are mammalian and can nurse their young in either form.

Psychology

Although to the galaxy in general Xigana seem well adjusted if somewhat effete and snobbish, they are in fact a mire of repression and denial. Inordinately proud of their position at the top of their world's evolutionary ladder, they deny to themselves (and hide from the galaxy at large) the fact that they shape-change into what they see as an inferior animal form.

Worse yet, from their point of view, is that their humanoid forms are sterile; they can only reproduce in wintershape. Combine this fact with an almost universal Xigana disgust with their "animal" alter egos, and the result is a race with deep-seated neuroses and sexual repression. To the average Xigana, the fact that they are required to turn into an animal in order to reproduce is an unspeakable obscenity; subsequently they have tarred *all* romantic and sexual

behavior -- up to and including the most innocent flirting -- with their disgust at their wintershapes. Other aspects of life are likewise affected; for example, while technically omnivorous, nearly all humanoid Xigana follow a vegetarian diet, looking down upon the consumption of meat as "unclean" and "animalistic."

Many Xigana take this to another extreme, looking upon the world that bore them -- and which requires of them the change -- as something to escape. As soon as they are able, these Xigana leave their homeworld, migrating and resettling somewhere, *anywhere*, where the local temperature never drops below 70° F. Those that can't resettle in warmer climes, or who for reason of employment or other obligation must make do with locations that suffer cold weather, are known for the remarkable extremes to which they go to remain warm during the winter: anything from the simple expedient of never leaving their homes, to the latest in temperature-maintaining arctic gear. The only option of which they do not make use is fur clothing, be it real or artificial -- the very idea disgusts them.

Culture

Attitudes like these have been cemented into Xigana culture over millennia by their inclusion in all the major Xigana religions. Even more significantly, the Xigana language itself attempts to deny and obfuscate their dual nature. The language (a M/H skill for non-Xigana) uses complicated tenses, pronouns and euphemisms to refer to their two forms, with the wintershape invariably treated (if it must be discussed at all) as an utterly different creature with which one has an unfortunate and reprehensible connection. One who has succumbed to wintershape is always "away" or "unavailable;" and offworlders who know better never, *ever* inquire about childbearing and offspring -- the only words for pregnancy and sex in the Xigana language are either obscenities, euphemisms or (rarely) obscure medical terminology.

Complicating matters is the fact that the Xigana possess a long, complex and heavily stylized mating ritual, at least partially instinctive in nature. As noted above, it is triggered by dropping temperatures, combined with the proximity of an individual of the opposite sex. An hours-long dance, equal parts touching intimacy and astounding savagery, it is strongly reminiscent of similar behaviors in earthly animals. Initiated while in humanoid form, the ritual ends with the act of mating anywhere from 24 to 48 hours later in predator form. While the change can occur without the ritual, the ritual *includes* the change and cannot complete without it.

Not surprisingly, the mating ritual is perhaps the greatest taboo in Xigana culture. It is never spoken of, even between a mated/mating pair. Native medical and psychological texts are maddeningly elliptical in their oblique attempts to refer to it without actually talking about it. And in every Xigana culture, any hint of its performance in a settled area is enough to have the offending couple arrested and executed -- if they aren't dragged off by a howling mob and lynched first.

Child-rearing is another delicate matter. "Pups" remain with their parents until their first transformation, which is usually some time in their first six months. After that, though, parents will hand over children to be raised in government- or church-run institutions, then go their separate ways, as often as not. The "nuclear family," as humans understand it, is an entirely alien concept to the Xigana.

Outside observers have noted that, as far as the cultural treatment of sexuality is concerned, the Xigana combine the worst aspects of Calvinism, Victorian prudery, and the most oppressive, reactionary branches of Islam. Even so, there are small, quiet rebel factions, trying to change the dominant social paradigm and shatter the racial denial. It will not come as a surprise to learn that these groups are almost universally outlawed on Gyrris, with execution the most common penalty for membership and activism. Additionally, rebels and social activists who attempt to operate off-planet and thus threaten the racial secret are often the targets of assassination squads dispatched by churches, government or even groups of "civic-minded" private citizens.

Politics

Although snobbish and standoffish, the Xigana freely mix in Galactic society. They tend to treat reptilian races and races possessing significant amounts of hair or fur with substantially more disdain than they offer other races, and they will ignore non-bipeds entirely as being "animals" and thus beneath them. They similarly categorize tiny races like the

Cidi (pp. A40-43). They can be at a bit of a loss upon first encountering races that do not fit easily into their pat world view (the Traders, Liook Sujan), but usually accord them "non-animal" status. *Any* race with no discernible romantic or sexual behaviors, such as (again) the Liook Sujan, often become objects of great respect.

Their government has no particularly special allies or enemies among the Galactic civilizations save for the usual suspects. Even so, they are happy to engage in commerce with any civilization -- even those they consider "animals," if a willing middleman can be found. They have parlayed their world's mineral riches and their own skills into a vast wealth.

Xigana Names

Adult Xigana names are usually composed of a personal name followed by an occupational surname. Personal names are two to five syllables long, each syllable being a consonant-vowel pair, plus an optional terminal consonant; sounds which are diphthongs and digraphs in English ("ae," "th," and so on) are common in the various dialects. Tegore, Kurathal, Rawonam, and Namapra are all common Xigana given names. There is no distinction between male and female names.

Occupational surnames may be as generic as "Baker," "Astrogator" and "Engineer," or they can become so complex that they are almost titles: "Chief Partner in Trade with Erapis IV," "Senior Regional Administrator for Evet Continent." As one might expect, such epithets can change many times in an individual's life.

There are no family or clan names. Immature Xigana are known by a given name and use the name of the institution in which they were raised as their surname. An adult Xigana with an institutional surname or no surname at all is regarded as shiftless and lazy. There are no honorifics or surnames indicating marriage/mating status, in the manner of the English "Miss"/"Mrs."

Xigana in the Campaign

As a race, the Xigana can be great fun for the GM: supercilious, obnoxious, and snobbish, without being at all evil. Many Xigana hold positions of power or influence throughout the galaxy, either because of wealth or because they are often good at imposing and/or managing hierarchies. A Xigana would make a good "manager you love to hate" for a group of player characters who share a Patron. Similarly, Xigana make good "shades of gray" opposition -- evil-seeming though not evil, simply unconcerned with what "lesser races" think is legal and illegal.

On the other manipulator, a renegade or insane Xigana can provide a sudden and unexpected plunge into a **Horror** scenario for players expecting a more conventional **Space** encounter: the mysterious, murderous beast that stalks an unsuspecting town or city in the depths of winter. Although their long shift times don't allow the kind of instant disappearance that makes a traditional werewolf story all the more creepy, the presence of a large, shaggy, and most importantly *intelligent* carnivore where one ought not to be can make for an adventure interesting not just for its combats with the beast, but for the investigation done to find out just what it is and where it is from. To add an extra fillip to such a scenario, have a team dispatched from Gyrris to hunt down the "dangerous animal" that they claim was illegally exported from their world.

Other Settings

While obviously designed for use in a **GURPS Space** campaign, the Xigana can be used as-is in a number of other settings. As always, **Atomic Horror**, **Black Ops**, and similar settings can make use of an apparent werewolf, especially if the more obnoxious aspects of the Xigana racial personality are tuned down a bit. The "monster-that-isn't" is a useful device, especially if players need to learn that shooting first isn't always the best tactic.

With a little modification, the Xigana can become a **Fantasy** race. The "scientific" justification for their shifting abilities must be discarded, of course, unless the game world is extremely un-Earthlike. Alternatively, it would not be hard to make them a magical race from the distant Northern or Southern sub-arctic regions of the world. For further

complications, they could be mistaken for more conventional were-creatures. If such weres are evil, that may well be why the Xigana are hiding their nature.

Xigana Characters

Because their shifting abilities are so slow and are all but involuntary, shape-changing will probably not be the primary reason one would choose to play a Xigana. Their complex suite of motivations, behaviors and beliefs, though, make them an intriguing roleplaying challenge.

Xigana characters can fit easily into a standard 100-point campaign. The GM should be aware, though, that unless there is a reason (or repeated reasons) to threaten the racial secret, much of the point cost of this race is wasted on a player character in an exploration/survey or interstellar war campaign. And after the third or fourth time, threats to the secret will not only grow old or repetitive, but will increasingly appear engineered.

Player character Xigana are probably better off as rebels and social activists in a more political campaign. Working quietly with a few trusted friends on several goals including liberalizing their repressed homeworld, they can reveal or conceal their shifting abilities as they see fit. Such characters often have an Enemy in the rest of the Xigana; their frequency of appearance is entirely dependent upon how vocal an activist the character is . . .

The GM may find Xigana NPCs easier to work with. They function well as patrons for any sort of treasure hunter, particularly those specializing in fine artworks. Others may support assassin teams aimed at off-world activists. Away from Patrons, the lone Xigana immigrant who seemingly has nothing to do with a mysterious "Werewolf" serial killer is a good campaign seed, if the GM can justify the necessary temperature extremes.

Sample Character: Tegore Inquisitor

Tegore Inquisitor is one of several "enforcers of orthodoxy" in the largest Xigana denomination, the Genevarians. While he administers to a local "diocese" as part of his duties, his primary job is the creation, dispatch and coordination of so-called "Orthodoxy Teams." These small "special forces"-like groups are assigned the task of capturing or assassinating those heretics who wish to drag the Xigana's secret shame into the sight of the debased Galactic culture.

A one-time officer in the Xigana planetary military, retired with pay due to injury, Tegore entered a Genevarian seminary, and now uses his skills to build the well-trained bands of troopers which protect the Xigana secret. He also makes frequent use of offworlder mercenary teams, who know little (and care less) about his reasons and their targets.

In person he is charming and friendly, with an endearing habit of starting to swear, catching himself, and instead saying something else innocuous and inoffensive. If forced into his "military" persona he suddenly becomes cold and intimidating -- although he still catches and corrects his swearing.

Tegore is not an adventuring character, and would not make a good PC unless the campaign is both political and based on Gyrris. As a frequent employer of offworlders for shady operations, he would be better used as a Contact or even a Patron (as a representative of the Genevarian Church). For characters less than sympathetic to the orthodox cause, Tegore is also a prime candidate for the "mastermind" behind their opposition; the fact that he is quite likable and not even particularly evil can add an extra level of complication to an adventure/campaign resolution.

Sample Character: Tegore Inquisitor

100 points

Xigana male, age 54; 5'10"; 140 lbs.; Ivory skin, green eyes, hairless.

ST 9 [0] **DX** 13 [20] **IQ** 14 [20] **HT** 10 [0]

Advantages: Clerical Investment/5 [25]; Patron: Genevarian Church, 12 or less [30]; Reputation +2 as Defender of the

Faith, Genevarian Church [4]; Status +2 [10]; Xigana [10].

Disadvantages: Duty to Church [-10]; Fanaticism: Genevarian Church [-15]; Lameness: Crippled Leg [-15].

Quirks: Dislikes offworlders; Intensely devout; Only uses stainless-steel canes; Peppers his speech with "near-miss" almost-swearing; Prides himself on organizing the best "Orthodoxy Teams" in the church [-5].

Skills: Administration-14 [2]; Bard-14 [2]; Beam Weapons/TL-16 [2]; Computer Operation/TL-15 [2]; Detect Lies-14 [4]; Diplomacy-14 [4]; Flower Arranging-15 [2]; Guns/TL-16 [2]; Intelligence Analysis-14 [4]; Interrogation-14 [2]; Intimidation-15 [4]; Karate-14 [8]; Knife-14 [2]; Performance (Instinctive Xigana Mating Ritual)-14 [0]; Performance/Ritual (Xigana/Genevarian)-17 [6]; Professional Skill (Genevarian Cleric)-17 [8]; Psychology (Xigana)-14 [4]; Savoir-Faire (Xigana)-16 [1]; Strategy-14 [4]; Streetwise-15 [4]; Tactics-15 [6]; Theology (Xigana/Genevarian)-16 [6].

Languages: Standard-14 [2]; Xigana-14 [0].

Tilting at Windmills

by S. E. Mortimer

Introduction

The mill was an integral component of peasant society, yet it is often neglected when a GM designs a medieval village. This technological development was an important tax raiser for the local lord and the miller was often one of the most influential members of rural society; there are other features of interest to gamers in a medieval village just as important, if not more so, than the manor house and local tavern. This article has been kept free of system mechanics although **GURPS Low-Tech** is used as a reference. Also, **GURPS** currency (\$) is used for pricing suggestions, but enough information has been presented to allow the reader to convert to other currencies.

Windmill History

As stated in **Low-Tech** (p. LT85), the first wind-powered mills were developed in Iran in the 6th century for grinding grain. These were horizontal mills with sails that rotated in a horizontal plane around a vertical axis (like a modern revolving door). These mills were fairly inefficient since they were entirely reliant on the wind speed to determine the grinding speed of the millstone.

It is likely that during the Crusades the windmill was introduced to Europe, where it evolved into the more efficient vertical shaft mill. This type of windmill usually incorporates four (sometimes more) vertical sails rotating around a horizontal axle (the "windshaft"). A wooden gear on this axle turns another gear on the vertical post. A millstone is attached to this post and the gear ratio is set to allow a reasonable grinding speed based on the average winds of the area. During the Third Crusade, the improved vertical shaft mill had been taken back to the Middle East. By 1195, windmills were common enough in Europe for Pope Celestine III to levy a tithe on them. He claimed that the air used by the windmills was provided by God and, as such, fell under Church jurisdiction.

The two most innovative countries in regards to windmill technology were the British and the Dutch. Windmills were primarily used to grind grain ("grist mills") but other uses include pumping water ("polder mills"), extracting oil from seeds ("oil mills"), and cutting timber ("saw mills"). The main disadvantage of the vertical shaft mill is that it must be rotated to face the wind. Smaller mills (see *Post Mills*, below) were rotated by means of a long wooden arm, called a "tiller beam," which could be lifted and moved by one person. Larger mills used devices such as treadwheels to rotate the roof-cap mechanism. Later windmills incorporated a large fin (called a "fantail") projecting from the rear of the roof-cap to keep the vanes pointing towards the wind.

Windmill Development

There are three main categories of windmills based roughly on size and technological advancement.

Post Mills

These were the earliest and smallest type of windmill, so-named because of the large central post upon which the housing was balanced. As stated above, a long "tiller beam" was used to rotate the entire structure around to face the wind. The tiller beam also provided an attachment point for a ladder to gain access to the mill.

Smock Mills

These appeared during the 14th century. Instead of rotating the entire structure to face the wind, smock mills consisted

of a fixed main structure, which contained the milling machinery and a rotating roof-cap, which held the windshaft, braking mechanism, and the sails. The roof cap could be rotated by means of a large treadwheel or perhaps via animal power. This development allowed the windmill to be built much larger, enabling more auxiliary machinery to be housed; and much higher, enabling longer sails to catch more wind.

Tower Mills

Similar to smock mills but often larger and made of stone instead of timber. The larger size improved the efficiency of the windmill, and the stone construction provided additional defense against attacks. These windmills were large enough to live in and even today, windmill caretakers (sometimes called "windsmiths") and their families are housed within restored tower mills.

Large tower mills might have multiple floors (as many as 10) devoted to grain milling, flour "boulting" (sifting), removing chaff, and storage. The ground floor served as the living room and master bedroom for the miller. It usually contained a bed for two people, a kitchen alcove, and some storage space. Children would either sleep under the parents' bed or on the upper floors. In smaller windmills children might sleep in platforms mounted up close to the cogwheels. Windmills were drafty and noisy places in which to live.

Feudal Obligations

During the Medieval period it was obligatory for people to take their grain to the mill, which was owned by their local lord. He may also have been the king or the bishop of the nearest monastery or cathedral. Each manor's charter contained a section called "milling soke" which governed mill operation. This was a rigorously enforced monopoly. There is a recorded incident of a man being excommunicated for not taking his grain to the bishop's mill, and there were laws forbidding the ownership of "querns and hand mills." This was a good revenue raiser since the lord kept a percentage of everything that was milled (called "multure"). Archaeological remains reveal the presence of many medieval hand mills, so it is likely that peasants avoided paying multure by grinding at least some of their own grain. Punishment for getting caught usually involved confiscation of animals and grain, or the cash payment of a fine. The larger the landholding, the greater the fine. The lord, in return, was responsible for having enough mills to meet the needs of his people and for handling major repairs. In later times, probably due to labor shortages caused by the Black Death, the lord would rent his mill out to the local miller. He would still retain the right to have his own grain milled for free and expected preferential treatment.

Windmill Operation

Construction

The building of a new mill would have been a fairly rare event in the history of a community, and likely to stir a great deal of interest and gossip. It would also have provided a good source of employment, albeit temporary. The average cost of building a windmill in England, in the 13th-14th centuries was in the order of £8 for a small post mill, £15 for a smock mill, and £25 for a stone tower mill. In **GURPS** terms, this translates to around \$3,200, \$6,000, and \$10,000 respectively (see *Wages and Pricing*, below). Almost all (around 95%) the cost of constructing a mill would have been for labor, while the cost of purchased materials made up the balance. The costs broke down as such:

Labor

Carpenters	35%
Unskilled laborers	25%
Transportation	20%
Roofers	5%
Smiths	4%
Woodcutters	1%
Other	5%

Materials 5%
(timber, millstones, brass, iron, lead, canvas, stone, grease, prefabricated components, etc.)

Maintenance

About 10% of the costs of construction were spent each year on repairs and maintenance. The majority of material costs were for replacing millstones. Two stones were needed -- the top "runner stone" and the bottom "bed stone." As a runner stone wears, it becomes thinner and lighter. Eventually it is not heavy enough to crush the grain and "floats" on top. Once this happened it needed replacing. Basalt was the preferred material and "blue" millstones from Germany (called "Cullin" stones) were considered the best. They usually cost four to five times the price of a local stone, but produced finer, better quality flour.

Production

The top "runner stone" was made with a hole in the center. Through this opening extended a spindle on which the runner stone rested. Grain was milled by hand feeding it through the hole. The runner stone was turned above the stationary bed stone, grinding the grain, and the resultant "meal" was collected. The meal was then sifted ("boulted") into different grades of flour through some sort of fabric -- linen, muslin, and silk made the best boulting cloths. A typical windmill (smock or tower mill) could grind about six bushels of grain an hour if the wind was steady. A good weekly throughput was about 1,000 bushels. Smaller post mills could grind maybe a quarter of this. A bushel was equivalent to approximately eight gallons of dry goods.

The lowest grade of flour came straight from the mill and was unboulted. The first boulting removed larger pieces of bran but smaller pieces remained and the flour was still fairly coarse. This was used for rough breads and "trenchers." *Twice bouted* flour is of a fine quality and used for typical breads and pastries. The finest flour was bouted a third time to remove any remaining traces of bran. Sometimes it was also bleached to further increase its whiteness. Bread made from this white flour was the most desired, but less nutritious than bread made from more coarse flour. The discarded bran was usually used as animal feed.

Wages and Pricing

An average skilled craftsmen in England, such as a carpenter, in the 13th and 14th centuries, earned about three pence per day or £3 per year. This assumes he worked an average of 240 days per year. If more work was available (not likely unless he was in a large city and had a good reputation) then he could earn more. A common laborer earned about half this amount. During the same time period a bushel of wheat was worth approximately 18 pence, or six days' work for our carpenter. According to *Low-Tech* (p. LT8), a carpenter earns about \$100 per month (around \$5 per working day) and a laborer earns \$60 per month (\$3 per day). Using this we can look at contemporary inventories and determine approximate \$ prices for various grains, before and after processing.

Grain prices (one bushel = 8 gallons or 4 "pecks" of dry goods)

Item (One bushel)	Weight	Cost
Oats	32 lbs	\$14
Maslin*	56 lbs	\$24
Barley	48 lbs	\$25
Wheat	60 lbs	\$30
Maslin flour*	54 lbs	\$28
Wheat flour, coarse	56 lbs	\$35 (first bouted flour)
Wheat flour, brown	56 lbs	\$45 (twice bouted flour)

Wheat flour, white 56 lbs \$60 (thrice bolted and bleached flour)

** maslin is mixed grain -- mainly rye with a little wheat and barley.*

Note that these are guidelines only -- simplified prices to assist roleplaying. The actual price of grain, especially wheat, fluctuated greatly even in supposedly economically stable times. This is probably because people had little wish to substitute wheat products for other foods during times when the supply of wheat was unpredictable.

The Miller ("Millwright")

The European reliance on grain products -- especially wheat -- as a dietary staple meant that the mill was a crucial piece of infrastructure and its miller usually had a high social status in the local community. Often he ranked third in social standing -- only the lord of the manor and the parish priest ranked higher. Millers also had a reputation for dishonesty, as portrayed by Chaucer in "The Miller's Tale." One interesting custom was if the miller was discovered taking more than his due, his apprentice would be hanged rather than himself; this was possibly because a master miller was too valuable to execute. Over time it became more common for a farmer to sell his grain to the miller and then buy back processed flour, rather than allow the miller to keep a portion for his services. This meant that the miller became increasingly responsible for finding markets for the village harvest.

The millwright's job was not an easy one. Windmills were complicated hybrids -- a cross between buildings and machinery. Their construction, maintenance, and operation required great skill and long experience. The millwright's skills were passed down from father to son, so a single family could be in control of a windmill for many generations. Hazards included lightning strikes and fires. Sudden wind gusts were also dangerous -- windmills were designed to withstand strong winds from the front only, so "tail winding" could result in serious damage to the sails and machinery.

In spite of the difficulty of the job and his high social standing, a miller's official income was surprisingly low; manorial records indicate that an average wage was maybe six to eight shillings per year for a miller who was a servant of the local lord. This wage was expected to be supplemented by grain livery but even with this toll, his total yearly income would have been modest -- maybe £2, or around \$65 per month -- significantly less than our carpenter. Sometimes the miller would set up a brewery or distillery to supplement this income and sometimes, as mentioned above, he would resort to less honest means to increase his livelihood. In later times, after the Black Death, a self-employed miller, who was renting the mill from his lord, could expect a much more comfortable income.

Roleplaying Suggestions

The importance of the local mill to peasant society means that many encounters in rural villages would involve either the windmill or its miller. Some suggestions follow:

- One of the previously mentioned hazards (lightning, fire, etc.) has damaged the mill during harvest time and stopped flour production. The PCs may decide to wait for it to be repaired which means that other suppliers would get the best prices. Or they may risk breaking the law and taking their grain to an outside mill.
- The local miller has deliberately shortchanged one of the farmers in a bid to send him into debt. His plan is to increase the farmer's level of debt over time and eventually take over his land.
- The village is attacked by raiders and the PCs can't reach the fortified manor house in time. The windmill is close and its stone tower construction might make it suitable for mounting a defense . . .
- The local miller is wrongly accused of skimming from that which is rightfully due to the lord. He is in danger of being severely fined and

Windmill Semaphore

In the Netherlands, windmills could sometimes be seen for many miles and were used to send messages to distant neighbors. The stationary positioning of the four vanes allowed for four different signals. If the vanes were aligned horizontally and vertically, this meant that the miller was taking a short break. If the vanes were positioned diagonally, this meant that the miller was off duty. If the top vane was positioned a little right of vertical, then this meant

losing his miller's rights. The real culprit is one of the lord's servants who is responsible for supervising the manor's grain and flour stores. This servant has a relative who will be able to take over the mill should the original miller be discredited.

- The local miller is (rightfully) accused of taking more grain than he is legally entitled (a practice sometimes called "hanging up the cat"), but nobody is listening to the complaints of the local peasants. Chaucer wrote about the "miller's gold thumb," which is a reference to the practice of pressing one's thumb on the scales when weighing grain. Another trick is to adulterate the flour with contaminants such as sawdust.
- Some very fine quality (and expensive) millstones have been imported by the local lord. The heroes have been hired to escort the shipment from the docks to the lord's manor. The shipment is larger than the lord implied, though, and the PCs' first task is to find a vehicle (or vehicles) capable of carrying the heavy load.
- A local peasant has been caught with a hand mill. This is a crime because everyone is legally obligated to grind all their grain at the lord's mill. A fine was imposed that the peasant could not afford to pay. The lord has reconsidered and "graciously" decided to take the offender's only son as an indentured servant instead.
- The PCs arrive in a village in time to witness the laying of the foundation for a new mill; apparently this is seen as a big deal by the locals and they are celebrating with a festival.
- The mill's construction is being sabotaged. The local lord wants the PCs to discover the culprit. Since this mill will be the second one in the village, a likely suspect is the miller of the original mill. Perhaps he doesn't want competition.

joy and expectation. If the top vane was positioned a little left of vertical, then this meant sorrow and mourning. In World War II, during the German occupation, Dutch windmills were used to warn those in hiding of enemy activity.

Hopefully, the next time the party rides into a rural village they might have to deal with something other than finding a bed for the night and getting drunk at the closest tavern. The local mill is an important rural landmark and its wily miller is a man to be reckoned with -- his social standing makes him difficult to ignore and his disreputable character will keep the heroes on their toes.

Further Reading

- *Windmill World*. -- <http://www.windmillworld.com/>
- *Windmills And How They Work*. -- http://www.garfnet.org.uk/new_mill/autumn96/jv_mill.htm
- Brief history. -- <http://telosnet.com/wind/early.html>
- Contemporary documentation summary -- <http://www.walsham-le-willows.org/review18.htm>
- Weights and measures -- <http://www.moore-warner.com/calculations.htm>

Follow the Red Line Around the World

or, How to *Rune* you Pulps

by Brian Rogers

Robin Law's game *Rune* posits an intriguing concept: rotating GMs within a single session. One player starts running the game with his character as an NPC. The Vikings descend into the dungeon, have one or two violent encounters, and then the Referee hands control over to another player, who leads our horn-helmed heroes (yes, yes, but this is *Rune*, okay?) through another series of encounters. Continue ad infinitum, until someone runs a good climax. What you get is a series of combat and puzzle-solving scenes that are even more loosely connected than a traditional dungeon crawl.

While arguments can be made that this is far more of a tactical simulation than a roleplaying game, it does model the game's first-person-shooter origins -- a gratuitous excuse to pummel things into bloody smears -- with the added bonus of speaking with bad accents. Arguments aside, the core idea of swapping the GM position in the middle of the game is one that is transferable to another, more common genre. A genre where the characters routinely move from scenario to scenario with minimal bridging in-between, where the larger plot is something bolted on in loose moments.

This is of course referring to pulp adventure serials, which, while they rely less on pummeling into bloody smears, do have plenty of room for outrageous accents. (It could be used equally well for goofy *Austin Powers*-esque spy games.)

The practice is simple: the Prime GM develops a scenario introduction and conclusion, informing the players in advance of the villains and theme (for example Magic-Hunting Nazis, High-tech Smugglers, Gorilla Cultists, etc.). When the session starts, the Prime GM opens up the story, introducing the Villains, the Hook, and the Major stay-at-home NPCs. After finishing the first major conflict or puzzle he cedes control to the next GM in line *before introducing the clues to the next part*.

That's the job of the new GM, who introduces clues to lead the heroes on the next stage of their quest. In a globe trotting setting this can take them anywhere, and the new scenario needs minimal ties to earlier stages. The second GM provides his hair-raising story up to the next major twist, at which point he hands off, and so on. Eventually it comes back to the prime GM, who runs the wrap up scenario to re-introduce the main plot (which might have gotten lost along the way) and tie everything up into a neat ball.

Well, a ball anyway. And "neat" in the fun and interesting sense, if not in the tidy, loose-end-free sense.

Here's an example: Asha tells her friends she's running a *Rune*-Pulp game, focusing on High tech Nazis. Once they're together, she runs the first part of the adventure.

Asha: "Germans have stolen plans from the Princeton's physics labs." [PCs track down & defeat Germans, but the plans are gone!] "A search of their base reveals . . ."

At which point Asha hands control of the game over to Bob, the player to her right. Bob's PC, NY Cop Rick Delany, becomes an NPC as Asha takes control of Sun Li, her acupuncturist master of kung fu.

Bob: ". . . rubbings of ancient Sanskrit tablets! The tablets are kept at a museum in Cairo." [The little red line on the map runs from New Jersey to Egypt, and our heroes step out into the Cairo sun. They find the tablets were stolen and defeat the thieves] "After capturing the master thief, you see . . ."

And Bob hands the game over to Chip, the player on his right. Rick Delany is once again his

boisterous self as Tommy Caliber, aircraft pilot and mechanic, becomes strangely subdued.

Chip: " . . . him die before your eyes, victim of a poison tooth containing a rare poison only found in Crete!" [And the little red line runs from Cairo to Crete, where wait a band Nazi-hired of assassins.]

And so on, until Asha gets the GM reins back to close things out with the American Nazi Sympathizer being revealed by the last set of clues, bringing the heroes to his penthouse fortress (with zeppelin mooring station, natch!) to recover the stolen rocket plans in a final battle.

Notice how Bob's adventure had nothing to do with Asha's initial premise, but it kept the game moving. Chip's adventure had a nod to Asha's Nazis, but that had no effect on her plot -- the assassins could just have easily been renegades, Mafia stooges or anyone else. Including the Nazi connection just applies a degree of connectivity between the arcs. (For another example, take a look at Pyramid's experimental ["Around the World in Eighty Thrills"](#) series. While presented as a series of adventures for a single GM to run for his players, the rotating authors gives the series as a whole a disjointed feel.)

Since **Rune** is a competitive game, each player has to abide by certain rules for encounter design. While it is unlikely that you'd want to translate **Rune's** difficulty scales, there are other ideas to mine for a rotating GM Pulp game.

- **Protect the GM's PC.** While running, the GM's character is reduced to a supporting role. To make sure there's no favoritism, protecting him is the players' job - if the GM's PC dies, all of the active PCs get reduced experience. This accounts for a lot of the Pulp heroes' "leave no one behind" credo.
- **"But you're dead!"** If any PC dies, the GM can bring him back at the end of his rotation with a suitably pulpy explanation. (We all know the Nazi's didn't *really* switch baskets, right? But hey, it made the movie better.)
- **How the GM earns Experience Points:** During the time that a GM's beloved PC is an NPC his hero is still earning experience, based on how well he runs the session. The goal is to badly bloody the heroes without killing them. Dead heroes aren't to anyone's benefit, so GMs are rewarded for kicking them around, but not knocking them off. This might also explain the fascination with deathtraps . . .

While you might not get a seamless story, what you will get will feel much like the old adventure serials, with their cliffhangers, sudden plot twists and leaps to exotic locales. In the end the Square-Jawed-heroes, adventurous women and intelligent pet gorillas have a chance to save the world from this far-ranging threat. Next month you can bet another threat will appear, forcing them to once again strap on their guns, don their leather jodhpurs, and pack their bandanas for another round-the-world adventure.

Pyramid Pick

Skull & Bones: Swashbuckling Horror in the Golden Age of Piracy (for d20 System)

Published by [Green Ronin Publishing](#)

Written by Gareth-Michael Skarka, Ian Sturrock, and T S Luikart

Cover by David Leri

Illustrated by Andrew Baker, Richard Becker, Larry Byrd, Tim Divar, Steve Lawton, Mike Swann, Joel Talacko, and Brian Wells

192-page perfect bound black and white book; \$27.95

If your tastes run to flying the skull and crossbones as your flag and giving no quarter to your enemy, then the last 12 months have been rich in terms of pirate plunder. This is especially true if you have no objection to the *d20 System* as there have been three supplements published under those mechanics. Avalanche Press, despite the tasteless cover, provided a surprisingly decent historical treatment in [Black Flags: Piracy in the Caribbean](#), while Living Imagination Inc.'s *Pirates!* more a fantastic take on the subject plugged easily into the high fantasy of *Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition*. Those preferring to avoid the *d20 System* might find the pleasingly fast and simple *Bloode Island - Swashbuckling Adventures 1PG* -- recently released by Deep7 as part of their *Shriek!/Bloode Island Double Feature* -- more to their liking. (*Bloode Island* is also available in an expanded version using the *XPG* mechanics). And then there is the third *d20 System* treatment of all things piratical . . .

Skull & Bones: Swashbuckling Horror in the Golden Age of Piracy is the second release in Green Ronin's "Mythic Vistas" line, following on from the wonderfully comprehensive treatment of the biblical age in [Testament: Roleplaying In The Biblical Era](#). Written by T S Luikart, Gareth-Michael Skarka (author of the *Age of Empire* and *Underworld* RPGs), and Ian Sturrock (designer of Mongoose Publishing's [Sláine: The Roleplaying Game of Celtic Heroes](#) and [The Slayer's Guide to Medusas](#), *Skull & Bones* opts for a treatment of its subject half way between *Pirates!* and *Black Flags*. It is set in the Caribbean, or rather on the Spanish Main during the golden years of piracy between 1690 and 1720; essentially after the end of the war of Spanish succession in Europe which released both soldiers and sailors looking to make their fortune. The fantasy element comes in the form of the horrors unleashed by the displaced slaves hauled across the Atlantic from Africa's West Coast. Purposely mixed in with members of other tribes, their beliefs have combined with those of others to coalesce in the melange that is known Voodoo. Calling upon the spirits both dark and light, known as Loa, the Negro priests have at their fingertips magics and powers that have long been denied to good Christians everywhere, unless of course they happen to have a holy relic. Our stalwart pirates may also face more fantastic threats that have been hinted at since the arrival of the Spanish over two centuries before - - Amazons, Island Giants, Jenny Hannivers, Troglodytes and the Zombie.

Skull & Bones wastes little time before getting down to discussing and detailing its adaptation of the *d20 System* to the high seas of the early 18th century. These start with the changes from the core *d20 System*, the first of which is dropping all other races except for humans. The Barbarian, Fighter, and Monk Rogue classes remain little changed -- the Barbarian representing perhaps the disaffected Scots highlander and the like, while Bards, Paladins, and Rangers all receive alterations that remove their arcane or divine derived abilities. The Cleric, Druid, Sorcerer, and Wizard classes are all essentially emasculated as to make them unsuited to the setting. That said, some of the monsters given in the book do have these classes as their preferred ones, but whether they use the altered versions of *Skull & Bones* or

the originals from the *Player's Handbook* is not clear. Also gone from *Skull & Bones* are most of the magic related feats.

Skull & Bones only introduces five new character classes, three of a nautical nature and two tied into the world of Voodoo. The first of the former are Buccaneers, survivors on the islands of the Caribbean who raid boats that come close to the shore; while the Sea Dogs are traditional sailors, whether aboard merchant or pirate ships or serving in the navy of one of the sea going powers of empire. They are able to gain bonuses when sailing their favored ships. The third is the Shantyman, a replacement for the Bard class, who serve as musicians and singers of sea songs aboard ship. Besides possessing several bardic abilities, they can improve the morale of a crew or instill fear in another, and even compose songs of characters' exploits to increase their fame or infamy. Of the last two new classes, the Bokor are the dark adherents of Voodoo, rarely of a benevolent nature and akin to Sorcerers in their spell use, which they call "Wanga." These are gained from ancient pacts and stolen power, and whenever a Wanga is cast, the Bokor suffers damage to his Hit Points. The Hougan or female equivalent, Mambo, are the priests of Voodoo, as well as leaders, spiritual advisers, confessors, and doctors, bonding with and faithfully serving the many Loa to gain rituals and divine spells.

The overall impression of these five classes, and especially the Buccaneer, Sea Dog, and Shantyman classes, is that they all feel very light in terms of abilities, though they do receive a reasonable number of feats. And just five classes does seem somewhat scanty, and it should be noted that *Skull & Bones* lacks an actual "Pirate" class. But then, being a pirate is more of an attitude and what you do, rather than what you are in *Skull & Bones*.

Pleasingly, this supplement provides a clever set of options that plug into and replace parts of character generation, serving to make individualizing a character much easier. For starters, where characters in other *d20 System* supplements receive extra skill levels for being human, in *Skull & Bones* they receive a Background. These do give the four extra skill points, but add a little more in the form of Charisma bonuses and penalties for dealing with certain groups and a contact or two. For example, a Slave has Escape Artist 2, Bluff 2, a Charisma bonus when dealing with other Slaves, a penalty when dealing with slave owners and the upper classes, plus a pair of Slave or Ex-Slave contacts. Likewise a Gentleman or Lady Adventurer receives Diplomacy 2, Knowledge (Any) 2, the bonus when dealing with the Upper Classes or Authorities, the penalty when dealing with Lower Classes, plus the contacts. Other Backgrounds include Colonist, Native, Indentured Servant, Sea Devil, Scum, and Seaman; the format also lends itself to the creation of more. It would have been nice if the authors had included several more to reflect a character's military service during the recent war in Europe. Further, characters can also possess Fortunes, initially four. These are usually of a general nature, providing both benefits and drawbacks: Dolls Eyes gives you the look of a predatory shark and thus +2 to Intimidate checks, but a -2 penalty to other Charisma based skill checks. While the Kid Fortune makes a character thirteen years old and levies a -3 penalty to Strength, but until they turn sixteen they can never die from failed skill saving throws or skill checks. Good Fortunes can also be taken, but must be balanced by an Ill Fortune each. There is a good mix of all three types to choose from and some of the most fun include the "Ex-zombie" -- you used to be undead, but you got better; the Worm -- Peter Lorré at sea; the Parrot Perch/Monkey Magnet-- you have a helpful pet; you are A Kin to Whale and possess great girth; and Whiskey Johnny -- you are extremely alcoholic, as opposed to the mild alcoholism of the average pirate.

Beyond the five basic classes, *Skull & Bones* details six new Prestige Classes, three of which are for players who fancy their characters as duelists, with every level of the three providing a new and more advanced maneuver. The Diestro is the master of "La Destreza," the Spanish school of fencing which takes a scientific and circular approach to defense. The "Master of the Fence" is trained in the English school of swordsmanship that borrows much from boxing and wrestling, and teaches the flashy styles needed for prize fights. The "Masters of the Scrimia" lets characters focus upon the French, German, or Italian styles and allows them to mix and match maneuvers to define their actual school. Along with the maneuvers for each of these three classes, the rules allow characters to parry attacks by giving up an attack and then rolling higher than an opponent's attack roll. These rules are further supported with a complete listing of the "Code Duello" or dueling etiquette, plus a guide to pirate duels and prize fighting.

The other Prestige Classes are again related to the sea. The Mystic Navigator keeps an arcane connection with the sea, and learns to master the winds, reefs, tides and is eventually quite literally able to create land in the form of small islands, and finally sculpt the sea to a character's benefit. The Officer prestige class is actually divided between Sea

Officer, who commands a vessel, and the Warrant Officer, who provides special skills such as Carpentry or Surgery

Skull & Bones makes a number of changes to the ***d20 System*** to get everyone buckling their swashes. Characters are divided into three categories: Cannon Fodder, NPCs, and Player Characters. Cannon Fodder lack Hit Points and take damage directly from their Constitution attribute, and gain no Hit Points whatever their class and level. Both NPCs and Player Characters possess Hit Points as normal, but can take damage directly from their Constitution score once their Hit Points are expended. Suffer too much damage to Constitution and a character must roll on the Afflictions table, which can be anything from an impressive scar to loss of a limb. Thankfully non-lethal damage does not bite into a character's Constitution, and Hit Points recover literally in minutes! Constitution recovery still takes days though.

To further play up the cinematic style warranted by the genre of ***Skull & Bones***, characters also have more than one life! How many is kept secret by the GM, but since the setting lacks the *Raise Dead* and *Resurrection* spells, this is the only way in which a swashbuckling hero or sneering villain can return to fight another day. They work hand-in-hand with the "Rolling the Bones" mechanics that add more to the swashbuckling feel of ***Skull & Bones***. These involve a straight luck roll on 2d6, with high rolls gaining the best results. This is necessary whenever a character suffers a fatal event (such as losing *all* of their Constitution in a fight) and when they lose half their Constitution score and still wish to remain conscious or during the midst of a dramatic event, such as fighting a duel along the rigging spars during a typhoon!

The rules included in ***Skull & Bones*** cover just about every aspect of piracy on the high seas. Not just the tasks of taking a ship out on the open seas and into battle, but also natural hazards such as the tides and weather, cannon fire, fire itself, and boarding actions. In addition to detailing pirate life on board and ashore, they also cover vices and pleasures (drinking, whoring and gambling); plus fame and sway (how a captain manages to lead and control the rough democracy of a pirate crew).

Of course, the rules that everyone will be interested in are those for the world of Voodoo. Practitioners revere the dead and worship Loa, powerfully spiritual beings or gods that are of either the Old World (of which the most recognizable is Legba, Lord of the Crossroads), or the New World (most notably, Baron Samedi, the zombi lord, and Carrefour, who as lord of the midnight crossroads is the counterpart to Legba). Both Hougan and Bokor will need to interact with the Loa, though only the Bokor are likely to traffic with Djab, elemental outsiders of a malicious bent. Each Loa and Djab is thoroughly described as well as the burdens they might lay upon their priests and worshippers if they are not faithful enough. For example, Legba dislikes those who are disrespectful to the elderly or make use of modern technology, such as firearms! He punishes such persons by making them suffer the effects of age and penalizes initiative rolls; or in more extreme cases, Legba as the "Wandering Sun" will decide that he does not want to look upon the unfaithful and stop them going out during the day. As Hougan or Bokor gain levels, they learn rituals usually held in honor of a Loa or to celebrate a particular event, but also to petition them for favors. These can be actual spells granted to the petitioners or a spell like effect that is worked out by the petitioning player.

The darkest of the voodoo rituals, and the one, for which the faith is best known, is that of the Zombi Ritual. This is a means of turning a victim into a member of the living dead, by stripping them of their "Gros-Bon-Age" or soul, which is then stored in a specially prepared skull. In game terms the victim receives the Greater Zombi Template given in the section on "Monstrous Races," and then has as many days as their Constitution and Wisdom attribute modifiers before he succumbs to his undead status . . . Should his friends find and return the skull holding their "Gros-Bon-Age" to be crushed in front of him, his situation can be reversed.

Overall there is a lot of depth to the rules for the faith and magic of Voodoo. To get the most out of them both player and GM will be called upon to put no little effort in. Much of that effort is in roleplaying and adventuring whether going on a quest to assemble the components of a "Drogue," the only magical item which ***Skull & Bones*** allows in which a Bokor can temporarily empower with his Wanga, or in petitioning the Loa for favors. The effect of this is of course, worthwhile, as the powers of voodoo outstrip those of Christianity.

The flavor and setting of ***Skull & Bones*** is supported by an equipment guide, which is not as well illustrated as it could be; a thorough look at plunder with plenty of examples, including both unique and magical items; and the

forementioned section on "Monstrous Races." This includes write ups and statistics for the many Djab, which like all of the entries in the section are all nicely illustrated by Toren Atkinson; and an island by island guide to the Caribbean. Each is given an in period style map along with its history and exports. In addition, every entry is accompanied by at least one scenario hook, so that in effect a **Skull & Bones** GM has at their fingertips over thirty ideas awaiting development. Green Ronin are supporting this guide from their [website](#) with expanded maps ready to download, along with the adventure, **Island of the Damned**, from Adamant Entertainment, who are further supporting this setting with the bi-monthly e-zine, *Buccaneers & Bokor*.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The game is supported by an adventure "Welcome to the Account," designed for a party of 4th-level characters. It opens with the heroes having just found home on the Pirate Island of Tortuga, just north of Hispaniola. A pair of brothers needs a crew to paddle South to where a Spanish supply ship has berthed in a cove to avoid a hurricane. This makes her ripe for the picking, but how will the player characters react when it seems that the brothers delayed their attack on the ship and sent the characters in first? If they do, it will result in a duel -- a difficult prospect aboard ship, as the rules testify earlier -- and should they win, it will leave them with a prize and some interesting passengers! "Welcome to the Account" is only a short affair, offering only an evening's play at the most, but it is enough to get a campaign started.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

In comparison to **Testament: Roleplaying In The Biblical Era**, where its broad remit left it feeling slightly thin in terms of campaign advice, the authors of **Skull & Bones** conduct themselves with aplomb in a short and salty section. This focuses upon troupe style play, in which a player takes on the multiple roles of three different characters, one at 1st, 4th, and 7th level, essentially the swab level or ordinary seaman, the mates, and the officers. This could be the Captain, the Carpenter's Mate, and a Marine for one player or the Surgeon, the Captain o' the Tops and an Ordinary Seaman for another player. The idea is to get the players involved in all aspects of running a ship and allow for lower level characters to rise in experience and position aboard ship as higher level characters are killed off. This works well aboard Navy vessels where the discipline is tight, but less so in the rough-and-tumble democracy of a pirate ship. In campaigns where the characters are Pirate Heroes or of legendary status, this troupe style is not needed, as the focus is very much upon the one or two hero characters with a mass of crewmen or cannon fodder below them. In addition, there are nine campaign outlines given as alternatives to the usual themes. Each of a differing length, these nine campaign models offer plenty of variety upon the pirate theme, though some need more work than others do.

Physically **Skull & Bones** is a professionally done book, as you would expect from Green Ronin Publishing. The layout is neat and tidy, with the dark gray-colored margins used only occasionally for a side bar of text. Scattered throughout the book are boxes labeled "Legends of Piracy," each containing an illustration of a pirate or buccaneer of note. This includes a note of their Hit Points, class, and levels, but no other game information. The 15 or so described include well-known pirates such as Anne Bonny and Mary Reade, Sir Harry Morgan and Edward "Blackbeard" Teach, as well as lesser known ones like Pierre Le Grand, Bartholomew Portugues and Roche "Rock" Brasihano. What this volume does lack is a bibliography, which is a shame after the one given in **Testament**.

If **Testament: Roleplaying In The Biblical Era** was an excellent treatment of a subject little covered in RPGs, **Skull & Bones: Swashbuckling Horror in the Golden Age of Piracy** is a wonderfully atmospheric treatment of something covered many times before. **Testament** set the standard for the Green Ronin Mythic Vistas imprint and **Skull & Bones** easily matches that, and benefits further from covering a narrower subject. It combines the cinematic and the swashbuckling with a strong sense of history, powering this with a set of intelligent alterations to the **d20 System** that fits the game and the author's approach to it. Which is no surprise really, given Ian Sturrock's efforts on **Sláine: The Roleplaying Game of Celtic Heroes**. Equally and ultimately they achieve a tone throughout the writing that very much feels right for the genre.

It is not inconceivable that **Skull & Bones** could be used to run a campaign in the style of *The Princess Bride* (sans, of course, Fred Savage and Columbo), but really, this is the game with which to do *Pirates of the Caribbean*. It gets the historical aspects as right as it needs to, while adding everything needed to get that element of the supernatural and the

darkness that film contained. So splice your main brace, buckle your swash, set to quarters, run out the guns, and set sail for the Spanish Main, because piracy RPGs don't get any better than this.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

Pirate's Cove

Published by [Days of Wonder](#)

Designed by Paul Randles and Daniel Stahl

Illustrated by Julian Delval

Graphic Design by Cyrille Daujean

Boardgame boxed set; \$44.95

Pirate's Cove is a legendary island in the Caribbean, a safe haven for scalawags of all persuasions, surrounded closely by five so-called "outer" islands where piles of plunder await. The life of a pirate captain in these waters is many things -- always colorful and adventuresome, often tense, and perhaps occasionally frustrating. Even in the frustrating moments, however, everything gushes with the romanticism of high seas piracy. Here, the pirate lifestyle has been boiled down to its essence: sailing to islands, plundering their valuables, taking them away to be buried, and blasting a broadside into anyone who gets in the way. Treasure, it should be noted, is not the real motivation for the denizens of Pirate's Cove. Fame is what a pirate captain is really after, the immortality of Blackbeard or Bartholomew Roberts. In 12 months, a pirate can rack up enough notoriety to make his name and his fortune or he can be swallowed by the tide of time and never heard from again.

Surveying the islands, the first thing anyone will notice is their lush beauty. From the gray battlements of the fort on Cannon Island to the eerie skull-shaped rock that juts out from one corner of Treasure Island, one couldn't pick a better environment for exercising one's rapacity. Talented local mapmakers Julien Delval and Cyrille Daujean have produced a sturdy map that captures every gorgeous detail of the islands in deep, vibrant colors. Their map clearly displays all the locations a pirate would want to sail to: on its edges are the five outer islands -- the scurrilous Tavern Island; the industrious supply islands called Hull Island, Sail Island, and Cannon Island; and the all-important Crew Island, populated by seasoned sea-salts just waiting for a new captain to sign up with. In the center of the map are Pirate's Cove itself and the even better known Treasure Island, where every successful plundering raid ends with a satisfying month of booty-burying. (Delval and Daujean's map also has a handy numbered track around the outside for monitoring the relative Fame of all pirate captains; "Fame Points" are, by pirate compact, used to count the usually ephemeral quality.)

Competitors for glory among these islands choose every month (remember, they're trying to collect the most Fame in one year -- 12 months) which of the islands to sail to. No one can be sure where his opponents will choose to go until everyone has arrived. And pirate ships, as we all know, find it difficult to cohabitate, especially when there are spoils to be had (which, as we shall see, there most definitely are). There can, ultimately, be only one ship at each of the outer islands. Pirates that meet in the harbors of each of these islands must fight until all but one have retreated. Only then can the island be plundered and its benefits exploited. Combat, as explained in detail below, is always risky, so the navigational decision at the beginning of each month is crucial to a captain's success. It takes a keen sense of others' needs and desires, as well as a healthy dose of instinct, to choose the most profitable location that is least likely to have other visitors.

Putting an extra knot in the rigging, as it were, is the prowling of a legendary pirate who makes a predictable but still bothersome circuit between the outer islands and Treasure Island. Be he a famous pirate of history (Blackbeard) or a rascal believed to be from the pages of fiction (Captain Hook), the awesome firepower of these villains makes the seas

seem that much more crowded, effectively eliminating their current location as a possible destination for all but the bravest and best-equipped. Vanquishing one villain inevitably summons forth another who picks up the cycle where it was left off. What dread pact has been forged to maintain this endless vigil around Pirate's Cove is hard to imagine.

Such are the deterrents, then, for settings one's eye on a particular island. Thankfully, the incentives are just as strong. First, each island has a purpose. Most let you pay doubloons to upgrade the quality of one of your ship's key elements: the Hull, Sails, Crew, and Cannon. These locations, you will have guessed by now, are named in a straightforward manner. On Tavern Island, a pirate captain can pay money to receive a random boon, which might be a special battle tactic, a devastating package of one-use cannon shot, the aid of a skilled craftsman for upgrading your vessel beyond normal means, or the most valuable boon of all, the parrot of one of the great pirates of legend. The knowledge these four famed avians have acquired is not to be scoffed at. Captain Flint's Parrot, for example, can teach a captain how to carry an unlimited amount of treasure on his ship. Long John Silver's Parrot makes any captain devastating in ship-to-ship combat. You can only have one parrot advisor, of course, and be warned: if the creature is killed, its new owner will lose some of his precious Fame. (By the way, all the boons gained from Tavern Island are conveniently recorded on small full-color cards that a captain can simply give to the grocer on his ship for safekeeping).

Before getting on to the reasons for visiting Pirate's Cove and Treasure Island, one other fact about the aforementioned "outer" islands should be noted. Each contains a random amount of booty in four forms: pure Fame Points, gold doubloons, treasure chests, and, occasionally, free supplies and boons like those purchasable on Tavern Island. A typical treasure stash, then, might include one Fame Point, five doubloons, and three treasure chests. The single pirate captain that ends up on the island bearing this stash gets all of those goodies.

Doubloons, as already noted, are useful on the outer islands for upgrading your ship. Treasure chests are a little less versatile. Let's face it: they're heavy and unwieldy, just as likely to be filled with bizarre Incan artifacts as gold coins, and everything inside usually works best as a set anyway. (That silver Spanish oyster-fork is much more valuable with the rest of the silver Spanish tea service than on its own.) For these reasons, sailors around Pirate's Cove prefer to keep their treasure chests closed and stored safely away in their ships' hulls (which may or may not have room for all of them; excess chests will have to be tossed overboard unless the captain happens to be on Hull Island and can upgrade). Until, that is, the ship moors off the shores of Treasure Island, where every chest onboard is summarily off-loaded and buried, each one earning a single Fame Point for the pirate captain burying them. Doubloons, it should be noted, can be buried as well; every three doubloons buried earn one Fame Point.

The last island, Pirate's Cove, is a place a pirate captain hopes he never has to visit. Indeed, he will never willingly choose to go there. It has little of value -- no upgrades and no booty. What it provides is a safe haven for repairing a battle-damaged ship (which costs a couple of doubloons). When forced to retreat from combat, Pirate's Cove is the defeated captain's inevitable destination.

Ah! Combat! Yes, that's what you've really wanted to hear about, isn't it? Well, to understand combat, we must first discuss ship upgrades. You see, besides the Hull that determines the number of chests that a ship can carry, all ship elements give an advantage in combat. Sails provide speed and initiative, allowing the well-rigged ship to maneuver and fire before its opponents. Cannon, of course, blast holes in the enemy, but they require a Crew member each to fire. Thus, pure offensive power is determined by either the number of Cannon or Crew, whichever is lower.

There are important choices to be made in combat, but ultimately plenty of luck is needed, too. A captain can choose which of the four elements of his enemy's ship he wants to aim his cannon at. Common sense dictates that the least upgraded element is generally the best target, since each hit will degrade the element by one step. If just one of the ship elements is reduced to effectively zero, that captain is on his way to Pirate's Cove. Sometimes a wily captain will try to take out the Crew or Cannon of his opponent, to temper any later attacks. The strategies are by no means endless or complex -- they do get a little more interesting when there are more than two combatants -- and generally the best target will be readily apparent to all. The real test is what happens once the cannon are fired, when the captain has no more control than a sailor who's three sheets to the wind. As mentioned, Lady Luck is the final arbiter, and even the biggest broadside has a chance of hitting nothing but minnows. You may as well be rolling a six-sided die for each manned cannon and counting the number of fives and sixes you get.

Many a naïve young sailor has come to Pirate's Cove thinking that there's glory and riches to be found in ship combat. But they're in for a rude awakening. Given the abundance of booty and Fame to be found on the outer islands, it's just not profitable to go picking fights. Every hit to your ship is a pile of doubloons down the drain, and makes you more vulnerable in later combats. It also limits your reasonable island choice each month, as there's only one place to go to improve a particular ship element. This, in turn, makes your moves more predictable to anyone wishing to hound you, and likely keeps you from being able to go dashing after the valuable treasures found on other islands. The pirate who avoids combat most assiduously (and only gets into those fights he knows he can win handily) thus maintains his freedom of movement and gains the advantage of being able to confidently enter a battle when the stakes are worth it. It may not match everyone's view of classic piracy tactics, but it is a fascinating dynamic of competition.

Unfortunately, the seriously detrimental effects of combat also mean that those who make some unlucky choices early on might be nastily crippled for the remainder of the game. I remember one year the most infamous pirate had 45 Fame Points while the most forgettable ended with 10. That won't happen often, but it is definitely possible to get in a position where catching up is extremely improbable. A willingness to fight for third place will keep you from feeling too disappointed when your adventures are over.

You want my opinion on the whole bloody affair? Well, if you prefer your competitions to be purely strategic battles of the mind, you're better off playing Nine Men's Morris with the other fops in the safety of the governor's mansion; **Pirate's Cove** is a place where even the best laid plans can flounder and sink. But, there's no shaking the sense of swashbuckling excitement while you're spending your time around these islands. It's enough to make anyone feel like Captain Blood or Sir Francis Drake, and even the loser will have plenty of stories of valiant combat and sneaky maneuvers to share by the end of it all.

--*Christopher Floyd*

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Two Hundred . . . Whats?

Two hundred milliseconds ago I was typing the word "milliseconds."

Two hundred millennia ago humanity was just about getting its genes together and thinking of itself as "modern." The world's first argument over pizza toppings took place shortly thereafter.

Two hundred seconds ago I was Googling furiously for "200,000 years ago."

Two hundred centuries ago the world was in the midst of its last major ice age; furious Googling indicates that the British Isles were even *chillier* than they are currently.

Two hundred minutes ago I was editing the rest of the articles for this week's issue, fighting off what's threatening to become a migraine.

Two hundred decades ago the common timeline was counting forward from zero, although people wouldn't realize this for another millennia or so.

Two hundred days ago Kenneth Hite's Suppressed Transmission was in the middle of its [200th column](#) celebration.

Two hundred years ago the United States had just about finished buying Louisiana from Crazy Napoleon's Going-Out-Of-America Sale. ("*Nos prix sont si bas, ils sont **fous!***" went one overplayed radio ad of the era.)

Two hundred weeks ago I started writing a column called Random Thought Table.

And I haven't stopped yet.

Of course, coming up with something neat and snazzy to mark this 200th column has turned out to be non-trivial; I've already written about [anniversaries](#), [time](#), and [Girl Scout Cookies](#). Most relevant comments made during my [100th column](#) still apply (assuming I made any relevant comments in the first place). And I can't have *too* much congratulatory back-patting, because I'm saving that for my fourth anniversary in February.

But still, it seems like a shame to let any kind of milestone go unnoticed (or, at the very least, get mined for a column topic . . . although considering that I *still* haven't trotted out my writer's block column -- a sure sign of writerly desperation -- I think I'm doing okay).

And as I was lying in bed last night for an all-too-brief nap, mulling over the implications of this milestone, I was trying to put it in perspective:

- If *Pyramid* was a monthly magazine, like *Dragon Magazine*, I would have been working on it for over 16 years . . . more than half my adult life.
- If it was bimonthly, like *Dungeon Magazine*, it would have been around longer than the gaming hobby.
- And if it was a daily-updated site, like *Salon* online, I would have been here just over six months (no doubt a smoldering stressed-out puddle of goo by now).

I started pondering the gaming potential of these kind of shifts, and I realized that all kinds of possibilities open up once you step back and view a campaign or premise through these different kind of lenses.

For example, the **Traveller** universe posits, as a core premise, that jumps between game worlds take a week each. This nicely limits the setting in a gamer-friendly way, making it difficult for outside forces to interfere with a situation and limiting options of sprinting around to other places for help or resources. ("The thing we need to thwart the Planet-Eater is on planet Boofar! Quickly, to the jumpship!" "Uhh, captain? It'll take two weeks to get there and back." "Hmm . . . That's a lot of eaten planets between now and then . . .")

But one interesting side effect of *Traveller's* jump travel is that those utilizing it experience time much less than the relative week; if someone jumped an obscene number of times, they would find themselves a fair bit younger than their non-jumping counterparts.

So, what happens if you view that one-week limit with a different lens? For example, what if each jump takes a constant *year*? Well, this would probably have two logical effects. First, all else being equal, jumping would probably become less common; after all, if all your non-jumping friends keep aging normally, then you'll leave them behind in your youth as they continue to age. But if a group of stalwart adventurers -- say, the PCs -- has a reason to travel (travell?) a lot, then suddenly the campaign almost stops being a space campaign and instead becomes a *time travel* game . . . albeit one limited to movement in one direction. After all, each time they enter a new world, they've also advanced a year in time. If they start out on a home planet, go somewhere and then return, at least two years will have passed for the PCs (even if it's only been a few minutes to them); the possibilities for plot should be obvious then.

The lens of alternate scales can be used in other games as well. For example, traditional vampire lore has a bitten victim turning into a vampire after a day or so. (Well, an evening, but you know what I'm saying.) But what if that was turned on its ear, so that a bitten victim will turn into a vampire after a decade, with the victim being perfectly normal in the interim and the transformation taking immediate effect after the 10 years? Consider the plot hook possibilities; any starting PC with this affliction immediately has focus for adventuring, since he only has 10 years to get as much done as he can with his life. And, in an existing campaign, giving the PCs a 10-year-bite will probably give the campaign some focus for a number of adventures. Or, if nothing else, it will provide PCs and NPCs alike with an interesting bit of background information; how would you feel if you learned that your sensei, new love interest, or neighboring enemy lord had a bite that would come to vampiric fruition in three years, six months, and 17 days?

The post-apocalyptic zombie movie *28 Days Later* basically uses the same concept; typical zombies take a minute to shamle across a room . . . what if it took them a *second*?

You can get all kinds of interesting concepts if you apply the distorting scale of different times, and the neat thing is you can contemplate distorting numbers for *any* situation. For example, the standard President here in the United States is elected to a four-year term. What if there was an alternate universe where leaders were elected as near-monarchies for four *decade* terms? Or envision a post-information-age hyper-democracy, with the President elected every four months. Either one can provide an interesting backdrop for a group of world-hoppers, all by changing one variable. (Of course, once you hit upon an interesting idea, you can tweak it accordingly; for example, the "near-monarchy" concept would probably work just as well with 10- or 15-year terms, and has at least one real-world presidential precedent for extrapolation purposes.)

Finally, you can tweak fundamentals of biology; if standard humans live 70 years, then you can envision races that live for seven or 700 years, and consider the effects on both the campaign and the psychology and roleplaying of the race. Sadly, these possibilities are difficult to keep in mind, and are seldom fully realized. Most people tend to play elves as "humans who smirk knowingly," and *Star Trek: Voyager* had a shipmate who was supposed to live for seven years . . . a concept which they never did anything with in the year-and-a-half I watched it before my body rejected the show.

Time is one of those concepts that is difficult to wrap your mind around fully; an hour spent in a corner for a child probably feels more agonizing than an adult's entire evening spent frittering away online. As such, the effects and implications of time can often only truly register when we view it askew, either through contemplation, analogy, or downright distortion. Doing so can lead to lots of good gaming possibilities, which can make even hoary old concepts feel fresh and new.

For example, if I was responsible for one column every minute, then I have less than two hours to figure out what I'm doing for my 300th column . . .

--Steven Marsh

Fantasy Origins

for *d20 System/Dungeons & Dragons*

by Mike Tresca

"Where did I come from?"

It's the most basic question that children ask, but often the question goes unanswered in a typical *d20 System* fantasy campaign. The races just came to be, usually in a god's own image, and that's that. But this answer can be as unsatisfying for a gaming group as talk of storks and cabbage patches is for inquisitive children. In short, it pays to be prepared for when PCs ask that same age-old question. This article attempts to provide a basic framework for a Dungeon Master to provide a cohesive evolution for his campaign.

For Dungeon Masters

As a Dungeon Master, it may seem that the origin of races may not be important. However, there are several reasons that a race's origins might matter, including:

- An ancient race that possessed powerful technology might have long since fallen and left behind a legacy of magic and technology. This power could alter the very fabric of civilization, depending on when it was introduced.
- Through chronomancy, an artifact, or the act of divine will, PCs might be transported back in time.
- Alternately, other planes of existence might actually be copies of a particular timeline, "photocopies" of a previous existence or simply a parallel universe.

For Players

A gradual evolutionary theory can provide opportunities for adventure and character development.

- Character races can be evolved and devolved, creating at least two variations on every race. Imagine playing an evolved orc or a devolved dwarf?
- The chronomancy spells in this article can be added to any wizard or sorcerer's repertoire.
- Clerics and druids can choose their theory of creation and structure their views on history and the future accordingly. When viewed through the lens of natural selection, some religions may choose to act or not act if the conflict might impact the future development of a race.

There are a many theories of the origin of humanity (and in the scope of this article, other races). Creationism and evolution are the most popular, but there are many others. Below are just a few:

- **Creationism:** Life is spontaneously created through divine will. The gods are the source of all life and therefore nothing is created without their intervention. In a campaign with creationist theory, it may well be blasphemous to some religions for an arcane spellcaster to create life (like the clone spell). Even the gods might take offense.
- **Gradual Evolution:** Living organisms develop gradually over millions of years, shaped by environmental selection. This theory proposes that all living things are related in some way and evolved into their current forms. The most recent form of gradual evolution is the bipedal humanoid, although there may be more advanced forms. This article examines the effects of gradual evolution on a fantasy campaign.
- **Spontaneous Evolution:** Rather than a slow progression, life spontaneously transforms into something else. Spontaneous evolution can cause an immediate and dramatic impact on a campaign world -- what if trolls began breeding little trolls that were immune to fire?

There are a wide variety of creatures that populate the fantasy universe of *Dungeons & Dragons*. However, historically, it's often difficult to determine which creatures came first. This can be significant when chronomancy is involved, making time travel, evolution, and devolution a possibility. Additionally, knowing which creatures are related to each other can help classify them both scientifically and magically -- biological relationships can have very serious consequences. Finally, knowing which creatures came first helps the Dungeon Master determine the history of his own game world. Attempted below is a basic overview of each creature in the Monster Manual and its place in the evolutionary scheme of things. Additionally, some creatures have "missing links" that require new creatures to fill in the blanks.

There are some general "rules" of gradual evolution. This is by no means a scientific classification but an easy means of quickly classifying creatures of various types.

1. Small creatures increase in size as they evolve when they're mammals, but in most other cases it's the reverse -- large creatures gradually get smaller in size.
2. Creatures tend to evolve from more legs to fewer legs -- thus a behir is the oldest of the draco-forms because it has twelve legs, followed by the basilisk with eight.
3. Evolution takes the easiest, most effective path of development. Therefore, if a creature develops magical abilities, its other evolutionary development probably stalls. Just as turtles remain essentially the same because their physical structure is invaluable in survival, blink dogs are unlikely to evolve further once they developed their magical abilities.
4. Nature likes homogeneity. Blended fantasy creatures would probably be much more blended than they appear in the Monster Manual. For example, a chimera's heads would probably appear much more reptilian rather than distinctly goat- and cat-like, although they may retain features that could cause a casual observer to confuse the creature's appearance with more common creatures.

Origins

Different creatures can be evolved or devolved depending on their type. Certain creature types do not evolve or devolve. Ultimately, devolution and evolution involves shifting the creature's personal time stream so that it advances or regresses as if undergoing millions of years of change. Below is a series of guidelines for how they might develop and where they rank on the evolutionary scale:

Lowest

Ooze
Vermin
Magical Beast
Animal
Giant
Monstrous
Humanoid
Highest

Types outside of the evolutionary scheme include: Construct, Elemental, Fey, Outsider, and Undead.

Plants and another unknown group, fungi, have their own evolutionary paths. This article deals primarily with creatures of the animalia taxonomy.

A creature that evolves or devolves more steps than it has hit dice changes type. These are extreme evolutionary steps.

Aberration

Some sages view the classification of "aberration" as a slur. Some aberrations are simply unclassified creatures with yet-to-be-studied anatomies. Others are magical amalgamations that are crafted through sorcery. The only thing

consistent about aberrations is that they are not uniform in appearance. Aberrations can be evolved and devolved, with bizarre results.

Animal

Animals populate the vast majority of the gradual evolution theory of creation. They are generally considered less evolved than bipedal humanoids. Animals can be evolved and devolved.

Beast

If animals are more common in gradual evolution, beasts are less developed. They tend to be more feral, more aggressive, and less intelligent. Beasts can be evolved and devolved.

Construct

Constructs are created by thinking beings and are thus not part of a natural evolutionary cycle. They cannot be evolved or devolved.

Dragon

Dragons are a peculiar strain of evolution. Although they are highly intelligent, their forms are frozen in evolution. They have more in common with dinosaurs (who have more in common with birds) than with other intelligent races. Dragons can be devolved, but they cannot be evolved. Somewhere along the evolutionary chain their forms froze in time (due to divine intervention, magic, or something else).

Elemental

Elementals are extra-planar and are older than most life on the Prime Plane. They cannot be evolved or devolved.

Fey

Although fey are denizens of the wilds of nature, they are immune to the ravages of time. Fey did not evolve -- they were spontaneously created. Thus, they cannot be evolved or devolved. At the Dungeon Master's option, elves, gnomes, and halflings may be considered fey for evolutionary purposes and thus remain unchanged throughout their development. Some scholars place the unicorn in this category, as it is believed to be a largely symbolic creature, incorruptible and outside normal evolution.

Giant

Giants are larger, more primitive versions of humanoids. They can be evolved and devolved.

Humanoid

Humanoids are higher on the evolutionary chain than most other beings. Their thumbs, stereoscopic vision, and mobility give them greater advantages at creating tools and developing weapons that enhance their chances for survival.

Monstrous Humanoid

Monstrous humanoids are generally less developed than humanoids. They tend to be hairy with tough skins and still possess the artifacts of a more violent time period: claws, fangs, smaller brains, and stronger bodies.

Ooze

The very first life in a gradual evolutionary theory was ooze and thus it is the lowest form of evolution. Some oozes are collections of cells while others are gigantic, single-celled beings. In all cases, oozes cannot be further devolved -- they can be evolved however.

Outsider

Outsiders come from other planes of existence. The majority of them is ageless and cannot be evolved or devolved, although there may be a few exceptions for humanoid-like beings that just happen to be from another reality.

Plant

Unlike animals, plants take much longer to evolve. They can be both evolved and devolved.

Undead

Like constructs, undead are created. They are not a natural part of evolution and therefore cannot be evolved or devolved.

Vermin

Vermin constitute the lower strata of evolutionary development, including rats and insects. Vermin can be evolved or devolved.

Evolution/Devolution

Evolution converges to the bipedal form. Thus, creatures that have monstrous traits are likely to lose them as they evolve further along the evolutionary scale. Conversely, creatures that are devolved become more feral and vicious, gaining claws and bite abilities.

Devolved

"Devolved" is a template that can be added to any corporeal creature (referred to hereafter as the "base creature"). The creature's type remains the same. It uses all the base creature's statistics and special abilities except as noted in their description.

Size: The base creature's size is increased by one size level.

Speed: The base creature's speed is increased in all modes of movement by 10 feet.

AC: The base creature's natural armor is increased by 4.

Damage: The base creature's claw and bite attack is increased by one die.

Special Attacks: Same as the base creature

Special Qualities: Same as the base creature

Base Saves: Same as the base creature. Devolved creatures gain a +4 racial bonus to Fort saves.

Abilities: Increase from the base creature as follows: Str +4, Dex +2, Con +2, Int -4, Wis -4.

Skills: A devolved creature skill points diminishes as its Intelligence decreases. If the creature has a class, it gains skills for class levels normally.

Climate/Terrain: Same as the base creature.

Organization: Solitary, pair, gang (3-5), or tribe (61+).

Challenge Rating: Same as the base creature +1.

Alignment: Creatures that devolve enough to lose intelligence below 3 become neutral in alignment. They can no

longer determine an ethos and act only in the interest of self-preservation.

Treasure: Same as the base creature.

Advancement: Same as the base creature.

Evolved

"Evolved" is a template that can be added to any corporeal creature (referred to hereafter as the "base creature"). The creature's type remains the same. It uses all the base creature's statistics and special abilities except as noted here.

Size: The base creature's size is reduced by one size level (e.g., from Colossal to Gargantuan, Gargantuan to Huge, etc.).

Speed: The base creature's speed is reduced in all modes of movement by 10 feet as physical locomotion becomes less important.

AC: The base creature's natural armor is reduced by 4.

Damage: The base creature's claw and bite attack is reduced by one die (from 1d20 to 1d12 to 1d10 to 1d8 to 1d6 to 1d4). If the base creature inflicts multiple dice of damage, the multiple dice is retained (so 2d6 points of damage becomes 2d4 points of damage).

Special Attacks: An evolved creature retains all the special attacks of the base creature and also gains the supernatural ability to use my light at will as the psionic power. Evolved creatures with an Intelligence or Wisdom score of 8 or higher possess the following psionic abilities, using their level as the manifester level, as specified in the table below. Unless otherwise indicated, the ability is usable once per day.

Level	Abilities
1-2	Lesser mindlink, 3/day, conceal thoughts
3-4	Detect thoughts, sensitivity to psychic impressions
5-6	Mindlink
7-8	Aura sight, forced mindlink
9-10	Mind probe
11-12	Precognition
13-14	Etherealness
15-16	Hypercognition
17-18	Mind blank
19+	Psychic surgery

Special Qualities: An evolved creature has all the special qualities of the base creature, plus low-light vision.

Base Saves: Same as the base creature. Evolved creatures gain a +4 racial bonus to Will saves.

Abilities: Increase from the base creature as follows: Str -4, Dex +2, Con -2, Int +4, Wis +4.

Skills: An evolved creature has 8 skill points, plus its Intelligence modifier, per Hit Die. Treat skills from the base creature's list as class skills and other skills as cross-class. If the creature has a class, it gains skills for class levels normally.

Climate/Terrain: Same as the base creature. Evolved creatures usually move out of their natural surroundings to live in more civilized areas.

Organization: Solitary, pair, gang (3-5), or tribe (61+).

Challenge Rating: Same as the base creature +1.

Alignment: Same as base creature.

Treasure: Same as the base creature.

Advancement: Same as the base creature.

Eras

The following eras help explain when creatures may have evolved and, if intelligent, how long their civilizations have the opportunity to flourish before man comes along. Also listed is the suggested starting place for the monster types listed in the Monster Manual.

Paleozoic Era

- **Cambrian Period (540-500 MYA):** The first single-celled and multicellular life is born. Oozes are the only creatures that might exist during this time period, making them the oldest fantasy beings.
- **Ordovician Period (500-435 MYA):** This era is marked for the first appearance of nautiloids and jawed vertebrates.
- **Silurian Period (435-410 MYA):** Two types of beings evolve in this period, plants and arachnids (vermin).
- **Devonian Period (410-355 MYA):** Creatures with four limbs and distinct digits appear.
- **Carboniferous Period (355-295 MYA):** The first reptiles and flying insects (vermin) appear on land.
- **Permian Period (295-250 MYA):** The first sail-back synapsids crawl onto land.

Mesozoic Era

- **Triassic Period (250-203 MYA):** The dizzying diversity of creatures begins to appear, including dinosaurs (beasts), small mammals (animals), turtles and frogs.
- **Jurassic Period (203-135 MYA):** Birds exist, but this most famous of all periods is best known for its dinosaurs.
- **Cretaceous Period (136-65 MYA):** The first modern mammals come into being while the non-avian dinosaurs die out.

Cenozoic Era

- **Paleocene Epoch (65-53 MYA):** Hedgehogs, owls, shrews and come to be.
- **Eocene Epoch (53-33.7 MYA):** Cats, dogs, elephants, and horses.
- **Oligocene Epoch (33.7-23.5 MYA):** Rhinoceroses, deer and monkeys appear.
- **Miocene Epoch (23.5-5.3 MYA):** Many animals appear, including apes and mice.
- **Pliocene Epoch (5.3-1.75 MYA):** The diversity of whales increases and the first cattle and sheep appear.
- **Pleistocene Epoch (1.75-0.01 MYA):** The first modern humans evolve. This is the era of gigantic mammals and the home of the dire versions of many creatures.
- **Holocene Epoch (0.01-Present):** Humanity as we know it.

Monsters

Below is a sampling of creatures, the effects of evolution and devolution, and their eras and classifications (clade). Some of these terms are arbitrary guesses but can help determine when a race rose to power. Dungeon Masters should consider the implications of an intelligent race that evolved earlier than humanoids. For example, the beholder's morphology is ancient, harkening back to a time when the world was covered with ocean, before land-dwelling life existed. Why didn't they take over the world? Perhaps they did, but the rise and collapse of beholder civilization is long since forgotten to man.

Some creatures defy classification. Manticores, centaurs, harpies, chimeras, lammasu, and other beasts are obviously the result of magical meddling and do not evolve naturally, even if they can reproduce.

Aboleth (*Piscus Diabolus*)

Clade: Lissamphibian

Era: Early to Late Permian

Description: The aboleth is amphibious, but it did not develop actual limbs for walking on land. This places its earliest evolution in the Permian era. It has a head start as an intelligent life form on many other races, but it may well have retreated from other predatory life or even failed to explore other lands.

Evolutionary Modifiers: Aboleths that devolve lose, in order per step: psionics, transformation, enslave. If evolved, aboleths gain 20 ft. land movement for the first step and lose their mucus cloud ability for the second step.

Ankheg (Vermis Rus)

Clade: Chilopoda

Era: Carboniferous

Description: The Carboniferous period is mostly swampland, which gave rise to giant arthropods. The land is humid and tropical, possibly with higher amounts of oxygen. Insects rule during this time, allowing the ankheg to grow to 10 feet long and nearly 800 pounds.

Evolutionary Modifiers: Ankhegs lose the following as they evolve for each step: spit acid, acid.

Basilisk (Statuosaurus)

Clade: Thyreophoran

Era: Early Jurassic

Description: Basilisks have eight legs, making them related to behirs and precursors to dragons. They are part of the draco-branch of evolution. Their size and appears essentially makes them magical armored dinosaurs.

Evolutionary Modifiers: Basilisks lose the following as they evolve for each step: petrifying gaze, one pair of limbs, and one pair of limbs. Basilisks that devolve gain a gore attack with its horn for 2d8 points of damage.

Behir (Behirus Bidens)

Clade: Thyreophoran

Era: Early Triassic

Description: The behir is an ancestor to the dragon with no less than twelve legs. It is related to the basilisk.

Evolutionary Modifiers: Evolved behirs lose one pair of limbs per step of evolution. Devolved behirs lose their breath weapon at the fourth step.

Bugbear (Adoptivus Cinco)

Clade: Australopithicus

Era: Quaternary

Description: The bugbear is lower on the evolutionary scale, appearing before modern humans. As indicated in the Monster Manual, they are not actually directly related to bears.

Bulette (Alopex Actus)

Clade: Parareptile

Era: Permian

Description: The armored appearance of the bulette gives its origins away. The description notes its appearance as a combination between an "armadillo and a snapping turtle." It's not far off. The bulette is related to the scutosaurus and probably originally developed as an herbivore. It later became omnivorous as a matter of necessity.

Canoids (Canis)

Clade: Canidae

Era: Pleistocene

Description: Dogs didn't appear until the Eocene. They include blink dogs, worgs, and winter wolves.

Evolutionary Modifiers: Devolved lose a special ability for each step. Once they lose all special abilities they gain the animal type.

Chuul (Stagnum Cammarus)

Clade: Palniura

Era: Mesozoic

Description: The chuul is distantly related to lobsters and crabs and probably evolved from them.

Evolutionary Modifiers: An evolved chuul loses its paralysis attack.

Cloaker (Trigon Traho)

Clade: Myliobatoidei

Era: Devonian

Description: Related to stingrays, cloakakers were originally amphibious predators. Their venture onto land was probably recent.

Evolutionary Modifiers: An evolved cloaker loses its shadow shift ability, then its moan ability. Devolved cloakakers lose their flight ability and gain the ability to swim at 40 feet (in addition to breathing underwater and aquatic subtype).

Cockatrice (Pullus Malus)

Clade: Archaeopteryx

Era: Late Jurassic

Description: Cockatrices exhibit both lizard and avian characteristics, placing them as ancestors to some of the earliest birds.

Evolutionary Modifiers: An evolved cockatrice loses its petrification ability. A devolved cockatrice gains the reptilian subtype.

Couatl (Serpula Pterotos)

Clade: Archaeopteryx

Era: Early Cretaceous

Description: Bizarrely, the couatl is distantly related to the cockatrice. It too, has both lizard and avian characteristics but is obviously more evolved.

Evolutionary Modifiers: A devolved couatl loses the following abilities, in order: spells, psionics, telepathy, and ethereal jaunt.

Darkmantle (Nigro Mantelum)

Clade: Vampyromorpha

Era: Silurian Period

Description: Incorrectly classified as a gastropod, the darkmantle is actually a form of land squid.

Evolutionary Modifiers: A devolved darkmantle loses its flight ability but gains the ability to swim at 30 ft., breathe underwater, and aquatic subtype. An evolved darkmantle loses its darkness ability.

Delver (Fossor)

Clade: Pulmonata

Era: Devonian Period

Description: Delvers are massive ancestors to common slugs.

Evolutionary Modifiers: An evolved delver loses its stone shape ability, then its corrosive slime. It also loses one size level per step. A devolved delver loses its burrowing speed but gains a swim speed of 10 ft., the ability to breathe underwater, and the aquatic subtype.

Destrachan (Dolosaurus)

Clade: Dromaeosauridae

Era: Early Cretaceous

Description: Destrachans are closely related to the velociraptor, as evidenced by their large claws and powerfully built legs.

Evolutionary Modifiers: Evolved destrachans lose their destructive harmonics, then reverberating harmonics, then protection from sonics. Devolved destrachan gain the reptile subtype.

Digester (Digero Acidus)

Clade: Dromaeosauridae

Era: Late Cretaceous

Description: Digesters are more closely related to the egg-stealer family of dinosaurs, specialized in running after smaller prey.

Evolutionary Modifiers: Evolved digesters lose their acid spray. Devolved digesters gain the reptile subtype.

Dragons (Dracus)

Clade: Hexaform

Era: Late Cretaceous

Description: Dragons are an ancient race that is largely unchanged from its original ancestry.

Evolutionary Modifiers: Devolved dragons lose one ability per evolutionary step, starting with their spell-like abilities and ending with their breath weapon. They also lose their flight ability completely but gain another pair of limbs. Dragons cannot evolve.

Dragonne (Leo Dracus)

Clade: Hexaform

Era: Late Cretaceous

Description: Dragonnes are also a member of the hexaform family.

Evolutionary Modifiers: Devolved dragonnes lose their flight ability but increase their speed to 50 ft. and gain additional pair of limbs. Evolved dragonnes lose their roar ability.

Ettercap (Homo Arachne)

Clade: Micrura

Era: Late Cretaceous

Description: Ettercaps are a highly advanced form of spider.

Evolutionary Modifiers: Devolved ettercaps change dramatically, transforming into medium-sized monstrous spiders. Evolved ettercaps lose their web, then poison abilities.

Frost Worm (Vermis Frigidus)

Clade: Chilopoda

Era: Quaternary

Description: Frost worms are not actually worms. The hint is their mandibles. In actuality, they are distantly related to centipedes, with many small stubby legs often concealed under the snow and ice. They flourished during the quaternary period, when ice ages were common.

Evolutionary Modifiers: Evolved frost worms lose their trill, cold damage, death throws, then breath weapon. They also lose one size level per evolutionary step.

Giants (Gigantes)

Clade: Australopithecus Gigantes

Era: Miocene Epoch

Description: Giants constitute a variety of races, including trolls, ogres, and ogre magi.

Evolutionary Modifiers: Giants decrease in size as they evolve for each evolutionary step.

Girallon (Hexa Siminus)

Clade: Hexaform

Era: Miocene Epoch

Description: Yet another peculiar six-limbed creature, girallons may be distantly related to dragons. A highly evolved girallon might look like a six-limbed race of humans.

Gnoll (Esor Corpus)

Clade: Chilopoda

Era: Pleistocene Epoch

Description: Gnolls are evolved from hyenas; despite wild hypothesizes by uninformed scholars to the contrary. Much of the confusion involves classification of hyenas, which are neither canines nor felines.

Goblinoids (Tuburcinor)

Clade: Australopithecus Tuburcinor

Era: Pliocene Epoch

Description: Goblins and their brethren, including hobgoblins and orcs, are a more primitive offshoot of humanity known as tuburcinor.

Evolutionary Modifiers: Each evolutionary step or devolutionary step changes the size of a goblinoid. In order, goblins evolve into orcs who evolve into hobgoblins.

Gorgon (Bos Ferrum)

Clade: Ornithischia

Era: Early Cretaceous

Description: The iron bull is not actually related to a bull at all, but has much more in common with dinosaurs like the triceratops.

Evolutionary Modifiers: Gorgons that evolve lose their breath weapon. Devolved gorgons gain the reptile subtype.

Gray Render (Reddo Prae)

Clade: Marsupalia

Era: Pleistocene

Description: The gray render is an advanced form of marsupial. It's related to a kangaroo!

Grick (Vermis Restio)

Clade: Annelida

Era: Silurian

Description: The grick is an advanced worm, dangerous above and below ground. Its segmentation gives it away as a member of the annelida family.

Harpy (Harpyiae)

Clade: Hexaform

Era: Late Cretaceous

Description: Harpies are yet another evolutionary development of the hexaform family.

Evolutionary Modifiers: Evolved harpies lose their captivating song ability.

Kraken (Krakenus)

Clade: Teuthoidea

Era: Ordovician Period

Description: Krakens are obviously related to giant squids.

Evolutionary Modifiers: Krakens that devolve lose their spell-like abilities. Krakens that evolve lose their jet, then ink cloud abilities.

Krenshar (Felus Suscito)

Clade: Feloidea

Era: Miocene Epoch

Description: Krenshar are an evolved form of feline.

Evolutionary Modifiers: Evolved krenshar lose the scare ability.

Minotaur (Homo Bos)

Clade: Bovidae

Era: Holocene Epoch

Description: Minotaurs are descended from cattle. In that regard they are very advanced, despite their comparison to other humanoid races.

Evolutionary Modifiers: If devolved enough steps, a minotaur becomes a bull.

Nagas (Serpula Cenuo)

Clade: Squamata

Era: Permian Period

Description: Nagas are another ancient race, descended from snakes.

Evolutionary Modifiers: Devolved naga lose their spells first, then spell-like abilities. Naga that are devolved enough become snakes.

Oozes (Liquefacio)

Clade: Eucarya

Era: Cambrian Period

Description: Oozes come in a variety of types and include black puddings, gelatinous cubes, gray oozes, and ochre jellies. They are the earliest form of single-celled life.

Evolutionary Modifiers: Oozes cannot be devolved. It takes many steps to evolve oozes up the evolutionary chain.

Otyugh (Esor Deluto)

Clade: Asteroidea

Era: Silurian Period

Description: An ancient race, otyughs are carnivorous relatives of the starfish with highly specialized limbs.

Evolutionary Modifiers: Devolved otyughs lose their land speed but can swim and breathe underwater.

Pegasus (Equus Aero)

Clade: Hexaform

Era: Pleiocene Epoch

Description: Pegasi are members of the hexaform family, with four hooves and a pair of wings.

Evolutionary Modifiers: Devolved pegasi have an additional pair of hooves but cannot fly. Their land speed increases by 20 feet.

Piscoids (Homo Piscus)

Clade: Dipnoi

Era: Devonian Period

Description: Piscoids include the locathah, sahuagin and merfolk. They are evolved from the lungfish, which developed the ability to walk and breathe on land.

Evolutionary Modifiers: In evolutionary order, locathah become sahuagin who become merfolk.

Purple Worm (Vermis Purpura)

Clade: Caecilian

Era: Carboniferous Period

Description: The purple worm's title is only partially correct -- it isn't a worm at all. The purple worm is actually a

form of legless, sightless lizard, although its poisonous tail is a hint to its diverse lineage.

Evolutionary Modifiers: Devolved purple worms gain the reptilian subtype.

Remorhaz (Fulmen Vermis)

Clade: Chilopoda

Era: Pleistocene Epoch

Description: Like the frost worm, the remorhaz is an adapted form that grew huge during the many ice ages. Unlike the frost worm, the remorhaz is actually a giant centipede adapted to cold weather.

Evolutionary Modifiers: Evolved remorhazes lose their heat ability. Devolved remorhazes change types to vermin.

Reptiloids (Homo Laneus)

Clade: Dromaesoauridae

Era: Jurassic Period

Description: Lizardoids include troglodytes, lizardfolk, and kobolds. They are relatives of upright dinosaurs.

Evolutionary Modifiers: In evolutionary order, kobolds become troglodytes who become lizardfolk.

Roc (Avis Elephantus)

Clade: Falconiformes

Era: Early Pleistocene

Description: Rocs are so large that they require massive prey. An early evolution of the dinosaur, rocs preyed on the gigantic mammals that roamed during the Pleistocene era.

Evolutionary Modifiers: Evolved rocs shrink in size levels.

Roper (Rigidus Hexa)

Clade: Scaphodoa

Era: Ordovician Period

Description: Ropers are actually land nautiloids. They form shell-like exteriors and then extrude their tentacles at will.

Evolutionary Modifiers: Devolved ropers lose their land speed but can swim instead. They also gain the jet speed common to squids.

Rust Monster (Monstrum Rusticus)

Clade: Blattodea

Era: Silurian Period

Description: Rust monsters are a highly evolved form of cockroach, living off of metal found in dirt. It is commonly

believed that they have six instead of four legs.

Evolutionary Modifiers: Devolved rust monsters lose their Rust special ability and gain the vermin type.

Shocker Lizard (Fulmensaurus)

Clade: Squamata

Era: Carboniferous Period

Description: Shocker lizards are closely related to normal lizards and, despite their electrical ability, are otherwise mundane.

Evolutionary Modifiers: Evolved shocker lizards lose, in order, lethal shock, stunning shock, and electricity sense.

Spider Eater (Esor Arachne)

Clade: Mecoptera

Era: Carboniferous Period

Description: Spider eaters are gigantic relatives of the scorpionfly.

Stirge (Haemophagus)

Clade: Diptera

Era: Carboniferous Period

Description: A larger version of the mosquito, stirges are able to sustain their massive appetites on the large reptiles on land.

Evolutionary Modifiers: A devolved stirge changes to the vermin type.

Wyvern (Scorpiosaurus)

Clade: Pterosauria

Era: Jurassic Period

Description: Some sages have falsely categorized the wyvern as a relative of the dragon. Sometimes categorized by erudite scholars as a "true dragon," the wyvern is a specialized offshoot of the pterosauria. It is a four-limbed creature, making it a logical extension of the pteranodons that evolved before it.

Evolutionary Modifier: Devolved wyverns gain the reptile subtype.

Yrthak (Voxosaurus)

Clade: Pterosauria

Era: Jurassic Period

Description: Another offshoot of the pterosauria, this bizarre creature developed its specialized horn and tongue as a night flier.

Evolutionary Modifier: Devolved yrthak gain the reptile subtype and lose the explosion, then sonic lance, then sonic vulnerability abilities.

The Missing Link

Fantasy bestiaries are filled with creatures that stretch the limits of evolution. Many of the evolved beasts have six limbs, most notably the dragons (two pairs of limbs and a pair of wings). While there is precedent for cephalopods and insects to have multiple limbs, that structure never carried over to vertebrates. Sages believe the below creatures must have existed but their remains have yet to be found. If discovered, it would offer an intriguing clue to the evolution of the hexaforms -- dragons, dragonnes, and pegasi.

Lowest

Hexasaurus

Dragon

Pegasus

Girallon

Harpy

Highest

Hexasaurus

Large Beast

Hit Dice: 6d10-8 (25 hp)

Initiative: +1 (+1 Dex)

Speed: 50 ft, climb 20 ft.

AC: 14 (+1 Dex, -1 size, +4 natural)

Attacks: Bite +7 melee, 4 claws +2 melee

Damage: Bite 1d8+4, claw 1d6+2

Face/Reach: 5 ft by 5 ft/10 ft

Special Attacks: pounce, rake, improved grab

Special Qualities: Low-light vision, darkvision

Saves: Fort +8, Ref +6, Will +2

Abilities: Str 18, Dex 12, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 10

Skills: Climb +9, Hide +10*, Listen +5, Move Silently +9, Spot +5

Challenge Rating: 5

Alignment: Neutral

The hexasaurus is the precursor to the dragon. It has six limbs tipped with ferocious claws and a long, whip-like tail. Its sinewy neck is topped by a maw jammed full of pointy teeth. They are cunning and already begin to exhibit the intelligence that will make dragons so deadly.

Combat

As an arboreal predator, the hexasaurus can catch prey in the trees or on the ground with terrifying speed.

Darkvision: This creature can see in complete darkness, up to 60 feet.

Improved Grab (Ex): When this creature hits with its claws, it attempts to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity.

Pounce (Ex): If a hexasaurus leaps upon a foe during the first round of combat, it can make a full attack even if it has already taken a move action.

Rake (Ex): A hexasaurus can make two rake attacks with its hind legs for 1d6+2 damage each. If the hexasaurus pounces on an opponent, it can also rake.

Skills: Hexasauruses receive a +4 racial bonus to Hide and Move Silently checks. In forested or overgrown areas, the Hide bonus improves to +8.

New Spells

Devolution

Transmutation

Level: Sor/Wiz 4

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)

Targets: One creature

Duration: Permanent

Saving Throw: Fortitude negates

Spell Resistance: Yes

Devolution evolves a creature one devolutionary step per five caster levels. Upon changing, the subject regains lost hit points as if having rested for a day (though this healing does not restore temporary ability damage and provide other benefits of resting for a day; and changing back does not heal the creature further). If slain, the devolved creature reverts to its original form, though it remains dead.

The devolved creature gains the devolved template. The new form can be disorienting. Any time the devolved creature is in a stressful or demanding situation (such as combat), the creature must succeed at a Will save (DC 19) or suffer a 2 penalty on all attack rolls, saves, skill checks, and ability checks until the situation passes. Creatures who are devolved for a long time (years and years) grow accustomed to their new form and can overcome some of these drawbacks (DM's discretion).

Material Component: A fossil of the creature to be devolved into. Note that a creature can only be devolved from its own species.

Evolution

Transmutation

Level: Sor/Wiz 4

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)

Targets: One creature

Duration: Permanent

Saving Throw: Fortitude negates

Spell Resistance: Yes

Evolution evolves a creature one evolutionary step per five caster levels. Upon changing, the subject regains lost hit points as if having rested for a day (though this healing does not restore temporary ability damage and provide other benefits of resting for a day; and changing back does not heal the creature further). If slain, the evolved creature reverts to its original form, though it remains dead.

The evolved creature gains the evolved template. The new form can be disorienting. Any time the evolved creature is in a stressful or demanding situation (such as combat), the creature must succeed at a Will save (DC 19) or suffer a 2

penalty on all attack rolls, saves, skill checks, and ability checks until the situation passes. Creatures who are evolved for a long time (years and years) grow accustomed to their new form and can overcome some of these drawbacks (DM's discretion).

Material Components: The true name of the target, whose history and lineage must be written on a piece of parchment and burned in the process.

Greater Devolution

Transmutation

Level: Sor/Wiz 8

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)

Targets: One creature

Duration: Permanent

Saving Throw: Fortitude negates

Spell Resistance: Yes

As the lesser devolution spell, except the target is devolved one step per two caster levels.

Greater Evolution

Transmutation

Level: Sor/Wiz 9

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)

Targets: One creature

Duration: Permanent

Saving Throw: Fortitude negates

Spell Resistance: Yes

As the evolution spell, except the target is evolved one step per two caster levels.

Lesser Devolution

Transmutation

Level: Sor/Wiz 3

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)

Targets: One creature

Duration: 1 round/level

Saving Throw: Fortitude negates

Spell Resistance: Yes

As per the devolution spell, but with a limited duration.

Lesser Evolution

Transmutation

Level: Sor/Wiz 3

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)

Targets: One creature

Duration: 1 round/level

Saving Throw: Fortitude negates

Spell Resistance: Yes

As per the evolution spell, but with a limited duration.

Ancient Secrets

New Conspiracies for *Illuminati*: *New World Order*

by Martin Lækkes

It has been quite a while since the *Church of the Subgenius* set was released. With the *Bavarian Fire Drill* expansion on indefinite hold, the thrilling sensation of using new cards looks far off indeed. This article contains just two new cards, but the kind of cards that make the greatest impact on the game: Two new illuminati. Hopefully these cards will make players reach for their collections and start devising new devious plans.

Design Snags

Creating such influential cards is tricky, especially ones that will not be dismissed as homebrew nonsense. An appealing new illuminati needs to be balanced, represent a "real" organization, and have a natural feel to both the parts and the whole. If you can base decks on both the goal and the special ability, then so much the better!

Fasces Romanum and Atlantis were based on the two remaining basic victory conditions: Resistance and global power. The resistance-based illuminati became the Fasces Romanum -- a real world secret society which believes that unity is strength. Atlantis was chosen as the illuminati whose secret plan revolves around global power -- inspired by the network in standard Illuminati. The Atlanteans have ignored the surface world for too long, and need global power to regain influence.

The Goals

There already exist quite a few "foo counts double" goals, and there are only so many tricks these decks can pull, so creating goals based on a total acquired amount made for more interesting decks. However, getting the balance right proved problematic.

With the Fasces Romanum, the problem was that pesky NWO: Solidarity, which doubles all resistance in play. If the amount of resistance required by the goal was set too low, then any deck using Solidarity would be a winner. But, if the amount was set too high, then only decks using the NWO would be viable.

The solution became to do a "doubling" goal, but with the Society of Assassins spin, so that your groups only count double if they have the most resistance in the game. This removed Solidarity from the equation entirely. With Atlantis, finding the right amount of global power was also quite a struggle. It seemed impossible to make the goal balanced in both casual and competitive play. Then again, neither is Bavaria's total power goal! In a completely degenerate play, this official illuminati can win on the second turn.

I finally got the idea of connecting the goal to the basic goal. By reaching 35 global power, the player gets a 3 group discount towards the basic goal. This ensures that the basic goal can not be circumvented, forcing players to spend a few turns on expanding.

The Special Abilities

Coming up with a natural special ability reflecting connections and alliances was easy. Drawing 2 group cards per turn seemed a perfect fit -- it is a simple ability with many applications. While extra group draws is a handy ability for an unmasking Adepts player, he could already do this by playing the UFOs, so that shouldn't be a problem.

Atlantis illuminated ability became to expose two plots, reflecting the supreme wisdom of the Atlanteans. Exposing is

a fundamental mechanic in the game, which made it an obvious choice for an illuminati ability.



Fasces Romanum

The Fasces Romanum was (and is) a pagan illuminated society, based on the idea that unity makes strong, and founded in the days of ancient Rome. Through the centuries the members of the Fasces have remained loyal to each other, and their web of influence has grown considerably. The ideology behind the Fasces was seen in the fascism of 20th century Italy.

Their symbol is a bundle of 23 sticks. One by one they are easily snapped in half, but together they are unbreakable.

Power: 9/9

Goals and Ability: You have allies everywhere. You start your turn by drawing two group cards.

Standing together will help everyone connected to the Fasces, so any group counts double towards your total number of groups controlled, as long as none of your rivals control a group with higher permanent resistance.

Playing the Fasces

Your special goal is both a blessing and a curse. Taking over high-resistance groups from hand is quite cumbersome, unless you've got matching alignments or a bonus to control to help you. Drawing two groups each turn opens up some interesting strategies to you. Resource heavy decks become a lot more viable, as do sandbag decks. If your lead bounces, then you have a better chance than your rival of getting it first.

Two-player strategy: In a two player game you're best off ignoring high-resistance groups. Instead, you should modify the resistance of your groups after you've taken them over. Pack a few sandbags in your deck -- if you get one right, you could cripple your rival in one fell swoop.

Multi-player strategy: High resistance isn't all bad in a multi-player game. If you can build up a good defense against attacks to destroy, then your rivals may have to look elsewhere for easy pickings. You need to be able to pull off an

attack to destroy if a rival has a group with higher resistance than yours.

Beware: Don't forget about power altogether, or you will be on the receiving end of an attack to destroy. Rely too much on duplicate plots for resistance, and you'll realize that one Nevermore! is all it takes to ruin your plans. Be prepared to destroy a rival's Australia!

Power gaming: There are plenty of high resistance groups that also have high power. Play some of these and you should be able to compete with the strongest rivals.

Subtlety: Never Surrender and Commitment are great for working towards your goal, but they can also be used to ruin your rivals' attacks to control from hand.

Deck Building

Key Groups: Wall Street, TV Preachers and SubGenius FisTemples increase the resistance of their puppets. Local Police Departments and Dittoheads both add to the resistance of their master. The Comic Books card ignores the resistance of its weird victims, making it easier to take over high-resistance groups. Australia has resistance 24 on a weekend!

The Convenience Stores card is good in a sandbag deck, and those extra group draws can also be used to power the Thule Group. Nephews of God, www.subgenius.com, Burschenschaften, and Fraternal Orders will let you draw even more groups.

Good Resources: Few resources work directly towards goal, but in a weird deck, the Principia Discordia is a monster. The Orgone Grinder will increase a personality's resistance to 10.

Good Plots: Commitment, Never surrender, and especially Messiah will add to your resistance -- and all of them are free to play. Peace in Our Time adds to +3 resistance to all peaceful groups. Fake Healing will make it easier to take over a high-resistance group, and Resistance is Useless will momentarily prevent a rival's group from overshadowing yours. Partition will let you play two Australias, or one if a rival has one already.

Goal Cards: If you are sandbagging, then there is probably a control/destroy goal that fits your deck. Or perhaps a back-up doubling goal will take your rivals by surprise.

Degenerate deck: Without a doubt: Low-resistance fanatic groups and multiple Never Surrenders -- just look out for Nevermore! Also, a somewhat degenerate group composition can be based on several Dittoheads, or on slurping multiple low-resistance Trading Card Games, and replacing them with other groups.

Opposing the Fasces

Remember that resistance has no effect on attacks to destroy. Try to outpace him -- if you spend a little power to mess up his attacks, he may be very hard pressed to take over those high resistance groups. Also, build a single high-resistance group if you have the means -- and protect it.

If he is using conspicuously many weird groups, be prepared to destroy the Principia Discordia. If he uses mainly peaceful groups, then hang on to your red NWOs.

Cards to use against Fasces Romanum: Backlash can undo a Commitment or Never Surrender at his moment of triumph. Resistance is Useless will postpone his victory 1 round, which should hopefully be enough to bring him down. If he is sandbagging, then Xanadu will keep you safe. The Magic Goes Away will reduce him to a crawl, if he relies on high-resistance groups.



Atlantis

Plato was the first to describe the lost continent of Atlantis. Atlantis housed a prosperous and advanced civilization, until it was suddenly swallowed up by the sea some three and a half millennia ago. In a single fateful day, a horrific natural disaster wiped Atlantis from the face of the earth -- the sur-face, that is.

The Atlanteans had foreseen the apocalypse, and managed to survive. Isolated in the depths of the ocean, the Atlantean society has evolved -- safe from the ravages of time and from the outside world.

Their symbol is a golden monolith, submerged and covered in seaweed.

Power: 7/7

Goals and Ability: You seek to regain control of the world that you have ignored for too long. Control of groups with a total global power of 35, including your own, reduces your basic goal by 3.

To help you in reaching your objective, you can expose 2 plots each turn, as a free move.

Playing Atlantis

Most of your groups will have global power, which makes your power structure very flexible. Use this to ruin your rivals' attacks, or just threaten to do so. Your ability to expose plot cards will be more useful to you if you control a group which can get rid of them. On the down side, your deck will probably lack matching alignments, so get a bonus to control from another source.

Two-player strategy: If you can manage to save a few tokens, then you can use them to foil your rival's takeovers. Exposing (and destroying) your opponent's plots is a particularly aggressive ability, which is perfectly suited for two-player games. In a tight game it may very well clinch the victory.

Multi-player strategy: Focus your exposing on the player, who you think will be your main competitor. Going after several players will just get you too many enemies to handle. Don't just use your global power to get enemies! It can

be used to make friends too.

Beware: Even though your global power is flexible, your rivals may well have more regular power, so look out for incoming attacks.

Power gaming: Most groups with high global power also have a lot of regular power. However, one or more powerful groups, with doubled power turned global, is probably your best power play.

Subtlety: There are many groups and plots that grant or modify global power. With the right hand you can go from innocent to game-winner in a single turn. Global power is useful when working towards many of the goals. If your rivals are too busy counting your global power, they may miss what you're really up to.

Deck Building

Key Groups: Democrats, USA, and Xists all have a global power of 5 -- great if you're going for a straightforward approach. If you want to trick your opponents, then use groups that can change their global power, like Cable TV, Hollywood, and Subliminals. Templars, Wargamers, Psychiatrist and League for Obvious Decency can get rid of exposed plots, and MWOWM can be used to steal a plot that you've just destroyed. Finally, Arms Dealers and Copy Shops do other interesting things with exposed plots, and Great Pyramid might tell you which player's plots to expose.

Good Resources: Big Prawn, Cyborg Soldiers and Necronomicon can double power -- which is very useful if you can also make it global. Fortunately Lenin's Body, Three-Fisted Tales of "Bob" and Midas Mill do just that. Book of Kells and Hidden City will add a little to Atlantis own global power.

Good Plots: Your best plots are the ones that turn regular power into global power, like Media Connections, Hidden Influence, Head Launching, and Nental Ife. These combine well with anything that increases power, including NWOs. Overman is also quite good. Use Cover of Darkness to protect your key resources, and Supernova, The Stars are Right and Saint of Sales to take over even more. Foiled, Psychic Pstench and Nice Idea -- It's Mine Now will let you get rid of a goal card that you've exposed, and Stealing the Plans can salvage a rival's plot that you've just destroyed.

Goal Cards: Your global power can help you achieve most goals, so always have a ?plan b? in your deck. Power for its Own Sake may help you if your rivals manage to prevent you from turning regular power into global power. Degenerate deck: Build a high-power deck (Bavaria-style), and then stack your deck with plots that grant global power. Using multiple Forgery, Cover of Darkness, and resource destroyers is a moderately degenerate way of making sure that nobody else gets your key resources.

Opposing Atlantis

When Atlantis boosts its global power, resources and plots will be more important than the printed global power of his groups. If you have a Suicide Squad, Atlantis is a prime target. Knock out the groups that he uses to get rid of exposed plots. Losing plots is a lot worse than just having them exposed. Don't be afraid of attacking. If there is a target with the right alignment, you'll have more attacking power, than he'll have global power to defend it with.

Cards to use against Atlantis: Anything that lowers power will eventually lower his global power too -- Angst is awesome, but quite a few New World Orders will do nicely too. Canceling actions or plot cards will keep him from creating too much global power, and Nevermore! will ensure that he only uses each such plot once.

Harvest Festival

When Greenery Is More Than Scenery

by Michele Armellini

Good game world designers always state that at a low technology level, the exalted knight would simply starve were it not for the nine peasants tilling the lands to feed him. At higher tech levels, the proportion may be reversed and a farmer's life may be less brutish, but the fact remains that nobody usually wants to roleplay boring farm life. But agricultural activities can actually be an interesting, and even exciting, element in adventures, with the added bonus that the players won't expect it. Sometimes, even the usual crops can make for adventure stuff -- and some crops (and wild plants) are just, well, unusual. This article presents a few ideas for making the harvest festival the place to be, and shows that sometimes a vegetable might become an adventure seed (pun intended!).

As a warning, since agriculture usually is what keeps the game society fed, introducing unusual plants, plant magic, or cultivation methods may well have unforeseen long-term effects on the game world's economy! Dealing with this is out of the scope of this article. If the GM doesn't want to deal with these potential complications, but he'd still like an agricultural MacGuffin, a limiting factor should be added. Maybe the new plant can grow only within a small environment, for instance.

A Rustic Life

While "straight" peasants are probably unsuitable as PCs, bringing adventurers into contact with the farmers might be an interesting change of pace. Maybe the party needs to go into hiding for a while, one of the heroes may need rest for convalescence, or they are all invited by a relative/childhood friend in the home village. Once they are there, they may discover how hard that life is, but they may also appreciate its simple pleasures. Let them get up before dawn to tend the cattle, antagonized by the local youths! Longsword-toting barbarians will be shown how to plough.

It might be funny if the heroes have to prove their worthiness to a local girl, the village elders, or some other key character, not by their usual heroic feats, but by tackling routine farm tasks. The harvest festival will be one of those simple pleasures mentioned above, but of course a brawl might erupt between one of the PCs and a stubborn, ruddy-faced farm boy. If the hero uses its full might, he'll certainly beat the boy, and maybe cause some collateral damage too; but this will affect the party's reputation, and the more permanent the damage (such as the boy's death), the worse the effect.

Of course, once the adventurers have concluded that "nothing happens here," there will be the looming threat the good villagefolks can't deal with: marauding bandits or raiders, or, worse, the greedy local lord's soldiers and taxmen looking for livestock and crops. Or a dragon. Or, for something more realistic, the villainous lord wants to reduce free farmers to serf status. Naturally, a situation like this could happen even if the PCs are perfect strangers (à la Clint Eastwood), but if they were encouraged to develop a liking for the farmers, they will take this much more personally, like Harrison Ford in *Witness*.

Advantaged Regions

Sometimes, the crops and livestock are natural, but rare. Maybe this region produces the best wines, or tobacco, or stallions on the planet; or, it's the *only* wine-producing region. Or maybe the land is so fertile that this is "the granary of the empire." Such advantages will be coveted by others. Adventurers might be tasked with either stealing a few vine saplings (or stallions, silkworm cocoons, etc.), or with providing security against such thefts. For a mercantile adventure, heroes might be appointed to buy, rather than steal, and negotiations with haughty landowners and old, stubborn village elders can be a challenge. Or, if the region itself is the prize, any adventure could quickly escalate into

a military campaign.

Gardening Is A Form Of Art . . .

And natural farming might become a luxury. Right now, in Tokyo a handful of perfect fruit fetches a price that is just below cheap jewelry. If the masses will eat krill pate and mashed seaweeds, steak and chips will be today's truffles. Competent agronomists will be comfortable, tending a rich man's status-symbol extensively tilled farm. Of course such, a waste of good land might result in nationalization attempts by the state, or, more likely, in assaults by envious mobs. "Biological" fungicide and pesticide methods might become prized secrets. And in a high-tech setting, you don't steal saplings or pups -- you steal DNA, which means even higher security standards.

Even in a fantasy/historical setting, kings and nobles may become very fond of certain rare plants, exceptional flowers, or strong spices, and those capable of catering to their whims become important persons. The person who really has the archduke's ear is . . . his gardener! Influencing, bribing, or blackmailing the man might be the purpose of the adventure, and of course the heroes would have to pose as his colleagues. Or, rare varieties of flowers may fetch astounding prices, and those capable of developing, say, a black tulip, could make a fortune.

Field Magic!

In fantasy worlds, magic may be a powerful multiplier of any intervention by a determined farmer. Seemingly trivial spells that protect the crops from parasites would have far-reaching effects if used extensively (as warned about in the introduction). But they can still make for an interesting backdrop if incredibly lush vegetation always grows right around, say, a secret shrine of the Goddess of Nature.

Aggressive spells, on the other hand, make for excellent strategic weapons, the equivalent of a modern bacteriological war aimed at a country's resources rather than at its population. Evil wizards may topple kingdoms by creating magical famines. A way to make a magical villain really unforgettable is to depict his mere presence as harmful for the plants. It's powerful, suggestive imagery: flowers wither when he touches them.

On the other hand, some individuals or race may be attuned to the plants around them. Elves famously suffer when trees are downed, and true "green fingers" have their own abilities and fixations, but there might be a plus side, too; for instance, a wizard having this gift might learn plant spells more easily. Plants might even act as wordless guardians for those endowed with this kind of empathy, or maybe they could get other minor blessings from their green friends (such as healing faster than normal when treated with medicinal herbs).

On a darker note, what if all those zombies, when not hunting the B-movie heroes, were . . . gathering sugar-cane. If zombies are available, they are the ideal unskilled workforce, as they don't sleep, don't eat, and don't complain. They do wear down in the long run. But they can make that old plantation a truly eerie place!

The higher forms of plant magic, of course, might transform the plants, at least temporarily, into valuable tools (or allies) for the caster, making them into impassable barriers, spies above suspicion, safe sanctuaries and, at the most powerful, slow but strong warriors.

Some plants, finally, have something supernatural about them without needing the intervention of any wizard. See below.

Supernatural Plants

To start with, herbal ingredients might be required for magical potions and elixirs. The "magical principle," or "mana," might be stored in any part of the plant. While in many fantasy magical systems a spell doesn't require physical ingredients, this isn't always true, and indeed magical concoctions have a major place in traditional folklore.

It's the wizard's or alchemist's job to prepare the potion, but in the step before that there will be a gardener, or gatherer, or farmer. If there is a small number of very important magical ingredients, mages' guilds will have their own "magical" lands and fields, offering the same profits (and problems) as poppy fields (see below). If the magical plants are hundreds, there will be walled gardens and highly specialized gardeners. Or maybe the most powerful plants only grow in the wild; skilled and tough herbalists will be needed to gather them, and savvy outdoorsmen might be needed to escort them if the wilderness is really dangerous.

Of course, the way this magical harvest is handled will affect the final result. Some herbs may be dried, but are more powerful when fresh, for instance, or a badly preserved magical root might lose all its power. This might be a major problem for magic-using PCs, or a subtle trick to harass an evil wizard.

Supernatural plants, however, might be more than mere ingredients. Some fantasy woods, especially the dark, foreboding variety, seem to have a will of their own. Maybe the single tree isn't sentient, but what if, taken together, they have something like a hive mind? Trees also played an important role in many historical religions, and they may do so in fantasy ones, especially if they are gigantic, extremely old, or belonging to rare species. An oak might be a sacred tree, or even a symbol of certain deities; a whole grove might be holy. Priests and clerics will perform their rituals, but either they are also skilled naturalists, or they might need specialists when the trees get sick!

Maybe the link between the plant and the supernatural being is stronger than symbolism. That incredibly tall tree might be a conduit that allows the clerics to talk with the god it's dedicated to. Or that gnarled, evil-looking stump is the right place for summoning a demon -- or even an altar to the less agreeable, swarming, hungry aspect of the Nature goddess. Or maybe the tree *itself*, after the proper ritual, when the stars are right, comes to life as a demi-god. Or it's an inter-dimensional passage: remember *Sleepy Hollow*.

Priceless Seeds

While silkworm cocoons are worth smuggling, and truffles are worth poaching, there are a few agricultural products that are actually worth much more than their weight in gold: spices and drugs.

Spices can help preserving meat, they add unusual and strong flavors to any food, and above all, at several times in history they were a trendy status symbol (see also ["Variety . . . of Life"](#) for a detailed treatment). Spices can be traded and robbed, but first of all one has to *grow* them. And more often than not, they grow in far-away, dangerous, exotic locales, where the natives are unfriendly and the climate uncomfortable. Foreign powers, pirates, and other interlopers will want to take their cut -- literally, at times. Additional drama might be provided if the spice-bearing plant is otherwise a portent, too (a supernatural living being, above, or a dangerous salad, below).

Drugs include both pharmaceutical products and more . . . recreational kinds. Until recently, they were all extracted from plants or plant parts, ranging from the all-important anti-malarial cinchona bark (quinine) to trance-inducing mushrooms, from the simple herbal remedies to coca leaves. Growing drugs can be illegal, dangerous, profitable; it can foster greed, violence and, of course, addiction when the imprudent farmer, gatherer, or guard tries the produce.

Tribal shamans might exact a fearsome revenge on unwary strangers who gallop across the holy ground where their fungi grow once a year, while, as of today, Kalashnikov-wielding thugs guard poppy fields and airborne troops might be sent in to burn them. Deep into the rain forests, unknown pharmaceuticals might still be hiding within humble flowers, and they might well be worth an expedition. In reality, the researchers would carefully test what they find, but in an adventure some unforeseen accident or illness might force them to become guinea pigs . . .

Dangerous Salads And Dangerous Animals

Historically, mankind has fought a relentless war against plants, at least against those plants we couldn't exploit. The conflict is still going on in the Amazon basin, for instance. Burning or felling forests to make room for farming is a typical aspect of this war (which humans usually win), and it would be a classic theme for a natives-vs.-colonists adventure (Elves vs. Humans in a fantasy setting). Most of the time, the animals are more dangerous than the plants;

defending the latter might provide an interesting campaign scope for ranger characters.

On the other hand, sometimes the salads become dangerous. As a defense against herbivores, the plants have developed a dazzling array of barbs, thorns, irritants, and venoms. In a fantasy world, where huge and thick-tongued herbivores might exist, these humble barbs might have become a hazard even for leather-armored adventurers who just happen to stroll through.

Another way for a plant to become a nuisance is through infestation. Weeds may seem a trivial problem . . . until they start stifling the tribe's sacred plantation or ruining the characters' agricultural enterprise. While ordinary weeds may be just be a nuisance, magically boosted or alien plants may become a serious threat. An extremely infesting, fast-growing, resistant, alien plant, against which the local crops are defenseless, is probably the first step in a terraforming attempt (as in the *Chtorr* series): some off-world intelligence has begun modifying the planet for its own use!

The truly scary plant, however, is the carnivorous plant. It's difficult to believe they are not intelligent. And the tricks, traps, and snares they can employ, intelligent or not, might fool even smart preys. On Earth, humans are lucky these plants are sized to capture just insects. At least, those we *know* about are; clever GMs can always come up with new species. The same rules of realism that apply to inventing new beasts apply. A large carnivorous plant can exist only if it can count on a reliable flow of largish prey, and it should probably be able to lure them within its range. Maybe a salad dangerous enough to kill a group of able-bodied heroes isn't too easy to envision; on the other hand, if an adventurer has been separated from his party, and he's wounded, he should beware of the thickets of hungry bird-eating plants!

Familiar Alternatives

What To Give The *d20 System* Mage Who Doesn't Want A Rat, Bat, Or Cat

by Owen K.C. Stephens

In standard *d20 System* fantasy games, sorcerers and wizards gain familiars at 1st level. These companions are fairly resilient, gain in power as the spellcaster goes up in level, and make excellent spies, guards, messengers, and even potion-delivery systems. Unfortunately, familiars simply aren't appropriate for all mage-type character concepts or all campaign styles. When used properly they can be a great boon to these characters, but for various reasons many arcane spellcaster prefer not to take them. This leaves them underpowered compared to their toad-toting brethren.

This article presents different abilities that arcane spellcaster may take instead of familiars. This decision must be made at first level, and cannot be changed. The abilities increase in power as the spellcaster gains levels, much as familiars do. None of the abilities should unbalance a campaign, though they are designed to replace the most useful familiars in the hands of experienced players. Some of the abilities can be enhanced by spending feats (much as there are feats to augment familiars in some *d20 System* books).

A GM may use these abilities to distinguish between spellcasters from different regions or different colleges. In a game trying for a different feel to magic, these abilities might even replace spellcasting ability, with a spellcaster gaining a new ability at each level he would normally gain a new spell level. The balance of such uses is questionable, but tweaking the frequency abilities are gained or the power of each ability can likely come close to a well-balanced class.

Though these abilities were designed to replace an arcane spellcaster's familiar, a GM may also allow similar abilities, such as a druid's animal companion or a bard's lore, to be replaced with one of these.

Arcane Sense

A spellcaster with this ability has acute sense beyond the normal range of those for its species. Its sense sharpen as it gains levels, as determined by the chart below.

Level	Damage
1-4	Low-Light or Alertness
5-8	Darkvision to 60 ft. (add 60 ft. to range if caster already has darkvision)
9-12	Scent
13-16	Blindsense to 60 ft. (hearing-based)
17+	Blindsight to 60 ft. (hearing-based)

Arcane Stamina

A spellcaster with this ability internalizes some of his arcane energies and feeds off them, allowing him to accomplish feats of stamina others of his build cannot.

Level	Bonus
1-4	Endurance feat
5-8	Toughness feat
9-12	Run feat
13-16	Toughness feat

17-20 Immune to sleep effects; need not sleep.

Craft Master

This ability creates a pool of experience the spellcaster can draw upon whenever item creation or spellcasting requires experience point expenditure. Every time the caster gains experience, his pool gains points equal to 10% of the experience gained. For example, a new 1st level sorcerer with craft master has no points in his pool. On his first adventure, he gains 500 XP, and his pool gains points equal to 10% of that (50). If the sorcerer creates a scroll that takes 5 XP, his pool is reduced to 45, though it will gain more points when he next gains experience.

Divine Spells

A spellcaster with this ability gains a small number of divine spells he may prepare and cast as if they were arcane spells (using his normal spell slots). At 3rd level, and every three levels after, the caster selects one divine spell to add to his arcane spell list. This spell is treated as if it were one level higher, and must be at least two levels lower than the highest level spell the caster already has access to. (For example, a 3rd level wizard with this ability, having access to 2nd level spells, could select *cure minor wounds*, a 0-level spell. He could then prepare and cast it as a 1st level spell.)

The spellcaster must select one class of divine spellcaster he may select spells from, and it must be a class that gains spells at 1st level (it's not possible to select ranger or paladin). Each spell, once selected, cannot be changed. Though the spells are treated as arcane spells, they cannot be learned by other arcane spellcasters.

Guardian

A guardian is similar to a familiar, and similar to a follower gained from the Leadership feat, but it's not quite either of these. A guardian is a loyal defender who places the spellcaster's well-being before its own. A guardian is a NPC of a typical ECL 0 race that starts with one non-heroic class level (normally adept, aristocrat, expert, or warrior). The guardian gains another non-heroic level when the spellcaster reaches 3rd, 5th, 7th, 8th, 10th, 11th, 13th, 14th, and 16th and each subsequent level. A spellcaster whose guardian dies suffers the same penalty as one who loses a familiar. A new guardian cannot be gained for a year and a day.

The oaths and mystic ties between a spellcaster and a guardian make the guardian vulnerable to the spellcaster's magics, resulting in a -4 penalty to any save the guardian makes against the spellcaster's spells. A guardian is loyal to the spellcaster in all ways, and is always of true neutral alignment.

Mage Blade

A mage blade is a shimmering melee weapon of arcane energies formed through sheer will, without the careful control and intricate formulas of spells. A spellcaster with this ability may form a mage blade as a standard action, then fight with it as a normal melee weapon.

The attack is treated as a mundane melee weapon (not a touch attack). A mage blade requires no proficiency and counts as a one-handed melee weapon. A mage blade does mundane weapon damage of a type chosen by the spellcaster at 1st level (bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing). The damage a mage blade deals is based on the spellcaster's level, as detailed below.

Level	Damage
1-2	1d3
3-4	1d4
5-8	1d6
9-12	1d8

13-14 1d10
15+ 1d12

Enhancements: By expending a feat, a spellcaster of 7th level or higher may change his mage blade so its damage is cold, fire, or electrical. A second feat allows a spellcaster of 13th or higher level to change his mage blade so it deals acid, sonic, or magic damage. In both cases the damage type is selected when the feat is taken, and cannot be changed.

Mage Bolts

A mage bolt is a missile of arcane energy created without the careful control and intricate formulas of spells. An arcane spellcaster can fire a single mage bolt as a standard action (which provokes an attack of opportunity) as long as he has at least one spell of 1st level or higher available to cast. A spellcaster who has expended all his spells of 1st level or higher cannot summon the energies needed for a mage bolt until he has rested and regained spells.

A character that gains multiple attacks a round may fire one mage bolt per attack when taking a full-attack action. The attack is treated as a mundane ranged weapon (not a touch attack). A mage bolt requires no proficiency, counts as a light weapon, and has a range increment of 20 feet. A mage bolt does mundane weapon damage of a type chosen by the spellcaster at first level (bludgeoning, piercing or slashing). The damage a mage bolt deals is based on the spellcaster's level, as detailed below.

Level	Damage
1-2	1d2
3-4	1d3
5-8	1d4
9-12	1d6
13-14	1d8
15+	1d10

Enhancements: By expending a feat, a spellcaster of 7th level or higher may change his mage bolt so its damage is cold, fire, or electrical. A second feat allows a spellcaster of 13th or higher level to change his mage bolt so it deals acid, sonic, or magic damage. In both cases the damage type is selected when the feat is taken, and cannot be changed.

Turn Elementals

This ability works like the clerical power to turn undead, but works only against creatures of the elemental type. The spellcaster may do this a number of times per day equal to 1 + (Wis Bonus), with a minimum of once per day.

Enhancements: The Extra Turning feat may be applied to this ability. By expending a feat, a spellcaster of 11th or higher level may gain the ability to rebuke elementals.

Turn Fey

This ability works like the clerical power to turn undead, but works only against creatures of the fey type. The spellcaster may do this a number of times per day equal to 1 + (Wis Bonus), with a minimum of once per day.

Enhancements: The Extra Turning feat may be applied to this ability. By expending a feat, a spellcaster of 11th or higher level may gain the ability to rebuke fey.

Witchlight

The spellcaster is able to create a light as a free action without resorting to spells. The light's radius of illumination is based on the caster's level, as are special abilities gained by the light, as detailed below. A radius of shadowy

illumination is cast out to twice this range. Once the witchlight has a range it may be moved once per round by the caster as a free action, or hover at a set distance, moving when the caster moves. The light may be of any color selected by the caster, but once chosen it cannot be changed.

Level	Radius	Range	Special
1-2	10 ft.	0 ft.	
3-4	20 ft.	10 ft.	
5-8	30 ft.	Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)	
9-12	40 ft.	Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)	
13-14	50 ft.	Long (400 ft. + 40 ft./level)	
15+	60 ft.	Long (400 ft. + 40 ft./level)	Light may be used to create a flare targeting any creature within the illumination, once per round, as a free action.

Pyramid Review

Dragon in the Smoke -- A Penny Dreadful for Victoriana

Published by [Heresy Gaming LLP](#)

Written by Kristian Bjorkelo

Cover by Ursula Vernon

Illustrated by Svetlana Chmakova & Matteo Lolli

56-page b&w softcover; \$12.99

Dragon in the Smoke is the first book to be released for [Victoriana -- A Roleplaying Game of Vile Villainy & Glorious Adventure](#), the English RPG that attempted to meld the traditional elements of fantasy RPGs -- Elves, Dwarves, magic, and so on -- with Victorian-era Steampunk. In truth, the finished product, as evidenced by the core rulebook, lacked coherency, but in the hands of a competent GM, there was nothing to prevent a fine game being run from the rules. This first supplement is not *The Smoke -- 1867*, the sourcebook for London as promised, but rather a scenario designed as an introduction to the setting.

Best played with a party of adventurers from across all levels of society, *Dragon in the Smoke* takes the heroes on an investigation and a hunt from high society into the wretched depths of London's East End. Two children have gone missing and their wealthy parents would prefer that they be returned quietly and without fuss. There are two means provided for getting the characters involved in the scenario: the first at the request of the children's parents, and the second through a chance encounter with the Gnome consulting detective that the parents have hired. The former is designed for use with upper-class characters, while the latter can be used with characters of any social standing. In fact, both could be run by the GM and thus used to bring several disparate characters together. No special requirements are needed in terms of character abilities, but a good mix of social and investigative skills would be a good start. The adventure involves very little in the way of magic, and then only during the climactic fight scene.

Dragon in the Smoke revolves around the wealthy Doyle family, the father, Henry Michael Doyle having made his money in the import/export business, specifically of spices in the Far East. That is, of course, a euphemism for importing the drug opium into China. It has not only made Doyle rich, but also allowed him to cultivate all manner of different contacts as well as his passion for the exotic art of the Orient. His latest acquisition is a statuette of a dragon in green jade, one that is reputed to grant its owner immortality. Unfortunately Doyle was never meant to "own" this piece and the "rightful" owners, a Chinese Tong (one that is political rather than criminal in nature) would very much like to have it back. To facilitate this, they hired agents in London, who have taken advantage of the adventuresome nature of Doyle's two children. Henrietta and her younger brother, Michael, stifled by their proper Victorian upbringing have been sneaking out of the house without their parents' permission or knowledge. It is while they were out that the small gang of thugs, employed by the Tong, took the opportunity to kidnap them.

The path of the investigation leads from the Doyle household and back again, through the streets of London, visiting taverns, a theatre, a rough church, an abandoned factory, and points in between. Along the way, the party should encounter members of the bohemian set, revolutionaries, firebrand preachers, various thugs and ner-do-wells, and finally members of the Tong itself. The many NPCs include a variety of different races as well, including Eldren, Dwarves, Halflings, Ogres, Gnomes, Ratmen, and even a Panda Beastman! They are all well-described, and are only stated up enough as is necessary.

Although the adventure is called ***Dragon in the Smoke***, this comes up against the fact that there are *no* dragons in the world of ***Victoriana***. Despite this, a dragon is involved in the story in a nicely handled manner, though one that is far from original. Over all, the adventure is well done, but what lets it down are the production values. The book itself looks good from the cover inwards, and the internal artwork is not bad, but it is in the details that it goes awry. Much like the corebook, ***Dragon in the Smoke*** suffers from a severe lack of proofreading. The fault lies not with the author, although it is clear that English is not his first language. Rather, the errors present in this book are the sort that should all have been picked up by the editor; in places, both the punctuation and the grammar are truly dreadful.

As an introductory adventure ***Dragon in the Smoke*** works very well, and is nicely grounded in one of the British Empire's more distasteful acts, the First and Second Opium Wars. Their inclusion hints at the hypocrisy of polite Victorian society, while the investigation exposes the heroes to some of its dark underbelly. At the adventure's end, the characters should have gained a handful of experience points, made several new contacts across the social spectrum, and -- for those of the lower and middle classes -- possibly earned them a small stipend. Besides the adventure itself, the book contains rules for creating characters that can wield martial arts, these an intentional omission from the core book. For fans of ***Victoriana***, ***Dragon in the Smoke*** makes several references to the forthcoming ***The Smoke -- 1867***, but this is not necessary to play. A map is not included in the adventure, but really a GM can get by without one.

Another unintended feature of ***Dragon in the Smoke*** is that ***Victoriana*** is not necessary to play it. It can be set any time from the 1850s up until the 1890s, which opens it up for use with a number of different RPGs. Most obvious is ***Castle Falkenstein*** and more so its ***GURPS*** conversion, which would allow the fantasy elements of the setting and adventure to be retained, but they could be dropped for use with ***Space 1889***, ***Cthulhu by Gaslight***, ***GURPS Steampunk***, and the 1850 Juncture of ***Feng Shui***. Finally, the scenario would work very well as a Victorian London set adventure for [***Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game***](#) or even a Dr. Who game in the style of the classic episode, *The Talons of Wen Chiang*.

One other advantage that this adventure has over its core rulebook is one of coherency. Limited to just 56 pages, the author is forced to concentrate upon a single subject; he does in such a manner that it can be run under any number of other games. Let down by shoddy editing and proofreading, ***Dragon in the Smoke*** is nonetheless an enjoyable adventure, with plenty of opportunity for action, roleplaying, and investigation.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Draconomicon (for Dungeons & Dragons)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Written by Andy Collins, Skip Williams, & James Wyatt

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288-page full-color hardcover; \$39.95

When you create a game called *Dungeons & Dragons*, sooner or later you're going to have to pony up the dragons. Admittedly, the line has produced this book before, but the 3.5th edition needed its own take, hence the latest incarnation of the *Draconomicon*.

Rather than see the dragon as the huge pile of hit points standing between you and a big pile of treasure, the writers try to flesh out these magnificent beasts. The book treats them as characters first and foremost, participants in the story, and in fact there are guidelines for using them as PCs, NPCs, forces of nature, or just the stuff of legend that dominates an area's history. They can be friend or foe, mentors, or part of the party.

There have been several varieties of dragons introduced over the years, and the issue has been clouded further by the inclusion of pseudo-dragons and other creatures with more than a passing similarity. The book defines what does and doesn't count as a "true" dragon, a necessary consideration because there's a full system for advancing dragons through the various age categories.

The first part of the book goes into heavy detail about dragons as living creatures: what (who) they eat, where they sleep, how they live their lives. Few stones are left unturned as the almost painfully complete ecology is laid out. They give you the bare bones of the beasts, and build from there. That is in no way a metaphor -- the skeletal structure, the scales, the senses, the origin of the flame breath . . . it's all included. There is also plenty about culture: religion, draconic gods, language, misconceptions both from inside the race and without. How they think and how that affects their sense of community is important if you want to know how they get together to mate or raise children.

Big distinctions in the creatures' lives are made through age categories. All dragons start as wyrmlings, and progress through 12 stages to become great wyrms some 1,200 years or more later. When the beast is at the point in its lifespan

where it's ready to die, it's called the twilight, and there's material on both it and the draconic death rituals.

After the general foundation is set down, each dragon category -- the book focuses mostly on the chromatic and metallic types -- is described so you know how blues differ from reds, and whites differ from golds. Once the biology lesson is out of the way, they get to some rules.

The ***Draconomicon*** follows the pattern now familiar to most readers of ***d20 System*** books, but the crunchy bits look at dragons from both sides of a fighter's shield. There are new feats, magics, and prestige classes, for both dragons and those explorers with whose paths they cross. The dragon prestige classes are mostly high-minded and grand, befitting a wondrous beast who seeks to become loftier still. The Dispassionate Watcher of Chronopsis patiently adjudicates matters for his draconic brethren, while the Elemental Master sits and ponders his place as dictated by the very nature of existence itself. Then again, the Unholy Ravager of Tiamat seeks nothing but destruction, held in check only by the Sacred Warrior of Bahamut.

The dragon feats seem like what you'd expect: They're mostly about fighting, but they do help bring the feel of combat with a dragon to life. If you thought dragons were tough customers before, they can now improve in combat just like the PCs. They can constrict with their tails, split their breath weapon among multiple targets (metabreath feats, if you can believe it), or slam the ground so hard it throws you off your feet. (None of these include the epic dragon feats -- those are *really* dangerous.) Then spells that increase the damage of a claw attack or animate breath weapons really ruin your day. And of course, the ever-popular polymorph spells let dragons move undetected among men, making your target harder to find.

On the other side of the rules coin is just folks. Men and their ilk are willing to put their lot in with dragons to one degree or another. Dracolutes worship the draconic gods and Dragonkith serve them, but Dragonriders and Dragonslayers have their own quite obvious uses for dragons (and the Hoardstealer illustration is almost worth the price of admission). New spells ape the dragon's powers or protect the user from them, and the feats allow you to channel dragon-like abilities or improve your chances against oversized beings in combat. If you do manage to kill one, a dragon's parts can be used for any number of spells, rituals, potions, or magic items.

The rest of the book contains primarily DM information. Anyone wanting to match up their dragons with their dungeons can use the tips provided to pit humanoids against the reptiles. How does the GM make the most of his dragon so his players won't walk over it? How does he make it a memorable encounter? Using this book, the winged beasties will become more than a few initiative rolls accompanied by some bursts of fire, they'll be clever and canny opponents, just as you'd expect from someone with centuries of experience.

The adventurers aren't left to their own means. The authors also look at combat from the other side of the equation -- how do you outflank someone who was old when your granddad was in short pants? How do you maneuver the dragon into all the wrong places so you can limit his movement? What forms of attack work best, and which ones are a waste of your firepower? Once both sides have taken this primer to heart, the battles should be much more impressive to play out.

You can have the dragons intermingle with humanoidkind most easily by shape shifting, which allows them to give counsel and seek adventure as any other two-legged being. Barring this, the average dragon can't fit into your standard magic armor, has little need of a shield, and is certainly never seen down at the marketplace. Yet he's always sitting on a stack of equipment and money. Not only does this volume provide new spells and magic items befitting the great race and their girth, it offers reasons why dragons have such a huge stash and tells you to what purpose they put it. Chief among them, it's a ritualistic component for assuring they pass from this life to the next in the manner they'd like. Dragons may become ghosts or even liches when this vale of tears no longer holds any interest for them, and their contributions to the draconic cause may be just beginning at that point. The back of the book takes a quick but terribly useful look at the dragon's hoard, with a handy how-to section on making the treasure experience come alive instead of relegating it to a long-winded DM's laundry list of goodies. There's also a set of sample hoards for CRs 1 through 27, and the items to be found therein have clearly heeded their own advice.

The many forms of the dragon don't end with a change in lifestyle. Just because they aren't "true" dragons doesn't mean the other dragon-like creatures of ***Dungeons & Dragons*** don't warrant some page count. All things draconic are

stuffed into a bestiary. Dragons from other planes, other dimensions, even beyond the grave creep, burrow, and fly from this chapter. Creatures of light, creatures of rust and decay, landwyrms, dragons from the pits of hell, and dozens more let you keep adding twists to what players think of when they hear the word "dragon."

Since there are rules for what dragons are like at different stages of life and more rules that allow them to advance as player characters do (the average PC only gets to see a snapshot of the dragon's total lifespan, so you have to scale it down from changes made over the centuries), the writers also wanted readers to see how dragons of different levels work when the character creation and development systems are put to work. To this end, they've provided a sample character for all the main dragon types at all levels.

Yes, that's right, 10 different dragons, 12 stages of life, 120 sample dragon characters with a thumbnail personality, their stat block, their spells, and their skills. A fourth of the book is taken up by these characters, the write-ups getting longer and longer as the dragons get older. And this is really the problem with the product.

The level of detail throughout is astounding, and while not dull by any stretch, it could obviously have been truncated in the interests of a briefer -- but perhaps less marketable? -- book. Wizards of the Coast seems unwilling to let go of a certain style of book design, one that apparently demands a minimum page count and the hard binding. The text isn't bad, but it's creative filler in too many instances. It's too much of a good thing; you just don't need so much of this. It also suffers from that custom **d20 System** books have of taking a piece of creature information (such as the Swim ability) and putting it in front of almost every single beast complete with the full ability description. Wizards of the Coast has also given up on an index when it's needed most.

The anatomical drawings, the depictions of the typical lair for each dragon type, the combat schematics . . . the artwork is another gallery of some of the finest talent in the business. The layout and graphics hold their own (but get ready for more of that text falling into the crack of the spine), and you can't fault either the quality or the commitment to the subject. Alas, **Draconomicon** fills a need that few fans will want to omit from their collection, and it does so by placing at least as much value on salability as it does on quality.

--Andy Vetromile

Irregular Webcomic



by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic



Irregular Webcomic



Murphy's Rules



by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules



¿Como Te Llama Gamespeak?

Lately I've been listening to a lot of [This American Life](#), the National Public Radio program with stories and vignettes about . . . well, just about anything involving life in the United States.

And by a lot, I mean a *lot*. I've gone through pretty much every weekly program from 1997 to 2000 in the past month. Listening in this way gives a very distorted view of time; themes flow like waves. In the span of a half-day it is Father's Day, then Election Day, then Thanksgiving, then Christmas. Soon the year changes, and it's Father's Day again.

Anyway, this week's column was indirectly inspired by holiday fare. For the 1999 [Christmas episode](#), writer and humorist David Sedaris had a story detailing an incident in an adult education French class in France, where he and his other classmates found themselves trying to explaining Easter to a Moroccan student. The problem for him and the class was two-fold. First, there was the difficulty in describing unfamiliar concepts in an unfamiliar language: "The rabbit of Easter! He bring of the chocolate! He come in the night when one sleep on a bed. With a hand he have the basket, like for bread!" The second problem was that the holiday traditions *themselves* didn't align; for example, apparently in France tradition has it that Easter chocolate is delivered by a flying bell from Rome, so concepts like "the rabbit of Easter" were viewed as completely cuckoo.

Anyway, the culture aspect of this anecdote should be fairly self-explanatory (and it's one I touch on from time to time already, most recently [a couple months ago](#)). But the aspect I found of this to be most inspiring was the idea of language.

Not too long ago I ran a LARP one-shot. I pregenerated characters for the players, and sent them on their way. Now, this was a LARP set in the ***Fading Suns*** universe, a feudal space opera setting with nobles and churches and grand (but nearly lost) technology coexisting in an uneasy balance. I tried divvying up the group as best I could into the three pillars (nobility, clergy, and skilled laborers), hoping they would find a means of coexisting but remaining stratified within their subgroups, as befit the system.

Almost as an afterthought, I gave two of the groups something that proved instrumental in this goal: Languages.

Within the game world, many factions already had their own languages, used to transmit their own lore and teachings. For example, the church had Latin, while the engineers and think machine (a.k.a. computer) operators had Urthtech, a dialect of the "normal" Urthish language consisting of jargon and slang that is almost incomprehensible to non-speakers. (As an aside, as an ex-comp-sci cadet, I found that to be one of the more brilliant additions of ***Fading Suns***. Watching my physicist and engineering friends get into arguments back in college was a whirlwind of indecipherable jargon, in-jokes, and general geekery gobbledygook.)

While the Tower of Babel's destruction drove mankind into disharmony by spreading the confusion of differing languages, giving each faction in the LARP proved to be a unifying force. By simply allowing subgroups to communicate among themselves -- with the expedient of being able to tell other players "You can't understand us!" -- I was able to create a more immersive simulation of the game world, where various groups guard their secrets fiercely.

As such, I can heartily recommend adding -- or enforcing -- languages for certain campaigns. Here are some ideas to spark your imagination about the addition of other tongues to the game:

Consider being misunderstood. I have had considerable fun playing characters whose command of the prevalent language is less-than-perfect. For example, I have played spiritual entities who can only speak ancient versions of one PC's language, resulting in mangling not dissimilar to David Sedaris' anecdote above: "Ah, yes . . . you seek crystal-shine stone part for to be stopping the bringing to completion the story of aged badness that is threatening to bring final harm to you and the friends of you?" (For some reason I find it easier to do this while adopting an outrageous Monty Python-esque "French" accent.) Usually this technique is only suited for short-term characters or characters who will eventually learn to speak more fluently, since -- let's be honest -- too much mangled language will probably result in

eventual sharp plasticine polyhedrons flung at your head.

On the other hand, it is possible to play a character who will *never* be understood. I never got to witness it firsthand, but my friend [Dennis](#) was in an old *Star Wars* game (pre-*d20 System*). One player was playing a Wookie, who has -- as part of his template -- the condition that one other PC can understand Wookie. So the Wookie player chose the Ewok PC as his confidant . . . and the Ewok doesn't have *any* necessary provisions for being understood by anyone else. Apparently whole scenes would pass with the Wookie and Ewok players gibbering away at each other in their own *Star Wars*-y alien imitations. And all the players loved it.

Consider all communication. Alternate, exclusive communications don't always mean a literal language. For example, science fantasy engineers may have their own tongue (such as Urthtech), or they may instead have access to an exclusive bulletin board system where they can communicate privately or publicly with others of their kind; access to this BBS might only be possible for those who get a special, guild-certified implant that allows them neural access. (And, to be honest, the biggest reason I mention this example is to try to make sure the world doesn't forget what a BBS is/was for at least another few months.) *Changeling* posits a "language" between noble fae that consists entirely of subtle gestures, nuances of word-choice, and minute interactions between its "speakers" (which drives commoners nuts); two nobles may be speaking audibly about the changes in the weather between their fiefs, but in actuality they are subtly threatening each other and attempting to see how willing or eager the other is to go to war. ("My people are very willing to withstand most ordinary storms." "Truly? I've heard it said that this coming season will be tumultuous indeed . . .") Creating and using these kind of alternate "languages" can go a long way toward distinguishing characters and generating new avenues for plots.

Make sure players can't "eavesdrop." Not all groups may have a problem with this, but most groups I've been with have a problem separating player and character knowledge, especially when it comes to conversations they aren't supposed to understand:

Powerful NPC, Speaking to the One PC who Shares His Language: "This group of yours . . . they do not seem worthy and respectful of my help."

PC Who Speaks the Language: "Uhhh . . ."

PC Who Doesn't Speak the Language: "If he happens to think we're not worthy, tell him we will offer to perform a test to prove our merit."

To help prevent this, I'll generally pull players who have the required language aside and have the conversation solely with them. Other groups pass notes or use other techniques, but I've always found this to be too slow . . . and, given my atrocious "refrigerator crayon drawing" handwriting, prone to errors. However, neither option is ideal; even if you don't speak a language, you can still glean information and sensations from the *way* the speaker is talking. (To be honest, this is one area where I'm hoping that some Clever Technological Breakthrough -- like anti-babelfish -- will enable me to keep players together in the same room, while still carrying on false "foreign" conversations with them. If anyone has any ideas, I'm all ears.)

Give useful game information to the language-bearers. Obviously, having a cool language that is never useful is . . . well, not so cool. If other players don't have the language (and thus promote intra-party unity and interaction), then the GM should consider making clues and lore available only in that language, if only to give those who put character points into languages a chance to shine as much as those who put it into the Prevalent Weapon skill.

All this should help bring the fun of communication to the gaming table, and hopefully give you some new ideas.

In the meantime, I need to await the man who wears red and has much fat; soon he comes down the place where there is fire to give us the boxes of things to play.¹

--Steven Marsh

* * *

¹ And for those looking for another hilarious David Sedaris Christmas story, I would direct you to [this episode](#) of This American Life.

The Sevenpart Soul

by [Chad Underkoffler](#)

Art by [Chris Cooper](#)

Genre & Fidelity: Fairy Tale

Style: Seelie or Unseelie

Campaign Setting and Background Information

The unborn Heir to the throne of the fairy tale kingdom of Mirabilis has been reft of his or her soul by evil magicians! Can anyone avert this curse before the Prince (or Princess) is born and catastrophe ensues?

What Everybody Knows

The Kingdom of Mirabilis

Ruled by Good King Frietag and his wife Good Queen Sarida, Mirabilis is a nation created by the recent union of the two smaller kingdoms of Mira and Bilis.

- *Mira:* The royal family of the Sunblessed has held the crown of Mira since time immemorial. Their clear-sightedness and strength in battle is proverbial, and they have ruled their forested land and plainspoken people with firmness and fairness. Even while a Prince, King Frietag warred against the roaming dragons, evil sorcerers, and wicked witches that came down from the northern mountains every season.
- *Bilis:* In Bilis, the cool valleys spill out onto verdant plains. The folk of Bilis are generous and stout, and both of these characteristics spring from their fertile croplands. The Moonseer family has ruled them with mercy and care since before the first stars lit the sky, and will do so forever, Moon-willing. When but a Princess, Queen Sarida proved a powerful and good witch, and staved off several supernatural attacks against her people by malcontent magicians.
- *Union:* Almost a year ago, these neighboring kingdoms fused into a single land with the marriage of Frietag and Sarida. The magic that runs deep in both of their bloodlines has begun to mix, and has helped push back threats against the new nation: fell monsters, envious kings, and evil wizards.

Mirabilian Magic

The magic of the world of the kingdom of Mirabilis is folk magic, fairy tale magic, empowered superstition. Supernatural abilities reside in people, things, and deeds:

- *People:* Some folk have abilities that surpass -- or transcend -- the skills of mundane people. Any unusual capability or an uncanny mastery of a familiar skill is considered magical. Examples include things in the vein of Eyes of the Hawk, the Strength of 10 Men, the Fastest Man Alive, Uncanny Minstrelry, Speak with Animals, Shapechanging, Spinning Straw into Gold, Catlike Tread, and so forth. These abilities could be the result of an unusual heritage or upbringing -- Son of the Wind, Fairy Changeling, Witch's Daughter, Full-Blooded Ogre, etc. (Some magical animals also fit into this category: felines with footwear, fowl that lay precious metals, dogs with unusually large eyes, etc.)
- *Things:* Magical power can be found in natural products of the earth -- herbs, crystals, the body parts of animals -- or constructed works of fine craftsmanship (which often require powerful natural products in their construction) -- Singing Swords, Invisibility Rings, Holocaust Cloaks, etc.
- *Deeds:* Step on a crack, break your mother's back. Find a penny, pick it up, and all the day you'll have good

luck. Sprinkle spilled salt over your shoulder to turn aside misfortune. Sow a good turn, reap one in return. Ask for your parent's blessing before your feet touch the road. Look into a dish of water when the light of the first star shines into it, and see your destined lover's face. Any superstitious ritual or action taken with the correct intent can be magical.

A magician (wizard, witch, sorcerer, etc.) is a being that possesses the abilities and/or lore of one or more of the above categories; everyone is a potential magician. (See also below, *Running Mirabilian Magic*.)

Disaster at the Anniversary Feast

The royal couple summoned all their loyal subjects to attend them upon the anniversary of their -- and the nation's -- union. A great tournament, fair, and gala ball was declared. Vast supplies of meat and drink were laid in, entertainers from near and far came to ply their trade at court, far-flung nobles -- both major and minor -- obeyed with alacrity, even country-bumpkins came, carrying their hard-won wares and produce to sell. All was well, all were happy, all were safe . . .

. . . Until after the tournament, on the last day of the fair, in the very hall of the fete, hot on the heels of the announcement that Good Queen Sarida was gloriously with child: tragedy struck. The sun itself dimmed, unexpectedly eclipsed by the moon, and seven shadows formed around the sitting Queen, tearing at her, striking long sparks off of her magical protections.

Good King Frietag and his wizard, Greenegg, leapt to her defense with sword and spell, but as hawk-swift as they were, the shadows were lightning. With a terrible shriek, they wrested magic from her -- no, not her, but her unborn child -- and fled. "My baby," she sobbed. "They've stolen its *soul*!"

The Quest

The situation is this: The soul of the still-quickening Heir has been stolen, and ripped into seven pieces. These pieces must be found, recovered, and returned, or else catastrophe will befall Mirabilis. Even the royal wizard Greenegg cannot see a jot of the future past the child's birth, not even to determine the sex of the Heir. All this wise one can glean are vague forebodings of the forthcoming:

- *The best case scenario* is that the child will be born without a soul, leading to either -- if incomplete -- a dire weakness in the future ruler of the land or -- if totally missing -- an unspeakable monster.
- *The worst case scenario* is that the fires that light the Sun and Moon themselves will start to dwindle and die, plunging the entire world into eternal darkness.

As the Queen has been weakened by the attack, so Mirabilis' might has been reduced. King Frietag must redouble efforts to keep the land secure from without, while Greenegg guards and supports Sarida, who struggles to maintain peace within. Therefore, none of these three mighty can seek the infant's soul -- and this inability galls them greatly. They call upon their gathered people, asking for the bravest, smartest, strongest amongst them step forward, to take up this gauntlet, to save their child, the kingdom, and possibly the world.

The Rewards

Why would anyone undertake such a Quest, seeking out obviously dangerous sorcerers?

- It's the right thing to do.
- Pity for the Heir, the King, and the Queen.
- Self-preservation -- if the Heir is weak, the land will be unprotected.
- The King offers a boon to any that bring back a part of the Heir's soul: he will grant anything asked, if it lies within his power, save that the request does not harm or imperil his family, his people, or his kingdom.
- Elevation to the aristocracy.

- Sacks and sacks of treasure.
- Royal pardon for any crime.
- The right to choose any unwed person to take as spouse (provided the spouse-elect agrees).
- And so forth . . .

The Sevenpart Soul

Greenegg can tell the King, the Queen, and those volunteers who take up the Quest the following information:

- Seven Parts:* The seven parts of the Heir's soul are:
 1. Beauty;
 2. Grace;
 3. Health;
 4. Strength;
 5. Willpower;
 6. Wisdom; and
 7. Wit.
- Spiritual Artifacts:* The externalization of the internal leads to power, magically. Thus, the seven parts of the Heir's soul have collapsed into physical objects that bequeath great ability upon the wearer. If held by one utterly lacking in the respective aspect of spirit, it grants them Good ability to all things involving that quality; held by someone with mild familiarity with that aspect, it grants Master ability; and to those already possessing a large amount of that aspect, it grants truly *supernatural* prowess (lifting a castle, jumping over the moon, parrying lightning, that sort of thing).
- Recovery:* The objects that comprise the Sevenpart Soul can only be retaken in three ways:
 1. Surrendered freely to another by the wearer;
 2. Stolen from the wearer's person at noon or midnight; or
 3. If the wearer is bested in a challenge of the spiritual aspect of the artifact.
- One Chance:* The ritual to restore the pieces of the infant's soul can only be performed once: the artifacts must be touched to the Heir's body before its first cry. So, as many pieces -- if not all -- of the Sevenpart Soul must be assembled and guarded for that singular moment.
- Time Limit:* The Queen was exactly two months pregnant when the shadows stole her baby's soul. This means that a clock is ticking, counting down to catastrophe. Greenegg has been able to fix precisely the span remaining: seven months and seven days before the child is born.
- Born Incomplete:* If the Heir is born without its entire soul, catastrophe will ensue. The child will probably be weak or twisted in some manner, since it will be out of balance. This could give rise to troubling future attitudes, actions, and fortunes, leading to personal, Mirabilian, or even world-wide devastation.

What Everybody Doesn't Know

The Seven Sinister Sorcerers

Individually, each of the Seven Sinister Sorcerers began making plans to injure the royal couple of Mirabilis on their anniversary. As they devised their varied stratagems, they became aware of the plans of the others. Among themselves, they came to solemn agreement: whoever's trap successfully sprung and caught the King and Queen, that Sorcerer would lead them all.

Alas, the protections woven around the couple were too strong: the poisoned apple was fed to a horse, the hired assassins were identified and killed before they could strike, the enchanted comb fell into the privy, the misled dupes woke up to their treachery, and so forth. The situation looked hopeless for our villains.

But then, Eniale Morgan realized that the eclipse predicted for later that day (in a rare, outlawed tome of witchery of which she possesses the only copy in the kingdom) would have an effect on the magic of both the Sunblessed and the Moonseer bloodlines. In exchange for freeing her from her gilded cage, she told the other six of the rare opportunity they had been given. Starting with Mazer, the others strongly approved. With the understanding that they'd work together for the nonce and sort out the division of Mirabilis after the Heir was born, they moved with a quickness. Utilizing all their magical talents and skills, they were able to successfully steal and shatter the Heir's soul and escape.

More information on each of the Seven Sinister Sorcerers can be found below (see *NPC Backgrounds* and also *Seven Sinister Situations*).

The Effects of Soul Externalization

What effect with the externalization of the Heir's soul into Spiritual Artifacts have if some or all of the pieces are returned to the Heir? Here are three options:

1. The soul aspect is *strengthened* by the "exercise" it received;
2. The soul aspect is *weakened* by having some of its apportioned amount of power used up; or

3. No effect.

PC Opportunities

Given the nature of the anniversary festivities -- fair, tournament, and ball -- just about any pseudo-medieval fairy tale character can be present at the beginning of the Quest: visiting princes of charm, lackwit but lucky third sons, apprentice witches, merchants, swineherds, chambermaids, blacksmiths, storytellers, heroic little girls off to see their grandma . . . anything.

The Quest -- this campaign -- is "Who's for Adventure?" writ large and sprinkled with Fairy Dust. Encourage your players to generate characters that would accept the challenge; characters that will accept the companionship of the other PCs would also be a good idea. (However, if a PC "party" just doesn't jell, running each PC's adventures in parallel with judicious uses of "cross-cutting" and "meanwhile, in the wastelands . . ." can work rather well.)

Players should decide which part of the kingdom they come from, and how far away from the Palace their home village is: this can help them flesh out their backgrounds with knowledge of (or possible past interactions with) one or more of the Seven Sinister Sorcerers (see below, *NPC Quick Reference Chart*).



NPC Backgrounds

Grobvadr: Ever since he can remember, Grobvadr has desired immortality, and all his researches and evil deeds have centered on this goal. A Master Alchemist, he is wise in the lore of the mystical qualities of plants, metals, minerals, and animals, and how to extract this power for his uses. Unfortunately, Queen Sarida kept thwarting his more involved and depraved experiments. He coldly joined with the other six miscreants in stealing the Heir's soul and won the Pearl Cloak of Wisdom for his trouble. He repaired to his hidden cave lab in the Wastelands of Bilis to apply his new acumen to his alchemical studies, but something has gone wrong. His new insight is showing him that he is doing evil, that he is following a wrong path, and that his entire life has been a tissue of wickedness. Stripped of his personal illusions, he struggles to determine what he must do to save his soul.

Rietta Lachat: Driven by the simple lust for gold (Poor ability to resist her Greed), Rietta is an Expert Knife-fighter, Master Dancer, and Mira's top Master Thief. Her criminal skills are aided by an inherent magical ability: Unable to Be Restrained by Normal Means Against Her Will (Expert). Without mastercraft mundane measures or strong magical ones, she cannot be stopped from going where she wants to go, no matter how secluded or remote. (This power also allows her to shed fetters, the grasping hands of guards, ropes, etc.) However, one snare *has* caught her: love. While attempting to pilfer Xul's Iron Tree, she came upon the enchanter and fell for him madly. He responded in kind, and built her a little cottage up among the waving branches of his home. Separately and together, this couple has plagued King Frietag for a decade. Rietta wears the Silken Slippers of Grace, enhancing her normal agility to supernatural levels -- she can now walk across smoke, skip across water, and dance up the sheerest walls with ease.

Leidan Manticora: Driven by his secret shame of only being a half-ogre rather than a full-blooded one, Leidan Manticora is a big Bully (Poor Social Interactions, except for Intimidation). His heritage has given him Master level Strength and Toughness, which he applies to any obstacle which pops up in his path (Poor Thinking). For Leidan, he is the hammer and everything else is a nail. Unfortunately, Queen Sarida has always been the nail that could not be hammered down. She has stopped every one of his plans; obviously, he wasn't strong enough. However, he should be now, because his hands are sheathed in the Steel Gauntlets of Strength, forged from her very own Heir. he will show the little Queen who's boss *now*. In the Tower of Time, Leidan prepares, gathering his barbarian forces and all the

necessary supplies for war.

Eniale Morgan: Step-sister of King Frietag, Eniale has always been plain-looking and Envious (Poor) of her step-sibling, but she's tried to make up for it with a Good Wit, an Expert gift for Lying, and a Master-ful grasp of intrigue. She's also an Expert in the use of sorcerous sigils and runes. But against the rightful king, all her plans to depose him and rule in his stead have come to naught. After her last escapade, Frietag made her a virtual prisoner in the Palace, where he could keep an eye on her. Freed by the other six, she is the one who realized the opportunity afforded by the eclipse. Her reward for her treachery against her unborn niece or nephew was the Diamond Circlet of Beauty, which has made her ravishing (Master Beautiful) and quite a bit Vain (Poor). Currently, she is insinuating herself into the royal court of the neighboring kingdom of Emases, where she plans to murder the Queen, marry the elderly King, and take his throne . . . all as a prelude to rolling over Mirabilis with Emases' legions.

Mazer Remarque: Mazer Remarque's youthful devotion to chaotic gods was rewarded with the gift of Expert Shapeshifting. This talent, combined with his industrious nature, makes him a Master of his chosen profession -- Sabotage. He hates and fears organization and perfection (Poor Reactions to displays of Order), and loathes Mirabilis and its monarchs because of this. Mazer latched onto Eniale's plan with great fervor, as the destruction of Mirabilis through its soulless Heir would be the crowning achievement of his career. He has remained in the Palace to assure that no one can prune the wonderful flower of anarchy that will grow from the seed he and his comrades have planted. Through his magical transformations, Mazer skulks as slovenly chambermaid, fly on the wall, obsequious minister, squeaking rat, and other forms to gum up the works of the Quest. He is supported in his interference with the Iron Mask of Willpower (reveling in delightful irony that part of the Heir will be the kingdom's undoing), which allows him to resist any mundane privation -- hunger, thirst, sleeplessness, pain -- in this pursuit.

Guillermo Typus: Wise -- or rather, *wicked* -- in the ways of the darker side of the natural world, Guillermo is an Expert in Speaking to Animals and Compounding Toxins (from plants and venoms). He's also Good at Cursing Others with Sickness. He's always been a minor irritant to the King and Queen, living in a small manor in the heart of the Verdulent Swamp of Bilis, where he harries the simple countryfolk. Sickly since birth (Poor Constitution), he claimed the Spiritual Artifact that would bolster his strength: the Amethyst Girdle of Health. Possession of the Girdle eliminates his weakness, positioning this minor player into a more dangerous foe. After a short period of enjoying his newfound wellness, he plans on creating a great swarm of nasty creatures and leading them through the swamps, into the sewers of the capital, where they will burst up into the Palace itself and begin to feed on all within.

Xul (the Crafty): Xul is the grandson of the greatest maker of Miran magical toys, but early in his apprenticeship to the old man, he found that he preferred to create enchanted items for himself rather than others (like his Flying Cloak and his Holocaust Sticks). A Master Enchanter and Intellect, he increasingly sees most other people as simply marionettes having their strings pulled by forces they do not understand. Why shouldn't he be the Puppeteer, then? He'd do a damnsight better job than whatever lout they have working now. This outlook makes him Poor at Interacting with Most People, and when not attempting to take over the throne, he prefers the privacy of his Iron Tree and his enchanted automata to living things. The major exception to this tendency is Rietta Lachat, the thief he loves. He has built her a little cottage for her atop his Tree, which is nearly impossible to reach, unless one is a very skilled climber or can fly. Singly and as a couple, Xul and Rietta have battled with King Frietag for over 10 years. Now, with the added brilliance granted to him through the power of the Ruby Ring of Wit, he is closer than ever to achieving world domination.

NPC Quick Reference Chart

NPC Name	NPC Demesnes	Distance from Palace	NPC Artifact
Grobvadr	A cave near the Wastelands.	Very Far (Bilis)	Pearl Cloak of Wisdom
Rietta Lachat	A cottage high in the Iron Tree.	Far (Mira)	Silken Slippers of Grace

Leidan Manticora	The Tower of Time.	Near (Bilis)	Steel Gauntlets of Strength
Eniale Morgan	Formerly, a prison-suite in the Palace; now, unknown (the court of the King of Emases).	Moderate (on the other side of Mira)	Diamond Circlet of Beauty
Mazer Remarque	Unknown (an unused storage room in the North Tower of the Palace).	Unknown (the Palace itself)	Iron Mask of Willpower
Guillermo Typus	A small manor in the middle of the Verdulent Swamp.	Moderate (Bilis)	Amethyst Girdle of Health
Xul the Crafty	The Iron Tree.	Far (Mira)	Ruby Ring of Wit

Events & Possible Story Arcs

It could be interesting for some groups to play through thwarting the various plots of the Seven Sinister Sorcerers noted in the *What Everyone Doesn't Know* section above. Then, suddenly, stakes are raised by the eclipse and ritual soul-theft of the Heir.

Also, the individual arcs of the PCs could be woven into the storyline of the campaign for maximum joy. For example, if a PC has an evil stepparent, consider making one of the Seven Sinister Sorcerers take on that role. Or if the PC has been enchanted into a four-foot-tall talking rabbit, perhaps completion of the Quest will release them from the curse.



Seven Sinister Situations

Each of the Seven Sinister Sorcerers has a plan for attacking Mirabilis' King and Queen. Depending upon when the PCs encounter them, the plans mentioned in their write-ups will be in different stages of development. *Early* means if the NPC is one of the first two approached; *middle* means that the specific NPC is tackled third, fourth, or fifth; and *late* means that the NPC is one of the last two sorcerers dealt with.

Grobvadr: Grobvadr is wrestling with the emergence of a powerful conscience that is not his own. He has retreated to integrate his thoughts.

- *Early:* Will put up token resistance if approached in this phase, before ultimately surrendering.
 - *Middle:* Will welcome PCs, and offer to aid them in retrieving the Spiritual Artifacts.
 - *Late:* Will already be actively working to collect the Spiritual Artifacts.
-

Rietta Lachat: Rietta really has no plans against the King and Queen currently: the severance of the Heir's soul left her a bit uncomfortable. (She still wants to keep the Slippers; she's just a little guilty over it.) Furthermore, after their escape, she had a huge fight with Xul, and the two are barely speaking to one another.

- *Early:* Remains secluded in her swaying, swinging, difficult-to-reach cottage; enjoying her slippers, not speaking to Xul.
- *Middle:* Guilt over events increases; initial overtures of reconciliation between Rietta and Xul.
- *Late:* Agrees to help Xul in his plan (see below), but guilt over the fate of the Heir is quite high.

Leidan Manticora: Leidan struts around the Tower of Time, spending half the day creating his military force, and the other half roughhousing, gambling, and carousing.

- *Early:* Actively recruiting barbarians to his army; laying in supplies.
 - *Middle:* Training his soldiers; sending out scout units and setting up caches.
 - *Late:* Begins marching on the capital and the Palace.
-

Eniale Morgan: Eniale is playing a longer game -- she's quite content to let the Heir be born and grow while she solidifies her hold on the King (and kingdom) of Emases and begins deep plots of diplomacy and intrigue, to stir up the ire of other neighboring kingdoms against Mirabilis.

- *Early:* Is becoming a fixture in Emases court society.
 - *Middle:* Is about to poison the Queen of Emases.
 - *Late:* Is about to marry the King of Emases.
-

Mazer Remarque: Mazer just likes messing things up, and prefers to start small and move to greater and greater levels of disruption. If possible, he prefers to perform a very small action that causes iterative changes until eventually, the whole target flies apart from the stress.

- *Early:* Does a little sabotage on *all* groups beginning the Quest (make sure their horse throws a shoe; sleeping draught in their wineskins, handing out wrong maps, paying guides to mislead questers, etc.).
 - *Middle:* Begins sending hired thugs and assassins against the PCs and whispering evil rumors about them in the Palace.
 - *Late:* Leaves the Palace himself to take the fight to the PCs, backed by a small group of highly-skilled cutthroats.
-

Guillermo Typus: Guillermo thinks small -- simple pain, cruelty, mayhem, and murder (he's only slightly smarter or sneakier than Leidan). He's mildly sadistic, but strictly minor league.

- *Early:* Guillermo spends most of his time running around the swamps, jumping, swimming, beating up on the peasants, and generally loafing.
 - *Middle:* Guillermo begins collecting his Swarm of Doom and concocting barrels of disease potions and poisonous elixirs.
 - *Late:* Guillermo leads his Swarm of Doom out of the swamps to the sewers, and prepares to dump his noxious brews into the Palace's water supply. After doing so, he'll wait a day or two for the poisons to take effect, and then burst up from below with the Swarm of Doom at his heels.
-

Xul (the Crafty): The Ruby Ring makes Xul supernaturally smart -- smarter than any normal human could ever be. This can be a difficult thing to portray for a GM. Here's a suggestion to help mimic that level of intellect, but *be warned* this will require a delicate touch. Simply, Xul will have thought of all reasonable, normal plans that the PCs could have come up with, and formulated a response. Now, there are three codicils to this:

1. Magic -- especially unknown and undisplayed capabilities -- muddies the waters.
2. Xul sees human interaction as simply a case of stimulus and response (that is, relationships and emotions are imposed from without, rather than arising from within), so that any action taken from random chance or impulse skew Xul's formulations.
3. The quality of Xul's response may be altered by circumstances outside of his control (flash floods washing away his Hopping Dolls, for example).

Furthermore, as the campaign progresses, Xul will become aware of the vying forces arraying upon the field, and will pay specific attention to three of them: Grobvadr's turn to the side of the angels, Eniale Morgan's machinations, and the Questing PCs (in that order).

- *Early*: Xul is creating enchanted toy soldiers and items of mayhem. Rietta is not speaking to him.
- *Middle*: Xul becomes aware that all is not right with Grobvadr and that Eniale is active in Emases. He begins to make-up with Rietta, and begins working on something that will allow him to take hold of other people's strings and become the Great Puppeteer.
- *Late*: Xul completes his special item, and convinces Rietta to smuggle it into the Palace; when activated, it will use the Heir -- through the intertwined mystical bloodlines of Mira and Bilis -- to skein the "strings" controlling all Mirabilians, placing their free will under his control. Xul sends minions to eliminate Grobvadr, and spies to watch Eniale and the PCs.

Advice, Opportunities, & Pitfalls

Fairy Tale Elements

Since fairy tales and myths are ubiquitous world-wide, most people have a decent grasp on how they go. Here's some quick reminders:

1. People get what they deserve in the long run.
2. Innocence protects for a short time only, because it cannot last forever.
3. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.
4. The youngest children in a family usually suffer the most, but are also the most lucky.
5. Evil tends to stem from envy and jealousy.
6. Step-relations are usually evil.
7. Favors done "for goodness' sake" are repaid greatly; favors done for gain usually backfire; unreturned favors lead to dire consequences.

Style: *Seelie* vs. *Unseelie*

An interesting question the GM should consider is whether he wants to run a *Seelie* fairy tale campaign (more lighthearted; rated G or PG) or an *Unseelie* fairy tale campaign (grimmer and grittier, or possibly just "nonstandard" fairy tales; rated PG-13, R, or NC-17). All players should know which style of game in which they'll be playing: it's often not fun to be a Disney character in a Fractured Fairy Tale -- or vice-versa.

Running Mirabilian Magic

Fairy tale magic -- and thus Mirabilian Magic -- has a different flavor than most RPG magic systems. Enchanted items proliferate, but the reader is rarely told how they are manufactured. Spells range wildly in power level, and aren't constructed to be consistent. Strange things happen; everything is topsy-turvy. Magic almost always "works" -- a failure in doing magic doesn't mean it doesn't activate, it means *something unintended happens* (for example, a flubbed love spell rebounds on the caster, or affects an unintended target).

The core concern with fairy tale magic is that it's a plot element usually used to surmount a difficulty that is presented. Good fairy tale magic is more shield than sword, used in defense (from attack, from hunger, from evil fairy tale magic, from intrigue) to protect the caster. Evil fairy tale magic is more sword than shield, used to hack away at or cow an enemy.

In running Mirabilian Magic, a GM should:

1. *Encourage* his players to come up with fairy-tale like abilities, spells, favors, and items to use in play; if that

- fails, he should *offer* opportunities for the PCs to gain suitable such.
2. Then, the GM must *evaluate* the magic so used. If the magic done is:
 - *Meaningful* (moves the game or storyline forward in a reasonable way), it should be permitted to work.
 - *Gratuitous* (unjustified, unreasonable, unnecessary, overkill, or otherwise out of place in a fairy tale), it should rebound negatively on the caster in some way.
 3. Lastly, the GM should *explore* the ramifications of the result of the magic. If a powerful Bard sings such that the stones of a castle's wall dance out of his way, will that cause the wall to collapse? Once freed of their masonic interment, can they be sung back into place? Or will they steadfastly refuse to return to the wall, leaving a clear breach? Are the stones now more inherently magical, having danced?

Genre Adaptations

With a little twisting, the fairy tale aspects of this campaign can be fit into other genres. Here are three examples:

- *Sevenpart Superpowers*: Nearly everyone rejoiced when they heard the news: Captain Incredible and Miracle Lady were expecting! Metahuman researchers around the world pondered the implications of this super-union; superheroes smiled under mask or cowl, heartened by a new ally to come in the fight against evil; almost every supervillain quaked a bit in fear. *Almost* every supervillain. Seven didn't. Using their combined powers and abilities, they ambushed the pregnant superheroine on her usual-patrol-that-won't-be-affected-by-my-condition, and managed to steal away the incredible superpowers of the child growing within her, and began a reign of terror. They must be stopped!
- *Sevenpart Splices*: Biff and Lacey Suriban, the richest couple in L5 (of Suriban BioTechnoNano, GmbH), spent several fortunes assuring that their progeny would have all the most advanced quality bio- and nano-splices available, literally trillions of credits. In comparison, it could be said -- unfairly perhaps -- that they could have spent more on personal security. Alas. A crack team of combat geneticists stripped the mods from the living embryo of their child. But why? Revenge? Corporate espionage? Activism? Terrorism? Biff Suriban wants to know exactly who and exactly why; Lacey Suriban wants is everyone responsible exactly *dead*; and they have the credits to burn in this pursuit.
- *Sevenpart Streets*: Frankie Dispositivo is a master of the Deal, able to buy and sell *everything* -- the secret recipe for your mother's meatloaf, seven years of bad luck, Hawkie's 20/20 vision, whatever. His wife Molly's a witch, wise in herbs and crystals and moonlight rituals -- to bring love, to interpret dreams, to shed curses. They grew up together as kids, and have always been crazy about each other. Molly captured Frank's conscience with a net made of tears to win him back to the side of Light. Together, these two lovebirds have brought something good back to Miracle Street: a sense of community. In this urban fantasy setting, they are the ones look out for their neighbors, in both the mundane and mystical senses. The whole block has been looking forward to the birth of their baby. But, one doesn't get to be a magical mover and shaker without stepping on a few toes: Frankie's got enemies from before he fell for Molly, and beautiful Molly's always had a number of jealous Wiccans just waiting for the chance to scratch her eyes out. Some of these foes ganged up to teach these mystic do-gooders a little lesson by stealing the soul of their child. Now, Frankie and Molly need the help of their neighbors.

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Painless Blades

by Elizabeth McCoy

Once upon a time there was a cabal of vampires (with the usual plans for conquest and domination) and a society of necromancers who didn't appreciate uppity undead. With mighty magics, some partaking of Eastern elementalism, the necromancers forged a blade that would be more sturdy and sharp than anything merely wooden.

When the weapon was done, the final step was to quench it in the heart of a vampire, that it would be their Bane. As it happened, one of the necromancers' sons had been turned by his ex-girlfriend (because sometimes Romeo and Juliet *don't* get along after the initial "wow, s/he's hot!" fades), and so hated his undead state that he was a willing volunteer.

However, apparently he didn't hate the vampires quite as much as he thought he did -- or else he was *really* allergic to pain. His soul does not reside within the blade, but some shreds of mercy do: the weapon will kill a vampire (or anything else) as handily as the usual wood, but it will cause no pain to anything it slices.

There are a few other quirks to the weapon. Firstly, it seems to have a core of silvery wood, the same color as its hilt -- though it is as sturdy as metal. (Indeed, in a modern campaign, it would show up on metal detectors. Magically, however, it is only vulnerable to spells that affect both plants and metals.) Secondly, it craves blood (though not death); it must feed lightly at least once a month, or its powers fade until the next feeding and it becomes dormant. And thirdly, more a feature than a quirk, it can perform a "vampirism" on other weapons.

This weapon-vampirism may be performed once per year without special ritual (though it must have fed sufficiently first), or more often with appropriate rites and spells which have probably been forgotten by the time Painless (also known as Mercy, or Vampire's Bane) shows up again. When the sword strikes a weapon of metal or wood, and its wielder desires, it holds fast! (This may require strength rolls to establish control of the conjoined weapons.) Within seconds, the mundane weapon is absorbed into Painless . . . which grows appropriately.

Naturally, once Painless gets too big, it's difficult to wield. So it must be taken to a blacksmith and "shorn." When a thrifty smith experimented, he discovered that the resulting woodmetal bits retain some of the nature of the original blade -- they cause no pain, damage vampires, and drink blood. They can't absorb other weapons, though.

Aside from weapons, any sufficiently advanced medical type will see the immediate uses for a surgical kit made from the Painless fragments. A full set of scalpels, clamps, and needles is priceless to surgeons and midwives. Excess blood that would get in the way is wicked away into the woodmetal itself. The patient does not have to be sedated due to pain. Even stitching an otherwise-acquired wound closed will ease the discomfort!

Game Mechanics

The Painless blades have the weight and damage of a normal metal weapon of their type. When Painless grows, it is usually balanced appropriately -- its hilt is also woodmetal, though often wrapped in leather for traction.

Painless itself has these attributes:

1. It is made of "woodmetal" -- the strength of metal, and the look and vampiric bane of wood. (If something is immune to *both* metal *and* wood, then it will be invulnerable to damage as usual. Otherwise, it can affect the being.)
2. Any wound it causes, from mortal to papercut, inflicts no pain. This means that there will be no shock/pain modifiers when it

Peacebonding and Chastity Belts . . .

GMs may have a group of player characters who, upon gaining control of Painless, will immediately flood the market with more sliver-blades of various types. If this is likely to become a problem for the campaign, the GM can Take Steps.

Option 1: Anyone flooding the market will become a target! After all, if it's profitable enough that the PCs can start

hits, though some sort of Fright Check may be warranted when the target looks down and sees the spurting blood. Laying it into an existing cut will reduce any pain modifiers (either by 1, or halving them, depending on the granularity of the system; for **GURPS**, halve them).

3. For 2 and 4, it requires blood. It must have at least 1 hit of blood, monthly, from a sapient, *living* being -- vampire blood doesn't count. It has no need for death energies, though this may not be known to its holder. Without blood, it "shuts down." To awaken it, it must drink hits of blood equal to the amount it's missed! (If it is lost for too long, it will only be "woodmetal" and a Vampire Bane for quite some time . . .)
4. It can absorb other weapons, at the holder's desire. (The desire to disarm an enemy may be enough, at the GM's option.) It takes 1 second per half-pound of weapon. It is, however, limited to absorbing wood and metal -- any sort of wood, and any sort of metal, but stone weapons are immune. Once it has done this, it adds the weight to its own, growing appropriately in the blade, hilt, and handguard (from the core, so it will not require re-sharpening immediately).
5. When carefully "shorn" by a blacksmith, the pieces can be used to make more Painless blades. Painless itself will probably require re-sharpening after this process, but its mystical properties are unharmed.

Anything made from a piece of Painless has the first, second, and third abilities. Most commonly, these are weapons, but a few surgical kits do exist, of varying states of precision and craftsmanship. (And tech level, depending on how long Painless has been around.)

Plot Seeds

- *The Chosen Heir*: It's been some decades or centuries, and Painless has been lost and found, lost and found, many a time. Now an uprising of monsters leads a descendant of those ancient necromancers into a quest to find the blade and discover its secrets! The PCs are either starting out as characters looking for this weapon, one or all of them being the heir, or come across a struggling teenager on a Mission. (While Painless is not as earth-shaking a weapon as a Chosen Heir might hope, if the local monsters are normally immune to metal . . . Painless, a blacksmith, and a source of crowbars can outfit quite a few people with woodmetal blades. A nasty surprise for overconfident vampires.)
- *Over-Eating*: In the possession of a scoundrel, Painless has eaten (or its owner intends for it to eat) a prized hereditary sword. The sword so targeted is not magical, but it is old and a fine weapon. If the PCs can't stop the "assassination" of the blade, they'll have to forge a new one -- literally! If they can't sneak a duplicate into place, there's likely to be war . . . or at least they'll lose their jobs. (Perhaps the victim will accept the weapon re-forged from woodmetal? Get a good blacksmith, and hope you can fast-talk around how it's been transmuted.)

wrecking the economy this way, then it's profitable enough for various NPCs to come crawling out of the woodwork to try to buy it, steal it, or loot it from their cooling bodies. If the group doesn't decide to "lose" (or actually lose!) the weapon somewhere to get the heat off, it might get destroyed in the ensuing mayhem. Or they might simply sell it for a single outrageous sum and retire from the field.

If the GM wants to make Painless the source of a campaign, or running series of plots, he can use Option 1 for that. Likewise, if the problem cropped up unexpectedly, this may be a way to get rid of it without compromising the players' expectations.

Option 2: The copies don't last! While the group can corner the market for a while, the items will begin to die off at some rate (a year? a year of life per pound of weight? 10 - weight in pounds years?). They might arm an army, yes, but they'll be working flat-out to keep it armed if the campaign takes very long . . .

Option 3: The copies must be specially constructed to last! This can be dark -- they must be quenched in something's life's blood with a special ritual -- or perhaps they merely require the blood "sacrifice" as normal. (Except they don't shut down, they crumble to dust.) Perhaps they only work *after* they've been used on a vampire!

Option 4: The copies are fragile! They can be burned, are subject to termites, etc. They might even be mildly explosive -- but the PCs are likely to use that to their advantage, so GMs should use that idea with care.

Option 5: Blade-slivers will only work in the hands of a Chosen One! Perhaps each shorn sliver must be fed its owner's blood before it is worked into a final form. Perhaps it must be fed its owner's blood periodically, ensuring that when the owner dies, the blade dies

- *Assassin*: Someone has shaved Painless down to a sliver of hilt, snuck the "letter opener" into a well-guarded town, and intends to assassinate the ruler (after feeding Painless several candle-sticks and fire-irons). This "someone" may be particularly clever PCs, particularly expendable characters given their marching orders, or the players may be running the guards who are supposed to stop this kind of thing from happening.
- *Revenge is Sweet, Love is Sweeter?* And what of the vampire who played Juliet to the sacrifice's Romeo? It seems that she's survived, and is seeking the holder of the blade. Or, more precisely, to steal the blade itself. She hopes to reawaken her Romeo's spirit within it -- but will love or revenge be her goal? If the former, perhaps she needs a handy host-body to "resurrect" her beloved? If the latter, will the ceremony require ritual sacrifices? Either way, the Painless blade itself is unlikely to survive, and a lot of surgeons would be most upset.

. . . Perhaps only those of the correct bloodline can awaken the sliver-blades' powers (leading to a legacy of surgeons?).

The Loremaster's Spellbook

More spells for *d20 System*

by Steve Honeywell

Sages, loremasters and wizards have an affinity for books and information. Where a fighter might spend his hard-earned gold on wine and women, a wizard will save up for a rare text that might contain a hint of magical lore. Naturally, wizards feel the need to keep those books safe and secure. Additionally, they often need answers to particularly tough questions quickly, a difficult proposition in a large library. The following spells can assist wizards, sages, and loremasters in locating necessary information quickly, in moving it from place to place, and in keeping it safe at all costs.

New Spells

1st Level Sorcerer and Wizard Spell

Divination

Find Text. Quickly locates specified text within a selected book.

2nd Level Sorcerer and Wizard Spell

Divination

Relocate Text. Locates previously-read text within nearby books.

3rd Level Sorcerer and Wizard Spell

Transmutation

Imprint. Removes writing from one document, transfers it to another.

4th Level Sorcerer and Wizard Spell

Transmutation

Restore Text. Restores text lost to age, erase spells, and similar magic.

5th Level Sorcerer and Wizard Spell

Conjuration

Disseminate. Makes multiple copies of a selected document or page.

6th Level Sorcerer and Wizard Spell

Transmutation

Scroll Transfer. Writes a scroll into a selected spellbook.

7th Level Sorcerer and Wizard Spell

Transmutation

Fast Scribe. Reduces creation time of scrolls, costs additional experience.

8th Level Sorcerer and Wizard Spell

Abjuration

Book Ward. Prevents theft or unauthorized use of valuable text.

9th Level Sorcerer and Wizard Spell

Transmutation

Safehouse. Makes an exact duplicate of a spellbook.

Book Ward

Abjuration

Level: Sor/Wiz 8

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 minute

Range: Touch

Target: 1 spellbook

Duration: Permanent until discharged

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

The *book ward* spell defends a spellbook or other tome against being read by anyone other than the owner. This spell invokes a variety of wards on the book being protected. All pages in the book are protected by *secret page* that affects everyone but the possessor of the book. Five *sepia snake sigils* and two *explosive runes* are placed in the book in random locations. The spell is activated when someone other than the caster opens the warded book. The *secret page* effect lasts for a number of days equal to the caster's level at the time of the casting. The other wards are permanent until discharged or the book is again in the possession of its owner. The owner of the warded book can suppress the effects or cancel them as desired.

Material Component: A small padlock and key. The key is swallowed by the book's owner at the time of the casting.

Disseminate

Conjuration (Creation)

Level: Sor/Wiz 5

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 minute

Range: Touch

Target: 1 or more sheets of paper or book pages

Duration: Permanent

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

The *disseminate* spell allows the caster to create a series of exact copies of one or more sheets of parchment or pages from a book. This spell copies all text, maps, and drawings of a non-magical nature and reproduces them exactly on new pieces of parchment. Up to five sheets or pages can be so duplicated, and the caster may create a total number of copies equal to twice his effective caster level.

Fast Scribe

Transmutation

Level: Sor/Wiz 7

Components: V, S, M, XP

Casting Time: 1 minute

Range: Touch

Duration: 1 day

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

Fast scribe allows a wizard or sorcerer to greatly reduce the time needed to create a scroll, but increases the

experience point cost for creation. The time needed is cut to 25%, potentially allowing the creator to write up to 2,500 gp worth of scrolls in one day. However, the experience cost for creating these scrolls is increased fourfold as well. The effects of this spell last an entire day, and the scrolls created are permanent until used.

Material Component: Blank scrolls (which become inscribed by the spell), a vial of ink.

XP Cost Four times the normal amount needed to make the scrolls.

Find Text

Divination

Level: Sor/Wiz 1

Components: V

Casting Time: 1 round

Range: Touch

Target: 1 book

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

This spell must be cast on a book being held by the caster. The caster asks a single question, and if the book being held contains the answer or any information on the given subject, it opens to the exact spot. If the book does not contain the requested information, the spell fails.

Imprint

Transmutation

Level: Sor/Wiz 3

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Target: 1 book page, document, or piece of writing

Duration: Permanent

Saving Throw: Yes (object)

Spell Resistance: Yes (object)

When cast, the *imprint* spell removes all non-magical writing from one page in a book, one sheet of parchment, or one document and reproduces it faithfully and completely on a new page. The page set to receive the text must be completely blank, which means this spell cannot be used to forge signatures on documents. Sages and librarians use this spell to rescue fragile documents withered from age and neglect.

Material Component: A blank page of parchment or vellum, a vial of ink

Restore Text

Transmutation

Level: Sor/Wiz 4

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Target: 1 blank page or sheet of parchment

Duration: Permanent

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

The *restore text* spell reproduces all non-magical writing on a book page or document that has been erased by any means. Magical writings (such as spells, *sepia snake sigils*, etc.) are not restored by the use of this spell.

Material Component: A piece of chalk or a small piece of charcoal.

Relocate Text

Divination

Level: Sor/Wiz 2

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 action

Effect: Sphere, centered on the caster, with a radius of 10 feet/level

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

A much more powerful version of the *find text* spell, *relocate text* allows the caster to retrieve information on a given topic from any book he has previously read within the radius of the spell. The book containing the information sought appears in the caster's hand immediately upon the spell's completion. If there is more than one book containing information on the topic, the one with the best or most recent information appears. If there is no book in the area containing the necessary information, or if the book has not previously been studied by the caster, the spell fails. Naturally, this spell is more effective in the caster's own private library.

Material Component: A small piece of paper on which the topic or question is written.

Safehouse

Transmutation

Level: Sor/Wiz 9

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 hour

Range: Touch

Target: 1 empty spellbook

Duration: Permanent

Saving Throw: Yes (object)

Spell Resistance: Yes (object)

The *safehouse* spell creates an exact duplicate of a spellbook, copying every spell exactly as written and in exactly the same order. To use this spell, the caster must have a blank spellbook prepared and ready to accept spells. Any spellbook being copied that does not belong to the spellcaster using this spell is entitled to a saving throw to prevent duplication.

Material Component: Ink and quills in an amount needed to transcribe all of the spells in the original spellbook.

Scroll Transfer

Transmutation

Level: Sor/Wiz 6

Components: V, S, M, XP

Casting Time: 10 minutes

Range: Touch

Target: 1 scroll

Duration: Permanent

Saving Throw: Yes (object)

Spell Resistance: Yes (object)

Scroll transfer allows the caster to copy the contents of a scroll he can read and understand from the scroll into a spellbook. The spellbook must have enough free pages to accept the new spell.

Material Component: Ink and quills.

XP Cost: The amount needed to write the scroll in question.

Pyramid Review

Lashings of Ginger Beer

Published by [Beyond Belief Games](#)

Written by Simon Washbourne

Illustrated by Allan Dotson, Burgess Sharrocks & Jay Forster

28-page saddle stitched black and white half-sized book; \$6.00

Let us take you back half a century to a simpler age. An age when kids were happy with their lot. When a bicycle was something that you rode rather than a device for performing tricks upon. When music was listened to on a gramophone or on the Light Programme broadcast by the BBC rather than through a pair of earplugs. When England was a green and pleasant land, and not one bisected by three-lane motorways. When the railways ran on time and were yet to be blighted by the coming of the diesel engines that replaced the glory and romance of steam. This is a land known as Idyllic England, a pastoral country that never really was, but existed sometime after the war and before the arrival of rock 'n' roll.

Where it really existed is in the works of Enid Blyton a prolific English Children's author who created *Noddy*, *The Famous Five*, *The Secret Seven*, and others. It is easy to forget that in her day, Enid Blyton was as big as J.K. Rowling, but the adventures of her characters never involved anything quite as arcane. Their concerns were mainly enjoying the countryside, going for bicycle rides in the country, camping, and hearty meals. Along the way, of course, they fall into adventures, especially after spotting suspiciously nefarious adults doing strange things, perhaps villainous in nature. Spurred on by their curious nature, our young heroes spy on these strange characters and are likely to discover that they are up to no good.

The best known of these books comprise Blyton's *Famous Five* series, followed by *the Secret Seven* and others. In the former, four children -- brothers Dick and Julian, their sister Anne, and their tomboy cousin George (Georgina) and her dog, Timmy -- have adventures all over Idyllic England, stopping the plans of smugglers, kidnappers, and so on. It is a world and a genre that will be familiar to older gamers, and it is one that has at times been viciously lampooned. Most notably in the mid-1980s by *The Comic Strip* in the episode "Five Go Mad In Dorset." To many, this single program remains as quotable as any *Monty Python* or *Blackadder* episode.

Which in some ways will be a problem for the roleplaying game that explores this world, ***Lashings of Ginger Beer***. Will either the GM or players be able to overcome that very knowing send up to explore a very innocent time? It is even one that this book acknowledges in its thumbnail illustrations. Yet if both players and GM can put this aside, perhaps they will be able to enjoy a few hours in a simpler age, when the divide between black and white, good and bad was a straight line, rather than a blurry zone of gray.

Lashings of Ginger Beer comes as a small 28-page half-sized booklet, half of which is devoted to the game's adventures. It is nicely laid out in a manner that abrogates the need for an index. If there is a problem with the book it is the layout of the character sheet, which looks a little vague. Another niggle is that the recipe for ginger beer given in the frontispiece listed in metric measurements first and imperial second in brackets. While this would be fine in the 21st century, it is not for the period of Idyllic England, which is very much set in an age of late empire. The book is available from the publisher's website, or as a download from [RPGnow.com](#).

In ***Lashings of Ginger Beer***, everyone plays a kid, aged between 10 and 15 years old. Their age determines the base for their attributes -- Tough, Deft, Clever, and Charm -- each of which are rated between one and three. Younger kids

posses better Deft and Charm, while older kids have better Tough and Clever attributes. Age can be rolled randomly (1d6+9) or chosen; the attribute scores are noted and a point is added to just one of the four.

Kids can be one of three types: good (normal), swots (bookworms), or truants (tomboys). Each is nicely described, and there is even an indication given of what each grows up to be. Thus the good kid lives in a semi-detached suburban house with room at the bottom of the garden for a den or tree house. His father works in insurance or in a bank, drives a solid car such as a Wolsey or Rover, and his mother is a housewife. The good kid will grow up to follow his father into the bank or insurance, or to become a doctor, accountant, solicitor, or politician. If the good kid is a girl, she will grow up, get married, and become a housewife, just like Mummy.

All kids begin with two skills, hide and snoop, both of which are rated at two dice. Another eight dice are spent on these and other skills. They can buy dice in a set of six "things they are good at," different for each kid type. Those "things they are good at" that lie outside of their kid type will be more expensive. The various "things they are good at" all fit the genre such as Act Innocently, Camping, and Spot Nasty People for the good kid; Useless Facts and other academic subjects for the swot; and Fighting, Wriggle (From Grasp), and Lie Convincingly for the truant, who is a slightly naughtier kid type, rather than being truly bad as are some children today. Character generation is simple and takes only a few minutes, all helped by a solid example.

Skill resolution is very simple. Whenever a kid wants to do something, the player rolls a number of six sided dice equal to the values for the appropriate attribute and "things they are good at," hoping for results of six. The more sixes thrown, the better the outcome. Should a kid be successful, he temporarily gains control of the current adventure's narrative to describe his action and its outcome, while the GM retains control of the narrative and describes the outcome if the kid failed. Of course, both player and GM are encouraged to keep within the flavor of Idyllic England.

Lashings of Ginger Beer does this in a number of ways, describing what kids get up to in their hols (holidays) in Idyllic England, suggesting gang names and giving several period phrases. The rules for equipment or rather Useful Items side step the issue of cold hard cash by allowing each kid to have three items. One they receive for free, tied into a skill; for example, a Swot with Useless Facts might have a copy of "1001 Amazing Facts." Good boys would have *Bumper Boys Own Adventure Stories*, while girls would be reading *Girls Own Romantic Adventure Stories*. The other two items are rolled for, with rolls for extra useful items made between adventures (to see if the kid saved enough pocket money) and after Christmas and birthdays to see what presents they received.

As befitting the genre, a gang can have one scruffy dog. Not quite a character in itself, this pet can be taught to obey simple one-word commands, such as sit, fetch, chase and so on. Overall, the rules are very simple, but at the same time, they capture the feel of the world of Idyllic England perfectly.

The remainder of ***Lashings of Ginger Beer*** is taken up by six adventures and mysteries, running in length between one and six pages.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The longest is "The Big Top Adventure," which has our gallant gang investigating the nefarious doings of a circus owner and some of his performers. It also introduces some new adult skills such as "Spot Nasty Kids" (their answer to the kids' Spot Nasty Person), "Shout Loudly," to stop a kid in his tracks, and "Firm Grip," which opposes the Wriggle (From Grasp) skill. In "The Mystery of the Haunted Castle," the kids have their curiosity aroused by strange lights at a nearby ruin while they are out camping, as does a thin, weasely faced man in "The Mysterious Manor." It is this curiosity that will be the kids undoing in "The Kidnap Caper," while it can be put to one side for "Camp Raids." This sets them against a rival gang of children after their camp is turned over, an adventure that is more akin to Arthur Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons*, another influence on ***Lashings of Ginger Beer***. The last adventure is "The Secret of Demon Rocks," which sends the children to holiday in an old lighthouse, where they might discover wrecker's treasure.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Lashings of Ginger Beer is very much a simple affair, as befits a far less cynical age. The rules are kept to a

minimum, with those given helping to capture the feel of the games setting -- particularly with the pleasing Useful Item rules. Also minimal are the guidelines for narrative control after skill resolutions, but they are enough to add an element of interactivity that is both pleasing and calls for a greater maturity among players and GM alike. The minimalist nature of the rules does leave room for the adventures, which makes for a very complete little game.

Ultimately, ***Lashings of Ginger Beer*** is a very English game -- and, it should be noted, a very chauvinist one -- but for those of us of a certain age, this is the perfect nostalgia trip, and a delightfully charming one.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

Oathbound: Arena (for d20 System)

Published by [Bastion Press](#)

Written by Kevin W. Melka and Todd R. Laing

160-page b&w softcover; \$27.95

Oathbound: Arena is a continent sourcebook for the **Oathbound** campaign setting. It includes information on its resident ruling divinity, the warlords who fight to exploit the desert continent's riches, area information, story hooks, a mass combat system, and an adventure to send PCs into Arena. It also includes a few new races, prestige classes, prestige races, gifts, mass combat feats, magic mecha constructs, artifacts, and a few monsters.

The **Oathbound** setting has seven deities bound to the world, each ruling a continent and drawing in outworlders to struggle on their created world. Arena is ruled by Barbello, the Mask of Fury, who thrives on warfare. She has seeded her desert continent with untold riches just waiting to be dug up and exploited. This draws in mortal leaders who wish to mine the riches. However there is no single mortal ruler of the land; it is a constantly shifting field of warlords who strive to control mines, oases, trade routes, fortifications, and populations of slaves. If a weakness appears in a neighbor, warlords are quick to send in their armies to take over the vulnerable resources of lesser leaders. Life is cheap and blood is often spilled to gather the riches that Barbello has buried in the land.

Power is based on armies, which are fielded by money gained from mining using slave labor. It is a fierce competition for resources and expending lives to obtain goals is an often necessary evil of the process. Benevolent leaders are few and far between, and often are quickly brought low by the economics of the land if they do not exploit slave miners. Many of the mortal powers of the land are evil and brutal tyrants who clawed their way to the top.

There are dozens of realms and individual warlords detailed, with interesting story hooks in most of them. Being a polyglot setting that takes elements from other worlds, the warlords are a variety of races and come from a number of cultural backgrounds. There are ancient Egyptian transplants, a race of winged Valkyrie warrior women with a vast stronghold, a goblin who evolved to become the most fearsomely potent enchanter/warlord of the land, an Asherake who seems to be a demigod dominating the largest section of the continent, a number of brutal reptilian warlords (one is a Dragori lizardman from Mystic Eye Game's **Empire of the Dragon Sands** book), and more. There are even a few good warlords including a paladin and two former slaves.

Since the clash of armies is such a big aspect of the setting, a **d20 System** mass combat system is introduced. Units are composed of 1,000 men and are treated mostly as individual characters that can level in unit type, multi-class, use base attacks, and inflict 8-20 dice of damage depending upon unit type and level. Each individual is one hit point for the unit, so each unit has the same amount of starting hit points; only damage and defense change with levels. Instead of AC there is a defense rating. All attacks hit but the base damage is modified by attack roll versus defense and a damage modifier chart, so clashes are always bloody. Arcane units can use blasting spells and divine ones can heal or support other units. There are pseudo-sneak attacking skirmishers, archery units, cavalry units, and base footmen. ECL race troops add directly to a unit's level, and training and battlefield success can modify a unit's level as well. Siege engines and new fantasy battlefield weapons add to the types of factors in a battle. Each mass combat round is one minute long.

Surprisingly, there are no rules for flying forces, either the winged races (such as the setting's Asherake, Vogel, and Valkyries) or flying ships (common among the Asherake and some of the other factions and powers). There are, however, rules for creating and using "Doom Striders" -- magical mecha constructs -- in mass combats. These are

expensive (and, on the face of it, inefficient) constructs that are powered by spell slots but need to expend two-levels of slot energy even to move for one round. They use a critical hit system similar to Battletech mechs where criticals damage internal components such as engines, weapons, etc.

Among the few monsters introduced -- some of which are reprints from other Bastion sources -- the Kine should probably be Magical beasts instead of animals . . . unless you want to see wildshaping druids turn into large regenerating camouflage camels with reach attacks and a swallow hole ability that can take in medium creatures.

The adventure is designed for levels 10-11 but has some notes for scaling it to other power levels; it says it should handle levels 8-14 without problems. It presumes the PCs work for a specific bloodlord from Penance but does not otherwise seem to be connected to the continuing plot from the other ***Oathbound*** supplement adventure series. The adventure drags the PCs into Arena to face perils, factions, intrigue, and mass combat. The read-aloud descriptions unfortunately take the tack of telling PCs how they feel and react instead of limiting descriptions to what they see or hear.

While there are lots of mechanics that were originally created in other ***Oathbound*** products (gifts, prestige races, channeling magic), they are given sufficient information here to run without the other books. Even NPCs who have gifts and prestige races from other books often have the powers listed out in the stat blocks. For instance, a warlord with the feral ravager class from *Librum Equitis* has the class powers for his level listed in his stat block. Only Barbello has some unexplained powers listed simply as standard avatar powers in her stat block.

Arena is a great delving into the ***Oathbound*** setting, providing plenty of description and story fodder for a DM to use in fleshing out the world or setting up adventures. All of the new standard ***d20 System*** mechanical bits are useable, and the mass combat system is a fairly straightforward adoption of standard combat with a few tweaks.

--*John Henry Stam*

This Monstrous Apparition: *Julius Caesar*

*"Between the acting of a dreadful thing
And the first motion, all the interim is
Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream:
-- William Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, II:i:68-70*

Again the sun dips low in the sky, again the year's breath begins to fail. And once again, by guttering light we return to the whispers of dramaturgical magic, the sussurus of conspiracy, the undertone of [sacred sacrifice](#) in [Shakespeare's occult oeuvre](#). This year, the knives come out and we chart our secrets in the gore of *Julius Caesar*. Beware the ides of March, especially when they come in late December . . .

*"Brutus and Caesar: what should be in that 'Caesar?'
Why should that name be sounded more than yours?
Write them together, yours is as fair a name;
Sound them, it doth become the mouth as well;
Weigh them, it is as heavy; conjure with 'em,
'Brutus' will start a spirit as soon as 'Caesar.'"
-- William Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, I:ii:150-155*

Julius Caesar, dictator of Rome, returns in triumph during the feast of Lupercalia after crushing Pompey's rebellion. A soothsayer warns Caesar of danger approaching on the Ides of March, but he dismisses such portents as mere fancies. However, Caesar's triumph stirs bitter resentment in Cassius, who suborns Casca and (eventually) Brutus into a conspiracy. Brutus joins when Mark Antony offers Caesar the crown; although Caesar refuses it, Brutus fears the effect of making Caesar king, and the end of the Republic. While Brutus and the others plot Caesar's murder, Caesar's wife Calpurnia tries to convince him to stay away from the Forum on the Ides of March; she fears the omens, but Decius Brutus (one of the conspirators) convinces Caesar to venture out. Again brushing off the soothsayer and other warnings, Caesar is murdered by the conspirators on the steps of the Senate. Brutus has foolishly prevented Caesar's killers from also murdering Mark Antony; Antony uses Caesar's funeral oration to rouse the city against Brutus, and the conspirators are forced to flee Rome.

Antony joins with Caesar's heir Octavian to rule Rome; they kill or exile the conspirators' friends and supporters. Brutus' inflexibility begins to irritate Cassius, but they remain allies; Caesar's ghost appears to Brutus and promises that they will meet again at Philippi. When the armies of Antony and Octavian meet Brutus and Cassius' armies at Philippi, the conspirators' lack of coordination, and Brutus' eagerness, result in their eventual defeat. Cassius kills himself based on a mistaken report, and Brutus incompetently kills himself at the last. Octavian orders Brutus, "the noblest Roman of them all," buried with full honors. Octavian and Antony prepare to "part the glories of this happy day," foreshadowing the [next round](#) of civil wars that will end the Republic forever.

*"How many ages hence
Shall this our lofty scene be acted o'er,
In states unborn and accents yet unknown?"
-- William Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, II:i:125-127*

Shakespeare's primary source for the history of Julius Caesar was Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans*, again most likely from the North 1579 English translation. He may also have taken some material from Suetonius, and there were a number of other Julius Caesar plays on the Elizabethan stage from the 1560s (one was performed on Candlemas of 1562) to the 1590s. Shakespeare may have played in one in 1594, although it's unknown whether that was Thomas Kyd's translation of Garnier's *Cornelie* or another such play. (In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare later has Polonius boast of having played Julius Caesar in his youth.) However, by the late 1590s, plays about conspiracy against tyrants became much more problematic in the harsh climate of the fading Elizabethan era. Shakespeare's decision to return to the material (which he alluded to in his first known play, *Henry VI Part Two*) was dangerous, despite the topic's clear popularity. Thanks to a fortuitous diary entry by a Swiss doctor, we know that *Julius Caesar* was performed at the

Globe on the autumnal equinox of 1599; it was likely written earlier that year. Since then, it has been the most reprinted of all Shakespeare's plays, performed almost without letup for three and a half centuries. (Interestingly, in its 1864 New York run, John Wilkes Booth played Antony.) Its themes and dark actions resonate to this day.

*"Let us be sacrificers, but not butchers, Caius.
We all stand up against the spirit of Caesar;
And in the spirit of men there is no blood:
O! then that we could come by Caesar's spirit,
And not dismember Caesar. But, alas!
Caesar must bleed for it. And, gentle friends,
Let's kill him boldly, but not wrathfully;
Let's carve him as a dish fit for the gods . . ."*
-- William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, II:i:181-188

Primary among those themes is that of ritual sacrifice. As the play opens, Julius Caesar is seemingly the solar king in his splendor. However, the heavens are unruly; comets and planets roll out of their courses and the dead "howl and gibber in the streets." Rather than a firm hand and a fertile realm, Caesar is presiding over a kind of [Misrule](#), driven home by his "foolery" in refusing the crown, and by the plebeians' parade at the beginning of the play during Caesar's triumph. Caesar's wife is barren (implying the Fisher King's sterility), and Caesar himself is half-deaf and suffers from epilepsy. Although Caesar's spirit is mighty, it has not been crowned; the rituals are not intact despite Caesar's injunction to "leave no ceremony out" for Lupercal.

The Roman Lupercalia, the Ides of February, is a fertility ritual featuring a sacred race and the sacrifice of dogs; Cassius calls Caesar a "wolf" in Act I, alluding to both the Lupercal sacrifice and the sacred animal of Rome. Brutus is even more explicit, seeking to exorcise Caesar's spirit by blood, calling on his cohorts to "carve him as a dish fit for the gods." Brutus (and Shakespeare) conducts the assassination itself in ritual tones, with each assassin stabbing in turn, and ceremonially bathing in Caesar's spilled blood. This blood, Antony implies, has ritual power; he urges the people to save their bloody handkerchiefs as relics. On increasingly thin ice, Shakespeare uses allusions to mystery plays, to (Cassius) Longinus (the Roman soldier who killed Christ), and other imagery -- Caesar's ghost even appears on the third day after his death -- to present the killing as, essentially, a Black Mass.

*"BRU. Get you to bed again; it is not day.
Is not to-morrow, boy, the ides of March?
LUC. I know not, sir.
BRU. Look in the calendar, and bring me word."*
-- William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, II:i:43-46

Much as Christ's death met the terms of prophecy and unleashed earthquakes and eclipses, Caesar's death follows soothsayers' warnings, and roils earth and heaven. In Renaissance theology, Christ's death echoes backward in history, a mythopoeic [reality quake](#); Shakespeare does the same with Caesar. In the quote above, the First Folio has Brutus ask Lucius "Is not tomorrow, boy, the *first* of March?" This may not be a misprint, but the playwright's intention, to point up Brutus' unmoored confusion; to set the assassin adrift in time. Shakespeare throughout this scene, and throughout the play, draws attention to the chaotic, compressed nature of time during this interim of "phantasma."

The month between Lupercal and the Ides of March passes in a single night, owls appear at noon, and the repeated references to striking clocks emphasize the onrush of time without a guiding hand on the reins. In *Shakespeare's Mystery Play*, author Steve Sohmer points out that the year before Caesar's death, he had radically upset the Roman calendar, instituting the Julian year at the expense of extending 45 B.C. by 80 extra days. That calendar, of course, had been itself superseded in Catholic Europe in 1582 -- but Elizabethan England clung to Julius Caesar's year, itself increasingly strained and chaotic. In 1599, for example, the Gregorian Easter fell on [April Fools' Day](#) in England, and the Gregorian Annunciation to Mary fell on the Ides of March. Is that why Brutus' wife Portia, who hears a supernatural prophecy in the play, says, "Say I am Merry?"

"But wherefore did you so much tempt the heavens?"

*It is the part of men to fear and tremble
When the most mighty gods by tokens send
Such dreadful heralds to astonish us."*
-- William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, I:iii:59-62

Shakespeare, says Sohmer, was well aware of the calendrical confusion, and played it for all it was worth in *Julius Caesar*. Sohmer also proposes that Shakespeare wrote *Julius Caesar* for the opening of the Globe Theater in 1599, and debuted it on the summer solstice, June 21. The Globe was, it appears, oriented with its axis facing sunrise at the summer solstice, and decorated with astrological and planetary motifs. Although there is no direct documentary evidence for it, it is almost certain that Shakespeare wrote a new play for the Globe's opening, and the only other strong contender, *Henry V*, is better dated earlier than midsummer that year. Interestingly, on June 21, 1599, the new moon exactly coincided with the solstice -- astrologically an excellent time for new ventures, with Mercury, Jupiter, and Saturn in syzygy, also appearing in Gemini, sign of the Twins (patrons of Caesar's legions), favorable for sudden and lasting literary success. The emblematic runners of Lupercalia are also twin brothers, and again we see Shakespeare's fascination with twinning peer out of the wings.

*"You shall confess that you are both deceiv'd.
Here, as I point my sword, the sun arises;
Which is a great way growing on the south,
Weighing the youthful season of the year.
Some two months hence up higher toward the north
He first presents his fire; and the high east
Stands, as the Capitol, directly here."*
-- William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, II:i:118-124

But twins and twisted time merely serve as portents to us that Shakespeare is once more up to his dramaturgical rites. But at what are they aimed? The play, intriguingly, gives us another clue. In Brutus' garden, the conspirators have fallen to squabbling about, of all things, the direction of sunrise. Casca, the first to stab Caesar, draws his sword and points it dramatically at the horizon during the speech quoted above. He points both south of east and north of east, again emphasizing the "unstuck" nature of the heavens (and underlining the calendrical confusion of both 44 B.C. and 1599), then splits the difference, pointing to the "high east" and "the Capitol." Due east of the Globe's stage, as it happens, is the Tower of London -- which, as Shakespeare knew, was founded by Julius Caesar. With a sword stroke, Casca stabs Caesar's Tower, creates a parallel between Rome and Britain, and -- perhaps -- awakens the ley energies embedded in London's sacred geometry. In the play, Casca and Cassius each see a lion prowling around the Capitoline Hill; perhaps a twinned reference to the lions (royal animals of England) kept at the Tower zoo, and to the alchemical lion, twin emblem of royal gold -- and of aqua regia, the destroyer of gold.

Did the swirl of dates and times in Shakespeare's twisted calendars point back to yet another birth? The Annunciation to Mary (promising the birth of the Redeemer) falls on March 25. March 25 was, to all theologically literate Elizabethans, also the date of Christ's crucifixion -- and in the old Julian calendar, behind by 10 days, it fell on the Ides of March. To Caesar, meanwhile, March 25 was the vernal equinox; we know, of course, that Shakespeare performed his play on the autumnal equinox of 1599 and perhaps opened it on the summer solstice. Resting on two "corners of the year," in the parabolic, occult "O" of the new-built Globe in the dark of the moon, Shakespeare reaches back to the spring, and ties it to the death of a tyrant, and the death of a god. And on March 25, 1599, did the foreshadow of Shakespeare's dramaturgical Annunciation-Crucifixion, his Mass of royal sacrifice, call forth the next century's Brutus? If not, Oliver Cromwell's birthday was quite a coincidence indeed.

Carol Connections

I'm blanking on a topic, so I figure I'll throw some random thoughts in the blender and see what develops. *Caveat gamer.*

Earlier today I was knee-deep in the Christmas spirit, in my own way (which is to say, I was home alone in an antisocial kind of way). I was surfing the Internet and checked out one of my favorite sites ([News From Me](#) -- informative home of noted comic/Hollywood/cartoon/writerly hombre Mark Evanier). In yesterday's installment he bemoans the number of pastiches and adaptations based on Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. He then pegs his favorite and most faithful as *Mr. Magoo's Christmas Carol*.

I tend to agree; I suspect it's because most serial works - such as television shows and comics - think there's a demand for a Christmas-themed story. However, the number of uplifting tropes and permutations available for seasonal fare are fairly small . . . and as soon as you start doing something about "grumpy Christmas-less person gets redeemed," you're skirting close to theft and might as well jump headlong into homage.

(I also considered the fact that there really *are* very few immediately recognizable Christmas offerings that are in the public domain. The only other ones I can think of are the story of the birth of Jesus - which might be considered too religious an offering for your standard sitcom - and the ubiquitous " 'Twas the Night Before Christmas," which I've parodied a number of times in my own day, including once for SJ Games itself . . . which I might share with you all one year if you're *really* good. However, blank verse is often a tough sell for 22 minutes of airtime.)

Anyway, I started considering if there were any *Christmas Carol* derivations that stuck in my mind as being both "memorable" and "good." The *Married . . . With Children* take on it scored high on the former but less so on the latter, even with (or because of) the appearance of late comedian Sam Kinison.

However, there was one that stuck in my mind, even years later, as being both noteworthy and entertaining. It was a primetime special of the *Real Ghostbusters* cartoon called "X-mas Marks The Spot." In it, the Ghostbusting quartet is hired by an elderly - and miserly - gentleman who is being plagued by three ghosts; the 'Busters successfully capture them, and hilarity ensues as Christmas is destroyed.

Now, I'm not going to spend much time raving about this episode. Suffice it to say, I found the fusion of a show about those who bust troublesome ghosts with a tale about troublesome ghosts is the most natural perversion of the hoary tale I've ever seen.

No, the interesting bit for me was when I did some Googling for "Christmas Carol" and "Ghostbusters," trying to learn a bit more about that episode.

It turns out that episode was written by J. Michael Straczynski. In fact, it turns out Straczynski wrote 21 episodes in total during the show's run. Oh, and he was also the story editor for the series for its first couple of years. Now, J. Michael Straczynski is known most immediately to me as a comic book writer of some note, including current stints on *Amazing Spider-Man* and other tales like *Rising Stars*. However, to the world at large he's probably best known as the creator, principal writer, and general mastermind behind *Babylon 5*, possibly the best science fiction television series ever.

Babylon 5 is also, of course, a property that has gone through two RPG iterations to date. (*Ghostbusters* went through two itself, the first of which I still consider one of the finest movie-to-gaming adaptations ever.)

Oh, and the aforementioned Mark Evanier? He was one of the masterminds behind the *Dungeons & Dragons* cartoon, which I understand was also based loosely on some roleplaying game I've never heard of.

(As another aside, [Peter David](#) - another comic writer whose work I admire - also wrote some episodes of *Babylon 5*. The tone and general approach of "Random Thought Table" itself has been heavily influenced on Peter David's own

weekly "But I Digress" column. Oh, and in the interest of full disclosure, I should note that I've only seen one episode of *Babylon 5* myself, although the first DVD set is on one of my shelves somewhere, and for all I know I bought the second season at some point, too.)

Anyway, as the pieces of this small-world conspiracy fell together at a Hitean pace, I found myself considering the gaming implications of all this. And I remembered one of my favorite "tricks" for any ongoing campaign. Namely, reduce, reuse, recycle. Unless there's a compelling plot or game reason to do otherwise, I tend to recycle characters and locations with an abandon.

I first stumbled across this in my long-running **GURPS Supers** campaign; panicking because the PCs decided to kick down a metaphorical plot door I hadn't fully intended them to, I found myself needing a metahuman character in a pinch. I didn't have a new one handy, so I used one I already had: Mandy Taylor. Now, Mandy was introduced in the first adventure of the campaign, when I had even less of a clue what I was doing than normal. As a result, she had the unlikely combination of fire-based and probability manipulation powers (a.k.a. Super Luck). To make a long story short, she ended up killing a PC in my first combat because **GURPS** combat was a tad deadlier than I was expecting (he got better). And she had no good reason to be involved with the plot thread that the PCs were unraveling.

So once the players discovered her involvement - which, again, I note was completely off the cuff - they, too, knew she had no good reason to be there. And this drove them nuts, trying to solve the mystery of *why* she was there. (I ultimately concocted a justification that was pretty good.)

Two adventures later, in similar circumstances, they chose another path less taken . . . and, again, they discovered Mandy. She wasn't a master villain; she just kept getting involved in other people's plans and entangled in events that were over her head. The PCs were rapidly becoming involved in her history; they were oddly protective, and both the players and characters cared about what happened to her.

(As an aside, I ultimately used her probability manipulation as partial justification for her involvement: "What are the *odds* that I would stumble onto the same plot as you?" [groans from the players])

By reusing characters and locations, you immediately add history and continuity to what could otherwise be a seemingly random situation. You reduce the amount of work you would need to do in creating characters and backstory, *and* you might give yourself something new to think about or spark new ideas: Why would the assassin the heroes escaped last month be the surprise witness at an unrelated medical malice suit involving unwitting genetic experiments?

People lead varied lives. Paths have an odd way of twisting back upon themselves and intertwining in unexpected ways. It's improbable that the same creator of a wildly popular science fiction show I'm largely unfamiliar with would *also* be behind a cartoon *and* several comics I enjoy . . . but it's possible. So why can't the ace pilot the PCs encounter also happen to be a billionaire benefactor, genius engineer, or film producer? (It worked for Howard Hughes.) It's a small world, and the ghosts of the past can crop up when you least expect it.

And they *usually* can't be thwarted by [Ghostbusters](#).

--Steven Marsh

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Designers' Notes: GURPS Covert Ops

by William H. Stoddard & Hans-Christian Vortisch

A Tale of Two Books

The project that became [GURPS Covert Ops](#) started out as two entirely different books.

Bill took on the job of preparing a final draft of **GURPS Assassins**, a 32-page treatment of assassins in history, fiction, and gaming, as villains or as heroes. At about the same time, Hans started work on **GURPS Spy-Tech**, a 48-page supplement intended as an update (and upgrade) of the equipment lists from **GURPS Espionage**. The two drafts arrived at Steve Jackson Games, more or less simultaneously . . . there was an interval of silence . . . and then a question came back: Could we collaborate on a single, larger book that integrated what we had done and expanded on it? Having worked together on previous projects, including **GURPS Special Ops** (which Hans co-wrote and Bill edited), we said, "Sure!"

And then things got interesting . . .

Spy-Tech had four chapters, all on different sorts of equipment. **Assassins** had six chapters, two of which looked at equipment. We kept the basic **Assassins** outline, reduced from six chapters to five, and fitted Hans's four chapters into the two technology chapters -- and made those the longest chapters of the planned book. By and large, Hans did the technology chapters, but Bill added low-tech and sidebars on fantasy and speculative equipment, as well as a few passages on other topics. By and large, Bill did the chapters on history, characters, and campaigns, but Hans added accounts of several noteworthy episodes of covert operations.

In the process, the book's mission changed from those of the smaller books. Obviously, it couldn't be just about equipment; it had to look at the people who used the equipment. It needed a broader focus than just assassination. Since it wasn't a new edition of **Espionage**, it couldn't be about spying; instead it was expanded from assassination alone to all kinds of active interference with an enemy's life, liberty, or property. Bill and Hans both thought, and Steve Jackson Games agreed, that the main audience for this book would be people interested in real-world operations, historical, current, or near-future/technothriller; so we kept the fantastic and speculative material in the sidebars, discussing general principles rather than game mechanics. In particular, we eliminated all the ultra-tech equipment that wasn't either already available or likely to be on the market in a few years -- particularly the superscience gadgets. As a result, a good deal of material ended up being cut.

Here, then, are some outtakes: historical material from Hans, and compilations of technology from Bill.

The Spy-Tech of the Future

Long before the technothriller genre got its name, suspense stories had an affinity for high-tech gadgets. But there's a hard-to-define line separating two classes of gadgets. One side holds gadgets that the audience can imagine might exist now, in some top-secret lab, or in the armory of some elite secret agency. The other holds gadgets so radical that they would change the world. The boundary between them is the boundary between technothrillers and speculative fiction. Many past **GURPS** supplements have offered equipment that could be used for covert operations, but only in a speculative fiction setting -- cyberpunk, space opera, or anywhere in between.

Some of these gadgets use power cells, as defined in **GURPS Ultra-Tech**, as their energy source. Less speculative versions would need much larger power sources, or would operate for about 1/10 as long.

First, some surveillance tools:

Beam Sensor (TL8). A laser or infrared beam that sets off an alarm if broken. It can be spotted by throwing glitter, powder, or vapor into its path (for a laser) or by infrared sensors (for an IR beam), and can then be jumped over or crawled under. If there are several beams, an Acrobatics roll may be required. \$400 per single entrance or 100 yards of perimeter.

Biohound (TL10). A small handheld sensor capable of detecting the molecules of a designated lifeform -- as general as a species (e.g., "humans") or as specific as a single individual. A detailed bioscanner analysis is required to detect and track unknown species or specific individuals. On a successful Electronics Operation (Sensors) roll, the biohound can tell if its target came within 5 yards of its sensors, at -1 to skill per half-hour the trail is old. Once acquired, a trail can be followed as long as that is physically possible -- an airlock or ride on a motorcycle would erase it. Additional rolls may be necessary every hour to keep on trace. Only one trail can be followed at a time. \$2,000, 2 lbs.

Sensor Visor (TL10). A goggle or helmet visor offering light intensification, thermal imaging, antiglare features (+5 to HT rolls avoiding to be blinded), and 2-100× magnification. \$1,500, 2 lbs.

Next, tools for intrusion and escape:

Electronic Thumb (TL8). A pocket-sized gadget that can be used to bypass fingerprint and retinal scanners. One end displays a retinal pattern; the other has a plastic pad that can be configured to match a thumbprint. New prints can be downloaded into it by a cable connection. An A cell powers it for a year. \$5,000, 0.25 lb.

Nanogrip Gear (late TL8). A pair of soft gloves and shoes covered with nanofibers that allow climbing up virtually any surface, like a gecko or spider. Add +4 to Climbing. \$250, 3 lbs. for complete set.

Plasma Torch (TL9). A small plasma generator for heavy cutting and welding. Its beam of ionized plasma does 7d per second; even if it doesn't penetrate DR, every 10 hits of damage will reduce DR by one, allowing it to eventually burn through any material. Its C cell powers it for 60 seconds. \$750; 4 lbs.

There is also a larger version available; the heavy plasma torch is a backpack-sized device that does 20d per second. It operates for 200 seconds on an E cell, which is carried on the back, together with the plasma generator. \$3,000; 40 lbs.

Intruder Suit (TL10). Several steps up from the TL8 chameleon suit, this full-body suit (including face mask, hood, gloves, and boots) "bends" the light around the wearer using fiber-optic light guides, granting a blurry almost-invisibility. Observers are -10 on Vision rolls to see the wearer if he is standing still, or -6 on Vision rolls if he is moving. It gives DR 1 (DR 6 against lasers). \$8,000, 12 lbs.

Holobelt (TL10). A holobelt projects a roughly man-sized three-dimensional image around the wearer, to conceal him. Standard holodisks show plants, animals, rocks, or other unanimated objects; alternatively, a disk showing a recording of somebody else can be used. A casual observer may not notice the wearer (+4 Camouflage), but close observation will reveal that something is wrong. In addition, the holo image, projecting light as it does, rather obviously glows in the dark. Once spotted, all attacks on the wearer are at -1 to skill, and attacks aimed at specific body parts are impossible unless the image closely mirrors the wearer. A B cell powers the projector for 24 hours. \$1,100, 4 lbs. Pre-recorded disks are \$100 each.

Cannibal Nanokit (TL11). Nanotech makes it possible to assemble objects at the molecular level -- and to disassemble other objects to provide raw material. A nanokit makes use of this capability for the benefit of people who need to hide what they're carrying. A tube of some seemingly innocuous material such as makeup can be squeezed onto suitable raw material (mechanical objects require metal; fuels and propellants require organic material) and reshape it into a weapon, explosive, or other controlled device, taking 1 minute per pound. The product must be one TL lower than the nanokit's TL. If the availability of suitable raw material is doubtful, roll 3d against the nanokit's TL. The nanokit weighs 1% of the weight of the end product and costs three times as much.

Tau-Field Generator (TL16). A tau-field generator creates a bubble in space/time, in which time is vastly accelerated.

It cuts off all inside the field from those outside, allowing those inside to take any action without interference from others. For example, an operative could deal with his targets at his leisure, since they can neither escape from the field nor get help from the outside. In fact, those outside and on "normal" time will not even note what happens inside the bubble. When the tau-field is switched off, they will see the results of the action inside, but to them, only a moment passed.

A backpack generator runs for 30 minutes of subjective time on a D cell and covers a one- to four-yard radius (depending on the setting chosen by the wearer). \$1,500, 40 lbs.

Intruders may want to take someone back out with them. For this purpose, restraints are helpful:

Pneumospray Hypo (TL7). A hand-held device that uses a charge of compressed air to give an injection. It can penetrate clothing with DR 1. An air cartridge is good for 100 injections. 1/4 lb.; \$125; +3 to Holdout skill. Invented for medical treatment, but assassins will find other uses for it! Changing either the air cartridge or the vial of injected substance takes 2 seconds.

Neural Inhibitor (TL10). A flat disk about 2" in diameter that can be attached to the skin, cutting off nerve impulses. The effects depend on the location; it is placed on the forearm, the forearm and hand are paralyzed (and feel no pain); if placed on the neck near the spinal cord, the entire body from the neck down is paralyzed. Intended for medical purposes (e.g., as a local anesthetic to perform surgery), it has many uses to "bind" kidnapping victims or to control prisoners. Each disk runs 24 hours on its two integral A cells. \$200, 0.25 lb.

The published material in ***GURPS Covert Ops*** includes many futuristic weapons, but as far as possible, these are extrapolations from current designs or research. Here are some more speculative ideas, often taken from classic science fiction:

Knives. At higher TLs, more advanced variations of knives become available.

Vibroblades (TL8) vibrate thousands of times per second, adding 1d to the regular damage of the weapon. DR protects against vibroblades at 1/5 value. The vibration cannot be seen, but generates a faint hum that can be detected at 1 hex range on a Hearing roll and that anyone familiar with vibroblades will recognize. Turning on the vibro effect takes 1 second; a successful Fast-Draw roll activates it as the weapon is drawn. The hilt of a vibroblade contains a B cell (p. B247) which supplies power for 1 hour divided by the blade's weight in pounds. Vibroblades have no added weight, but cost \$200 extra for any knife size.

Monowire blades (TL9) have edges of molecular thickness, enabling them to cut into almost anything, adding 1d to the regular cutting damage of weapon. DR protects against monowire cutting attacks at 1/10 value. Monowire blades have no added weight, but cost \$500 extra for any knife size.

Hyperdense Filament Blades (TL10) appear in laboratories and advanced workshops as a more durable single-molecule tool head. Originally they represent a tiny edge set into a larger blade to permit improved penetration of dense materials and individual cells. These blades are cutting-only tools that gain no damage bonus, but inflict +1d damage and penetrate the target's armor considerably better than anything before: one-fifth normal DR at early TL10 and one-tenth by the end of TL10. They appear in the hands of covert operatives and on the black market in the form of stilettos at first, having the same effect as early TL10 laboratory blades, then as the edge and tip on the most expensive combat knives. These filament lattice blades are the thinnest advanced alloys with hyperdense filaments inserted into the edge and tip in a microscopic copy of the Aztec macauitl. The blade weighs the same as a normal knife, as the lighter alloy is balanced by the heavier edge. Costs vary due to rarity and the bespoke nature of this item from a base of \$1,000× weight, halving at early TL11. Making a hyperdense blade also a vibroblade adds +1d to damage but does not add to the blade's penetration.

Force knives (TL11) are smaller variants on force swords and use the Force Sword skill (p. B50); anyone who has only used the full-sized version is at --2 with the knife size due to unfamiliarity, and vice versa. A force knife is a small hilt, about the size of a dagger hilt; when activated, it generates a "blade" of energy that inflicts cutting or impaling damage. DR protects against force knives at 1/5 value. Any limb that takes twice the damage required to cripple it in a single hit (p. B129) is cut off, and the wound is cauterized; excess damage is lost. Any material weapon that carries a force knife is broken, except on a critical success. It takes 1 second to activate a force knife, except on a Fast-Draw roll, and 1 second more for the blade to stabilize. Power comes from a C cell in the hilt, which allows 10 minutes of continuous use.

Needlers (TL8). Needlers use a magnetic field to fire a steel sliver. Because they don't use chemical propellant, chemsniffers can't locate them, making them easier to conceal. Their damage is impaling rather than crushing as for chemical slugthrowers.

Beam Weapons. Energy projection weapons, or beam weapons, are speculative technology, as none have yet been made practical, especially not as man-portable or concealable weapons! For more detail on these weapons, see **GURPS Ultra-Tech** and **Ultra-Tech 2**. Several varieties would be useful in covert operations:

Lasers (TL8) fire a beam of coherent light. They have very long ranges and no recoil; the dispersion of shots is less than the diameter of the beam. As a result, when a laser is fired on full automatic setting (see pp. B119-120), the damage from all shots that hit the same location in the same turn is totaled before DR is subtracted. Damage is impaling: any damage that gets through DR is doubled. Any hit to the eyes (location 5 from the front; see p. B211) causes double damage and blinds the victim unless he makes a HT roll; +5 for anti-glare goggles. Roll as for crippling injuries to recover. Actual damage to the eye results in permanent blindness. Lasers do half damage in fog or smoke and are stopped by heavy smoke such as generated by military smoke dischargers.

Blasters (TL9) fire a bolt of charged particles; the beam does impaling damage and also inflicts knockback. It is treated as a projectile for blow-through purposes. This isn't a subtle weapon, but may appeal to a heavy.

Disruptors (TL9), or masers, fire coherent microwave radiation. Metal reflects disruptor beams, giving metal armor PD 8; the armor emits massive sparks in the process. Disruptors are thus mainly useful for attacks on unarmored targets. Damage to living targets is tripled after DR; the target's cells actually explode. The model specified here is designed to be broken down into four pocket-sized components; assembly or disassembly takes one minute.

Flamers (TL9) are beam weapons that fire short-range plasma discharges and can hit multiple targets in the same arc of fire (see p. B121). Arsonists are likely to find them useful; they automatically ignite paper and dry wood, and set fire to other flammable materials whose DR is exceeded. Unsealed armor has only 1/2 its normal DR against a flamer. For every 10 points of damage done (before subtracting DR), armor loses 1 point of DR at the location hit; if it loses 1/5 of its original DR it becomes unsealed at that location.

X-ray lasers (TL10), also known as xasers, are similar to standard lasers, but are not affected by smoke, fog, or mirrors. Halve the DR of any armor or force screen against an X-ray laser. *Grasers* (TL14) are even more effective; force screens and armor protect with only 1/5 DR.

Disintegrators (TL15) completely destroy the target, producing heat and concussion in surrounding hexes. Force screens protect at 1/100 DR, and nuclear damper fields completely block them; armor and deflectors provide no protection at all. This is a good weapon for disposing of evidence; if there are no witnesses or recorders, it may not be possible to tell who was disintegrated.

Brainwipe. In societies with highly developed medical capabilities (TL9 and up), neither blood loss nor failure of a major vital organ need be fatal if the victim receives medical care quickly enough. If the brain still functions, cybernetic interfaces may permit it to communicate with other people, despite having the No Physical Body disadvantage (p. CI83). Cloning technology may be able to replace a destroyed body. The only certain death may be destruction of the brain.

There are plenty of crude ways to accomplish this, ranging from blunt instruments to surgical lasers. But a more advanced technology may provide specialized tools.

Brainwipe (TL10) requires bulky and expensive equipment (\$50,000, 500 lbs., 1 cy). The procedure takes an hour and requires Electronics Operation (Medical)/TL10 skill. The necessary equipment is legal only for governments. However, an illegal organization that has the equipment may find it worthwhile to kidnap an enemy and subject him to the process. It's even possible to install the equipment in a moderately large truck or similar vehicle and go to meet the victim.

Mindscramblers (TL12) and *mindrippers* (TL14) are portable weapons that accomplish similar results with focused electromagnetic radiation. They use Beam Weapons (Neural) skill. A mindscrambler can rip apart the target's brain, reducing his DX and IQ to 1 and erasing his memories. A mindripper does the same, but also scans the brain and makes a copy of the information stored in it. (From one point of view, this makes it a tool for kidnappers or thieves rather than assassins.) If the attack hits, roll vs. HT-5 at +1 per 10 points of DR protecting the brain. If the HT roll succeeds, the target suffers no more than a mild headache; if it succeeds by no more than 1 point, he is mentally stunned. If it fails, he suffers the full effects.

Of course, if it's possible to record the information in a brain, the victim may have done so already, as a precautionary measure.

Weapons Tables

Hand Weapons

Type	Damage	Reach	Cost	Wt	Min ST	Hold	TL
Force knife	cut 4d (5) imp 2d (5)	C	\$2,000	1	--	+4	11
Monowire knife	cut +1d (10)	*	+\$500	--	--	--	9
Vibroknife	cut/imp +1d (5)	*	+\$200	--	--	--	8

Ranged Weapons

Weapon	Malf	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt	RoF	Shots	ST	Rcl	Hold	Cost	TL
Beam Weapons														
Blaster pistol	ver.	6d imp.	10	6	--	300	2	3~	20/C	5	-1	0	\$2,000	9
Disintegrator pistol	crit.	8d (100)	10	12	--	1,000	4	1	6/C	--	0	-2	\$6,000	15
Disruptor rifle	crit.	6d	13	10	500	1,000	9	3~	20/C	--	0	+2	\$3,100	9
Hand flamer	crit.	10d	4	12	70	150	4	1	8/C	6	0	-2	\$1,300	9
Holdout laser	crit.	1d-1	10	4	50	100	1/4	1	5/B	--	0	+4	\$500	9
Laser pistol	crit.	1d	9	7	200	500	2	4	20/C	--	0	0	\$1,000	8
Laser rifle	crit.	2d	15	13	900	1,200	5	3~	12/C	--	0	-5	\$2,000	8
Mindscrambler	crit.	Spcl.	12	14	--	50	8	1	50/C	--	0	-5	\$20,000	12
Mindripper	crit.	Spcl.	12	14	--	50	10	1	50/C	--	0	-5	\$50,000	14
Pistols and Revolvers														
Plastic minipistol, 9mm	crit.	2d	10	3	150	900	1	3~						
Gauss minineedler	crit.	1d	10	2	75	300	0.1	4	25/AA	-	0	+5	\$400	10
Rifles														
Gauss needle rifle, .02	crit.	2d+1	14	11	500	1,000	6	20*	100/B	9	-1	-5	\$2,500	8

Note: In the shots column, a slash followed by a capital letter indicates the number of shots per power cell of that size.

Weapons call forth defenses, so a futuristic setting may have advanced types of armor as well:

Arachnoweave Armor (TL8). Created using synthetic proteins derived from spider silk. The standard forms are black,

gray, or green for military or combat applications; multicolored patterns cost 25% more and range from camouflage designs (-2 to Vision against similar backgrounds, +2 against inappropriate backgrounds) to brightly colored patterns for sportswear or kimonos (+2 to Vision against any background). Light arachnoweave is PD 1, DR 4 (PD 0, DR 2 vs. impaling); a vest is 0.5 lb. and \$400, a full suit is 1 lb., \$500. Medium arachnoweave is PD 2, DR 8 (PD 1, DR 2 vs. impaling); a vest is 1 lb. and \$600, a full suit is 2.5 lbs. and \$800. Heavy arachnoweave is PD 2, DR 12 (PD 1, DR 2 vs. impaling); a vest is 1.5 lbs. and \$8000, a full suit is 4 lbs. and \$1,000. A vest protects hit locations 9-10 and 17-18. Any 6 rolled does 1 point of crushing damage, even if the attack fails to penetrate the armor.

Bioplas Armor (TL10). Made from pseudo-alive, self-repairing material (repairs minor holes in six hours if it has access to sunlight and air, longer for major damage), bioplastic armor provides PD 2, DR 15. A full suit costs \$2,000 and weighs 3 lbs.

Reflex Armor (TL10). Made of bioplastic (above) and normally gives PD 2, DR 15. However, it also incorporates sophisticated passive sensors to detect incoming projectiles or blows. Melee weapons, thrown objects or other low-velocity attacks are automatically detected; bullets, rockets, and sonic beams on a roll of 14 or less; and hypervelocity projectiles only on a roll of 12 or less. Lasers or similar beams are too fast. Once an incoming attack detected, the bioplastic contracts its "muscles" to become rigid for an instant -- protecting the impact point with PD 5, DR 30. Reflex armor requires a power source (usually a B cell that lasts for three months). A full suit is \$4,000 and weighs 10 lbs.

Energy Cloth (TL11). Woven from single-crystal ballistic fiber and thermal-superconducting material, and easily concealable as part of clothing. A vest protects hit locations 9-10 and 17-18, weighs 2 lbs., and costs \$2,800; a full body suit (with hood) weighs 4 lbs. and costs \$5,600. Either has PD 4, DR 50.

Deflector Belt (TL12). A generator that creates a form-fitting deflector field over the wearer's body and clothing; it does not extend over objects held in the hand (unless they are completely enclosed). Two settings are available: steady, which provides PD 6 but does not let air pass through, and flicker, which provides PD 5 and allows air (and other gases) to pass through. Two C cells provide power for 5 minutes on steady or 10 minutes on flicker. 2 lbs., \$5,000.

Finally, advanced medical care can treat many injuries:

Automedic (TL9). An automedic looks like a coffin with integral medical computer; it will attempt to diagnose and heal anyone placed into it. It is fully automated and stocked with drugs and supplies to deal with any injury or sickness a physician can normally treat. Its computer is programmed with First Aid-14, Diagnosis-13, Physician-13, and Surgery-13 (+1 to skill for every TL over 9). It cannot bring back the dead, and should it be confronted with unknown diseases or strange problems, it will put the patient in suspended animation and call for help. The results of critical automedic failures are up to the GM; a sabotaged unit is a death trap . . .

At TL9, it is \$50,000, 600 lbs. At both TL10 and 11, subtract 100 lbs.; cost remains the same.

Case Study: "I'll Blow That Hitler Up!"

There were many attempts to kill Adolf Hitler (p. WWii110) prior to and during World War II. None of them worked - to the despair of many -- but some came close. Their details illustrate some of the pitfalls of covert operations.

Georg "Schorsch" Elser was a simple carpenter from a small town in Swabia, who liked to puzzle with "inventions." Elser, a socialist, had little interest in political parties (including the Communists). Nevertheless, he understood early on that the Nazi regime was not to the advantage of the common German worker. By 1938 he knew what had to be done: somebody had to kill the Führer.

Hitler and his henchmen came to Munich every year to honor the anniversary of his failed "Beer Hall Putsch" of November 8th, 1923 (p. W:IC8) at the very place of the putsch. In 1938, Elser went to the Bürgerbräukeller at the

Rosenthaler Platz in Munich and reconnoitered the building. Security was lax. He began planning and designing a bomb. For a time, he worked with a company that produced munitions; later he worked at a quarry. He stole explosives, detonators, and blasting caps, cleverly taking small amounts so that nobody noticed. In late summer of 1939, he went to Munich, living off his savings. Every third night for three months he let himself be locked into the beer hall. He build a secret door into the wooden paneling of the pillar right behind where the speaker's table used to be and then carefully cut a 28"×35" hole into the pillar, using tools wrapped with rags to dampen the sound. He made the plaster for the compartment with his own urine to avoid using the taps. His bomb consisted of two Black Forest clocks (lined with cork plates to suppress the ticking), three detonators, and about 20 lbs. of black powder (p. CV80). He set the timer on the night of the 6th to detonate it at 9:20 p.m. on the 8th. It worked as planned, taking down the ceiling and blowing out one of the outer walls (p. W:IC11). The charge was relatively small, considering the inefficient black powder he had to use. But Elser had learned to tamp the charge for maximum effect by reading a combat engineering manual freely available for public education. However, contrary to tradition (and for the first time in years) Hitler had arrived early and had already departed at 9:07 p.m. The huge hall was void of the top Nazis; only 120 of the "old warriors" remained. Eight people were killed and 63 wounded. At first, it was thought a poison gas bomb had been used, due to the thick smoke generated by the plaster and black powder.

Elser was arrested the same day, as he tried to illegally cross the border to Switzerland near Constance. A few days later he was connected with the bombing (he had parts of a detonator and other incriminating evidence with him when he was arrested). The Gestapo couldn't believe one man alone was responsible, and tried to link others to it, but didn't succeed. He was shot at the KZ Dachau on April 9th, 1945.

Another attempt was made on Hitler's life in July 1944, orchestrated by a large conspiracy consisting primarily of conservative general staff officers, but also incorporating social democrats, communists, and others (pp. W32, W:IC24). Many of the men involved had been contemplating an assassination attempt for years. Some had even begun such thinking before the war, and most wanted to see Goebbels and Himmler dead as well. Valuable time passed as they tried to work out how to take over the state and especially the armed forces after Hitler's death ("Operation Wallküre").

The man who eventually took on the suicidal task of actually killing the Führer was Major Claus Graf von Stauffenberg, a conservative aristocrat and member of the general staff. He was deeply convinced that the unlawful killings of prisoners of war, Jews, and civilians were unethical and dishonorable.

Stauffenberg was to meet with Hitler at the Wolfsschanze, near Rastenberg (the armed forces' headquarters), on July 20th, 1944. Fog had prevented him from arriving early, so he only had minutes between a staff meeting and his meeting with Hitler (scheduled for 12:30 p.m.). He stepped out (ostensibly to change his shirt) and primed the explosive charge in his briefcase. He had two 2.2-lb. blocks of plastic explosive (p. CV81). However, Stauffenberg had lost an eye, his right hand, and two fingers on his left hand in combat, so that he was fumbling with the acid detonator, and because of the time pressure, only managed to prime one of the blocks and take it with him to the meeting with Hitler. After placing the briefcase leaning on the table in the conference room, he excused himself to make a phone call. The charge blew up, but was too small to do the job. The blast was partly deflected by the heavy table. Hitler sustained only popped eardrums and a bad bruise on his arm (by afternoon he was back on his feet, giving Mussolini a tour of the carnage). Four others died from the blast.

Stauffenberg and an aide left the Wolfsschanze, believing they had done the job, got past two guards by sheer chutzpah, and headed for Berlin on a He 111 plane that had been provided by the conspirators. There they tried to set in motion their putsch, but it failed as news of his Hitler's survival trickled out. The same evening, Stauffenberg and a few others were caught after a short firefight with the Gestapo. They were executed around midnight. Over 200 others were rounded up and killed or driven to suicide as well, including General Beck (p. W:IC55), Admiral Canaris (p. W50), and Feldmarschall Rommel (pp. W50, WWii112).

Case Study: The Bellasi Case

In the night of August 12, 1999, the Swiss police arrested 39-year old Dino Bellasi at the Zürich airport on charge of embezzlement. Mr. Bellasi, formerly

The Armoury

Bellasi's cache consisted of 248

of the accountant bureau of the Swiss military *Nachrichtendienst* (intelligence service) with the rank of *Stabssekretär/Hauptmann* (captain), was accused of having stolen more than 8.8 million Swiss francs (some \$5.8 million) in a period between 1994 and 1999 by forging invoices which he then cashed at the national bank.

When his home and several other premises were searched, the police found some 220 modern firearms. Piece by piece, it emerged that Bellasi had not only lived very large (with a wife, two concubines, regular brothel visits, expensive cars, and gifts for his friends), but had also invested in luxury houses in Austria and Portugal, a collection of expensive pipes, and modern firearms and munitions. The weapons cache was especially suspicious, since he had acquired dozens of the latest firearms in sets, as if to equip teams with identical weapons (see *The Armoury*). For whom?

In police custody, Bellasi claimed to have acted on order of his superiors at the *Nachrichtendienst*, the aim having been to set up a completely secret shadow intelligence service outside of the control of parliament.

Switzerland had already had a similar covert organization between 1967 and 1990, the infamous P 26 secret army. The 1,000-man strong P 26 had ostensibly been set up for the event of a Soviet attack against Western Europe, to organize resistance and maintain contact to a government in exile. During the Cold War, such covert "guerrilla" organizations had been set up with help of the [CIA](#) all over Europe -- however, such a relationship to NATO was of course totally unacceptable for the adamantly neutral Switzerland. In addition, P 26 was outside the oversight of the democratically elected parliament and funds (some \$6 million annually) were acquired illegally by funnelling them away from the military budget (hidden in acquisition costs). P 26 was abolished in 1990 for these reasons, parliament also naming fear of "self-activation," that is, a putsch (p. CV8) by the covert organization. However, leading figures of P 26 (such as its last commander, Generalstabsobersr Efrem Cattelan, codename "Rico") publically stated that it was only "dormant," not disrupted.

The Bellasi case looked suspiciously as if it was a new or resurrected version of such an organization. Officials denied this, as did Bellasi after "further questioning." Bellasi was sentenced to six years in prison and everybody else implicated was cleared of all accusations. Bellasi walked free in August 2003, after less than four years.

Adventure Seeds

The Bellasi case illustrates several points that may play a role in a *Covert Ops* campaign: how to set up a covert organization within existing structures, how to acquire funds, how to get suitable weapons, and how to deny everything after the cover has been blown.

The most important point, finance, would appear to be fairly simple: find an accountant who knows how to get the blank documents required for cash withdrawals, to bury the withdrawals inside other posts, and to hide the money in off-shore "businesses."

The case also illustrates a number of things you should *not* do: don't waste your

firearms (including some 30 older collector's pieces, mainly pre-WWII military rifles), numerous sound suppressors, scopes, and targeting devices, as well as more than 70,000 rounds of ammunition. He had spent a total of 566,199 Swiss francs (more than \$370,000) on the more modern weapons. All were bought legally from a dealer in Bern.

Among these were 3× H&K MK23 MOD0 (p. SO114), 1× Ruger MKII with integral suppressor (similar to High Standard [HDMS](#), p. CV66), 7× SIG-Sauer [P228](#) (pp. C63, SO114), 6× SIG-Sauer P229 (in .357 SIG, p. CV67), 7× S&W Model 29 (p. HT110), 2× Beretta [Mod 12S](#), 4× FN P90 (pp. HT116, SW52), 2× H&K MP5A5 (pp. SO117, SW52), 3× H&K [MP5K](#) (p. CV68), 5× IMI Mini-Uzi (p. HT116), 2× Olympic Arms CAR-15 with integral suppressor (based on Colt [CAR-15 R635](#), p. MF28), 4× Orbis MGV-176 with suppressor (based on American 180, p. HT116), 1× Accuracy International [AW](#) (p. MF24), 1× Barrett Model 90 (p. HT115), 1× H&K HK33SG1 (p. SW53), 3× Izhmash AKS-74U (pp. HT114, SO115), 1× Remington Model 700 (p. CV67), 3× Steyr SSG 69 -- one with integral suppressor (p. SW53), 7× Mossberg Model 590 (p. C63), 5× Remington Model 870 with short barrel (pp. C63, HT112), plus custom-made sniper rifles with integral suppressor by Kitzmann, Marlin, and Sabatti.

Some of the ammunition was stowed (illegally) on military premises (where he and other members of the army and intelligence trained with the

funds on trifles, don't try to withdraw money *after* you left the organization you stole it from, and don't carry weapons on your person if you haven't got the right papers for them.

weapons), much of the rest in Bellasi's private stowage rooms.

While the Bellasi case has been officially closed in Switzerland by the authorities, some questions remain. Here are some suggestions how to use the affair in a ***Covert Ops*** campaign:

Common Fraud

Everything happened as the court ruled. There was no conspiracy, no shadow army, and no criminal connection to the underworld. Bellasi was an embezzler who liked guns, girls and tobacco pipes, in short, a common criminal -- and, like every criminal who let himself get caught, a stupid one.

Still, real covert operatives might have found Bellasi (or a similar, but fictional person in Switzerland or another country) more than useful. He had access to funds, he could provide modern weapons including suppressed sniper rifles, and he knew many people in local and foreign intelligence as well as the underworld. He might become an unwilling puppet in a larger conspiracy, or the logistics specialist for the player characters (or the NPCs).

Organized Crime

It has been widely speculated that Bellasi had connections to organized crime -- especially to Serbian organizations. Criminals have similar requirements for secrecy, money, and weapons as covert organizations, although their goals are ultimately not political, but to acquire more money. In a ***GURPS Cops*** campaign, detectives could try to unravel the case itself, or track back money or a mafia assassin's murder weapon to the cache.

Shadow Army

Everything happened as Bellasi first claimed. He might have acted on orders of the Swiss military intelligence service (a very small organization indeed), be on the payroll of the Gnomes of Zürich, or a foreign service. The houses in Austria and Portugal would have been safe houses for covert agents, the weapons cached for operatives or hired assassins.